

What You Should Know About The Future

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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Foreword

As I begin writing this book, it is March of 2009. The United States Of America is in crisis along with much of the rest of the world. Driven by greed and political ambition, reckless fiscal policies have taken their toll and the day of reckoning could well be upon us or at least not very far off.

Barak Obama has been president of the United States for less than two months and already profound changes are being instituted from the top down. Things are “ripe for the picking.” Secularists are working energetically to consolidate their seemingly emergent control of the culture, including its moral, political and economic life.

Weakened by decades of blind selfishness, the nation’s foundational moral principles and cultural institutions are under direct and relentless assault. In the name of “freedom,” human sexuality has been animalized and perverted; marriage has been mocked and trivialized; and the innocent blood of millions of preborn babies has been shed.

That root of all evil, the love of money, has grown its poisonous plant and produced its deadly fruit.

The Church has not escaped unscathed. In many places worldliness has seeped in like a toxic fog, anesthetizing many professed believers and creating a spiritual haze that blurs the sharp distinction between right and wrong, saint and sinner.

As of March, 2009, that is some of the bad news. Here is the good news. Many Christians are beginning to wake up. They are shaking off the lethargy, preparing themselves for spiritual battle, and giving themselves to earnest prayer for a genuine spiritual awakening that will result in the conversion of sinners and the transformation of society.

This book is the last in the “What You Should Know About” series on the major truths of the Bible. I am not in a hurry to write it. In fact, I hope that our Lord Jesus Christ returns before the book is finished. He alone can complete it fully and accurately by the cosmic drama of the *eschaton*, “the day of the Lord.”

Prophecy is a field of study that requires humility, diligence, simplicity and clarity. So I enter it as a student as well as a teacher. I used to “know” more about prophecy than I do now. I have come to realize how much more there is to know about it. When I was a young student

at what is now Bethany University in California, I took it upon myself to write a 12,000 word commentary on the Book Of Revelation. It was a monument to my ignorance. Several years later I used the manuscript as scratch paper.

Does that mean that I know nothing about God's written revelation concerning the future? Not at all. I know enough to know how much we have yet to understand. Many prophecy "experts" are in a similar situation, whether they realize it or not.

What I do know is solidly established in The Scriptures. And please, do not dismiss the Bible with a disdainful and cavalier air. The prophecies in that Book have a proven one hundred percent accuracy rate so far. That gives us full confidence in those prophecies yet to be fulfilled. Also, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy apostles rest on a firm evidential foundation. It is sheer folly to risk everything on the chance that Jesus Christ was wrong or on the speculation that the record of His words is not accurate.

So what *do* we know? First, Jesus Christ *shall* return. Second, there *shall* be a judgment. Third, we *will* spend eternity either with Christ or in the lake of fire. *This we know.*

What about the details? Where are we now in the drama of the ages? That is what we are yet learning. We still "see through a mirror, dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Although I am not rigid about the precise chronology involved, as an ordained minister of the Assemblies Of God, I honor corporate belief. I am sure that this is true of many others. That is, regarding biblical prophecy we subscribe to and honor the statement of faith of our fellowship to the fullest extent of our understanding.

I firmly believe, preach and teach that we are living in the "last days," specifically, the *last* of the last days. Jesus Christ will return at any time. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Genuine believers will be "raptured" (caught up) to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:15). We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). After the judgment before Him who sits on the "great white throne" (Revelation 20:11), the unbelievers will go to eternal punishment and the righteous will enter into eternal life (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; John 5:28, 29).

These are non-negotiable "givens," established anchor points of biblical prophecy and human teleology.

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout,

with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:3).

Introduction

"The future is not what it used to be."

This statement certainly applies to the history of the interpretation of biblical prophecy—not to biblical prophecy itself, but to the meandering streams of prophetic interpretation.

When I was a boy, prophecy preaching was popular. The message was geared to the times. Sermon after sermon confidently identified Adolf Hitler as the Antichrist. To this day I remember the mathematical formula that made the word "Hitler" add up to 666 ("a" equals 1, "b" equals 2, and so forth; then add 99 to the numerical equivalent of each letter; then total the result).

Benito Mussolini was a standby just in case *Der Fuhrer* did not measure up. When neither survived World War II, neither did a lot of prophecy books and sermon notes.

So Joseph Stalin was next. After him, others also came and went. Even Henry Kissinger was identified as the Antichrist in at least one prophecy paperback.

In late 1953 I came across a book that had been written years earlier. In it the author predicted that by September of that year (1953) the rapture of the Church will have taken place, the seven year Great Tribulation would be past, and we would be well into the Millennium.

Because of speculations such as these and because of the prosperity that followed World War II, prophecy fell into neglect. "Jesus is coming soon" received a nod of agreement among believers; however, the sense of urgency seemed to be lacking.

Emerging world events and the popularity of the dramatic “Left Behind” series have awakened a new interest in biblical prophecy. Certainly, the renewing of an emphasis on biblical prophecy is past due. Eschatology (the doctrine of last things) urgently needs to be restored to its rightful place in the Church and the world. The hope is that it will be biblically sound and practically relevant, not dissipated in sensational speculation.

We are prone to think of “future” events from the perspective of our own lifetime, of what is future *to us*. The early Church thought of “future” events from the perspective of *their* lifetime, of what was future to *them*. We tend to push and pack all prophecy ahead into *our* future. If we think back, place ourselves among the first and second century believers, and think of future events from their point of view, we will have a broader perspective on biblical prophecy.

For example, the apostle John wrote, “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last time” (1 John 2:18). Also, in the Prologue of the Apocalypse we read, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1).

Schools Of Prophetic Interpretation.

Believers have developed various schools of prophetic interpretation. At the core of each of the various schools is the way it views and interprets the Book Of Revelation (The Apocalypse). That interpretation forms much of the premise of its eschatology. Each system follows its premise to its logical conclusions and applications. Prominent in this process is the view each school takes of the one thousand years of Revelation 20, known as the Millennium.

The belief in a one thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on earth is variously termed millennialism, chiliasm, and millenarianism.

The roots of this go back to the pre-Christian Jewish anticipation of a kingdom of God on earth, a hope very much alive at the time of Christ. “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” His disciples asked after His resurrection (Acts 1:6). Jesus replied that it was not for them to know the times or seasons the Father has put in His own authority. They were to focus on world-wide evangelism after the Holy Spirit descended on them.

The Jewish apocalyptic literature continued to have an influence. Millennialism (chiliasm) remained strong in the Church during the Roman imperial persecutions. When the Church gained political influence and power, it was easy for Augustine and those he influenced to view the organized Church as the established kingdom of God on earth. As a result, the expectation of a millennial reign of Christ on earth was neglected. The Church was in control, especially in the west. Who needed a millennium?

Enthusiasm for a millennium waxed and waned throughout subsequent church history, depending largely on the condition of the times. Chiliasm was regarded as a heresy to those in power, especially when it was attached to such groups as the Montanists. The prospect of a future kingdom seemed revolutionary and threatened the *status quo*. When world conditions were unstable and threatening, the hope of a millennium revived. When the political and social situation improved, again millennialism was neglected.

How the Book of Revelation was interpreted also changed with the Church's emphases. When morality and ethics became a dominant concern, eschatology was reduced to its essentials: the return of Christ, the judgment, and the eternal state. Also, the excesses of some chiliasts embarrassed the Church and led either to the neglect of the Apocalypse altogether or to the reduction of much of its content to allegory.

So, where do things stand today? World conditions are what Jesus predicted that they would be in the last days just prior to His return (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The inspired writings of the apostles predict the same things. The result is a renewed emphasis on biblical prophecy over the last century and a half, including a new interest in the one thousand years of Revelation 20.

Let us consider briefly the main schools of biblical prophecy and how each approaches the Book of Revelation. Each system has its strong points. Each has its weaknesses.

Preterist.

"Preterist" means past—over and done with. The preterist school of prophetic interpretation believes that the Book of Revelation describes the conditions that existed at the end of the first century and that would exist shortly thereafter. The beasts and Babylon were Imperial Rome and its Caesars persecuting the ancient Church (the woman of Revelation 12). According to this interpretation the Apocalypse is essentially fulfilled. This has been a favored interpretation among Roman Catholic scholars. For one thing, it avoids the Reformation identification of the second beast as the papacy. One of its weaknesses is its inability to account for the references in the Apocalypse to end time events.

Historicist.

The historicist school of prophetic interpretation holds that the Book of Revelation portrays the entire Church age from the time of John the apostle to the end of the age. The seals, trumpets, and vials (bowls) refer to periods and events throughout Church history. The focus of this view is the Church in the European west, especially during the Middle Ages. This view was popular during the Protestant Reformation. The reformers generally assumed that at least the second beast of Revelation 13 is the papacy and that the harlot ("Mystery, Babylon") of

Revelation 17 and 18 is papal Rome. Even a designation of the Pope was seen as evidence that he is the Antichrist (the numerical values of “*vicarius filii dei*”—“in place of the Son of God”—add up to 666). A weakness of the historicist system of interpretation is the difficulty it has to correlate consistently the symbols of the book with the assumed periods of history. It also tends to neglect end time events.

Futurist.

As its name implies, the futurist school of prophetic interpretation places almost all of the Book of Revelation in the future, at the end time. All of chapters 4 through 22 of the Apocalypse are placed into the future. The seven churches of chapters 2 and 3 are viewed as analogous to the spiritual conditions that were predicted to exist in the Church at various periods of its history. Thus we are said to be living today in the period of the “Laodicean church.”

Idealist.

The idealist school of prophetic interpretation views the Apocalypse as a graphic portrayal of the on-going conflict between good and evil, especially in the first century, with no literal meaning to the visions. To this system everything is symbolic and general in its application. This “system” of interpretation is not a system at all. Its ambiguity affords everyone an opportunity to idealize it as he or she wishes.

Closely related to the various schools of prophetic interpretation are the terms *amillennial*, *premillennial*, and *postmillennial*.

Postmillennialism was popular during the optimistic 19th century. The Church was influencing the world for the better. Most people would be converted, ushering in a thousand years of righteousness and peace. At the end of the thousand years Jesus will return. The resurrection and final judgment will then take place, followed by the eternal destiny of each individual either in the lake of fire or with Christ. After two world wars, postmillennialism lost much of its influence. Except for the most optimistic, it is hardly found among evangelicals. It gains some support during hopeful times.

Amillennialism (“*a*” is privative, a negation) means no millennium in the sense of literal time. It is compatible with the historicist school of prophetic interpretation. Dutch Reformed eschatology is amillennial. Amillennialism is simple and straight forward. When Jesus returns, believers will be raptured (caught up) to meet Him in the air. The general judgment of all

mankind will take place immediately upon Christ's return. This is the judgment of the sheep and goats, the judgment seat of Christ, and the white throne judgment—all three are one and the same. The thousand years of Revelation 20 refers to the rule of Christ in this present gospel age. Christ is now on His throne. Satan was cast out of heaven at the time of Christ's redemptive work and resurrection (Luke 10:18; John 12:31). The angels that sinned are now in chains (2 Peter 2:4). Satan is prohibited from deceiving the nations *nationally*. He will be loosed for a short season and will be defeated at Armageddon when Christ returns. The present heavens and earth will pass away and be replaced by new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10). The eternal destiny of all mankind follows immediately after that. Amillennialism has its strengths. It also has its weaknesses. Its interpretations are spiritual; yet it has difficulty interpreting seemingly literal passages. Second Thessalonians chapter 1 fits well into amillennialism. Amillennialism has problems, however, interpreting passages such as the personal reference to "the man of sin [or, lawlessness]," etc., in chapter 2.

Premillennialism, as the name indicates, means that Christ will return before the Millennium. Jesus will come at any moment, resurrect the righteous dead, rapture the believers, and take them all to Heaven. The seven year Great Tribulation on earth will follow. During this time believers will appear before the judgment seat (*bema*) of Christ. At the end of the seven years Christ will return with His saints, defeat the Antichrist, bind Satan, usher in the Millennium and rule the earth from Jerusalem for a thousand years. At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be loosed for a short season and will raise up an army of rebellion against Christ. They will be defeated. Satan and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire. All unbelievers will be judged by the Father at the white throne judgment. The wicked will be cast into the lake of fire. The redeemed will be with Christ forever.

Premillennialism has flourished in the last 150 years. It is very popular and has become the established eschatology among most of evangelicals, including pentecostals. The sensational Left Behind series is based on premillennialism.

Variations are to be found within premillennialism. For example, some hold that the rapture will take place at the beginning of "the week" (seven year tribulation and *bema* judgment, the judgment seat of Christ). Some place the rapture at the middle of the tribulation. Some place it at the end of the tribulation. So we have "pre-tribulation," "mid-tribulation," and "post-tribulation" premillennialists. Premillennialism also has its strengths and its weaknesses. For example, it has not successfully dealt with Jesus' words in John 5:22, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." Also Acts 17:30, 31.

Daniel and Revelation.

These schools hold different interpretations of the book of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Let us consider two of the systems of interpretation: premillennialism and amillennialism, and how they approach these two prophetic books.

In Daniel 9:24 - 27, for example, we read that the angel Gabriel was sent to Daniel with a message and skill to understand it.

“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured on the desolate.”

The “weeks” are understood to mean periods of seven years each—seven heptads.

The command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was given in 458 B.C. by Artaxerxes I (see Ezra 7). The first 49 years were times of trouble during the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity and Nehemiah’s reforms. The next 434 years covered the history of the Jews in Palestine until A.D. 26, the inauguration of Christ’s earthly ministry at age 30 (it is widely accepted that Jesus’ birth was in 4 B.C.—the misalignment being due to early errors in the creation of the calendar we use). That is a total of 69 “weeks” (483 years). What about the 70th “week” of seven years?

The premillennial view separates the 69th and 70th “weeks” by the entire Church Age. It holds that the Church is a “parenthesis” in biblical prophecy that the ancient prophets did not see. Their prophecy was about the destiny of Israel, and so they overlooked the Church. This places the 70th “week” of Daniel at the end times and identifies it specifically as the seven year Great Tribulation period. It is the antichrist who will confirm a covenant with the Jews for one “week,” but in the middle of the week he will bring an end to the animal sacrifices.

The amillennial view places the 70th “week” immediately after the 69th “week.” The 70th “week” begins with Christ’s anointing and earthly ministry. In the middle of the “week” Christ is “cut off”—crucified. By His crucifixion He finishes the transgression, makes an end of sins,

makes reconciliation for iniquity, and brings in everlasting righteousness for all who believe on Him. It is Christ, not the antichrist, who brings an end to sacrifice and offering by becoming Himself our Passover. The Church is not a parenthesis, but is a major theme of the ancient prophets, as Peter declares to the Jews in Acts 3:24, "Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days." By "these days" Peter is referring to the gospel, the New Covenant, the Church age.

The "prince who is to come" is *generally* recognized by both schools as Titus, the Roman, who destroyed the city and the temple in A.D. 70.

The two schools interpret The Apocalypse very differently.

The premillennial view spiritualizes the letters to the seven churches and identifies them with various periods in the subsequent history of the Church. It finds the rapture of the Church in Chapter 4, verse 1, where the first voice said to John, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." Immediately John was in the Spirit and saw the throne of God. Some (e.g., J. Barton Payne) place the rapture of the Church at Revelation 11:12. Premillennialism places most of the Book Of Revelation within the seven year Great Tribulation period between the "rapture" (*parousia*) and the "revelation" (*apokalupsis*). It takes the following thousand years of Revelation 20 literally. It places the white throne judgment after the millennium, to be followed by the renewing of the cosmos and the eternal state.

The amillennial view believes that most of the Book of Revelation, including the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls, covers the features and events of the entire Church age from John's day to the glorious return of Christ. It makes no distinction between "rapture" and "revelation," making them one and the same event at the end of the age. It also teaches that there will be a general judgment, making no distinction between the judgment seat of Christ and the great white throne judgment, citing Jesus' words in John 5:22 "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." It teaches that the future final events will all take place at one time: rapture, revelation, Armageddon, judgment, the renewing of the cosmos, all to be followed by the eternal state.

And then there are those who consider themselves to be "*pan*-millennial." They believe that when Jesus Christ returns, everything will "*pan out*" according to God's purpose.

Rules Of Prophetic Interpretation.

The Bible is not a sheet of rubber that can be pulled and stretched in any direction to fit any meaning. Although a biblical passage can have more than one *application*, it has only one true *interpretation*.

The Bible was given by the inspiration of The Holy Spirit to be understood by ordinary, intelligent and reasonable people in its natural grammatical/ historical meaning. To know what the Bible means, first *read what it says*.

The Bible contains more than one literary genre. Part of it is history; part is (Hebrew) poetry; part is prophecy; part is instruction; part is apocalyptic. It is all to be understood in the usual meanings common to each genre. A statement in one of the books of the Bible should be understood and interpreted according to the genre of that book, unless the context and/or the teachings of the Bible as a whole demand an interpretation that is exceptional to the book's genre.

Although the Bible is meant to be taken literally, parts of it are not to be taken "letterally." For example, when Psalm 58:3 says that the wicked "go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies," no reasonable person would claim that it teaches that newborn babies get up and walk around the nursery telling lies to the doctors, nurses and other babies. The statement is easily recognized as hyperbole for the sake of emphasis.

In our daily conversations we use expressions that are not to be pressed to the letter but nevertheless have a literal meaning. If someone makes an off-hand remark that his neighbor "kicked the bucket," no one asks, "did he hurt his foot?" Of course not. We know what he literally meant. His neighbor died. When a businessman says that his plans for a new warehouse are "dead in the water," we do not imagine a set of plans floating around in a pool. We know the literal meaning of his words. He will not be able to go ahead with his plans for a new warehouse.

The Bible uses metaphor, simile, hyperbole, imagery, each meant to be understood in its own context to teach a literal truth.

Also, scripture must be interpreted according to scripture. No passage of The Scriptures is to be taken out of context: whether it is the immediate context, the historical context, the context of the particular biblical book, or the context of The Scriptures as a whole. Ask, "what is the subject matter under consideration?" The well known saying is true: "a text without its context is a pretext."

To interpret and understand biblical prophecy and prophetic passages, we do not go first to the Book of Revelation or other apocalyptic books in the Bible. We study the Old Testament prophecies; then we go to the New Testament and read how Jesus and the inspired New Testament writers interpreted and/or applied the Old Testament prophecies. We adopt and follow their hermeneutic, their method of interpretation and application. The prophecies of the Old Testament are to be understood in the light of the New Testament, not the other way around. This is very important.

Also, to interpret and understand biblical prophecy it is essential to keep in mind that *all prophecy is Christ-centered*. "The testimony [witness] of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"

(Revelation 19:10). For other references to the testimony of Jesus see Revelation 1:2, 9, and 12:17.

Prophecy is not event-centered, people-centered, or time-centered. It is Christ-centered. Jesus Christ Himself is the ultimate reference point of biblical prophecy. Vance Havner said it well: “we are not looking for something to happen; we are looking for Someone to come.” In the Bible, God’s prophets and apostles prophesied about many subjects: events, times and places. All are relevant in and to their times and places. Still, the overall prophetic message of the Bible is focused on Jesus Christ and is fulfilled in and through Him.

Jesus Christ is the Truth (John 14:6). That includes prophetic truth. He is *the* authority on prophecy. To understand biblical prophecy we must refer to what Jesus said. That is our foundation, our “baseline.” He is our starting and ending point in understanding biblical prophecy, given by Him and by His Spirit through the writers of The Scriptures. This is the principle that must and will guide us.

Chapter 1

The Kingdom Of God

The Scriptures begin with this sublime statement: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). No statement of the origin of things can come close to this majestic declaration. It is simple; it is complete; it is sufficient. Nothing else is. It is categorical because it is authoritative.

Exodus 20:11 likewise declares, “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.”

God created everything *ex nihilo*—out of nothing—by His spoken word. “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Psalm 33:6).

“I have made the earth, and created man on it. It was I—My hands that stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded” (Isaiah 45:12). “Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand up together” (Isaiah 48:13).

The origin of the material universe was an event outside of scientific observation and beyond scientific demonstration. It is known only by Divine revelation. The faith that accepts

that revelation will find the knowable data, when truly and fully known, to be in harmony with that revelation. Also, the science that is not biased against that revelation will find the knowable data, when truly and fully known, to be in harmony with that faith. Such faith is not blind. On the contrary, it is truly enlightened. It is required by the evidence.

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). This rules out the notion of the eternity of matter. God is eternal; matter is not.

As the Creator, God is the owner and sole proprietor of His creation. His title reads, “All the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5). Psalm 24:1 affirms, “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”

Moses said to Israel, “Indeed, heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it” (Deuteronomy 10:14). God said to Job, “Everything under heaven is mine” (Job 41:10).

So then, God rules, guides, and upholds His universe by right of creation. He does so also by right of qualification. He is the only one who is able to do so.

God is also the *moral* governor of the universe.

We are moral beings. We have freedom of will, freedom to make executive (directive, controlling) choices. Our inner moral choices are not coerced and cannot be coerced—influenced, yes; pressured, yes; forced, no.

Because we are aware of the value of our own well being and happiness, we know the value of the well being and happiness of others. Their well being, their happiness, is just as valuable in itself as our own. Therefore, we know we ought to love others as ourselves. In other words, we know right from wrong. We are morally obligated. If we choose not to love others—that is, if we choose not to do to them as we would have them do to us—we thereby choose to sacrifice their well being to our own personal gratification. We act contrary to reality and therefore contrary to reason. We deliberately act selfishly, and selfishness is evil and the essence of sin.

We also have a built-in “God consciousness” that tells us that if the well being and happiness of others is as valuable as our own, the well being and happiness of God is infinitely greater than our own. We know that we ought to love God supremely because of who He is. If we choose not to love God supremely, it is because we have chosen to love ourselves supremely. We thereby choose to sacrifice *His* well being also to our own personal gratification. We act totally contrary to reality and therefore to reason. This is the highest and most wicked essence of sin. *This is total moral depravity.*

Moral Law.

All of these intrinsic values create and impose moral law, and our awareness of them creates and imposes personal moral obligation. Moral law is not a formulated and established set of rules. Moral law and moral obligation come right out of our very nature and relationships. I have a fist and you have a nose. That fact in itself applies moral law and creates a moral obligation for me to keep my fist off of your nose. No law has to be passed to tell me that. The reality creates the law, and God and man enforce it.

The moral law comes from who we are and it functions in our relationships, both with one another and especially with God. It is the universal law of love. God reveals it and He oversees its actions. It is there because of who He is and who we are.

Quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 respectively, Jesus said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37 - 40).

Moral Order.

Because there are moral beings and therefore there is moral law, there must also be moral *order*.

Not all human beings have the same moral character, nor are they all of equal intelligence and knowledge. That creates the *need* for moral governance. Someone who is qualified to administer moral governance must have—yes, is *obligated* to have—the moral authority that is necessary for the good of all. The only moral being who is qualified to do so on a universal scale is *God Himself*. God has the moral right and also the moral obligation to rule. The rest of us have the moral obligation to obey; if we do not, we become moral rebels, and both God and we suffer for it.

God. The Supreme Moral Governor.

God is the supreme universal moral Governor. He is the King. All else is His kingdom. He allows us to have as much personal and societal self-governance as we are morally qualified to possess. If intelligence and virtue decline, of necessity He allows us to come under greater authority. When intelligence and virtue increase, He allows us more freedom and self-government.

God's supreme moral authority and our obligation to obey in love for the good of all is affirmed in The Scriptures.

As king David blessed the Lord publicly, he included the following words. "Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11b).

In Psalm 22:28 we read, "For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations."

At a time of national crisis, king Jehoshaphat included this rhetorical question in his prayer: "O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations,...?" (2 Chronicles 20:6).

Psalm 45:6 says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom." This and the rest of the statement is quoted in Hebrews 1:8 in reference to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 47:8 testifies, "God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne."

Psalm 66:7 affirms, "He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; do not let the rebellious exalt themselves."

King Nebuchadnezzar of ancient Babylon learned the hard way. We read his story and his confession in Daniel, chapter 4. After his humiliation and restoration, Nebuchadnezzar said, "I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever, for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'what have You done?'" The king went on to say, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase" (see verses 34 - 37).

Abraham asked rhetorically, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

The psalmist exclaimed, "Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth" (Psalm 67:4). This is the hope of the mismanaged, exploited and ravaged people of this world. Christ will rule! Let the nations celebrate!

"The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19).

The Bible is loaded with affirmations of God's supreme moral authority. The following list of references is large but still not exhaustive: Exodus 15:18; 1 Kings 22:19; 1 Chronicles 16:31; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Psalm 9:4, 7; 11:4; 45:6; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1, 2; 99:1; 132:12; 146:10; Isaiah

6:1; 24:23; 32:1; 52:7; Jeremiah 23:5; Micah 4:7; Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:33; Romans 15:12 (quoting Isaiah 11:10); 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 8:1, 2; Revelation 4:2 - 10; 5:1 - 13; 6:16; 7:9 - 17; 11:15 - 18; 19:6, 11; 22:1.

In this present age, God's governance in civil affairs is carried out by human government. Romans 13:1 - 7 is specific. Verse 1 says, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." That does not mean that all rulers have a divine right to act as they please. It means that the *institution* of human government *per se* is God-ordained. All who live under its authority have a responsibility to obey it, except when its laws clearly conflict with the moral law of God. All who govern have a responsibility to rule properly and in the fear of God. Think how different human history would be if all who have ever exercised civil authority recognized that their position was a stewardship from God and that they are ultimately accountable to God for the way they exercise that stewardship.

However, even the worst of governments carry out the basic functions of governance. At least they maintain order, direct traffic, punish crime, and do other necessary things. Paul wrote the Epistle To The Romans during the time of the Roman Empire, and *that* system of government was far from democratic. Nevertheless, it swept the pirates from the Mediterranean Sea and made travel by land relatively safe.

Even though God is King over all, His kingdom functions where He is obeyed. Thus Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 KJV).

God rules over the physical creation. All nature obeys Him. Only man and devils disobey Him. His kingdom is present and functions in His Church to the extent that the Church obeys Him. His kingdom is the heart and life of every true, obedient believer.

The person who is not loving and obeying God is a cosmic outlaw, a part of the doomed evil rebellion.

Israel, God's Old Covenant Kingdom: The Kingdom Past.

God said to ancient Israel, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6a).

The "house" (dynasty) of king David was a prophetic type of the eternal rule (kingdom) of Jesus Christ, the Son of David. "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations'" (Psalm 89:3, 4).

In the messianic Second Psalm, verse 6, God says, "I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion."

The prophet Isaiah spoke in the dramatic present, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

Later, Isaiah prophesied, "Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule with justice" (Isaiah 32:1. See also Psalm 72:11; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 9:9 - 11).

The second chapter of Daniel records a dream that came to the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar. God revealed both the dream and its interpretation to the prophet. In his dream the king saw an image with a gold head, silver chest and arms, bronze belly and thighs, iron legs, and feet and toes of mixed iron and clay. These represented successive empires of the middle east of that time and the centuries immediately following. The Babylonian Empire, represented by the king, was the head of gold; after that the Persian Empire (silver), the Greek Empire (bronze), the Roman Empire (iron) and later the divided Roman Empire (iron and clay mixed). History records that all of this happened as predicted by the prophet Daniel.

Daniel's prophecy included this prediction: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). Clearly this refers to the kingdom of Christ.

In a parallel "dream and visions" that Daniel himself had, recorded in Daniel 7, the same kingdoms are represented respectively as a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a "dreadful and terrible" non-descript beast. During that vision Daniel said, "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (verses 13 and 14).

Then Daniel was given the interpretation. "Those great beasts, which are four, are four kingdoms which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever" (verses 17 and 18; see also verses 22 and 27). Again, this is a clear reference to the kingdom of Christ and His Church.

Jesus Christ: The King Of The Kingdom.

“The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!” (Psalm 110:1, 2).

In the eternal purpose and plan of God, the moment of redemption arrived. The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a young girl in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. When the angel arrived, he announced to Mary, the virgin who was chosen by God to be the mother of the humanity of Jesus the Christ: “you have found favor with God. And, behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31 - 33).

After Jesus was born, “wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him’” (Luke 2:1, 2). They were directed to Bethlehem on the basis of the ancient prophecy of Micah: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel” (Matthew 2:6, from Micah 5:2).

John the Baptist was the immediate forerunner of Christ. As such, he was the herald of the kingdom of God. “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 3:1, 2).

Later, Jesus referred back to John the Baptist in John’s time and place in God’s drama of redemption. “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You’ [quoting Malachi 3:1]. Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (Matthew 11:11 - 13. See Luke 7:24 - 28). “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it” (Luke 16:16).

This is an appropriate place to call attention to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:17 - 20, particularly verse 19. “Do not think that I came to destroy [*katalusaī*] the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks [*lusei*—loosens, relaxes, annuls] one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your

righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Compare Luke 16:16, 17).

Jesus warns against antinomianism, the notion that, in the kingdom of God, faith in Christ “loosens” the believer from the moral law. At that time there were those who had a strict view of the Law and also those who had a more “relaxed” view of the Law. Jesus warns against assuming a permissive view of the Law. At the same time He tells the people that their righteousness must exceed the legalistic “righteousness” of those who held a strict view of the Law (scribes and Pharisees).

Jesus affirmed the fact that under the Law there was a moral obligation attached to every precept of the Law. Jesus did not come to abolish that moral obligation. That moral obligation was fulfilled only when Jesus fulfilled the precepts themselves either by fulfilling in Himself the types embodied in the ceremonial rites and thus doing away with the ceremonial rites themselves, or when He elevated and established the underlying moral obligation in the higher, universal law of love (the law of faith), now embodied in “all Scripture” (2 Timothy 3:14 - 17).

Note also Paul’s statement in Romans 3:31 “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” The apostle is referring to *moral* law and *moral* obligation. That cannot and will not be abolished.

Jesus is issuing a stern warning against misguided interpretation that relaxes moral law and moral obligation in the name of faith and grace. Only God knows how much harm has been done by the preaching of “cheap grace” by godly but misguided believers.

When I was a teenager, with my own ears I heard a respected lady in my home church say, “The sins of the flesh don’t matter because the flesh is going to be destroyed anyway.” An evangelical pastor once said to me, “If I died in the arms of a prostitute I would go to Heaven.” Such notions and such statements are epidemic. Will those who so “loosen” the moral law in their teaching (but not in their personal living) enter the kingdom of God? If they do so because of honest misunderstanding and misinterpretation, yes; however, they will be least regarded in it. The tragedy is that *some* of the people they have taught will not enter the kingdom of God.

It should be noted that “Kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are the same. There is no difference between them. Jesus probably used the two terms as synonymous and interchangeable. Because Matthew wrote to the Jews, we read “kingdom of heaven” in his gospel. The Jews were familiar with the concept from the Old Testament (e.g. Psalm 11:4; Daniel 2:44; 4:37; 7:27). “Kingdom of heaven” is found only in Matthew. In referring to the same events, the other gospel writers use “kingdom of God” (for example, compare Matthew 13:11 and Mark 4:11).

Before and during Jesus' earthly life and ministry others were waiting for the kingdom of God, Joseph of Arimathea among them (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51). However they perceived the kingdom of God, the anticipation of the kingdom was common among the Jews of that time.

From the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God. "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel'" (Mark 1:14, 15. See also Matthew 4:17 and 23).

Jesus lived with an urgency to preach the kingdom of God. "I must preach the kingdom of God..." (Luke 4:43). "He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1). "But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing" (Luke 9:11).

He said, "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28. See Luke 11:20). In Jesus' words here we see the broad definition of the kingdom of God. It includes divine authority over demons as well as over earthly realms.

Jesus sent out His disciples to preach the kingdom of God. "Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1, 2. See also Matthew 10:7, 8). Later He sent out seventy of His disciples with the same message (Luke 10:9 - 11).

Jesus spoke many parables concerning the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God (heaven) is like..." We read it over and over. In the book Buried Treasure: Exploring the Parables Of Jesus, I write about these discourses of Jesus, including His parables of the kingdom. In His parables of the kingdom our Lord sets forth the principles of God's kingdom, the rule of God, as it operates here on earth among believers and also in society.

Jesus told His disciples why He spoke to the crowds in parables. "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries [hidden principles] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11. See also Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10). Jesus did not give the parables to make the truth plain, but to make it *almost* plain. He did this so that only the ones who really wanted the truth would "dig" for it and find it.

He said, "Every scribe who is instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew 13:52).

Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come ... For Yours is the kingdom..." (Matthew 6:11, 13).

To Whom Does The Kingdom Of God Belong?

As was mentioned before, God gave the kingdom first to Israel, His covenant people. The religious establishment shut the door of God's kingdom to the masses. Jesus denounced them sternly for doing this. "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13). He said that the door of the kingdom would be open to repentant sinners before the religious types would ever get in.

The chief priests and elders of the people confronted Jesus in the temple. In His response Jesus warned them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 21:31). He told them, "the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (verse 43).

Earlier He had forewarned them, "Many will come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:11, 12. See also Luke 13:28, 29). Thus He foretold that the kingdom of heaven would become world-wide, just as we see it today.

Centuries before this, God said to Isaiah the prophet "I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by My name" (Isaiah 65:1).

In Exodus 19:5 and 6, God said to Israel that if they would obey Him and keep His covenant, they would be to Him "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." As a whole, the nation of Israel failed to obey Him and keep His covenant. So, as Jesus said, the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to a fruitful nation. The promise of Exodus 19 is now fulfilled in believers in Christ. Revelation 1:6 declares that Jesus Christ has "made us to be a kingdom and priests" (NIV). See also Revelation 5:10. So then, they who enter the kingdom of God become part of the kingdom of God. We enter the kingdom. We possess the kingdom. We become a kingdom.

Eventually the religious and political establishment rejected and crucified their own King. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" In His response Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." When Pilate proceeded to ask Him, "Are you a King then," Jesus replied, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (see John 18:33 - 37).

When Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" they cried out "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests responded

hypocritically, "We have no king but Caesar!" (see John 19:14, 15). Later Pilate placed this inscription on the cross, just above Jesus' head: "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matthew 27:37).

Yes, some *did* receive the King and therefore the kingdom. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus promised that the kingdom of heaven would belong to the poor in spirit and to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matthew 5:3, 10. See Luke 6:20). He said to His disciples, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29, 30).

James wrote, "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5).

On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus gave Peter, James, and John a preview of the future glory of the kingdom. He said to His disciples, "Assuredly I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." After six days He "took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them" (Mark 9:1, 2. See also Matthew 16:28 - 7:1).

When the thief on the cross implored Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom," Jesus assured him, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42, 43).

Jesus Christ Ushered In The Kingdom Age: The Kingdom Present.

Jesus preached and taught so much about the kingdom of God that one day the Pharisees asked Him pointedly when the kingdom of God would come. He answered them, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21). Jesus was saying that the kingdom of God is not in an outward display. The kingdom of God exists within, where God rules the heart and life, and also among those whose hearts and lives are ruled by God. Later on the kingdom of God will come openly.

At that time the King Himself was with them, preaching and teaching the principles of the rule of God in the human heart and demonstrating its power in healings and miracles. Their preconceived concept of the kingdom of God was so foreign to the true rule of God that they missed the kingdom entirely. Eventually they killed their King.

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus met with His disciples in an upper room to eat the annual Passover meal with them. We call it The Last Supper. On that occasion Jesus instituted

a new “supper.” We call it The Lord’s Supper. He broke the bread and gave it to them to eat, saying, “This is my body.” Then He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink.

He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:24, 25).

Luke records: “Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes’” (Luke 22:15 - 18).

So, when did Jesus drink of the fruit of the vine *again* with His disciples? Peter tells us. “Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen of God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead” (Acts 10:40, 41).

“After He rose from the dead.” Jesus was crucified, buried, and on the third day raised from the dead. He ate and drank again with His disciples. *They were in the kingdom of God.*

Satan and his angels were cast out of Heaven. Jesus saw them fall (Luke 10:18). Later, on the island of Patmos, the apostle John heard the heavenly announcement: “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down” (see Revelation 12:1 - 17). Christ rules in Heaven. “With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (:12). What an insult to the blood of Jesus Christ it would be to allow Satan to stand before God in the presence of our High Priest and continue to accuse the redeemed and justified saints of God! The blood of Jesus Christ speaks on our behalf in Heaven (Hebrews 12:24). Satan has nothing to say there; so they expelled him. Hallelujah to the Lamb!

Yes, Jesus Christ now rules in Heaven and from Heaven, and “He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25). He is right now seated on the highest possible throne of authority, seated with His Father in His throne (Revelation 3:21), ruling in “the Jerusalem above” (Galatians 4:26), with all authority given fully to Him in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18). For Jesus to leave that throne and assume a merely earthly one would be an immeasurable demotion.

Jesus Committed The Preaching Of The Kingdom To The Church.

In this present age the Church is the domain where the King now rules on earth, where His principles are in effect, where His truth, authority and power now reside on earth. Because

the kingdom is now operating in and through the Church, as the Church advances so does the kingdom in this world. The King ought to rule the whole world, and some day He will. Now His rule is in effect where He is obeyed, that is, in the hearts and lives of His disciples. As more people submit to Him and receive His grace, His Church grows and therefore His kingdom prospers.

Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

During that forty day period Jesus gave His disciples an advanced, “post-resurrection” course of instruction on the kingdom of God. It must have clarified and expanded much of their thinking and understanding concerning the nature and principles of God’s power and authority on earth in and through His Church.

Still, the disciples continued to have a lingering and deeply embedded assumption about the kingdom of God. So they asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (verse 6). Jesus bypassed the question and redirected their attention to the important subject at hand: the soon coming of the Holy Spirit to empower believers to carry the gospel everywhere and thus extend the kingdom of God into the whole world.

Jesus had specifically stated: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). *The progress of the gospel is God’s “time clock” of this age.*

Peter.

Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom to Peter (Matthew 16:19). As the original lead apostle, Peter exercised his delegated “opening and closing” authority under Christ first to preach the gospel and open the door of the kingdom to the Jews on the Day Of Pentecost (Acts 2), and also during his subsequent apostolic ministry among the Jews (Acts chapters 2 and 3; Galatians 2:7 - 9).

Although Philip the evangelist “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12) to the Samaritans and baptized the converts on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ, it was Peter, accompanied by the apostle John, who came and laid the apostolic foundation of the kingdom of God among them (see Ephesians 2:20, where it is stated that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets).

Finally, although Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7 - 9), it was Peter who first preached the gospel to the Gentiles and opened the door of the kingdom to them (Acts 10).

Paul.

At Ephesus, the apostle Paul “went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). Later, Paul testified to the elders of the church at Ephesus, “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more” (Acts 20:25).

Even as a prisoner in Rome, Paul opened the place where he was lodging for a meeting with the Jews who lived in Rome, “to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). He “dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (verses 30, 31).

In his letter to the Colossians Paul referred to those who were with him as his “fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision” (Colossians 4:11).

The Power Of The Kingdom Of God.

“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Corinthians 4:20). The NIV reads, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”

The kingdom of God is not an idealized state ruled by an imaginary deity. It is not theoretical, a subject of abstract philosophical speculation and postulating. It is more than a correct theological formulation (although it certainly is that, as this chapter itself endeavors to demonstrate). The kingdom of God is in *power*. It is real. God is real. His word is real. His power is real. His works are real. His universal moral authority is real.

God has not retired to exist passively in remote seclusion, a distant and detached observer of human events. God is love. That is His character. Love is purposeful, committed, active, energetic, effective. Because God loves fully, He is fully committed to the object of His love. That full and total divine commitment is dynamic, pervasive and personal. God’s infinite love directs His infinite power according to His infinite knowledge and wisdom to secure the greatest possible amount of good, *all things being considered together*.

So then, God is not at all interested in some of the petty legalisms and trivialities that burden much of “religion.” Although we are to glorify God in what we eat, drink, and in whatever we do (1 Corinthians 10:31), “the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and

peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). God is interested in righteousness, not rituals. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Christ’s kingdom (Hebrews 1:8).

The Vital Importance Of The Kingdom Of God.

Jesus spoke several parables concerning the kingdom of God. These parables of the kingdom illustrate the principles of the kingdom and emphasize its surpassing importance.

“The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12). “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it” (Luke 16:16).

When I was a boy my mother took me to a fire sale at the J. C. Penney store in Coos Bay, Oregon. I still remember the crowd of people pushing and shoving to get in the door. *That’s* the kind of aggressive attitude we should have about pressing into the kingdom of God.

“The kingdom of God is like ... buried treasure ... the pearl of great price.” Go for the kingdom of God with everything in you! Seek it above all else. “Sell out” to God and seize the kingdom. Do whatever it takes, make whatever personal sacrifice is necessary. Go all out for the King and the kingdom!

In one sense the kingdom of God is a free gift of grace—a right relationship with the King by grace through faith. In another sense it will cost you everything—the total surrender of yourself, your personal self-supremacy that is the essence of rebellion against the King and His kingdom. The rebel must “lay down his weapons,” yes, throw them away eagerly because of his new loyalty to his rightful Sovereign and His blessed and happy rule.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). “But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:31, 32).

“Assuredly I say to you, There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life” (Luke 18:29, 30).

Jesus is not requiring us to abandon our property and to reject our basic moral obligations to our families. He is saying that the kingdom of God takes precedence over even these earthly values and relationships. If any of these conflict with our essential obedience to God, God comes first. Many people have been forced to flee from their homes and/or have been rejected and even persecuted by their own family members because of their faith in Christ and their obedience to Him. Christian wives have been abandoned by their unbelieving

husbands, and vice versa. Children have chosen to follow Christ even though they knew it would mean being disowned by their parents.

James and John left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants to follow Christ's call (Mark 1:20). Sons and daughters have left the family business or declined to follow the careers their parents dreamed and planned for them in order to follow God's call to ministry and missions. It hurt to have to disappoint the family, but the kingdom of God came first. Later, many of those same parents proudly boasted of their children's accomplishments.

On the same theme Jesus said, "For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to accept it, let him accept it" (Matthew 19:12).

Here the Lord is referring to some who have forgone the joys of marriage itself in order to serve the Lord in some high risk ministry. Paul is a good example. No man in his right mind would say to a prospective bride, "Will you marry me? I'm going to be mobbed, beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned and finally killed for the sake of the gospel." No sane woman would respond, "Sure! Sounds like fun. Let's do it together."

Think also about Jesus' startling statement recorded in Mark 9:47. "And if your eye makes you sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." (Also Matthew 20:21).

Now, Jesus does not expect anyone to be so foolish as to gouge out an eye (or cut off a hand or foot). He is emphasizing the necessity to eliminate anything that would keep oneself out of the kingdom of God. Jesus correctly assumed that reasonable people would stop practicing sin and using their eyes, hands and feet as "instruments of unrighteousness to sin" (Romans 6:13) long before they would go to such extreme measures. Nevertheless, such extreme measures *would* be far preferable to being kept out of the kingdom of God and landing in hell fire. Jesus' point is graphically clear: the consequences of sin are far worse than the trauma of self-mutilation would be. Both are unthinkable—especially sin and the consequences of sin. So, let's abhor sin and keep our eyes, hands and feet to be used as "instruments of righteousness to God."

Luke 9:57 - 62 records an occasion when Jesus encountered some prospective disciples. To the first eager disciple Jesus made it clear that He had nothing earthly to offer him. When He said "follow me" to the second man, he replied "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." It is possible that the man's father was still alive and well; the man just wanted to delay until after his father died before obeying Christ's call to discipleship. Jesus said that the man had others, perhaps other children, who were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) who could take care of the funeral arrangements when the time came (whether

sooner or later). The man's immediate and overriding obligation was to follow Christ and go preach the kingdom of God.

The response of the third man also came from his reluctance to follow Jesus. It, too, revealed the lack of importance he placed on the kingdom of God and therefore his unwillingness to commit himself whole-heartedly to Christ and His call. He proved himself unfit for the kingdom of God. He was the "double minded man" of James 1:8 and 4:8. No one who is looking backward can plow a straight furrow.

One day a scribe asked Jesus, "which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus replied, "The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength' [quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, 5]. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' [quoting Leviticus 19:18]. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe agreed with Jesus. When Jesus saw that the scribe answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." See Mark 12:28 - 34.

The scribe had the right answer. He knew and spoke the truth. That meant that he was "not far" from the kingdom of God—not far but not yet in. The truth was in his head, but not yet in his heart.

The kingdom of God is near. You might be "not far" *from* it and yet not *in* it. If not, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

How Do We Enter The Kingdom Of God?

Jesus lived in a very religious culture. As the covenant people of God, Israel had a rich spiritual and cultural heritage. Certain classes of people developed and maintained a very high code of conduct. The scribes and Pharisees regarded themselves and were regarded by others as the supreme examples of righteousness.

What a shock it must have been to those present at the Sermon On The Mount when they heard Jesus say, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). The shock must have become more intense when the Lord continued over and over to refer to the most "righteous" men of that day as "hypocrites."

What? Unless our righteousness exceeds that of our spiritual leaders we cannot even get into the kingdom of God? If they cannot get in, what hope is there for us?

On another occasion Jesus also made this startling statement: "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples were astonished at His

words, He phrased it another way: “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:23 - 25. See also Matthew 19:23, 24 and Luke 18:24, 25).

The people had been led to believe that prosperity and riches were evidence of God’s approval. Yet, although God has promised to bless and prosper those who obey Him and follow His principles laid down in The Scriptures, wealth in itself is certainly no proof of personal righteousness and divine endorsement. The ancient prophets and Jesus Himself spoke stern words of condemnation concerning those who misuse wealth and oppress the poor.

Jesus is saying that for many people wealth forms a great impediment even to *getting into* the kingdom of God. Wealth tends to create a sense of pride and self-sufficiency that will keep them out of the kingdom of God. That is why God has “chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him” (James 2:5).

Early in His ministry Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Thinking only in a biological and physical frame of reference, Nicodemus asked, “How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (verse 4). Jesus repeated what He had just said: “Unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (verse 5). The Lord went on to explain that He was speaking of a moral and spiritual birth, and asked Nicodemus “Are you a teacher of Israel, and do you not know these things?” (verse 10). Nicodemus should have understood moral and spiritual rebirth from what The Scriptures said about getting our heart right and new (for example, see Ezekiel 18:31).

The new birth is the totally changed “set” of the soul, the direction of the heart (“will”) in response to the influences of the Holy Spirit. It is getting into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, being delivered by the Father from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13), and as a result living a transformed life.

Regarding our children, Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it” (Mark 10:14, 15). Also Matthew 19:14 and Luke 18:16).

Children come to Jesus readily if and when they are given the opportunity. They have not yet been “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). They have not yet set themselves in a personal selfish agenda and built up defensive biases against the truth. A pure and honest child-like (not childish) faith is the only way to enter the kingdom of God.

On the same subject, Jesus said “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him that a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” (Mark 9:42; also Matthew 18:6 and Luke 17:2). In other words, if you cause one child who believes in Jesus Christ to stumble and thereby you keep that child from entering the kingdom of God, *it would be better for you if the Mafia got you!*

We have just looked at what Jesus said in Mark 10:15. Matthew also says that on one occasion the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus responded by calling a little child to Him and setting him among them. Then He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1 - 4). That little child did not hesitate, rationalize, or argue. He just got up and came to Jesus. It is as simple as that.

So then, to enter the kingdom of God we must come with child-like honesty, faith and obedience. We must value the kingdom above all else. We must press into it—go for it with all that we have within us. The kingdom of God is free, but it is not cheap. It costs us nothing and yet it costs us everything. And *it is worth everything.*

It is not easy. Paul reminded the new believers in Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). He wrote to the believers in Thessalonica that he “bragged” on them among the churches for their patience and faith in all the persecutions and tribulations that they were enduring. What they were going through was “manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer” (2 Thessalonians 1:4, 5).

On the island of Patmos the apostle John referred to himself as “your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9).

Personal holiness is essential to entering the kingdom of God. Toward the end of the Sermon On The Mount Jesus made it very clear and definite: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (John 7:21).

Here are Paul’s inspired words in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10 in the Amplified Version: “Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (misled); neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality, nor cheats—swindlers and thieves; nor greedy graspers, nor drunkards, nor foulmouthed revilers and slanderers, nor extortioners and robbers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God.” *Wow!*

Paul’s inspired words on the subject are clear and definite. Let no one maneuver around them theologically or philosophically. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions,

jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19 - 21). “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Ephesians 5:5).

Remember, “the kingdom of God is ... righteousness” (Romans 14:17). So, let us “live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12 NIV).

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things [see verses 5 - 9] you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10, 11).

The King Is Coming: The Kingdom Future.

The King is coming, and He means business! The kingdom of God will triumph over all opposition. The rebellion is doomed.

“The Lord Jesus Christ ... will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:1). Paul wrote this inspired epistle to Timothy just before the aged apostle was to be executed. In 4:18 he declared in triumph, “The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” Like Paul, our confidence is in the power of God to keep us and bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom.

Much earlier, in his first recorded epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:22 - 24). There shall be a resurrection, because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (verse 50).

In Revelation 11:15 we read, “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’”

Jesus concluded His explanation of the Parable Of The Tares (Matthew 13:36 - 43) by saying "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, "When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:31 - 34)

So, are you in the kingdom of God? Have you been born again? Do you love the King and are you obeying Him? Has His holy rule and reign been established in your heart and life? If not, humble yourself as did the trusting, obedient child, and come to Him now. He is calling you.

Chapter 2

The Day Of The Lord

The basic definition of "the day of the Lord" is *a specific moment when God takes decisive and conclusive action to bring judgment, put an end to evil, and establish righteousness and justice*. It encompasses the final events of the consummation of this present age, leading to the eternal state.

The revelation of the coming day of the Lord was given first to the ancient prophets of Israel. Some of their prophecies are in the form of what are called "prophetic types." That is, although the prophecy is directed to a contemporary situation, it contains major elements that can refer only to the consummation of the age. Some call this "the law of double reference"; however, that term can be misleading in that it tends to place equal interpretation on both the immediate and the ultimate fulfilment, whereas in the overall scope of prophetic events the immediate fulfilment is the minor element of the prophecy and the future fulfilment is the major

element. The contemporary particulars of the prophecy are fulfilled in history and do not carry through to the end of the age. So then, “prophetic type” is the preferred designation.

Sometimes “the day of the Lord” referred to God’s judgment on specific nations. For example, the prophecy of Obadiah was a prediction of God’s judgment on Edom, Israel’s neighbor and enemy, for their treatment of the people of Judah probably during the Philistine and Arabian invasion of Jerusalem during the reign of king Jehoram (c. 844 B.C. See 2 Chronicles 21:16, 17). Obadiah verse 15 contains a reference to the day of the Lord. God’s impending judgment on Edom was a prophetic type of His sure judgment on all the nations. It is “near” in God’s view and timing. Isaiah picked up the same prophetic theme (Isaiah 34, particularly verses 5 - 8).

God is poised to bring both present and final judgment on the nations for their wickedness, and His historical judgment on Edom was a part of His moral governance over the nations. Edom was destroyed and is no longer a people. The remnants of ancient Edom became the Idumeans of Jesus’ day.

So then, “the day of the Lord” on Edom was fulfilled in the historic events and has no reference to the future day of the Lord except to illustrate and provide an example of its coming awesome power and finality. Obadiah’s prophecy climaxes with the promise that “the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (verse 21).

Jeremiah also prophesied concerning contemporary events that are called “the day of the Lord.” Although these do not refer to the end of the age, they are typical of the way God judges nations now and also the way He will judge the world at the end of time (see Jeremiah 46:1 - 12, particularly verse 10).

Ezekiel also prophesied concerning contemporary events that are called “the day of the Lord,” although they did not refer to the end of the age (see Ezekiel 30).

The prophet Joel referred to a recent terrible plague of locusts as a vivid type of the severity of the coming day of the Lord. The purpose was to call God’s people to repentance to avert God’s judgment and to prepare for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The second chapter of Joel and part of the third chapter contain several references to the coming day of the Lord. Here are the pertinent passages.

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations” (Joel 2:1, 2).

Verses 3 through 9 describe the utter destruction that will occur at the coming day of the Lord by comparing it to the desolation caused by the locust plague of Joel’s day. The locusts

are pictured as an irresistible army that consumes everything in its path. The prophet uses dramatic hyperbole in establishing the prophetic type. In verses 10 and 11 the prophet transitions to the future day of the Lord by announcing the final cosmic and stellar events that will accompany that day, final events that are beyond the scope of the events of Joel's day. Notice what will happen on the day of the Lord:

- (1) the earth shall shake (a transition from the events of Joel's day to the future day of the Lord, blending features of both);
- (2) the heavens shall tremble;
- (3) the sun and the moon shall be dark;
- (4) the stars will withhold their brightness;
- (5) the Lord will give His voice before His army;
- (6) the Lord will execute His word;
- (7) no one can endure that day.

This is followed by a call to repentance (Joel 2:12 - 17) and a promise of blessing to the obedient (verses 18 - 27). Verses 28 - 32 promise the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a promise that was fulfilled centuries later on the Day Of Pentecost (Acts 2). "Afterward" in Joel 2:28 means after the restorative work described in verses 12 - 27. That was done after Joel's time and before Christ's first advent. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter identified "afterward" as "the last days" (see Peter's quotation from Joel in Acts 2:17 - 21). This accords with the fact that "the last days" began with Christ's ministry, vicarious death, resurrection, ascension, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. See also Hebrews 1:1, 2 ("God ... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son"), and 1 John 2:18 ("Little children, it is the last hour").

In Joel Chapter 3, verses 13 through 16 the prophet's vision is again focused on the day of the Lord. There we see again the events of the day of the Lord: the gathering of the nations to "decision day"—the day of judgment, cosmic and stellar events, Christ's voice from Zion, the shaking of the heavens and the earth, and the reward of His people. See a parallel passage in Psalm 50:1 - 6.

The prophet Amos also described the future day of the Lord. "Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18 - 20).

Some of the people were wanting the day of the Lord to come, not realizing what it would mean for sinful humanity. Through the prophet Amos God allows us to take briefly another soul-searching look at what that terrible day will be.

Isaiah's prophecies include several references to the future day of the Lord. We find these in Isaiah 2:10 - 21; 13:6 - 13; 24:19 - 23; and 34:1 - 4. Isaiah's prophecies of the day of the Lord form an important part of the unified message of The Scriptures concerning the day of the Lord.

One day in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus turned to what we now refer to as Isaiah 61:1 - 3, "The Spirit of the LORD God is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD..." After reading this passage, Jesus sat down and said to the people in the synagogue, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Although Luke does not say that Jesus went on to read the part of Isaiah's prophecy that refers to "the day of vengeance of our God," etc., we know from our Lord's own words, recorded also by Luke, that He certainly did refer to the day of the Lord in such terms (see Luke 21:33 - 36).

Jeremiah referred to the decisive Battle Of Carchemish in 605 B.C., where the Egyptians were defeated by the Babylonians, as a prophetic type of the future day of the Lord (Jeremiah 46:10 and context).

Other Old Testament prophets also prophesied about the future day of the Lord. Please read Zephaniah 1:14 - 2:3; Haggai 2:6, 7 (see Hebrews 12:25 - 29); Zechariah 14:1 - 9; and Malachi 4:1 - 6. Some of these prophecies contain unique features. They all agree in their divine witness to the main features of the day of the Lord.

New Testament References To The Day Of The Lord.

In the next chapter we will explore the subject of the return of Christ. Right now we are looking at New Testament passages that refer specifically to the day of the Lord and to the terms that Jesus and others used to refer to it. Some of these are embodied in larger passages that will be addressed later. It is always important to keep their context in mind.

The day.

"Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:30).

“...in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:16).

“...each one’s work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it” (1 Corinthians 3:13).

“...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

A day.

“the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him...” (Luke 12:46)

“He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness...” (Acts 17:31).

That day.

“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied...’” (Matthew 7:22).

“But of that day no one knows,...” (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32).

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly” (Luke 21:34).

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

“These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe,...” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

“He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

“The Lord grant to him [Onesiphorus] that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day” (2 Timothy 1:18).

Paul wrote, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day...” (2 Timothy 4:8).

The day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“...so that you come behind in no gift, waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:7, 8).

“...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

“We are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus” (2 Corinthians 1:14).

“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

“...that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:10).

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:1, 2).

“...holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (Philippians 2:16). See also 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

His day.

“For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day” (Luke 17:24).

The last day.

“This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day... No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day... Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54).

“Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’” (John 11:24).

“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

The day of redemption.

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30).

The great and notable day of the Lord.

“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20, Peter quoting Joel 2:31).

The great day.

“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

The day of God.

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12).

That great day of God Almighty.

“For they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14. See 19:11 - 16).

The Day of judgment.

“It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” (Matthew 10:15. See Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; and also Matthew 11:22, 24).

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9).

“But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

“Love has been among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).

The day of wrath.

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5).

“For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Revelation 6:17).

The day of vengeance.

“To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61).

The end.

“But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately” (Luke 21:9).

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:19).

“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Summary.

From what The Scriptures say about the day of the Lord, it is clear that the day of the Lord will include: (1) the personal, visible, bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven; (2) the resurrection; (3) the rapture (catching up) of all believers; (4) sudden destruction on the unbelievers; (5) the renovation of the cosmos; (6) the judgment. After this will be the eternal state.

The day of the Lord begins with the visible, personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ. His coming brings the end of the present age.

Chapter 3

The Return Of Jesus Christ

Jude records that ancient Enoch prophesied of the Lord's coming. "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14, 15).

The Book Of Enoch is not part of inspired, canonical Scripture. However, the Epistle Of Jude is. Jude affirms that Enoch's statement *itself* is historical and also prophetic.

Thousands of years ago Job prophesied, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25 - 27).

In studying end-time prophecy, we must start with the Lord Jesus Christ—not the Book Of Revelation or even the other inspired writings of the New Testament authors. Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6). All truth is personalized in Him and embodied in His words. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35). He is the measure of all truth. Remember, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). He is the ultimate interpreter of The Scriptures, including the writings of the prophets, the apostles, and the other writers of The Scriptures. He is the Cornerstone of the edifice of biblical interpretation, including the interpretation of prophecy. That Cornerstone determines the framework of biblical prophecy. It all must "square" with Him.

So then, a thorough exploration of what Jesus Christ revealed about His return and the events surrounding it is essential to a correct understanding of eschatology. The words of our Lord form the core of divine revelation concerning His return and the events associated with it.

After reprimanding Peter and reminding His disciples that following Him includes total commitment, even to death itself, Jesus said, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27).

On The Way To Jerusalem.

While Jesus was on His last journey toward Jerusalem, the Pharisees asked Him when the kingdom of God would come. He answered, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20, 21).

Then the Lord took the occasion to give the disciples some important information and instructions. Luke alone records His words:

Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.” And they answered and said to Him, “Where, Lord?” So He said to them, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” -Luke 17:22 – 37

He tells them to be patient, to prepare themselves to “go the distance.” The time will come when they will yearn to have Jesus with them again, even just for one day. But it will not

happen, not in the way they would like. The desire for Jesus' presence will be so great that people will be saying, "Look, He's here!" or, "Look, He's there!" Hold steady. Do not go chasing after them.

This indeed is what has happened in church history. Messianic expectations have given rise to such movements. False "christs" have arisen and led many after them.

Jesus goes on to tell them (and us) that when He *does* return, it will be like the brilliance of a flash of lightning that reaches across the entire sky.

First things first. Right then He was facing rejection by that generation and the sufferings of scourging and crucifixion.

So what will things be like in the days leading directly to His return, the "days of the Son of Man"? They will be like the days of Noah—eating, drinking, marrying wives, all for sensual pleasure. It was "party time" right up until the very day that Noah entered into the ark. Nobody took Noah seriously nor the strange "big box" he was building.

Those days will also be like the days of Lot, in Abraham's time. They were not just having a big time eating and drinking. They were also buying, selling, planting, and building. It was a time of great commercial, agricultural, and construction activity. Things were booming! Work hard all day and party at night! That *also* went on right up to the day that Lot was evacuated from the doomed city.

"Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (verse 30).

Notice, "in the day ... on the day ... in the day ... in that day ... in that night." It is His day, the day He will be revealed. The "days of the Son of Man" lead right up to the very *day* that He is revealed.

In verse 31 Jesus says that the urgency of Lot's escape gives us an example of the urgency of His coming day. The angels grabbed Lot's hand, the hand of his wife, the hands of his two daughters, and pulled them out of the city (see Genesis 19). When Jesus comes, there will be no time to turn back and pack your "valuables." Drop it all and go meet Jesus! Don't hold on too tightly to the things of this life. Hold them so that you can let them go in a moment! Don't look back. *Remember Lot's wife.*

In this passage Jesus is not referring at all to the coming destruction of Jerusalem, as He did later in The Olivet Discourse. This passage in Luke 17 is *all* about His second coming.

In verse 33 Jesus says that discipleship means giving up our very lives in order to preserve them. If we choose this life over eternal life, we will lose it all. If we choose eternal life over this life, we will preserve it all.

So, what will happen “in that night”? (Yes, in some parts of the world it will be night; in some parts it will be day). “There will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left” (verse 34). “Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left” (verse 35). (Some manuscripts insert verse 36 from Matthew 24:40). The regular daily schedule of life will be going on. Nothing seems out of the ordinary. Life is going on as usual. Suddenly everything is completely changed. The end has come. One is taken (*paralempthesetai*, from *paralambano* “taken with, taken unto, received.” The same word is used in John 14:3 “I will come again and receive (*paralempsomai*) you to Myself.” The other is left (*aphethesetai*, from *aphiemi* “abandoned, forsaken, left behind”).

“Where, Lord?” the disciples asked. They are not asking where the one is *taken*. They are asking where the other is *left*. Where are they left? to what fate? Jesus replied, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (verse 37. See Job 39:30). “Eagles” here possibly refers to vultures, because eagles do not ordinarily feed on carrion. There were lots of vultures in Palestine.

The ones who are taken will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air. The unbelievers will be left, like dead bodies ready for vultures to come together and pounce on them. What a graphic picture of the judgment. Even now the angels of judgment are “circling over” those who are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1. See Matthew 13:49, 50).

In His follow-up Jesus asked, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). By the sovereign grace of God, He will.

The Olivet Discourse.

The main body of Jesus’ prophetic teaching is called The Olivet Discourse. It is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

It was during the crucifixion week. Jesus’ disciples were admiring the temple and remarking to one another about the buildings, the massive stones and costly ornaments. Jesus showed no interest in their sight-seeing activities; so His disciples called His attention to what they were observing. One of them said, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” (Mark 13:1).

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down’” (verse 2).

Jesus proceeded to lead His puzzled disciples out to the Mount Of Olives. Once He was seated with the temple in full view, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

They were asking two questions (not three). They inquired about the destruction of the temple and also about the sign of His coming and of the end of the age.

Jesus began His answer to their two questions by warning them not to be deceived by the many who would come in His name claiming to be “Christ.” He spoke of coming wars and rumors of wars. He told them not to be terrified. That is not yet the end. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, pestilences, earthquakes, troubles, fearful sights and great signs from heaven. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Before all that, believers will be persecuted, arrested, delivered up to councils, beaten in the synagogues, brought before rulers and kings for His sake as a testimony against those authorities and the unbelieving people. They will even be killed. They will be hated of all nations, all peoples, for His name’s sake. Believers will be betrayed by parents, siblings, relatives, friends. But not a hair of their head shall perish. Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall grow cold. But he (and she) who shall endure to the end shall be saved.

When the persecutors do all these things against the followers of Jesus, believers are not to be anxious about what they are going to say. Jesus Himself by the Holy Spirit will give them what to say in that moment. He will give them a mouth and wisdom that none of their adversaries shall be able to contradict or resist (Luke 21:15).

The gospel, the good news of the kingdom of God, must first be proclaimed in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come. Remember, *the progress of the gospel is God’s prophetic time clock.*

Then Jesus went back and addressed their *first* question, the one that was at the forefront of their minds—the fate of temple.

When they see “the abomination of desolation, spoken by Daniel the prophet” (Daniel 11:31; 12:11)—that is, when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies (which happened in A.D. 68)—that is the sign that will alert them that the desolation of the entire city, not just the temple, is near (“whoever reads, let him understand”). The Roman army entered Jerusalem and the temple, holy places that were not to be desecrated. The city and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70.

When the Roman army began to surround Jerusalem, that was moment believers were to get out of the city and the surrounding Judean countryside immediately! Flee to the mountains. Leave everything behind. If they were out in the field, they were not to go back into the city even to get their clothes. Pregnant women and parents with babies would encounter the most severe difficulties. For obvious reasons, they were to pray that it will not happen during the winter. They were to pray also that it would not be on a sabbath day, as that would complicate and impede their escape.

Such tribulation will cause panic and trigger false messianic rumors. Jesus repeats the instructions He had given previously in Luke 17:23, 24.

Still speaking in the context of the first question of the disciples, Jesus said that will be the greatest time of tribulation and affliction that Israel as a nation had ever suffered or ever would suffer as a nation. Had it continued, no one would have survived. For the sake of the elect, Jews who had received the Messiah or who would receive Him in the future, those days were stopped short of the total annihilation of the population.

This time of tribulation and affliction Jesus called “the days of vengeance ... For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people” (Luke 21:22, 23). Later, Jesus said to the women who mourned and waited for Him as He was being led away to be crucified, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children...” (see Luke 23:28 - 31). The prophetic terminology Jesus used originated in Hosea 10:8 and will be ultimately fulfilled at the great day of the Lord (Revelation 6:15, 16).

Jerusalem would be trampled by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled—that is, until the times for the Gentiles to hear the gospel, the elect Gentiles to be saved and their fullness come in (see Isaiah 59:20, 21; Romans 11:25 - 27).

The prophesied destruction of Jerusalem established the prophetic type of the future fulfillment of the prophecy at the consummation of the age, the day of the Lord. With that established, Jesus transitions to the second part of their question, “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken...” See Matthew 24:29 - 31. “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven will be shaken...” See Mark 13:24 - 27. (Jesus used phenomenal language—describing things as they appear from earth—when speaking of stars “falling”). These are the very events that the ancient prophets of Israel described when they foretold the day of the Lord.

We notice in Matthew 24:31 that Jesus said that He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet. This reminds us of Paul’s inspired prophetic words in 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Paul wrote, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

When did “the tribulation of those days” begin? It began with the siege and fall of Jerusalem. Those were “the days of vengeance” (Luke 21:22). It was “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7), and the only way to be saved out of it was in Christ, the prophesied “David” (verse 9). That tribulation has continued ever since and will continue until Jesus returns. For centuries Jerusalem was trampled by the Gentiles. The Jews were dispersed and have suffered greatly ever since. “Wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

After the Jews rejected the Messiah, God went to the Gentiles “to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). These are “the times of the Gentiles,” when God is bringing the Gentiles to Christ. The Jews have suffered terribly and will continue to suffer under this centuries-old tribulation. God loves the Jews. Like Paul, we should pray for them that they may be saved (Romans 10:1). “Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Romans 11:28). The elect Jews are those who have received and will receive the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. They are beloved “for the sake of the fathers.” God is provoking the Jews to jealousy in order to save some of them (Romans 10:19; 11:11, 14). Their only hope is to turn to their Messiah and be grafted back into their “olive tree” (Romans 11:23). Keep in mind that Jesus’ subject is not geopolitics; it is God’s eternal purpose in the gospel.

So when Jesus said “Immediately after the tribulation of those days,” He did not mean immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, but immediately after the tribulation that started then and has been going on ever since and will continue right up until He returns.

We do not know when Christ will return. It is not for us to know the times or seasons the Father has put in His own authority (Acts 1:7). When Jesus spoke these things on the Mount Of Olives, at the time of His self-limitation as the “Son of man” even He did not know the day or the hour (Mark 13:32). We must stay in Scripture and not stray into speculation.

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:25 - 28).

Jesus went on to express these truths in parables. He spoke the parable of the fig tree “and all the trees” (Luke 21:29). The Scriptures at times use the fig tree as a metaphor for Israel (Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7). But here the Lord is merely making a general reference to the common fact that new leaves on the trees means summer is coming. Just as new leaves means summer is coming, so the signs He spoke of will be evidence that the day of the Lord is near, “at the very doors” (Matthew 24:33).

“Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled” (Matthew 24:34). First, that generation did not pass away until the prophetic type was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Second, the Jewish people have remained and will not pass away until all is fulfilled at the day of the Lord. Third, the generation of believers who live to see the end time signs that Jesus described will live to see them all fulfilled.

At that time Jesus gave the Parable Of The Ten Virgins. Its theme is to be ready and watching for the Bridegroom. He also gave the Parable of the Talents. Its theme is to be diligent and productive.

A parable usually has one main theme. It is not wise to base doctrine on the details of a parable. In the Parable Of The Ten Virgins one outstanding statement is essential to the main theme. It is found in verse 10 “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.” *And the door was shut.* Those who tried to get in later were shut out. *Only God knows how many people have been deceived and their souls destroyed by the erroneous teaching that people can and will be saved after the rapture!*

The day of the Lord will bring the judgment of the nations (*ethne=nations, Gentiles, people*, from *ethnos*). This is a judgment of the *people*, not a judgment of national units (countries). The assumption that this is a judgment of national units has led to some strange interpretations. Of course, The United States Of America is always assumed to be a “sheep nation.” Germany was once considered a “goat nation,” but that might have changed. Who knows about Zimbabwe. or Angola. or...

Again, these are not sheep and goat *countries*. They are “sheep” and “goat” *people*, the righteous versus the wicked. This is not to judge which countries are going to go into the “millennium,” based on their treatment of the Jews. It is to judge whether people are going into everlasting punishment or into eternal life (Matthew 25:46) based on whether or not they had the love of God in them as evidenced by how they treated the least of His brethren. His “brethren” are those who hear the word of God and do it (Matthew 12:50).

Later Jesus assured His disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions [*monai*, dwelling places, residences]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1 - 3).

During His trial, when the high priest asked Jesus if He is the Son of God, Jesus declared “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62; also Matthew 26:64).

In the Book Of Revelation, Jesus said to the church at Philadelphia, “Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).

At the opening of the sixth vial (bowl), the risen, ascended, glorified Christ said “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15).

Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, made these final declarations: “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:7). “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (verse 12). “Surely I am coming quickly” (verse 20).

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

“Angelic Eschatology”.

After His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples through a period of forty days, “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). After focusing their attention on the coming descent of the Holy Spirit and their subsequent mission, He led them out as far as Bethany and blessed them. As He was blessing them, He began His ascent into Heaven. The awed disciples kept staring upward as a cloud engulfed Him.

Suddenly, two angels in human form and wearing white apparel stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10, 11).

Apostolic Eschatology.

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ are the foundation and the unifying point of all biblical teaching concerning future events. Also, the Holy Spirit revealed much truth to the apostles and other New Testament writers. These inspired writings supplement, harmonize with, and expand on what Jesus said. They are always consistent with the teachings of our Lord and are to be interpreted according to His teaching. Any interpretation or application of Scripture that is inconsistent with what Jesus said is erroneous.

There is no exclusively “Pauline eschatology,” “Petrine eschatology,” or “Johannine eschatology.” All apostolic and other biblical prophetic revelation is a unified whole. All parts converge; none diverges. Each tributary flows into and contributes to the great river of biblical prophecy.

Paul wrote his prophetic passages out of the need for eschatological clarification in the churches, notably the Thessalonian and Corinthian churches. Peter wrote out of the need to give the Church a deposit of truth that they (and we) are to keep in mind (2 Peter 1:15). John wrote in the context of the doctrinal errors growing in his day and also out of the revelation given to him in the Apocalypse.

In our journey through the apostolic eschatology, we begin with Peter's sermon to the people following the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple (Acts 3). For our present purpose we are particularly interested in verses 19 - 21. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before [he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus (NIV)], whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

"The times of restoration of all things" are exactly what God had revealed to the ancient prophets of Israel concerning the day of the Lord. Here Peter affirms that the "times of restoration of all things" is the time when the Lord will return.

Though not an apostle, James was inspired to write, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7, 8). Notice the emphasis on patience and stability of heart because Christ's return was (and still is) imminent.

Later, Peter wrote "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

In chapter 4:12 and 13 of the same epistle, Peter encourages believers, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."

The writer of the Epistle To The Hebrews states, "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). At His second appearing, Jesus Christ will not come as a sin offering to bring salvation. That He did once for all at His first advent. The second time He will come to complete the saving purpose of God in this age of grace and salvation.

Later in his epistle the same author wrote, "...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). And in verse 37 he writes, "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37). "A little while" is in God's

reckoning of time according to “times and seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

Late in his life the apostle John urged believers “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28).

Also, while he was exiled on Patmos, John declared, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7).

As we explored the teaching of The Scriptures concerning the day of the Lord, we noted Paul’s statement to the men of Athens, recorded by Luke in Acts 17:30, 31: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead.”

Just prior to this, Paul had preached the gospel at Thessalonica. From Paul’s two epistles to the church that was established there it is evident that the apostle had taught them about the imminency of Christ’s return and the day of the Lord. As a result, they became a very prophecy minded church. They misunderstood some things, however, and the misunderstandings became the occasion for the writing of First and especially Second Thessalonians.

Every chapter in First Thessalonians contains a reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ. The content of these passages gives us an idea of the doctrinal misunderstandings and the resulting problems. Following are the passages from First Thessalonians.

“For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven,... (1:9, 10). Notice the emphasis on waiting.

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (2:19). This tells us that at Christ’s coming and in their resurrected bodies, believers will retain their individual identity. We will recognize one another. We will love one another and find great joy in one another. For references to the believer’s “crown,” see also 1 Corinthians 9:25; Philippians 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10; 3:11.

“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (3:12, 13). Here the emphasis again is on stability of heart in holiness before God “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with

all His saints.” It is important to note that the event that we are to be looking for now is Christ’s coming *with all His saints*.

The most well known passage in this first epistle to the Thessalonians is found in chapter 4, verse 13 through chapter 5, verse 6. Most of the passage was quoted in the Foreword of this book. Please refer to it there or read it in your Bible. It is a foundational, definitive statement in Scripture on the coming of the Lord. It speaks for itself, and its message is clear and plain. Again, it is unfortunate that a chapter break was made in the middle of this passage. Paul did not intend to write “chapter 4, ending with verse 18,” then write “chapter 5, starting at verse 1.” Paul did not write chapters and verses. Those were added much later. Paul wrote one unified passage in essentially two paragraphs.

At the conclusion of his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul gives this benediction: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24).

Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonian church did not succeed in settling some people down. Instead, some who erroneously thought Paul had taught that Jesus was going to return immediately quit their employment and created a disturbance (see 2 Thessalonians 3:5 - 15). Spurious spiritual utterances and fake letters that were claimed to be written by Paul added fuel to the wildfire. So Paul writes Second Thessalonians, this time with a more corrective tone. The apostle begins with a commendation. After that Paul continues, “...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest [relief] with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when he comes in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:6 - 10).

This passage describes the horrific events that will take place at the coming of Christ. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. This is in full accord with Jesus’ statement that He will come in the glory of His Father with His angels (Matthew 16:27). This passage is also a dramatic and fearful statement of what will happen at that time to all who do not know God and to those who refuse to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Flaming fire. Everlasting destruction.* This echoes Isaiah 66:15, 16.

In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 2, verses 1 - 12, the apostle Paul tells the believers to hold steady and not allow themselves to become “soon shaken in mind or troubled” by spurious spiritual utterances, unsound teachings, or false rumors of a letter from Paul saying that the day of the Lord was right then upon them.

The timing of prophetic events is determined by how God works in time, as Peter makes clear in 2 Peter 3:8, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Although God transcends time, He works within time.

The Thessalonian believers did not understand the difference between *imminent* and *immediate*. The two can be defined and differentiated this way: imminent means it *could* happen at any moment; immediate means it *will* happen *this moment*. For example, the coming of the Lord continues to be imminent even while we are attending a morning worship service. If His return happens to be immediate while we are attending a morning worship service, *forget dinner!*

The coming of the Lord has been *imminent* for nearly 2,000 years. At any moment during that time it *could* have been immediate. His return is always imminent, always near in human terms. Jesus has been poised to return any moment that it pleases the Father to send Him. For that reason believers are instructed to be ready and waiting for His coming. Believers have always looked for Christ’s return daily while at the same time living faithfully and productively in the overall view of God’s sovereign purpose and timing.

“Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:8).

The Antichrist.

In Second Thessalonians 2, verses 3 and 4, the apostle tells us that two things must precede the day of the Lord: the “falling away” (apostasy) and the revealing of the man of sin (lawlessness), the son of perdition (ruin, destruction).

Jesus called Judas Iscariot “the son of perdition” (John 17:12). This does not mean that Judas Iscariot is the antichrist. The term refers to anyone who is headed for utter and eternal ruin and loss.

This man of sin (lawlessness), the son of perdition, asserts his divinity above (against) *all* “gods” and even God Himself. He is the opposer of all deity, whether the True or the false. Notice the use of the present tense (“opposes ... exalts ... sits ... showing ... is); however, this should not be pressed.

He sits in the temple of God. The prevailing view among evangelicals is that the Jewish temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem and that the Antichrist will occupy it during a seven year tribulation period. Others who are equally evangelical take this to mean the Church, the true temple of God. Still others think “temple” simply means metaphorically “God’s place,” that is, God’s position (that Lucifer tried to usurp—Isaiah 14:12, 13).

“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told [was telling] you these things?” (verse 5). How we wish we could have been present!

“And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He [or, he] who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way” (verses 6 - 7). “What” in verse 6; “Who” (or, who) in verse 7.

So, what and Who (or, who) are restraining? Impersonal institutions (what) are led by personal rulers (who). The traditional view is that this was the Roman Empire and its governmental structure. The Romans did restrain lawlessness. They imposed law and order, swept the pirates from the sea, made travel relatively safe, and established general security.

Some assume it to be civil government in general in its restraining role, according to Romans 13. Modern democracies that make void the law of God (Psalm 119:126) are in danger of falling and being removed.

The premillennial view is that it is the Holy Spirit present in the Church, Who will be removed when believers are raptured. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the world is to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8); therefore, some believe that His ministry does not include restraining lawlessness in society.

Even in Paul’s time the “mystery, which is lawlessness” (genitive of apposition), was already at work. “Mystery”: the hidden, Satan-inspired errors and delusions that emerge within the culture in their own seasons and times.

At that time the “falling away” and the spirit of lawlessness (antinomianism) was already fermenting in Christianity. The seeds of a spurious, antichrist theology were already being sown. In his Epistle To The Colossians Paul exposed and opposed gnosticism and its invasive influence among believers. Also, Paul had warned the elders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20). His warnings intensified in his second epistle to Timothy. By the time John wrote, the gnostic errors had become so advanced that his apostolic epistles embodied an all-out polemic against them.

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming [*parousia*]. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2:8 - 10).

The Lord will consume the lawless one with the breath of His mouth. This calls to mind Revelation 1:16, “out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword”; and also Hebrews 4:12, “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” So it is reasonable to think of “the breath of His mouth” as the power of His word. Christ will destroy (*katargesei*,

bring to nothing, render useless) the man of sin (lawlessness) with the brightness (manifestation, splendor) of His coming (*parousia*).

The falling away (apostasy) makes possible the rise and revelation of the lawless one. If there were no apostasy, the lawless one could not assert himself. He is swallowed up and nullified by the Lord at His coming.

The lawless one has his own “coming” (*parousia*). It is energized by Satan with all the limited ability he has to deceive by his own kind of powers, signs, and lying wonders. The lawless one will have a “field day” with gullible people who assume that if anything is supernatural, it must therefore be of God or at least have divine credibility. They are the “perishing ones” who refuse to receive the love of the truth that would save them. This is a moral condition, not an intellectual one. It is a deliberate, wicked choice. By rejecting the course of moral honesty they open themselves up to seduction and error. The determination to reject the truth creates a willingness to embrace error. Satan has a full repertoire for the man of lawlessness to perform.

So, what does God do about it? The answer is in 2:11 and 12. “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned [judged] who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Why would God do that? Because when people deliberately choose to believe the big lie, God lets them have it. He gives it to them. He grants to them the result of their chosen spiritual darkness. It is said that no eyes are as blind as those that refuse to see. See Romans, chapter 1, especially verses 28 and 29. Their choice to follow and indulge the pleasure of unrighteousness is the root cause of their unbelief. Moral perversion leads to intellectual perversion.

Jesus instructs us not to cast our pearls before swine. If we do, they will trample them under foot and turn around and rip us (Matthew 7:6). People who reject the truth because they are committed to their unrighteous indulgences trample on the truth and rip into those who attempt to place the truth before their minds. God does not want His pearls of truth trampled on and His people torn up.

Also, strange as it might seem, this judicial blindness—giving people the strong delusion that they prefer—is a mercy. The more truth unbelievers have and reject, the more they have to answer for, and therefore the greater is their guilt and condemnation. So, to lessen the degree of their punishment and at the same time hold them accountable and punish them for the great guilt of rejecting the light they *do* have, God releases on them the popular delusions. Error demanded becomes error granted. Delusion is part of the punishment for unbelief.

It is important to note that in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2 and also in the epistles of John, *the influence of the man of sin (lawlessness) is exclusively theological and spiritual*. He is not

described as a political and civil ruler. He is regarded as a political and civil ruler only when he is identified as the beast of Revelation chapter 13.

So, who is the man of sin (lawlessness)? Paul does not use the term “antichrist”; nevertheless, this is the person he means.

Although the term “antichrist” is found only in the first and second epistles of John, the concept is present in other biblical passages as well. In the Old Testament we find the term “Belial.” It meant “worthlessness.” A “son of Belial” was a no-good and destructive person. Paul used the word to represent everything antithetical to Christ. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?...” (2 Corinthians 6:14, 15).

Antichrist “types” have appeared in the past. Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria 175 - 164 B.C., was a type of the antichrist. He is considered to be the “little horn” prophesied in Daniel, chapters 7 and 8. He desecrated the temple in Jerusalem and was called “the manifest god.”

In time, emperor worship became established in the Roman Empire. Several years before Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, the emperor Caius Caligula claimed to be God and attempted to set up his image in the temple.

A coin of Julius Caesar had “*theos*” (God) inscribed on one side and “*thessalonikeon*” inscribed on the other.

The emperor Nero certainly showed many traits of the antichrist.

About 40 years after Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, the apostle John wrote his first and second epistles. He writes, “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18. Some manuscripts omit “the” before “Antichrist”). He goes on to say, “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (verse 22. Here the Greek text reads “He is the antichrist...”).

In chapter 4, verse 3 John writes that whoever does not confess Jesus, that person is not of God. “And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” Where did they hear this? From what Paul wrote 40 years before! By the time John wrote, it had become common knowledge among believers.

Again, in 2 John 7 the apostle writes, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” Here again the Greek text reads, “this is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

So, John also teaches that the influence of the antichrist is theological and spiritual. The epistles of John contain no hint of the antichrist being a political and civil ruler. John affirms the coming of the antichrist. Then he emphasizes that the spirit of the antichrist was then actively promoting doctrinal error. This follows what Paul said about the mystery of iniquity already working.

So the early church anticipated the coming of the antichrist. They watched Docetism, Ebionism, and other errors as they grew into the full assault of Gnosticism on the Church. Paul had warned against it. Forty years or so later and for many years to come, the Church had to battle against it for its very survival.

The early Church fathers seldom alluded to the antichrist. Polycarp did quote 2 John 7 and identified it with Docetism. Irenaeus (Second Century) was the first to attempt to associate the number 666 with the value of Greek letters. Commodion (Third Century) suggested that the antichrist was Nero revived. During the Middle Ages the Church associated the antichrist with Mohammed. During the Reformation, the Protestants identified the Pope as the antichrist, and the Roman Catholics claimed in turn that the reformers themselves were the antichrist. Since the late 19th century, many have been anticipating the appearing of the antichrist in the future at the end of the age.

From the Scriptures two things are clear: (1) from the time of the apostles, the spirit of antichrist has been present in the world and working within Christianity; (2) although there have been and are many antichrists, there *is or will be* one man who fulfills the prophecy of 2 Thessalonians Chapter 2, who will be consumed and destroyed by Jesus Christ at His coming at the battle of that great day of God Almighty, the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:14 - 16). He will be revealed in his own time.

Only the fulfillment of the prophecy will reveal its clear and correct interpretation.

Paul's epistles contain other references to the return of Christ. He wrote to the Corinthians, "...you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation (*apokalupsin*) of our Lord Jesus Christ, who also will confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7, 8). We note that it is the *revelation* of Jesus Christ that we are eagerly waiting for.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

"We are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:14).

To the Philippians Paul wrote, “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). “...holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain (2:16).

Paul urged Timothy, “...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed a good confession before many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing” (1 Timothy 6:11 - 14).

In his epistle to Titus, Paul wrote, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11 - 13). We notice again that it is Christ’s *glorious* appearing that we are now looking for.

Just before his martyrdom, Paul wrote to Timothy, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

Later in his same last epistle, Paul described the moral condition of society in the last days. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:1 - 5). This certainly describes the current moral condition of the world. For sure, we are in the last days.

We remember Paul’s charge to Timothy “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” (see 2 Timothy 4:1 - 5).

The Believers’ Reward.

The Scriptures refer often to the believers’ reward, and associate this reward with Christ’s return. During this life, believers are to “lay up treasures” in heaven (Matthew 6:19 - 21). Jesus said that when we are persecuted, “rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12; also Luke 6:23). While we live and love and labor here on earth, our reward is accumulating in heaven.

So, when do believers receive their reward for faithfulness and service here on earth? Don’t they receive their reward as soon as they die and go to heaven? At death, believers go to be with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:6 - 9; Philippians 1:21 - 23). As was mentioned in the section on the intermediate state, there is where believers rest. “Blessed are the dead who die in the

Lord...” They “rest from their labors, and their works follow them” (Revelation 14:13). God Himself is their “exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1). In His presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11).

Nevertheless, their reward for faithfulness and service here on earth will be given to them at the return of Christ and the resurrection.

“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming; behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him’” (Isaiah 62:11).

Jesus said, “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matthew 10:41, 42)

“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great,…” (Luke 6:35).

Jesus said to his dinner host that if he would invite to his dinner those who cannot repay him, he “shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14).

Paul said of those who work in God’s “building,” the Church, “If anyone’s work which he has built on it [the foundation] endures, he will receive a reward” (1 Corinthians 3:14). He also said that if he preached the gospel willingly, he has a reward (1 Corinthians 9:17).

He warns, “Let no one defraud you of your reward,…” (Colossians 2:18). He says also in 3:24, “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”

The apostle John writes, “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward” (2 John 8).

At the seventh trumpet, the twenty-four elders worshiped God, saying, “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18).

The apostle John urges us to purify (decontaminate) ourselves in view of our destiny as believers. “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as

He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2, 3).

Jesus said, “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15).

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (Revelation 19:6 - 9).

John saw a vision that dramatized Christ’s coming in His power. “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11 - 16).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Chapter 4

The Resurrection

People were not created to die. It is not part of our humanity as God intended it to be. Death came by man [Adam] (1 Corinthians 15:21). Death is an intruder, an enemy, the last of

our enemies to be destroyed (verse 26). As death came by man, “by Man [Jesus] also came the resurrection of the dead” (verse 21).

God has built into our very being the conviction that we will exist beyond this present life. God has set eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). To become a convinced atheist one has to suppress and finally crush the deepest part of one’s humanity. Evidence of this awareness abounds in the burial practices of practically all cultures, ancient and modern.

This awareness is expressed in The Scriptures. Job asked, “If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes” (Job 14:14). Later he states, “And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:26, 27).

David says with an assurance given by the Holy Spirit, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Psalm 17:15). “You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth” (Psalm 71:20).

Isaiah prophesied, “He [God] will swallow up death forever...” (Isaiah 25:8, referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:54). Again, Isaiah prophesied, “Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26:19).

The message that came from God to the prophet Daniel contains this passage: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:2, 3).

Through the prophet Hosea God announced, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave [*Sheol*]; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave [*Sheol*], I will be your destruction!” (Hosea 13:14, also referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55).

In these passages from the Old Testament we see a progressive revelation concerning the resurrection of the body and life after death. Although what God revealed about this subject in the Old Testament is the truth, it is not all there is of the truth. For the full revelation concerning the resurrection and life after death, we go to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who pulled back the veil and “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

So what did Jesus reveal to us? First, His revelation built on what God had already revealed in The Scriptures. He responded to the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they

neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, '*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*'? God is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:29 - 32; also Mark 12:25 - 27 and Luke 20:34 - 38).

Notice, Jesus said that there will be no marriage in the resurrection. That means that earthly marriage relationships also will not carry over into our resurrected state. That is clear also from Jesus' direct response to the question posed by the Sadducees from the case of the woman who had seven husbands (Matthew 22:23 - 30; Mark 12:18 - 25; Luke 20:27 - 36). Marriage is only for human beings in this present life. In Heaven and the eternal state, it will not be needed and it will not be missed. Our eternal relationship with our spouses who are believers will be much higher, richer and fuller. The same is true of our relationship with other family members who are believers.

Also, there will be no animals in Heaven or on the new earth. Animals do not have eternal life. The Bible does not teach that animals will be resurrected. We must base our beliefs on Scripture, not on sentiment. The Bible passages that speak of future peace between lions and lambs, plus similar references involving animals, symbolize the peace and harmony that exists and will exist in the kingdom of God. Any interpretation of Scripture that makes the symbolism itself the reality leads to puerile conclusions and raises silly questions. We will address this subject again in Chapter 8.

Jesus instructed His dinner host, "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13, 14).

John records much of what Jesus taught on this subject. We read in John 5:21, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will." We go on to verses 25 through 29: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted to the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also [see verse 22], because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

The first part of our Lord's statement means that the hour was coming, indeed had come, for those who are spiritually dead to hear His word and come to life spiritually—that is, to receive the gift of eternal life. The second part refers to the future resurrection of all who are physically dead.

Later Jesus said "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent

Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39, 40).

When the people murmured among themselves over Jesus’ statement that He is the bread that came down from heaven, Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (verse 44). “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (verse 54).

When Jesus approached the tomb of Lazarus, He said to Martha, “Your brother shall rise again.” Martha replied, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus assured her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” (See John 11:23 - 26).

Just before His crucifixion Jesus assured His disciples, “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19).

The apostles and early Church continued to preach the future resurrection of the dead. Their words recorded in inspired Scripture expanded the body of divine revelation on the subject.

On one occasion the apostles were arrested because “they preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:1, 2).

At Athens certain philosophers called Paul a “babbling” (“seed-picker”) because he preached Jesus and the resurrection (thinking that *Anastasis*—“resurrection”—was another “god”).

Both as a former Pharisee and also now as a disciple of Jesus Christ, Paul believed in the resurrection. He confessed this before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6) and before the Roman governor Felix (Acts 24:15, 21).

As we have already read in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 13 through chapter 5, verse 3, Paul laid down early the foundational facts of Christ’s return. The resurrection of believers is an essential component of that eschatological structure: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (4:16).

In Romans 2:7 Paul writes that God will give “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.” “Immortality” here is *aphtharsia*, “incorruptibility.” It refers to the future resurrected bodies of believers. Although all will be raised from the dead to live forever, only believers are looking forward to their eternal reward and only their immortality is meaningful and therefore worthy of the term.

In Romans 6:5 Paul writes, “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

In Romans 8:11 we read, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power” (1 Corinthians 6:14).

That same epistle embodies the foundational apostolic teaching on the resurrection. First Corinthians 15 is the great resurrection chapter. In it Paul defends the resurrection against those even in the church at Corinth who denied it (verse 12). He makes it clear that the resurrection is essential to the gospel; without the resurrection there would be no gospel, no hope, at all. Life would be only “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (verse 32). He calls foolish those who ask shallow questions, and uses analogies from nature to illustrate the truth (36 - 49).

Beginning with verse 51, the apostle crescendos in a declaration of final victory. “Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: *‘Death is swallowed up in victory’* [quoting Isaiah 25:8]. *‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory!’*” [quoting Hosea 13:14].

In his second epistle to the Corinthians Paul again affirms the fact of the resurrection. “He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you” (2 Corinthians 4:14).

In 2 Corinthians 5:1 - 5 we read, “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (*ton arrabona tou pneumatos*: “the earnest of the Spirit”—King James Version).

Our resurrection is not affected by what happens to our present “tent.” Our present body of flesh might be buried in the ground, lost at sea and eaten by sharks, or burned to ashes. (I know of at least one mortician who has a T-shirt that reads, “all men are cremated equal”). God has a new model designed in heaven. It will “over-clothe” our present mortal *morphe* (form). Even in this present state our bodies are being renewed gradually, cell by cell. Old cells die and

new cells replace them. In this process our body still remains part of who we are. It is still *our* body and it is recognizable as such. Our resurrected body will still be *our* body, transformed to be like Jesus' body.

The resurrected Jesus was not a disembodied spirit, a "ghost" (Luke 24:39). He had a real body, the same one He had before His crucifixion, only now resurrected and glorified. Even though His body was glorified, it had the same identifying features, including the nail prints and the spear wound. He interacted with mortals, prepared breakfast for them, ate with them, talked with them, breathed on them (see Luke 24 and John 21). Some of His disciples had already seen a preview of His glorification at the time of His momentary transfiguration (Matthew 17:1 - 8).

John saw a majestic, yet symbolic, vision of the risen, glorified Jesus, recorded in Revelation 1:12 - 16. It was symbolic in its representations. For example, Jesus does not have a literal sword sticking out of His mouth (verse 16). It was a visible metaphor for His word, "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17).

New heavens and a new earth require renewed, glorified human bodies. Our bodies must have the same physics as the new heavens and the new earth. That will happen at the resurrection.

In the Epistle To The Ephesians, the resurrection of our bodies is referred to as "the redemption of the purchased possession" (1:13 and 14) and "the day of redemption" (4:30). In Romans 8:23 Paul says that we are "eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

In Philippians 3:10 Paul expresses his desire to know Christ "and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death," and also his steadfast purpose that by any of the available means of grace to "attain to the resurrection from the dead" (verse 11).

Hebrews 11:35 says that by faith "women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." Think of the joy of a mother whose child is raised from the dead by faith in the power of God. This reminds us of the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17 - 24) and the Shunamite's son (2 Kings 4:18 - 37). Still, that is only a temporal "resurrection" compared to the future, "better" resurrection that awaits those who by faith and for the faith endured torture and forfeited their earthly lives.

In 2 Timothy 2:18 the apostle addresses and corrects a serious doctrinal error. It is called "the Hymenaeus and Philetus" error. They and others of their persuasion "strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some." This has nothing to do with the fact that believers have been "raised with Christ" (Colossians 3:1) to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4), or with what Jesus said in John 5:25

("...the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live"), or the amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:4. The "Hymenaeus and Philetus" error was a direct denial of the future bodily resurrection. It was an error that overthrew the faith of some.

Hebrews 6:2 informs us that the doctrine of the resurrection is a foundational truth that does not need to be laid again. It is firmly in place. Let us leave it there and go on to perfection (maturity).

The risen, glorified Christ declared "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:18).

On the island of Patmos, the aged apostle John recorded in his revelation, "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Revelation 20:4 - 6). The statement, "this is the first resurrection," does not refer to "the rest of the dead" who did not live until after the thousand years were finished (verse 5); rather, it refers to the first group—the believers who had been faithful (verse 4); they are the main subject of the immediate passage, and the concluding statement of verse 5 and all of verse 6 refers to them.

In his subsequent vision of the Great White Throne Judgment, John records, "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (Revelation 20:13).

The fact is firmly established: everyone will be raised from the dead—everyone that is, except Enoch and Elijah, who were translated and therefore did not go through the experience of death.

There will be two resurrections, at least in the nature and destiny of each resurrection. In premillennial eschatology the two resurrections are separated by 1,007 years (1,000 years plus for "tribulation saints"). In amillennial eschatology the two resurrections take place in the same time frame, with the resurrection of deceased believers immediately preceding the rapture of all believers, living and dead; and the resurrection of unbelievers presumed to follow immediately after the rapture of the believers. It would seem incongruous for unbelievers to be resurrected before believers are raptured. "The dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

In any case, Jesus is coming, and He means business. Let us be ready and found faithful.

Chapter 5

The Cosmos

Job was aware that the resurrection of the body would not take place so long as the present heavens lasted. He said, "As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep" (Job 14:11, 12). Then in verse 14 he asks an ultimate question and expresses his hope for a future resurrection. "If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes." This was followed by his confident assurance, found in Job 19:26 and 27, "And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

The resurrection of our bodies is an essential part of the restoration and renewal of the physical creation. Let us ponder Paul's inspired revelation in Romans 8:19 - 23.

"For the earnest expectation of the creature eagerly awaits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

We find references to the redemption of believers' bodies in Ephesians. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who [or, which] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13, 14. See 1 Corinthians 6:20). "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of

God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). Believers have been redeemed from sin now; their bodies will be redeemed from the curse at the resurrection.

Because of Adam’s sin, God put our present earth under a curse (Genesis 3:17 - 19). Entropy is at work all around us, including in our bodies. Things wear out. People deteriorate and die. God did this to limit each sinner’s time of opportunity to degenerate morally in this life. When a person turns away from God and chooses to live a selfish life, that person continues to progress in moral depravity. Look at what happens to people when as children they set themselves on a life-time course of pride, self-will and self gratification. They progress steadily in sin and its consequences. Look at those same people 70 or 80 years later. Talk to them about accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and getting right with God. Their usual response will be one of stiff resistance. It might be a snarl and a curse, or it might be a calm and benign smile. Either way, the state of the heart is the same. The nice, kind “mature” sinner will say “no” to Jesus Christ just as firmly as a hardened criminal, only in a polite way.

So the creation around us suffers under physical pain, decay and death. It is under the curse. The curse is necessary because of man’s sin. This curse on the creation affects saints as well as sinners. Believers have been redeemed from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13); nevertheless, believers still live in a physical creation that is under the curse, and we feel its pain and experience its decay. God has provided biblical principles to help us live in this decaying world and to manage it. Through Jesus Christ, God has provided healing for our bodies. He has given us resources and enabled us to develop technologies that help us get well and live healthy lives. Nevertheless, as long as we are in this present age, it is a losing battle, as we know when we look in the mirror or try to fix that car we bought brand new 20 years ago.

Two related questions need to be addressed: (1) what is the extent of the curse? and (2) what is the extent of the reconciliation accomplished through Christ?

Genesis chapter 3 indicates that the curse extended to human beings, animals, and the ground. Romans 8:19 - 21 states that the curse extends to “the creation.” Does that mean the created earth only, or the universal creation?

Ephesians 1:10 says “that in the dispensation [administration] of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things [*ta panta*] in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.” God’s purpose is to restore in Christ a lost unity in the universe. This does not teach universalism, the erroneous doctrine that everyone will be saved. That is contrary to the plain teachings of The Scriptures. Also, it does not teach the philosophical and eastern notion of the divinization of nature or that the “All” will be absorbed into the “One.” It means that God’s purpose is to restore in Christ a unity in the universe that was lost because of sin—the sin of fallen angels and the sin of fallen humanity. The created universe is a battlefield. War broke out in heaven. Satan and his angels have been defeated and expelled (Revelation 12:9). Earth is now the “occupied territory” of the enemies of God—rebellious man and rebellious angels (“the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of

disobedience”—Ephesians 2:2; also 6:12). The desecrated and corrupted “battlefield” must be sanctified and reunited under the rightful authority of God. That will be done in Christ in the “maturity of the times and the climax of the ages” (Amplified Version).

This is also the teaching of Romans 8:19 - 23.

The same subject is addressed in Colossians 1:19, 20 “For it pleased [the Father] that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace by the blood of His cross.” Christ’s death on the cross removed the sins of believers under the Old Covenant and removes the sins of those who believe under the New Covenant. That settled the sin issue and paved the way for the sanctifying and reuniting of the cosmos.

There is a scholarly discussion whether *eis auton*” (to Him) in verse 20 is reflexive—”to Himself,” that is, the Father, and thus the equivalent of *heautoi* (“to Himself”) in 2 Corinthians 5:19—or whether it refers to Christ. Either way, what is reconciled to the Father through Christ is of necessity also reconciled to Christ.

So what are we waiting for? What is the whole deteriorating creation eagerly anticipating? *The revealing of the sons of God*—that is, the resurrection! The whole creation was placed under the curse in Eden for the sake of sinners; it will be released from the curse at the resurrection for the sake of redeemed saints.

The new heavens and new earth will not be a total *ex nihilo* creation (creation out of nothing), because Psalm 78:69 says that God established the earth forever. Also, Psalm 104:5 states that God “laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever.” Just as powerful geological events, such as volcanic eruptions, both destroy its surroundings and also provide the conditions for new life and beauty, so also the cataclysmic events accompanying the day of the Lord will both remove the old physical order and establish the new created order, free from entropy and decay.

In 2 Peter, chapter 3, we find a parallel between the destruction of the inhabitable earth by the waters of the flood of Noah’s day and the destruction of the inhabitable earth by fire at the future day of the Lord. Although it destroyed the inhabitable earth, the flood did not cause the earth itself to go out of existence. The parallel would lead to the assumption that the future destruction of the earth by fire will not cause the earth itself to go out of existence.

In Chapter 2, when we researched the biblical references to the day of the Lord, we noticed that the day of the Lord will include the complete and total renovation of the physical creation, at least insofar as it involves the earth and the solar system, and probably beyond.

Joel prophesied that the heavens and earth will shake. “The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel (Joel 3:16).

Other prophecies also predict the shaking of earth and heaven. Isaiah's prophecies speak of God shaking the earth and heaven. "Go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily" (Isaiah 2:21). "Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger" (Isaiah 13:13). "For the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth are shaken. The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again" (Isaiah 24:18 - 20). "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall roll up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree" (Isaiah 34:4). "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment" (Isaiah 51:6).

This indicates that the renewing of the earth sphere will involve violent geological disruptions and severe orbital readjustments including probably a change in the tilt of the earth's axis.

The psalmist wrote: "Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, all of them will grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end" (Psalm 102:25 - 27, quoted in Hebrews 1:10 - 12 as referring to Jesus Christ).

The prophecy of the prophet Haggai concerning the day of the Lord includes this statement: "For thus says the LORD of hosts; 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land'" (Haggai 2:6). The writer of the Epistle To The Hebrews quotes this prophecy of Haggai and declares, "Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Hebrews 12:26, 27).

Please keep in mind that God will shake heaven and earth *once more*, and that all subsequent biblical passages that mention God shaking the earth and heaven include the *removal* of what is shaken—that is, the created cosmos.

In the Sermon On The Mount Jesus mentioned the "passing away" of heaven and earth. "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18; also Luke 21:33). Also, we remember that in the Olivet Discourse Jesus said, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29. See also Luke 21:26). He also said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35 KJV).

The classic and basic passage of Scripture on this phase of the day of the Lord is the apostle Peter's statement in 2 Peter, chapter 3, written shortly before his martyrdom:

¹Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), ²that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, ³knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." ⁵For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ⁸But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

As we look at this foundational prophetic passage, we note several features:

- (1) the apostle cites the authority of the prophets and the other apostles (verse 2);
- (2) the prediction that in the last days ungodly scoffers will taunt believers about the promise of Christ's coming. They will do so out of ignorance regarding the revealed geological and hydrological history of the earth, erroneously assuming uniformitarianism (verses 3 - 6);
- (3) the prediction that, in contrast to the waters of the flood, the next cataclysm will be by fire in connection with the day of judgment (verse 7);
- (4) the time principle that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (verse 8).
- (5) the reason for the apparent delay mentioned in verse 8 is God's longsuffering and willingness that all should come to repentance (verse 9);

(6) the certainty that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, when the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will melt with fervent heat, the earth and the works in it will be burned up (or exposed, laid bare) by fire (verse 10).

In view of this, what kind of people should we be in holy conduct and godliness as we continue to look earnestly for and hasten the coming of the day of God? The answer to this rhetorical question is rooted in the awesome drama of the day of the Lord itself. The consummation of the age spurs us to total obedience in character and conduct. As we give ourselves to full obedience, we hasten on the coming of the day of God. God is ready to punish all disobedience when our obedience is fulfilled (2 Corinthians 10:5, 6). God takes this condition into consideration in the structure of His sovereign “times and seasons” (Acts 1:7). So let us go on to spiritual maturity (Hebrews 6:1) and complete the Great Commission (Matthew 24:14). Let us do our part under God to “bring back the King.”

There will be new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will fully and forever “settle down and be at home.” This is according to God’s promise. “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17. See Isaiah 66:22). Isaiah 65:16 says that “the former troubles are forgotten.” So if we understand verse 17 in connection with verse 16, “the former things” that “shall not be remembered” are “the former troubles,” not necessarily all of the past.

In 2 Peter 3:14 the apostle Peter again urges us to be diligent “to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” as we continue to look forward to these things. This is not merely an ideal, an ultimate distant goal. It is a present basic obligation and divine command that the nature of the day of the Lord itself demands of our reason and our conscience. It demands present and full diligence.

In these inspired words of Scripture we are reminded again that the day of the Lord is imminent and that we are moving directly to its awesome events and finality. What we are looking for and hasting is the very consummation of the present age. When the day of the Lord comes, no one will be “hanging around” to see what will happen next. When Jesus comes, *that will be it*. It’s over.

“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of

the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Revelation 6:12 - 17). We read this same thing in Isaiah 2:21.

The same event is mentioned again at the opening of the seventh bowl (vial). “Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found” (Revelation 16:20).

Again, in John’s vision the event is associated with the great white throne judgment and the presence of Him who sits on the throne. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them” (Revelation 20:11).

Beginning in Revelation 21, verse 1, the scene moves ahead to the new heavens and the new earth. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea.” These are the new heavens and the new earth that the apostle Peter had previously foretold.

Chapter 6

The Judgment

We reflect back to what was established in Chapter 1 concerning the kingdom of God. We are moral beings with the obligation to obey moral law—the law of our nature and reason—the law of God, the universal moral law with which God’s own moral character harmonizes and that God reveals and enforces.

When a person becomes aware that other people have the same feelings he or she has and that their well-being is as valuable as his or her own, that is the moment moral obligation begins and the person becomes a moral agent. That makes the person a subject of moral law and it obligates him or her to live according to moral law.

By the instructions of His word and by the influence of His Spirit, God enlightens our reason. That enhances our awareness of objective moral values. We become aware not only that we should love others as ourselves but also that God exists and that we should love Him supremely. He enhances our awareness of moral law, the law of our nature and our reason.

The upholding of moral order requires moral authority. Moral authority is a necessity. That necessity creates its right to exist and obligates the moral Governor to exercise that moral authority. It also obligates all who live in that moral order and under that necessary moral authority to obey.

Moral authority has both the right and the duty to maintain moral order by upholding moral law for the good of all. Of necessity that involves the right and duty to exercise judgment and secure justice, rewarding obedience and punishing disobedience. A moral authority that had no right, authority and power to punish evil would have no credibility. In fact, it would be no moral authority at all.

God is the supreme moral Authority. His governance is an absolute necessity to the well-being of the universe. Also, He is the only one qualified to govern. That obligates Him to be the Judge.

The judgment of sinners is a horrible task that God has to perform. He has done and is doing everything wisely possible to provide mercy and forgiveness for human rebels and to persuade them to repent and be saved. He gave the Law of Moses. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on a cross to make forgiveness morally and governmentally possible. He sent the Holy Spirit to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). He commanded and empowered His Church to carry the good news that a pardon and justification has been provided through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for all who will repent and believe.

“Prepare to meet your God” is the urgent message (Amos 4:12).

In spite of all of this, most of humanity has rejected and continues to reject every gracious act of God to save them. The only alternative is divine justice and judgment. They have brought just judgment on themselves, and God is prepared to execute the just and necessary penalty. “He has prepared His throne for judgment” (Psalm 9:7, 8). God is “the Judge of all” (Hebrews 12:23).

Job declared, “For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; they shall be brought out on the day of wrath” (Job 21:30).

In his discourse to Job and his “comforters,” Elihu defended the justice of God. Among other things he affirmed, “Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice” (Job 34:12).

Abraham knew that God is just. He interceded with God to spare Sodom if a certain number of righteous people were in the city, Abraham said to God, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do

such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right" (Genesis 18:23 - 25).

Hannah was the mother of the prophet Samuel. Her prayer includes the following: "The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from Heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth" (1 Samuel 2:10).

The Psalms state clearly that God is the supreme Judge and that He will judge the world.

"The LORD shall judge the peoples" (Psalm 7:8). "God is a just Judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (verse 11).

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: 'Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.' Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge" (Psalm 50:3 - 6). We notice the association of fire and a tempest with His coming. This is expressed also in Daniel 7:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:8, and 2 Peter 3:10.

"Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely He is God who judges in the earth" (Psalm 58:11).

"Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth" (Psalm 67:3, 4). Long awaited justice is coming. Sinners and their sin will be eliminated from orderly society. The result will be "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Let the whole earth rejoice!

Psalm 72 is a messianic psalm. Its ultimate reference is to the reign of Christ. Verses 2 - 4 predict that Christ will judge God's people with righteousness and His poor with justice. "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor."

The Lord says, "When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly. The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars" (Psalm 75:2). "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down" (verse 8).

"Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations" (Psalm 82:8).

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face" (Psalm 89:14).

“O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs —O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud” (Psalm 94:1, 2).

“Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.’ Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth” (Psalm 96:9 - 13). See also Psalm 98:4 - 9 and 1 Chronicles 16:28 - 33.

Psalm 93:1 also says, “Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.” This and Psalm 96:9 say the same thing. Although the present earth is firmly established by God and will not move from its orbit now, it *will* move and be renovated at the day of the Lord. The new earth will be firmly established forever and will never be moved out of its place.

All heaven and earth, all people everywhere, are called on to worship God joyfully and to give Him reverence. All of nature (which has suffered under the curse because of man’s sin) will join in the celebration. What are they celebrating? That God is coming to judge the world with righteousness and the people with His truth. They do not take pleasure in the sufferings that the wicked will endure as the just penalty for their wickedness; rather, they rejoice that justice will be done and that righteousness and truth will be upheld and will prevail forever.

Psalm 110 is a clear, definite and powerful reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 5 and 6 read, “The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries.”

“For the LORD will judge His people, and He will have compassion on His servants” (Psalm 135:14).

“God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there shall be a time there for every purpose and for every work” (Ecclesiastes 3:17).

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment” (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

God gave the prophet Isaiah a revelation of the “mountain of the Lord’s house,” that is, the Church, the true “house of God” (Hebrews 3:6), the New Covenant Zion (Hebrews 12:22), as a “city set on a hill” (Matthew 5:14). It grows as the converts of the nations “flow to it.” Following that, God “shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up

sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:1 - 4). Following the judgment there will be universal peace forever.

The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, uttered the same prophecy (Micah 4:1 - 3).

Isaiah, chapter 11, is a prophecy describing the reign of the Messiah, the Rod and Branch who came from the root of Jesse (the father of king David). Verses 3 and 4 state “He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.” This echoes Psalm 72:2 - 4.

“My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands will wait upon Me, and on My arm they will trust” (Isaiah 51:5).

“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:10).

“‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity shall not be your ruin’” (Ezekiel 18:30).

Joel prophesied that God will judge the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and that the judgment will include judgment on the surrounding nations for their treatment of Israel (Joel 3). The judgment will include all of the sins of all humanity since the beginning of time, and how the nations have treated Israel will certainly be included.

James writes, “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned [judged]. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:9).

They will be judged “who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:12).

In Romans 2:1 - 16 the apostle Paul writes extensively about the judgment. There will be “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil...”

The apostle Peter wrote, “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Peter 4:3 - 5).

God Will Judge By Jesus Christ.

Some of the biblical passages that establish this fact have already been stated (see John 5:22; Acts 17:31; and 2 Timothy 4:1). Let us review and expand on this truth.

Jesus announced, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27).

In the section on The Olivet Discourse we studied Jesus’ teaching about the coming judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31 - 46). As was stated then, this judgment of the nations is a judgment of *people*—individuals—not political entities (countries).

We also remember John 5:22, “The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.” God gave Jesus “authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man” (verse 27). See also verse 31.

In his presentation of the gospel at the house of Cornelius, Peter said that Jesus “commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained of God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42).

Paul’s words to the Athenians recorded in Acts 17:31 were quoted earlier. “He [God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead.”

The day is coming “when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16).

In Romans 14:10 - 12 we read, “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ [some old manuscripts read “God”]. For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Paul affirms in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that these words of Jehovah refer to Jesus Christ. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Paul goes on to say that this motivates us to evangelism, to persuading people to “get reconciled to God” (verse 11).

In his last epistle Paul said that the Lord Jesus Christ “will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:1).

We look again at the prophecy of Enoch, inscripturated in Jude 14, 15. “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are

ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh sayings which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”

Jesus Christ declared from heaven, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work” (Revelation 22:12).

There is a common saying that nothing is certain except death and taxes. It should be added *and the judgment*. “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

The judgment will be thorough. Every sin that has not been removed by faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ will be accounted for. “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

Jesus said, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36, 37).

The Church will be the first to be examined at the judgment seat (*bema*) of Christ. “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17).

Even now believers are to examine themselves as to whether or not they are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). They are to make sure that they remain in the faith and live godly lives. For this purpose God chastens and corrects believers (1 Corinthians 11:27 - 33 and Hebrews 12:3 - 11).

Believers will be examined for their works, that is, how they spent their time, used their opportunities and employed their resources and talents. It has to do with what they accomplished with what they had, particularly in building up the Church, the temple of God. According to 1 Corinthians 3:10 - 17, Jesus is the Foundation of the Church; other laborers build on that foundation. Some build with gold, silver, and precious building stones (truth and godliness); some with wood, hay, and stubble (personality, social programs and temporal concerns). The fire of the judgment will test what each one has built. What will not stand the test of timeless truth and eternal values will burn up. If the builder labored under honest ignorance, the same fire of divine scrutiny will recognize that fact, and the worker will be saved. Only the product of his life’s work will be lost. They who built right will not only be saved but also receive a reward.

The elect have repented and have been washed from their sins by the blood of Christ. Yet, not everyone who says to Christ, “Lord, Lord,” will enter into the kingdom of heaven, only

they who do the will of the Father in heaven. There will be many in “Christianity” who will stand before Christ and plead, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” to whom Jesus will reply, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (see Matthew 7:21 - 23). They claim the “gifts,” talents and abilities that created an outward show of spiritual success, but they lack the integrity of a right relationship with God. They thought character did not matter. They separated faith from godly living. They made the horrible mistake of believing that one act of “faith” removed any penalty for any future antinomian living (lawlessness). Deluded souls!

Hebrews 10:26, 27 reads, “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.” This was written first to Hebrew believers who were in danger of forsaking Christ and returning to the provisions and sacrifices of the Old Covenant. That covenant was done away in Christ, along with its sacrifices. There is no remaining sacrifice to go back to. Christ is the only Sacrifice for sin. He is the only one who can forgive sin. Without Him we face a fearful judgment. We all have one choice: Jesus or judgment.

Christ’s letters to the seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 contain serious warnings and admonitions. For example, consider what He said to the church at Thyatira, that allowed a woman to teach immorality in the church. “And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall I know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works” (Revelation 2:23).

The apostle Peter urges believers, “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17).

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul deals with a gross moral problem in the church at Corinth. A man was living with his father’s wife. Paul says that even the Gentiles do not do that. Instead of mourning over the situation and taking care of it, the church became puffed up and defensive. Paul says that he had already judged, as though he were present with them in spirit, “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh [the NIV reads, “so that his sinful nature may be destroyed”—terrible translation], that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:4, 5). The apostle is saying that the eternal consequences of this man’s sin are so horrific that to bring him to repentance Paul and the church are to hand him over to Satan (remove divine protection from him) and allow Satan to attack his body—including the bodily functions and passions leading him to sin—so that the man’s spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, the day of judgment.

“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God. Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with judgment

[punishment]. The man who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:16 - 18 NIV). The person who does not truly love God lives in fear of the coming judgment. When the heart is right, that fear is expelled.

Believers Will Assist In Judging The World.

Isaiah prophesied, “Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice” (Isaiah 32:1).

John records, “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them” (Revelation 20:4). Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28. See also Luke 22:30.) Paul wrote, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Corinthians 6:2).

Jesus said, “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power [authority] over the nations—’He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter’s vessels shall he be broken to pieces’—as I also have received from My Father” (Revelation 2:26, 27). Here Jesus quotes Psalm 2:9, a messianic psalm, and states that He will give to the overcomers the same task and authority that He received from the Father—that of participating with Him in judging the world. They will join Him in the heart-rending task of sending sinners to eternal punishment.

What a sobering thought that is! What unfathomable sorrow a loving Savior will suffer when, in His and His Father’s justice, He must execute the just penalty of the moral law on those who have rejected both law and grace! This is a horrific task that the Father has committed to the Son (John 5:22). If we are to know the full “fellowship of His sufferings” (Philippians 3:10), we must share His sufferings in this task also. Must the Father and the Son suffer this alone? Should the redeemed, who have come to know God in deep and total communion, not share it? We *must*—we *will*—know and experience this with Him also.

Believers will also be involved in judging the fallen angels. Jesus said, “the ruler of this world [Satan] is judged” (John 16:11). Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 6, “Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (verse 3). Peter wrote, “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). This is echoed in Jude 6, “the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

Judgment will be according to the light one has. “For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and as many as have

sinned in the law will be judged by the law” (Romans 2:11, 12). Gentiles who do not know the Law of Moses will not be judged by that Law; nevertheless, as moral agents they will be judged by the light they do possess and have sinned against. They will be judged according to the light of their conscience. Jesus said that the hypocrites “will receive greater condemnation” (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47). They sinned under greater light and against greater light.

Romans Chapter 1 contains a vivid description of the evils of the wicked. The chapter concludes, “who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32). Sinners who have never heard the gospel are still sinners and they know it, and they will be judged accordingly. Romans Chapter 2 says that people who know the Law of Moses and who sin against its commandments will be judged by that greater light (Romans 2). Also, all who have the light of the gospel and reject it will be judged by that greatest light.

We will be judged according to our spiritual privileges. Jesus made that clear when He said to His disciples, “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” (Matthew 10:14, 15).

Jesus denounced the cities where He had done most of His mighty works, because they refused to repent and believe. He told them that if those mighty works had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have repented and been spared. For that reason it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for those cities (Matthew 11:20 - 24). He says the same about the men of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah (Matthew 12:41, 42). See also Luke 12:47, 48.

Jesus said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48 KJV).

It has been said that the person who will be in the deepest part of hell will be the person who was raised in a Bible-believing church, who knew so much *but obeyed none of it*.

Believers will be judged by “the law of liberty.” “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12). The law of liberty is the law of love—love informed by The Scriptures.

When Jesus said “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1), He was not saying that we must not tell the truth about sin and sinful behavior. He was letting us know that when we judge the behavior of others, we are admitting that we ourselves know that such behavior is wrong. The light we judge others by is the light we ourselves will be judged by because it is the light we ourselves possess. The Lord was speaking to a Jewish audience. The Jews prided themselves in their superior moral knowledge and judged others by that light. They often became very legalistic in their judgment. Jesus is saying that if we commit the very sins we

judge others for committing, we shall be judged according to our own judgment. God will hold us to the standard we set for others.

Let us look at 1 Peter 3:18 - 20. Christ was “put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah...” Chapter 4, verses 5 and 6 state that people who live in sin “will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit [literally, “in flesh” ... “in spirit”].”

The key to understanding Peter’s meaning in Chapter 3 is found in Chapter 1, verses 10 and 11. There Peter writes, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”

Peter affirms that it was the Spirit of Christ who was in the prophets and speaking through them. With that hermeneutical principle in mind, we approach the passages in Chapters 3 and 4. Christ *by the Spirit* preached through Noah (“a preacher of righteousness”—2 Peter 2:5) to Noah’s disobedient generation. They were judged “according to men in the flesh” by the Flood. “In Adam all die”—physical death (1 Corinthians 15:22). They are now in “prison” in Hades. Because they received the message of righteousness from Christ by the Spirit through Noah, they must stand before God in the judgment and give account for that message, that greater light than merely the light of conscience, and thereafter live forever as resurrected beings—spirit and body—in God’s judgment.

“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9).

“Therefore the ungodly shall not stand [shall have no defense] in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalm 1:5, 6).

Paul says, “Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later” (1 Timothy 5:24). Some people’s sins are so prominent that they are leading the person’s parade to judgment. It would be like a condemned man walking to the gallows with a marching band leading the way with banners publicizing his crime. For some, the person’s sins are so hidden that his appearance at the judgment will be a shocking exposure.

The prophet Daniel watched a preview of the judgment. Here is his description of what he saw: “I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A

thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court [judgment] was seated, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9, 10).

It is described in Revelation 11:15 - 19 “Then the seventh angel sounded: and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’ And the twenty four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.’ Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.” What an awesome and sobering scene!

Also, John saw an angel flying in the midst of heaven and saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7).

John also records, “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11).

The final judgment is described again in Revelation 20:11 - 15. “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (NASB).

No wonder Felix, the Roman governor, became terrified when Paul reasoned with him of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come (Acts 24:25).

Contrast Felix’s terrified reaction with Paul’s eager anticipation. Paul wrote to Timothy, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).

The difference? Paul was “in Christ Jesus.” “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Chapter 7

The Second Death

In theology, religion, morality, and “spirituality,” everything depends ultimately on our view of God. Our view of everything else is based on our view of God, and then proceeds from that.

If our understanding of the person and character of God is correct, our understanding of ourselves will be correct; therefore, our understanding of sin will be correct. Accordingly, our understanding of the just and necessary penalty for sin will also be correct. A result of that will be a correct understanding of salvation.

On the other hand, if our understanding of God is skewed, our understanding of all that follows and proceeds from that will also be skewed. We will have a wrong view of ourselves, a wrong view of sin and its penalty, and consequently a wrong view of salvation.

God is love. He is wholly committed to the highest well being of Himself and His creatures. As the supreme and universal moral authority, God must protect the moral order for the good of all. Because sin is the most destructive influence in the universal moral order, God must forbid it and enforce the just and necessary penalty against it. If He did not, He would not be acting out of love. He would be recklessly disregarding the well being of both Himself and His creatures and abandoning them to the consequences of moral anarchy. That would be a violation of His character. God is love, and love is just.

A broken law demands a penalty. If the law were not upheld by a penalty, it would not be a law. It would be only advice.

To get a clear understanding of the values that the moral law is designed to protect, the guilt of disregarding and violating those values, and God’s determination to protect them, look at the penalty. The greater the values, the greater is the guilt of disregarding and violating them; consequently, the greater is the penalty for doing so. So, how great are the values that God is

determined to protect? How great is the sin of disregarding and violating them? *Look at the penalty.*

God is just. He has placed upon sin the exact penalty it deserves—no more and no less. Sin is a crime of such magnitude and guilt that God has imposed upon those who commit sin the greatest possible penalty; still, that has not deterred people from sinning. That in itself demonstrates that the penalty for sin is not excessive.

God is also merciful. He desires to forgive, not punish, whenever forgiveness is morally and governmentally possible. But forgiving sin means removing penalty for sin from those who are forgiven. *That* is the most dangerous thing God could do. By itself it would make moral law meaningless and lead to the disintegration of moral order and the destruction of society. God cannot wisely and justly do that; therefore, He *will not* do that.

How, then, can God forgive sin and at the same time be just? The only way is by means of a substitute. Someone who is innocent would have to suffer under the penalty on behalf of the guilty and in such a way as to satisfy the demands of the broken moral law. It would have to be someone whose sufferings and death are *at least* as effective in upholding the moral law and preventing sin as the penalty does or is intended to do.

Who can make such a sacrifice? Only One—God Himself! That is exactly what He did in sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross on our behalf. Only by that means is God “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

So then, how serious is God about forgiving sin only on conditions that uphold the integrity of the moral law and that break the power of sin in the hearts and lives of those being forgiven? *Look at the Substitute!* If the sight of our loving and just Savior—God in the flesh—dying on the cross under the penalty of our sins—if that does not turn us to God from sin, nothing will.

What, then, is the degree of the guilt of those who not only continue to violate the letter of the moral law but also reject the pardon and the gift of eternal life that God offers them freely in Jesus Christ?

“Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God under foot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:28, 29).

Hell and the Lake of Fire are for the incorrigibles—Satan, his angels, and all who choose to follow them to the bitter end in spite of all that God has done and wisely can do to save them from their own chosen course and destiny.

The annihilation of sinners would not satisfy the demands of justice. It would not be a penalty at all, but an escape from justice.

It has been said that “Hell is separation from God.” That is the truth, but not all the truth. Separation from God is what impenitent sinners want and what they already have. They do not want God in their thinking, their personal “reality” (Romans 1:28). They avoid God and want Him to leave them alone. In their thinking separation from God is not Hell; it is their idea of “paradise.” Wretched souls.

Sin—the choice to gratify oneself above all else, to live one’s life to please oneself no matter if God or others suffer because of it—is a crime of such magnitude, both in its germinating principle and in the way it develops in life, that it cannot wisely and justly be punished by anything less than everlasting misery.

What we are to be we are becoming. Character formed here is character established forever. The evil choice will continue forever; therefore the punishment must continue forever.

Hell.

“Forget Hell”

The boldness of the bumper sticker jarred me.

Risk everything on the chance that Jesus Christ was wrong? What a losing gamble! What consummate folly!

In spite of all odds, many seem willing and determined to do just that. Ignore Jesus Christ. Forget Hell.

Preaching and teaching about Hell is risky. It does not appeal to the current “consumer mentality.” Keep the message “positive.” Bring people to Jesus and leave the “negative” alone.

Well and good—so far. The downside is that people might not hear the whole truth.

Before Jesus Christ came and “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10), a variety of ideas had developed about life after death—some biblical, some not. Jesus decisively clarified all that.

Ancient cultures had their beliefs about life after death. The concept itself is so general and so much a part of our humanity that it cannot be maintained that the ancient Hebrews adopted their concept of the hereafter from these pagan cultures. From the nature of the subject itself it would be expected that the Hebrews’ limited revelation concerning life after death would include certain essential features that other cultures would infer from our human nature

apart from divine revelation. The Hebrews would naturally recognize the validity of these inferences.

Although true and correct so far as they go, the teachings of the Old Testament concerning life after death are incomplete and veiled in mystery.

Sheol.

The word “hell” comes from a Teutonic root that means “to hide, cover.” It originally referred to the mysterious unseen world of the dead in general.

The Hebrew word for the place of the departed dead is *Sheol*. In the King James Version of the Bible it is translated “hell” 31 times, *mistranslated* “grave” 31 times (probably because the grave and what lies beyond are closely associated), and translated “pit” 3 times. The limited Old Testament revelation concerning life after death pictures Sheol as the unseen place of darkness, silence, and limited mental and volitional activity (but not unconsciousness), in contrast to our present experience in this life.

When Jacob thought that his son Joseph was dead, he said, “Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son” (Genesis 37:35 NASB). See also Jacob’s similar statements in Genesis 42:38 and 44:29 and 31.

Job was aware of the reality of Sheol. He said, “When a cloud vanishes, it is gone. So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up” (Job 7:9 NASB). He asks, “But a man dies and lies prostrate. Man expires, and where is he?” (Job 14:10 NASB). In his misery he asks God to hide him in Sheol (verse 13). Then he asks, “If a man die, will he live again?” and follows that by expressing his confidence, “All the days of my struggle I will wait, until my change comes” (verse 14).

Job says that the wicked “spend their days in prosperity, and suddenly they go down to Sheol” (Job 21:13 NASB). “Drought and heat consume the snow waters, so does Sheol those who have sinned” (Job 24:19 NASB).

The psalmist David spoke of Sheol. “In Sheol who will give Thee thanks?” (Psalm 6:5 NASB). “The wicked shall be turned into hell [literally, “be turned backwards to Sheol”], and all the nations [peoples] that forget God” (Psalm 9:17).

Proverbs 5:5 says about the immoral woman, “Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell [Sheol].” “Her house is the way to hell [Sheol] (Proverbs 7:27). About the man who visits the house of the prostitute, Proverbs 9:18 says, “But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell [Sheol].”

Proverbs 27:20 says that Sheol is never full. Isaiah 5:14 says that Sheol has enlarged itself and made its entrance immeasurably wider to accommodate the masses of people who are descending into it.

In Sheol, present earthly opportunities are over and gone. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with your might; for there is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going (NASB). Isaiah 38:18 says, "For Sheol cannot thank You; Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth."

God is not excluded from Sheol. He sees what is going on there. "Hell [Sheol] and Destruction [Abaddon] are before the LORD; so how much more the hearts of the sons of men" (Proverbs 15:11). The psalmist declared, "If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell [Sheol], behold, You are there" (Psalm 139:8).

Sheol is spoken of as being underground. People "go down" to Sheol. "The way of life winds upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell [Sheol] below" (Proverbs 15:24).

In her prayer of thanksgiving, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, said, "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6 NASB).

Sometime between His crucifixion and His resurrection, Jesus Christ descended into Sheol. In his sermon to the people on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted David's prophecy in Psalm 16:10, "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." The apostle points out the obvious fact that David could not be referring to himself because David *did* die and experience physical corruption. "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:29 - 31).

We notice that the Hebrew word "Sheol" in Psalm 16:10 is referred to as "Hades" in Acts 2:27.

In Ephesians 4:8 - 10 the apostle Paul refers to Psalm 68:18 and applies it to Christ's descent into the lower parts of the earth just after His crucifixion and before His resurrection and ascension. "Now this, 'He ascended'—what does it mean that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things."

In the preliminary and incomplete Old Testament revelation concerning life after death, Sheol is undifferentiated. That is, little is said about Sheol having two compartments: one of torment for the wicked and one of blessedness for the righteous. The concept of Sheol having two compartments developed later in Jewish thought and understanding. Jesus confirmed that this concept is true. In His remarkable and informative story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus

said that “being in torments in Hades, he [the rich man] lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom’ (Luke 16:23).

“Abraham’s bosom” became the term used to identify the place of the righteous dead in Sheol (Hades). It was the place of “comfort” in contrast to the other compartment, which was the place of torment. A great gulf was set in place between the two to prevent anyone from going from one to the other. Still, verbal communication between the two was possible.

The place of the righteous dead was also called Paradise, the compartment of Sheol (Hades) where Jesus and the penitent thief on the cross met the same day, right after they died. Jesus promised him categorically “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Christ took the Paradise compartment of Hades to Heaven, where the apostle Paul affirms that it is now located. Fourteen years before he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul knew someone who had been there, either in or out of the body. Probably Paul was referring to himself. He reports, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:2 - 4).

When Jesus said to the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in Paradise that day, Jesus had not yet ascended into Heaven. Therefore, at that moment Paradise was not yet in Heaven. Jesus and the thief descended into Sheol (Hades), where Paradise was at that time. At His resurrection Jesus “led captive a host of captives” (Ephesians 4:8 NASB). Because He has the keys of Hades and of Death (Revelation 1:18), Jesus took captive Hades and Death and took Paradise with its righteous inhabitants to Heaven. The victorious Christ led the way, followed in triumph by the liberated righteous host. What a parade!

Now when believers die, they go immediately to be with Christ. “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6 - 8).

Paul himself said that he had “a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23).

Hades.

The Greek word for the place of the departed dead is *Hades*. The word itself means “unseen.” It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Sheol*. They are one and the same. Both are commonly translated “hell.”

The Greeks thought of Hades as a two-compartment place, one of bliss and the other of torment. However, this was not the source of the New Testament concept of Hades. The New Testament revelation of Hades progressed from the Old Testament revelation of Sheol. Any valid development in Jewish thought concerning Sheol during the intertestamental period (between the Old Testament and the New Testament) was confirmed by the subsequent New Covenant revelation, particularly by our Lord Jesus Christ. We will come to the full revelation when we explore Jesus’ use of the word *Gehenna*.

Jesus did use the word *Hades* when denouncing the cities that witnessed many of His mighty miracles but refused to repent.

“Woe to you, Chorazin! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:21 - 24; also Luke 10:13 - 15).

The unrepentant inhabitants of those Galilean cities have been in Hades with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah for centuries. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are “set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). Still, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for ancient Capernaum. The cities that witnessed Christ’s miracles and heard His word, but did not repent, will have no defense in the day of judgment. Even the Ninevites and the queen of the south will condemn them for refusing to repent in spite of their great opportunity (Matthew 12:41, 42).

Jesus said that the “gates of Hades” would not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18). He said that Hades is in the lower part of the earth, where He was going to be three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40).

The risen, glorified Christ declared, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Revelation 1:18). That is why the “gates of Hades” cannot prevail against His Church.

After death, unrepentant sinners go to Hades, which is now exclusively a place of torment. It follows death (Revelation 6:8). It is where Judas Iscariot went at death. “Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25).

As we read in Romans 10:7, sometimes Hades is referred to as “the deep” (*abussos*, abyss “bottomless pit”). It is where the rebellious angels (demons) have been consigned. The apostle Peter said that “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [*Tartaros*, the deepest part of Hades] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). Demons have been allowed some present measure of operation as they await the final judgment. The demons Jesus cast out of the Gadarenes begged Him not to cast them into the abyss, that is, to torment them before the time (Luke 8:31; Matthew 8:29).

When the fifth angel sounded, John saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the “bottomless pit” (abyss). When he opened it, a huge billow of smoke came out. Out of the smoke came locusts with authority to torment people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Their king was the angel of the abyss, whose name is Abaddon (Hebrew) and Apollyon (Greek), meaning “destruction.” (See Revelation 9:1 - 12).

Revelation 11:7 says that when the two witnesses “finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit [abyss] will make war against them, and kill them.” Later, one of the seven angels said to John, “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit [abyss] and go to perdition [*apoleia*, destruction]” (Revelation 17:8).

After that John “saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit [abyss] and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and cast him into the bottomless pit [abyss], and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while” (Revelation 20:1 - 3).

John had just seen the final destiny of the beast and the false prophet. He reports, “And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:19, 20).

Hades is temporary and will be thrown into the lake of fire, the permanent and everlasting place of torment. John records, “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and the heaven fled away. And no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not

found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:11 - 15 NASB).

The Lord Jesus shall be “revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints,…” (2 Thessalonians 1:7 - 10).

The final message concerning the lake of fire came directly from Him who sat on the throne. “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:7, 8).

Gehenna.

The word that Jesus used to identify the final and everlasting place of punishment is *Gehenna*, literally, the Valley of Hinnom. *Gehenna is the Lake of Fire.*

Gehenna was an appropriate word for Jesus to use because it had become a synonym among the Jews for the place of torment in the afterlife. James also used the word Gehenna in his epistle. “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell [Gehenna]” (James 3:6).

The Valley of Hinnom (or, the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom) became associated with the place of everlasting punishment for some definite reasons. It had a history of horrible evil. It was the place where children were burned alive in the idolatrous worship of Moloch during the reign of the wicked king Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:3) and his wicked grandson Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:6). When Josiah became king, he desecrated the place so it would never again be used for such a horrific purpose.

It is called “Tophet” in Isaiah 30:33. Tophet is located in the Valley of Hinnom and is described as a place of fiery judgment. Jeremiah’s prophecy associated Tophet with divine judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 7:29 - 34).

The Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) became the garbage dump of Jerusalem. It was located somewhere in the south or southwest area of the city. Refuse and the bodies of criminals were burned there. It certainly was an appropriate name to associate with the place of everlasting punishment.

Gehenna has been prepared for the devil, his angels, and all who join his evil rebellion against a holy, just and loving God. “Then will He [Jesus Christ] say to them on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matthew 25:41, 46). They “will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (verse 46).

Who in their right mind would want to be forever with the incorrigibles of the universe!

Jesus said that the Pharisees went to great lengths to make one proselyte, only to “make him twice as much a son of Gehenna” as themselves (Matthew 23:15). To be a “son of Gehenna” means to conform oneself to the character of Satan—to join his rebellion, adopt his attitudes, follow his actions, share his destiny.

What we are to be we are becoming. Every moral choice we make reinforces our commitment to our chosen moral character and chosen end. Each moral choice helps forge our character and shapes us for our chosen destiny. They who follow Jesus Christ spend a lifetime being conformed to His character image (Romans 8:28 - 30). They become increasingly compatible with Heaven and prepared for its enjoyments and employments. They “are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:39).

Likewise, they who follow Satan in his pride and self-will are spending their lifetime conforming themselves to his character and preparing themselves for Gehenna. They are “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Romans 9:22). They have prepared themselves for their own destruction. Their hostility to real Christians “is to them a proof of perdition” (Philippians 1:28). Their end is destruction (Philippians 3:19). Like the Pharisees, how can they “escape the condemnation of Gehenna?” (Matthew 23:33). The only way is to turn completely to Christ now and follow Him.

Jesus said that verbal expressions that reveal hatred for others would put one in danger of the fire of Gehenna (Matthew 5:22). He said that the “tree” that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:19). He said that God has the power to destroy (ruin) both soul and body in Gehenna (Matthew 10:28).

Jesus said that being in the unquenchable fire of Gehenna forever is far worse than losing a part of one’s body (Mark 9:42 - 48). In Gehenna “their worm [living being] does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Jesus is quoting Isaiah 66:24).

Jesus called Gehenna “outer darkness” and “the furnace of fire,” where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. “But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12). The “sons of the kingdom” are those of Israel who reject the Messiah.

“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:41 - 43).

“The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:49, 50).

Jesus concluded His parable of the marriage of the king’s son by these words: “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him [the unprepared guest] hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:13, 14). See also Matthew 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

The Lord Jesus Christ left no doubt about the horrific reality of eternal punishment. His many statements are clear and authoritative.

John the Baptist said about Jesus, “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12). The Greek word for “burn up” is the perfect tense of *katakaio* (“burn down,” consume). The analogy of burning up chaff does not mean that the wicked are annihilated. Fire does not “annihilate” what it consumes; it only changes its form. The false conclusion of annihilation is prevented by the emphasis on the fact that the fire is “unquenchable.” It is forever “feeding” on its object.

The fire of Hades and Gehenna (the Lake of Fire) is different from any fire on earth. It is not the rapid oxidation and combustion of matter. It does not need a material fuel source. Its torment does not need a neurological system. The body of the rich man in Luke 16 had been buried; still, in Hades he continued to possess the form and functions of eyes, a tongue and a voice. He could feel real, intense and continuous pain.

The sensory reality is beyond one’s anatomical structure and neurological system, and is independent of it.

Ignoring the Lake of Fire will not make it go away. It is real. Jesus said so clearly, graphically and with divine authority. We must be very serious about it. God certainly is.

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

That is why “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Chapter 8

Eternal Life

An old spiritual song says “Everybody talkin’ ‘bout Heaven aint goin’ there.”

In our modern culture, going to Heaven is almost a “given.” Cartoons show almost all newly departed souls standing on fleecy clouds, dressed in white, with wings on their backs.

All “good” people go to Heaven, don’t they?

Doesn’t *everybody* want to go to Heaven and live there forever?

Let’s look at it this way. Today is your wedding day. The chapel is filled with friends and family. The music is playing. You are standing up front with the minister. The bridesmaids and groomsmen have already entered and are standing in their places. Next come the ring bearer and the flower girl. The door opens; the musician strikes the strong chords of the wedding march; and in she walks with her father. She is dressed in her wedding gown. A bashful smile crosses her face. She is beautiful! You are aglow with “warm fuzzies.”

When she is half way down the aisle, *suddenly it dawns on you*. It’s so clear to you now. Why didn’t you see it before? *The only reason she is marrying you is to get the house you are building*.

You mind reels and your heart sinks. Just then you look around and notice the sign that says E-X-I-T.

If she is marrying you for the house, she is marrying you for the wrong reason. If she loves you, she is marrying you for the right reason. The house is secondary. The house (or apartment) is significant only because it is the place where you and the one you love are going to live and blend your lives together.

Contrary to a common notion among world religions, Heaven is *not* a place of eternal self-indulgence. Yes, Heaven is a place of supreme joy and happiness. But people who are

“religious” or who are trying to live a “Christian” life just to get to Heaven will never get there. The only people who will be in Heaven are those who truly love God.

God’s will is done in Heaven. Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The prayer is not, “My kingdom come. My will be done on earth as I hope some day it will be done in Heaven.”

People in Heaven will serve God. “His servants shall serve Him” (Revelation 22:3).

In fact, the only people who will be happy in Heaven are those who love and obey God and find pleasure in serving Him. Why would people who do not love God even want to go to Heaven? All their life they avoid Him, disobey Him, reject His Son Jesus Christ. What would they do in Heaven while others are worshiping God, enjoying His presence, talking about Him, and serving Him? If people are out of place in a prayer meeting, think how out of place they would be in Heaven. If people feel miserable in a “red hot” revival meeting, think how they would feel in Heaven.

They would be desperate to leave. “Let me out of here! There’s too much religion up here for me!”

But where else would they go?

They don’t want to go there, either.

So people who do not love God have a real dilemma. They would be miserable in Heaven, and they certainly *will* be miserable in Hades and the Lake of Fire!

There is only one solution: get right with God. Repent—turn to God from sin—and put your faith in your Savior, Jesus Christ. Follow Him as your Lord. He will take you to Heaven. He said, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). Notice: “*to Myself, ... where I am.*”

The emphasis is not on *where* believers are going, but *with Whom* we are going to be. We are not looking just for a *place*; we are looking for a *Person*. God’s presence fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24). Wherever we are in the new Heaven and on the new Earth, we will always be surrounded with the glory of His presence. God said to Abraham, “I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1). His presence is Heaven’s highest joy. We will love God and enjoy Him forever. “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

Paul wrote, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). “I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23). “Then we who are

alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Heaven is all about Jesus Christ. *Fall in love with Jesus, and you will know what Heaven is all about.*

Eternal Life.

“Life” can refer to physical life, whether animal life (*zoe*, zoology, “what is in the zoo”), or plant life. *Zoe* applies to the physical part of our humanity. *Zoe* is the word used in James 4:14, “What is your life [*zoe*]? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.”

“Life” can also refer to the quality of a person’s character and the course of a person’s relationships and experiences (*bios*, biography). “He/she lives a good life.” “What a life!” “Get a life!”

What, then, is *eternal* life?

First, what is meant by “eternal?” In the Bible, “eternal” and “everlasting” are the same, both being translations of the same Greek word, *aionios*, meaning perpetual, unending, from *aion*, “age,” “perpetuity”—forever.

As defined and used in The Scriptures, eternal life is much more than endless existence. It is not “blessed nothingness,” or “reabsorption” into an impersonal and universal “all.” It is not total and neverending self indulgence and self gratification.

Eternal life is not a “thing,” a mystical essence that exists by itself. Although “the gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23), eternal life is not an entity that is detachable from the Giver. Romans 6:23 goes on to say that it is “in Jesus Christ our Lord.” One cannot accept the gift of eternal life, then leave the Giver and take the gift with him.

The reason is this: *a person’s relationship with the Giver is the essence of the gift.* The gift exists and functions only in that relationship. No relationship, no gift. No relationship, no life. In His high-priestly prayer Jesus said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify You. For you granted him authority over all men that he might give eternal life to all those you have given to him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:1 - 3 NIV). “May know” is present active subjunctive, continuous action—“should keep on knowing.”

So then, eternal life is a vital, continuing, conscious relationship with the Father and the Son.

“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11, 12). “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (verse 20).

The life is in the Son, because “in Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

In John, chapter 15, Jesus made it very clear that to continue to have life and bear fruit, we must continue to remain in Him, just as a branch cannot continue to have life and bear fruit unless it continues to remain in the vine. “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and thrown them into the fire, and they are burned” (verse 6).

Abiding ... dwelling ... living ... “staying put” in Christ is vital to continuing in eternal life.

Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” (John 10:27 - 30).

Hear ... know ... follow ... give. These are in the present, active, indicative, denoting continuous action. Christ’s sheep continue to hear His voice. He continues to know (acknowledge) them. They continue to follow Him. He continues to give them eternal life. Thus they shall never perish.

Only those who are listening to Christ’s voice and are following Him have eternal life. No one else does. *Jesus Christ has no sheep who do not follow Him.*

Just as air is a gift that we must keep on breathing, so eternal life is a gift that we must keep on receiving.

Although eternal life cannot die, because it is in the Son, we can die if we do not remain in the Son. Eternal life continues in us only as we continue in Him.

John 6:48 - 58 records that while Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum, He announced to His startled audience that in order to have eternal life they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (verse 54).

Of course, Jesus was not instituting cannibalism, a silly charge the pagans leveled against the early Christians in their misunderstanding of the Eucharist. Also, Jesus did not

mean that eternal life is in the Eucharist itself. *Eternal life is not something we swallow.* Jesus was saying that eternal life is the reality of a vital relationship with Him in a living faith in the crucifixion of His flesh and the shedding of His blood on the cross.

The Eucharist (Communion) is an emblematic remembrance of that salvation-providing event.

Eternal life is in abiding (remaining, continuing) in Christ, and abiding in Him includes abiding in His word. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Jesus Himself said that the Father's command is everlasting life (John 12:50).

The quest for eternal life runs deep in the human soul. God has put eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Someone said, "I wish I knew where I was going to die, and I'd never come near the place."

The rich young ruler spoke for people everywhere and in all ages when he asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (See Mark 10:17 - 22; also Matthew 19:16 - 22 and Luke 18:8 - 23). Like so many others, he thought that eternal life is a reward for something that we do, a duty we perform. All of us have forfeited that option because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Nevertheless, Jesus told him what everyone must do if they expect to receive eternal life as a reward—a reward for keeping the commandments.

The rich young ruler confidently asserted that he had kept at least the letter of all the commandments. Yet he sensed that something was missing. "What do I still lack?" he asked (Matthew 19:20).

Jesus told him what he lacked. He put His finger on the man's sore spot by telling him to do something he would refuse to do—sell out, give to the poor, take up the cross, and follow Jesus. The young man went away sad because he would not die to his selfishness and follow Christ. He kept the letter of the law, so he claimed, but he did not have the love of God in him. *That* produces the true righteousness, and that is what he lacked. His "righteousnesses" merited him nothing. They were like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:14, 15).

Eternal life is more than "life after death." Eternal life is knowing the Father and the Son in a personal relationship, a moral and spiritual unity that is lived in love, faith and obedience. It is a quality of life that begins the moment a person repents and is reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ, and that continues in that relationship both now and forever.

What does this living faith do? It “purifies the heart” (Acts 15:9); it “works by love” (Galatians 5:6); and it “overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4).

This continuing relationship, this “eternal life,” produces true righteousness and attains its fullest development and realization in the age to come.

Eternal life—this personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ—is received by faith.

“...whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:15, 16). “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (verse 36).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24).

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:1).

Paul wrote, “However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life” (1 Timothy 1:16).

If you want eternal life, *believe on Jesus Christ!*

Following is a “cluster” of Bible passages that refer to eternal life.

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

“Assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life” (Luke 18:29, 30. Also Matthew 19:29).

“But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:35, 36).

“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). “Hate” here means “love less.” It means to place less value on one’s own life than on Christ, even if it means forfeiting one’s own life for Christ.

[God] “will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality” (Romans 2:6, 7).

“As sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21). Where grace reigns there is righteousness. Grace always produces righteousness. It is through righteousness that grace reigns to eternal life. Grace never “reigns to eternal life” apart from righteousness. Death “reigned” by the Law because of sin; grace leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord because grace “reigns” through righteousness.

This same connection between holiness and everlasting life is taught again in Romans 6:22. “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

Earlier the apostle Paul had written in his Epistle To The Galatians, “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:8). To reap everlasting life, we must continue “sowing” to the Spirit and not the flesh. Do not sow to the flesh, and then hope for a “crop failure”! It will not happen. What we sow we will reap.

“And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17).

We look now at an interesting and relevant passage of Scripture found in Acts, chapter 13. Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel of Jesus Christ in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. The body of Paul’s message is found in verses 16 through 41. Many believed. The Gentiles who were present asked that the same message be presented again the next Sabbath.

When the next Sabbath arrived, almost the whole city turned out to hear the word of God. The Jews who refused to believe were envious and began to contradict Paul. The direct response of Paul and Barnabas is recorded in verses 46 and 47: “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles, For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth’” (quoting Isaiah 49:6).

Notice Paul’s announcement that he and Barnabas were turning to the Gentiles to proclaim the gospel to them. Couple that with the statement in verse 48: “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

Here we see “both sides of the same coin”—God’s sovereign fore-ordaining of some to eternal life (verse 48), and the deliberate choice by some to reject the gospel and thus to judge themselves unworthy of eternal life (verse 46).

God’s sovereign election is according to foreknowledge, not vice versa. The apostle Peter wrote that believers are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2). The apostle did not say that believers are foreknown according to the election of God, but elect according to His foreknowledge. Of course, both foreknowledge and election are simultaneous in the eternal mind and purpose of God. The point is that God’s election is *conditioned* on His foreknowledge—not merely His foreknowledge of what we would do, but of what *He* can and will do with and for us consistent with His wisdom, moral propriety and principles. God has foreknown from all eternity on whom to invest His efficient grace, and He does so wisely.

And so Jude wrote, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20, 21).

Eternal life is the great hope, the anticipation of the absolute certainty, that God’s elect possess.

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (Colossians 1:3 - 5).

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgement of the truth which is according to godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:1, 2).

“Having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).

“And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life” (1 John 25).

“And having been perfected, He [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9).

“And for this reason He [Jesus] is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15).

“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

The apostle Paul urged Timothy (and all believers), “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life...” (1 Timothy 6:12). He instructs Timothy to “command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (verses 17 - 19). This reminds us of the words of our Lord recorded in Luke 16:9. “Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail [or, it fails], they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

Grab hold of eternal life! Get a firm grip on it and hang on with the tenacity of a bulldog!

Jesus Christ is our great High Priest “who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless [*akatalutos*—indestructible] life” (Hebrews 7:16). Because Jesus *is* life—*the* life (John 14:6)—His life is indestructible. As He continues to abide in us and we in Him, His indestructible, eternal life remains in us.

“Therefore He [Jesus] is also able to save to the uttermost [completely and forever] those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25). There is our hope. There is the believer’s security.

The Book Of Life.

The first reference in The Scriptures to the Book of Life is contained in the intercessory prayer of Moses and in God’s response, recorded in Exodus Chapter 32. Moses said, “Oh, these people have sinned a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (verses 31, 32). God replied, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book” (verse 33).

The depth of Moses’s intercession goes beyond merely asking God to kill him if He would not forgive and spare the people. That in itself could be interpreted as a “pity party” and a self-centered desire for personal relief from the burden of leadership. That would not be a highly noble prayer that God could answer and still uphold His honor and moral authority, as the prayer of Moses truly was. Moses is expressing a depth of love for the people akin to that of Paul when the apostle said that he was “at the point of wishing” himself accursed from Christ for his fellow Israelites (Romans 9:1 - 5).

Psalm 69 contains several messianic references (e.g., verses 9, 25). The psalmist's prayer against his enemies includes this petition: "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous" (verse 28).

Another passage in the Old Testament that mentions the Book of Life is found in Daniel Chapter 12. Verses 1 through 3 form a summary of the end time. Verse 2 says, "And at that time your [Daniel's] people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book."

Jesus told His disciples to rejoice because their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

Paul asked prayer for his fellow workers, "whose names are in the Book of Life" (Philippians 4:3).

Hebrews 12:23 says that we have come "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven."

All of this leads up to and culminates in the Apocalypse. The Book of Revelation contains several references to the Book of Life.

In Revelation 3:5 Christ says to the angel [messenger] of the church in Sardis, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life." This promise is to the overcomer, and only to the overcomer.

Revelation 13:8 says that "all who dwell on the earth shall worship him [the beast], whose names have not been written [*ou gegraptai*, perfect passive indicative, "does not stand written"] in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Likewise, Revelation 17:8 says that "those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written [*ou gegraptai*] in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

In his vision of the great white throne, John "saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:12 - 15 NASB).

Concerning the New Jerusalem, "there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27).

And finally, Jesus Christ Himself warns from Heaven, “if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:19).

What does all of this mean?

First, laying aside all ancient traditions, Judaic and otherwise, it means that God keeps a register and a record in Heaven of His own people. It is infallibly and inerrantly established in the omniscient mind of God. For that reason it does not necessarily have to be written on paper or any other physical substance, although God could and probably will produce it in written form for display at the judgment.

Also, the Book of Life contains the names of all the elect—those whose names are written in it “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 17:8). Their names have always been there from the beginning in the eternal purpose of God. Their names are there permanently and will not be removed; otherwise, they would not be elect, “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:2). They *are* saved and will ultimately *be* saved. When they come to their age of personal moral accountability and commit sin (which all moral agents do—Romans 3:23), by His means God will bring them to obedience and faith. If they stray away, God has a covenant of chastisement with them and He will take effective (and sometimes painful) measures to restore them.

The Book of Life contains the names of all infants and children up until the beginning of their individual and personal moral accountability and thus their ability to sin. When a moral agent begins a *permanent* life of sin and impenitence, that person’s name is blotted out of the book (Exodus 32:33). That is divine reprobation. That person could be saved, but that person will not because he or she has permanently chosen not to be saved.

So, although the elect have been written in the Book of Life “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 17:8) and will remain there, not every name that is or has been written in the Book of Life is there permanently. God blots out the names of those who sin and will not repent. He blots out the names of those who deliberately add to or take away from His word in order to establish themselves and others in their errors. He blots out the names of those who come to faith in Christ, but who do not “abide in Him” (John 15:6).

So, let us make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:5 - 11).

Heaven.

Pointing to her pet dog lying at her feet, a lady once said to me, “If that dog doesn’t go to heaven, I don’t want to go, either.” Poor soul. Jesus had less value to her than her dog. In fact, Jesus was of no value her at all. Poor, blind, benighted soul.

Neglect of the subject of Heaven—that is, of the eternal state and destiny of the redeemed—has resulted in widespread ignorance on the subject and has created a vacuum that has been filled and is still being filled with speculation and imagination. The vacuum must be filled with biblical content. Some things we can only imagine; however, imagination must not go beyond The Scriptures. It is all right to imagine, to fill in the unknown by our imagination, if we keep in mind that the imagination is not the reality and does not necessarily correspond to the reality. Our imagination must be biblically informed. If we confuse imagination with reality, imagination flies off into fantasy and we create more questions than we do answers.

Various cultures project their own present, earthly values into their concept of the hereafter. To earlier Native Americans, it was “the happy hunting ground,” where bows and arrows kill abundant venison forever. Male dominated cultures that subjugate women to their own desires imagine the hereafter to be one eternal sex orgy. To some westerners, heaven is the continuation of their present pleasurable activities, one perpetual football game, baseball game, drag race, fishing trip, cruise, fashion show, *ad infinitum*. To some eastern devotees, it is “blessed nothingness,” a boring absence of activity.

Many Christians assume heaven to be one eternal “church service.” When one considers the weekly “church” routine that some endure, no wonder they fail to get excited about Heaven!

Quoting from Isaiah 64:4, Paul wrote, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” The apostle goes on to say, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9, 10).

God has revealed them to us; nevertheless, He has not given us all the details. The Bible declares, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). We may imagine all we want. The reality is still far greater. God has some wonderful surprises in store for us. In fact, eternal life brings and will forever bring a continuous, never-ending growth in believers’ knowledge and experience of God, His fullness, and His blessings. About the time we think we know and are experiencing all there is to know and experience of God and what He has in store for us, He will open to us new, unexpected and delightful dimensions of Himself and His blessings. Our eternal future with God will be progressively more blessed and more joyful without interruption and without end. Don’t miss it!

The Old Testament Hebrew word for “heaven” is *shamayim*. It means “the heights,” that is, what is lofty. It refers to the general direction or source of things beyond the surface of the earth.

The New Testament Greek word for “heaven” is *ouranos*. It means “that which is raised up,” that is, what is above.

This reminds us of the little boy who asked his father, "Daddy, how high is 'up'?"

In the Bible "up" does not have to be very far. It was right above Mt. Sinai in Exodus 20:22. The Lord said to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel: 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.'"

It could be several yards or meters as one looks up into the sky, as in 1 Chronicles 21:16, "Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven,..."

It could be only several feet off the ground, as in 2 Samuel 18:9. Absalom, king David's son, led a rebellion against his father. "Absalom rode on a mule. The mule went under the thick boughs of a great terebinth tree, and his head caught in the terebinth; so he was left hanging between heaven and earth. And the mule which was under him went on."

It could be everything seen in the sky, far and near. "Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth;' and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth,..." (Genesis 1:14 - 17).

"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened" (Genesis 7:11).

In The Scriptures, the term "heaven" is applied to three distinct areas. The first area is the atmosphere, the atmospheric heaven.

"Let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens" (Genesis 1:20).

"The land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven" (Deuteronomy 11:11).

"He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens..." (Psalm 78:26).

The second area is the solar system and the stellar cosmos, often referred to as "the heavens."

"So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven" (Joshua 10:13).

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:10 - 13).

The third area is the eternal Heaven. It is non-material, yet not merely ethereal. It is a real “place.” It is called “the heaven of heavens” in 1 Kings 8:27 (The NASB renders it “the highest heaven”). It is also called “the third heaven,” where Paradise is now located (2 Corinthians 12:2 - 4; Revelation 2:7). In Hebrews 9:24 it is called “heaven itself,” where “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” is now located (Hebrews 12:22), and from where John saw the celestial city descending (Revelation 21:3, 10). Jesus referred to it very intimately as “My Father’s house” (John 14:1 - 3).

God is omnipresent, that is, present everywhere at once. At the same time, the third Heaven—the Heaven of heavens, Heaven itself—is the place of “the throne of God,” the locus of His immediate executive and administrative presence, the center of His divine and supernatural control of the universe.

“Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people...” (Deuteronomy 26:15).

“The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth” (Psalm 33:13, 14).

“Look down from heaven, and see from Your habitation, holy and glorious” (Isaiah 63:15).

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

“The LORD is in His holy temple, The LORD’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men” (Psalm 11:14).

“For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the LORD viewed the earth,...” (Psalm 102:19).

“The LORD established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19).

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool’” (Isaiah 66:1). Jesus had this in mind when He said, “Do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool” (Matthew 5:34).

Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, “He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it” (Matthew 23:22). This should cause us to pause so that we do not carelessly say, “By heaven...”

God gave the apostle John a series of visions that involved God’s heavenly sanctuary and throne. At the time of the seventh trumpet, “then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple” (Revelation 11:19).

Just prior to the pouring out of the seven “vials” (bowls), John “looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened” (Revelation 15:5). “The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed” (verse 8).

After the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, “a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’” (Revelation 16:17).

As the Second Person of the eternal Godhead, Jesus Christ pre-existed in Heaven. He said, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). “For the bread of God is He [Jesus] who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). “For I came down from heaven” (verse 38). “I am the living bread which came down from heaven” (verse 51).

Satan fell from Heaven. The prophetic type of this event is found in Isaiah 14:12, “How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [Day Star], son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!” Jesus observed it happen. He said to the seventy disciples, “I saw Satan like lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18). It is reported and described in Revelation 12:7 - 9, “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Satan still remains in the atmospheric “heaven.” He is “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2).

At His ascension, Jesus passed through the heavens into Heaven itself. “Now when He [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). The angel announced to the awestruck disciples, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (verse 11). Here

“heaven” is a general term. The disciples could not literally see into the Third Heaven. They were looking up in the general direction Jesus ascended. When He comes back from Heaven, He will come from the same general direction. When His glory “paints the sky,” it would be high drama indeed if He took a “victory lap” around the whole globe in such glory and majesty that every eye in every hemisphere would see Him!

“After the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 6:19).

Luke records it this way: “Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51).

Jesus passed “through the heavens” (Hebrews 4:14 NASB). He is now at the right hand of God.

God granted the apostle John a “video drama” of that event in Revelation Chapter 12, verses 1 - 5. The “woman clothed with the sun” represents Israel. The “Child” (Jesus) came to Israel (the nation) *through* Israel (the genealogy of Abraham, through David, to Mary). Satan, the “fiery red dragon,” attempted to destroy Jesus as soon as He was born. After His resurrection, Jesus was “caught up to God and to His throne” (verse 5).

Part of Paul’s prayer for believers, recorded in Ephesians, Chapter 1, includes the desire that they would know God’s “mighty power when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:19 - 21). Ephesians 4:10 says, “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.”

Jesus has “gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22).

An early confession of the Church is recorded in 1 Timothy 3:16, “God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” “God” is the reading of the majority of manuscripts and accords with some patristic writings (e.g., Gregory-Nyssa, Chrysostom) that are practically as ancient as Sinaiticus and earlier than Ephraemi Rescriptus. There is credible evidence that *theos* was the reading of Alexandrinus before the word was obscured by wear. The saying, “manuscripts should be weighed, not counted,” raises the question, “on whose scales?”

Hebrews 12:2 urges believers to look away from every distraction and fix our eyes on Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Peter urged his audience, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He

may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before [who has been appointed for you, NIV], whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:19 - 21).

“Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24).

Jesus Christ shall come from Heaven. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). “...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels...” (2 Thessalonians 1:7).

Our reward is in Heaven. Jesus said, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...” (Matthew 5:11, 12).

Our inheritance is in Heaven. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...” (1 Peter 1:3, 4).

Our treasures are in Heaven. In Heaven we “have a better and an enduring possession” (Hebrews 10:24).

We remember the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking what he should do to inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17 - 22). Jesus told him sell whatever he had and give to the poor, and he would have treasure in heaven, and then come and take up his cross and follow Him. He chose earthly treasures instead and went away sad.

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19 - 21).

On another occasion the Lord said, “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:33, 34).

The Intermediate State

What happens to believers during the time between death and the resurrection? This time has been referred to as “the intermediate state.” As always, for the answers that have been revealed to us, we go to The Scriptures, especially The New Testament. As was stated before, the Biblical revelation concerning life after death was only preliminary and partial under the Old Covenant. It was Jesus Christ who “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Simply put, Heaven itself is now the home of departed believers. Paul wrote this inspired statement: “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6 - 8). Paul expressed his own longing for Heaven. “For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23).

John records that he heard a voice from heaven that commanded him, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them” (Revelation 14:13). Heaven is a place where departed believers rest from earthly labors. The Bible does not teach that this is a state of inactivity. That certainly would not be Heaven. That was not what Paul described in 2 Corinthians 12:2, where the man caught up into Paradise (perhaps Paul himself) “heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” From this we infer that for departed believers Heaven is now a delightful place of wonder and joy in the presence of the Lord. Also, we conclude that most of what is going on in Heaven right now is not for us to know at this time.

Paul wrote, “There are also celestial [heavenly] bodies and terrestrial [earthly] bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another” (1 Corinthians 15:40). In this verse Paul is not referring to the sun, moon, and stars, as he does in the next verse (41). If “celestial bodies” (verse 40) referred to the sun, moon, and stars, then “terrestrial bodies” (in the same verse) would be an unrelated and therefore meaningless antithesis or contrast. Verse 40 connects directly with verse 39, and indirectly with verse 41. Although the apostle was speaking of the future resurrection of the body, he does affirm that celestial bodies do exist.

Back in Chapter 4 of this book (The Resurrection), reference was made to Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:1 - 5. Let us look again at verses 1 through 4. “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.”

This passage has experienced several interpretations. Without attempting to sort through them, let us at least consider a few relevant points. For one thing, Paul was probably

opposing the gnostic tendency to disparage the body and to desire to be freed from it (to be *gumnos*, “naked”).

Also, let us go back to verses 16 - 18 of the previous chapter. “Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

From that context we go again to chapter 5. We notice that Paul blends two metaphors: a house and a garment. Our body is our “house.” It is also our “clothing.” Right now we are “clothed” with our earthly “house.” We groan in it because of its aches, pains, frailties, infirmities. It is in the process of being destroyed (torn down). We notice also that we *have* “a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” It is already there. We already have it. We want our mortal bodies to be “further clothed” with this “house” and take on its immortal and eternal nature. That will happen at the resurrection, when it comes from (“out of”) heaven.

Now the question is this: while deceased believers are in Heaven awaiting the resurrection, are they—including Paul—disembodied (“naked”) spirits while they wait for the “redemption” (resurrection) of the terrestrial bodies they left behind at death, or are they “modeling” their celestial bodies and will they bring them with them to “overclothe” their mortal bodies at the resurrection?

In heaven, while awaiting the resurrection of their earthly bodies, believers are not formless and without definite features. Although they are incorporeal, that is, not made up of matter (atoms, molecules), our celestial (heavenly) bodies retain our essential personhood.

When Jesus comes, we will understand all about it.

The Holy City.

Abraham was the “father” of faith and of the faithful. His faith and faithfulness is described in Hebrews 11:8 - 19. “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (verses 9, 10).

Abraham’s offspring became “as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore” (verse 12). According to Galatians 3:29, these are Abraham’s seed “by promise”: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

God said to the prophet Ezekiel, "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them [Israel], and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore" (Ezekiel 37:26 - 28).

The Epistle To The Hebrews states definitely that Jesus Christ brought in the new, everlasting covenant that the prophets had prophesied (Hebrews 8:6 - 13; 10:16, 29). Jesus is "the Mediator of the new covenant" (Hebrews 12:24). The blood of Jesus Christ is "the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Hebrews 13:20). Quoting from Isaiah 59:20, 21, the apostle Paul writes in Romans 11:27, "For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." It is God's covenant with the true "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). To teach that God will make some future covenant with "Israel after the flesh" (1 Corinthians 10:18) to take away their sins is to teach heresy. The "blood of the everlasting covenant" is the only way God takes away sin. God is not going to revert to animal sacrifices in some future earthly temple.

Ezekiel's extensive and elaborate vision of the future sanctuary, city, and country (Ezekiel 40 - 48) is a highly stylized and symbolic representation of the future state of the New Covenant Israel, the Church, in terms that the prophet and the people could relate to.

Generations "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland [fatherland]" (Hebrews 11:13, 14). "But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (verse 16).

What is that country, and what is that city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God?" Hebrews 12:22, 23 tells us: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven,..." It is the heavenly Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, the true Mount Zion, where the departed believers are now and where the names of the redeemed are now enrolled!

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

So where is it now? Where is the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, with its roster of the redeemed? *In Heaven.*

But it will not remain there. After the resurrection, after the judgment, after the old cosmic order has passed away and the new heaven and earth have been established, *it will come down from God out of Heaven.*

In the Book of Revelation, Chapters 21 and 22 God gave the apostle John a dramatic preview of that awesome event.

To understand Revelation 21 and 22 we go first to Isaiah, Chapters 65 and 66, because the drama of Revelation 21 and 22 is the fulfilment of Isaiah 65 and 66.

In Isaiah 65:17 God declared, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered nor come to mind.” This establishes the fact that everything prophesied from Isaiah 65:17 through Isaiah Chapter 66 is *after* the creation of the new heavens and the new earth.

In 65:18 God declares, “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy.” Because this refers to the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth, the Jerusalem of Isaiah 65 cannot be the “Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.” It must be the Jerusalem above, that is free and “the mother of us all.” (Galatians 4:25, 26).

God has created a new Jerusalem for the new earth. When the new earth is established, Revelation 20 will be past and we will be in Revelation 21 and 22. The Jerusalem of Isaiah 65:18 is a new “creation” where we shall be glad and rejoice forever. It is a rejoicing in itself, and its people are an eternal joy.

Isaiah 65:19 - 25 describes the blessedness of the New Jerusalem in terminology to which the readers of the prophecy could relate. By relating the blessedness of the New Jerusalem to their knowledge of and longings for the Jerusalem that they already knew, they could better understand and feel the meaning and significance of the prophecy.

Verse 25 says “‘The wolf and the lamb shall feed together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,’ says the LORD.”

This brings up again the subject of animals. It was addressed briefly in Chapter 4, on The Resurrection. Isaiah 11:6 - 9 predicts the future peaceful relationship between the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the young goat, the calf and the young lion, the cow and the bear. It says also that the infant shall play by the cobra’s hole and the young child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. Isaiah Chapter 60 mentions camels, dromedaries, flocks and rams. In Isaiah 66:20 God states, “Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters (wagons—NIV), on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem.”

First, we must understand that all of God’s promises to Israel belong to “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16. See Psalm 125:5). Israel is the “olive tree” (Romans 11), from which the unbelieving branches were removed (to be restored individually only if they do not remain in unbelief—Romans 11:23), and into which the believing Gentiles have been grafted. So “the

Israel of God” is the body of believers in Christ. “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29; see also Hebrews 6:11, 12). *The promises of God belong only to those who accept the Messiah, the Christ.* The elect Jews (those who will believe and thus be grafted in again, as was Paul—see Romans 11:1 and 2) “are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Romans 11:28). God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew and thus has elected to salvation; that is, God has not shut the door of salvation to them. They can and will be saved and restored if and when they no longer remain in unbelief regarding Jesus, the Messiah. That is the basic point of Romans 11.

So then, all the prophecies in Isaiah and elsewhere in The Scriptures that speak of the future glory of Zion and Jerusalem are now and in the future fulfilled in “the Israel of God,” that is, the Israel that God recognizes. The prophecies were given in terms that the contemporary readers could relate to, symbolic language that stands for far more than literal horses, chariots, wagons, mules, camels, cobras and vipers.

For that reason, these prophecies in themselves cannot be used as a basis for the belief that there will be animals in Heaven and in the New Jerusalem. Also, to infer from the future redemption of the creation that this includes animals is to infer too much in itself without substantial scriptural corroboration.

Isaiah Chapter 66 begins with a divine statement and a startling question. Jehovah declares, “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?” (verse 1).

Where is the house, the place of God’s rest? Wasn’t it the temple that was even then still standing in Jerusalem in all of its splendor? To what house, then, and to what place of His rest could God be referring? In his defense before the Council, Stephen quoted this passage as scriptural support for his statement that the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48 - 50).

The Lord continues by saying that His approval is upon the person who is humble and of a contrite spirit, who trembles at His word (verse 2). He goes on to say that the animal sacrifices of the hypocrites are loathsome to Him (verses 3, 4). The faithful are assured of His favor and His justice, though they are hated by their taunting enemies (verses 5, 6).

God further promised to bring forth a new “nation” suddenly (verse 7 - 14). This new nation is the one Jesus foretold when He said to the chief priests and elders, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43). It is “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). Peter assured the believers, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

God declares His judgment by fire and sword on all flesh for their idolatry and evil (verses 15 - 18a). They became His enemies by rejecting His salvation. The apostle Paul wrote to believers, "Concerning the gospel, they [unbelieving Israel] are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Romans 11:28).

The remnant of Israel (according to the election of grace—see Isaiah 10:22, 23; Romans 9:27; 11:5), became the original messengers of the gospel to declare God's glory among the Gentiles and bring a new brotherhood in Christ into this new Jerusalem to form a new priestly order (verses 18b - 21).

This will culminate in the new heavens and the new earth, where "all flesh"—the resurrected righteous—will continue the true worship of God forever. The redeemed will witness God's judgment on the "carcasses" of the impenitent transgressors, whose "worm does not die" and whose "fire is not quenched," who will remain "an abhorrence to all" (verses 22 - 24). Jesus Himself repeated this warning (Mark 9:48).

So then, what is this Jerusalem of Isaiah 66:10, that God promised; the one that brings gladness, rejoicing and joy, in contrast to the Jerusalem that now is (Galatians 4:25) over which so many have mourned? The answer to the climactic passage of Isaiah's prophecy is revealed in the parallel climactic passage of Revelation Chapters 21 and 22. It is the city that Abraham looked for, the one that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10), the Jerusalem that is the "mother" city of all believers in Jesus Christ—Jew and Gentile—the "continuing city," the one that we seek to come (Hebrews 13:14). It is the true Jerusalem that God announced through Isaiah. It has peace like a river. The glory of the gentile converts is flowing into it. It is a place of comfort, rejoicing, and fulfillment.

The apostle John writes, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1, 2).

Then John heard a loud voice from heaven. It said, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (verses 3 and 4).

After the One who sits on the throne declared that He makes all things new, announced that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, invited all who are thirsty to drink freely of the water of life, confirmed that the overcomer will inherit all things, assured the overcomers that He is their God and they are His sons, and declared the horrific fate of "the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all

liars” (verses 5 - 8)—an angel said to John, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (verse 9).

The angel carried John away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed him “the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (verse 10 NIV).

What did the angel say to John? “I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” *What did he show him?* “the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

The New Jerusalem is not only a place; it is also the Church, the eternal bride and wife of Christ, the Lamb, *in her eternal home* forever with her Bridegroom, her Husband, her Savior and Lord!

Suppose someone says to you, “I want to show you a picture of my wife.” He pulls out his wallet and shows you a picture of his house. If you remark about the house, its architecture, its color, its landscaping, immediately he will say, “No, no! I mean the beautiful lady standing in the doorway.” The house is where *you* live—together with your wife.

John reported earlier, “And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (Revelation 19:6 - 9).

Revelation 21, verses 11 - 21 describe in majestic symbolism the features of the Bride in her eternal splendor and habitation.

The brilliance of God’s glory in her was like that of a most precious jewel, like crystal-clear jasper (verse 11). This is the final result of the spiritual and character-building process that is described in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

The high wall signifies inclusion *and* exclusion, security, divine order, permanence. At the twelve gates twelve angels are stationed. The gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (verses 12 and 13). “The twelve tribes” was a term that identified Israel collectively, as in “our twelve tribes” (Acts 26:7; see also James 1:1). These twelve gates symbolize the fact that believers in Christ have entered and become citizens of the true Israel of God. Blessed are those who enter those gates into the company of the elect.

The foundation stones of the wall bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (verse 14). The apostles were foundational to the Church. Ephesians 2:20 says that we have been “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief

cornerstone.” Paul writes that each laborer in the kingdom must take heed how he builds on that foundation, for God’s “building” is made up of gold, silver, and precious building stones (1 Corinthians 3:12). “Wood, hay, and stubble” will not stand the test.

The foursquare design—12,000 stadia (about 1,500 miles) square, with 144 cubit (about 215 foot) walls (verses 15 - 17)—speaks of the perfection of believers and the completeness of the number of the elect.

The pure and transparent-like gold, the jewelry and the pearls of the walls, the city, its foundation, its gates, and its street (verses 18 - 21) signify and portray that the city embodies everything that is most precious, beautiful, desirable, pleasurable, and enduring.

Revelation 21, verses 22 and 23 state that the city needs no temple building *per se* because “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” The dwellingplace of the blessed Godhead is the surrounding effulgence of His own presence. Revelation 7:14, 15 says that the 144,000, “the ones who come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ... are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.” The reason is that God Himself and the Lamb *are* the temple. They will worship and serve Him in His immediate, all-encompassing, presence and fellowship.

Revelation 21, verses 24 through 26 say that the nations [*ethne*—peoples] will walk in its light (the light being the glory of God Himself); the true royalty of the earth bring with them their glory into it; its gates will never be shut and there will be no night there; and they will bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. The City Of God will be filled with the very best of everything that the redeemed saints and the renewed creation will provide. The language used here comes directly from Isaiah 60, particularly verses 3, 11, and 20.

“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (verse 27 NIV). No sin will be there because all who commit sin are excluded. Only those who are enrolled in the Lamb’s book of life will enter there. Only the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

Because the City Of God is the eternal state and home of the Bride of the Lamb, and because the Bride will have made herself ready (Revelation 19:7), only those who become pure in heart are part of it even now. If we are going to be part of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ *then*, we must become part of it *now*. We must become part of “the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are registered in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23), and we must do it *now*.

Is *your* name written there?

The vision continues in [Revelation 22:1 - 5](#).

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (verse 1).

In several places The Scriptures speak of rivers in a spiritual sense. Psalm 36 says that God gives us to drink from the river of His pleasures, for with Him “is the fountain of life” (verses 8 and 9).

Psalm 46:4 says, “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.”

God gave the prophet Ezekiel an extensive, stylized and picturesque vision of a new city and a new “temple.” It is recorded in Ezekiel 40:1 through 47:12. The vision included “a river that could not be crossed” because it had become so deep (47:5).

Zechariah, Chapter 14 records a prophecy that the prophet gave concerning the day of Lord. The prophecy includes a reference to “living waters.” “And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem...” (verse 8).

This leads us to what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, recorded in John Chapter 4. “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (verse 10). The Lord continued, “The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (verse 14).

Add to that what Jesus said to the crowd on the great day of the feast. “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who were to believe on Him were to receive...” (John 7:37 - 39a NASB).

This establishes a broad Biblical context for Jesus’ invitation in Revelation 21:6, “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely” (KJV). Also, it all leads directly and ultimately to John’s vision of the water of life in Revelation 22:1 and to the open invitation recorded in verse 17, “And the Spirit and the bride [Church] say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who is athirst come. And whosoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

Our life—eternal life now and forever—originated in the sovereign purpose and election of God through Jesus Christ. It will “flow” fully and freely forever by the Holy Spirit in our personal and direct relationship with, and in the immediate presence of, the Father and the Son.

The Tree Of Life.

“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2 KJV).

“In the midst of the street of it.” What is “it”? The answer is, The Holy City, The New Jerusalem. The street signifies activity, community, solidarity. Right in the middle of the street is the tree of life.

Because of man’s sin, humanity was excluded from the tree of life, which was in the garden of Eden. Referring to Adam, God said, “‘And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:22 - 24).

The tree of life is different from any other tree. We know of no ordinary tree (including the apple tree) that produces fruit that has the power to cause human beings to live forever. The tree of life is a literal tree that produced edible fruit that has properties that God created in it, either supernatural properties or physical properties that science has not discovered as of 2009.

The “tree of life” is now located in the Paradise of God, which is presently in the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2 - 4). When the Holy City descends to earth, Paradise will be on earth with the tree of life in the middle of it. What man lost in Genesis is restored in Revelation.

Sin results in spiritual death, separation from God, as well as the second death. Christ brought us redemption from sin and its consequences. Therefore, “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

The tree of life is nourished by the “river of water of life.”

Picture a wide river, with a street in the middle of it. In the middle of the street is the tree of life, with branches spread over the river of life that is flowing along both sides of the street. The branches are loaded with a dozen kinds of fruit, bearing a new crop every month forever, its leaves bringing permanent healing and perpetual health to all the nations of the redeemed.

This corresponds to Ezekiel’s stylized prophetic vision of the future “temple,” with the vast river flowing from under its threshold toward the east. Ezekiel 47:12 says, “Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.” What was lost in Genesis is prophesied in Ezekiel and restored in Revelation.

The curse is gone (Revelation 22:3). The throne of God and of the Lamb is in it. The locus of the divine, supernatural control and governance of the universe has been transferred to the restored new earth and will function from there throughout the universe forever.

“His servants shall serve Him.” The redeemed will always be free moral agents, not robots. The love, devotion and service that we give to God forever will always be voluntary, willing, eager, and joyful. If it were not, the entire Romans 8:29 process of conforming the elect to the character image of Jesus Christ in this life and under the trials of this life would be superfluous and meaningless.

“But,” someone might ask, “if we continue to have a free will forever, what if eventually someone sins? What guarantee is there that this will not happen?”

The guarantee is right here in verse 3: “His servants shall serve Him.” By His grace God has so fully and finally secured the faithful love and obedience of the elect now in this life under the pressures of the three sources of temptation—the world, the flesh, and the devil—that when these sources of temptation are removed, the character of the elect will be so established in Christ by the Spirit and the word that God in His infinite foreknowledge could direct the angel to tell John that the elect will never fail, never sin! “His servants shall serve Him.”

“And they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads” (verse 4). This requires glorified bodies, bodies made like the glorified and glorious body of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:21), because in our present physical body no one can see the full unmodified and unmediated face of God and live (Exodus 33:20).

Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). “See”—experience in direct, unmodified, full personal relationship forever.

David wrote, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). This affirms that our joy in heaven is fulfilled by God Himself—the Holy Trinity. Only those who are supremely happy in God’s presence will enjoy the celestial and terrestrial surroundings.

It is no wonder “the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10; 51:11). “Everlasting joy shall be theirs” (Isaiah 61:7).

It is no wonder Jesus told the disciples to rejoice because their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

“Whom [Jesus] having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8, 9).

Verse 4 also says that “His name shall be on their foreheads.” This passage links to Revelation 3:12, “He who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”

It also connects with the sealing of the 144,000 (the servants of God) on their foreheads (Revelation 7:3, 4). Also, in Revelation 14:1 John records that he saw “a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads.”

The Father’s name and the new name of the Lamb written on the foreheads of the redeemed signifies God’s approval and ownership, and our full and eternal identification with Him.

We go briefly to Revelation Chapter 7, verses 9 through 17. John saw a vision of the throne of God and of the Lamb. All the angels were standing around it; then they fell down before the throne. John saw the redeemed, those who had come out of great tribulation (literally, “the tribulation the great”). These numbered far more than 144,000. They were “a great multitude which no one could number” (Revelation 7:9). So then, this was a vision of *all* the redeemed, and “the great tribulation” that they had endured was the great tribulation of life itself that all believers go through in some way in our spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains [“fountains of the waters of life”]. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes” (7:15 - 17).

We return to Revelation chapter 22 and continue at verse 5. “And there shall be no night there...” The new earth will be part of a new cosmos. In fact, the eternal nature of the new heavens and new earth will be different from what it is now. The physics (*phusis*) will be different. The Second Law Of Thermodynamics will not operate in the new physics. There will be no entropy.

There will be no need for the sun (or for the moon to reflect the light of a sun). God Himself is the eternal effulgence of that city.

Verse 5 also says, “And they shall reign forever and ever.” Revelation 5:10 says that the redeemed “shall reign on the earth.” Romans 5:17 says “those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” Paul writes, “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12).

Referring to Psalm 8:4 - 6, the writer of The Epistle To The Hebrews says that we do not yet see all things put under the authority of man (Hebrews 2:8). This, of course, is due to the fall of the human race in Adam. Man is now a demoted ruler, with some things but not all things subject to him. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste of death for everyone" (verse 9). One man, the man Christ Jesus, has conquered. He is now in full authority. His victory is man's victory. In His victory man's victory is restored. In Him the redeemed from among mankind will experience man's full and final restoration to authority over the works of God's hands.

We should avoid the assumption that believers will rule over other believers in the new heavens and new earth. Many assume this or something similar to it from Jesus' Parable Of The Pounds (Minas) in Luke 19. The faithful servants in the parable were awarded authority over cities, one ten and one five. It is important to remember that Jesus' parables have one main point, one central truth. We get into difficulty when we base our doctrine on the details of parables. Jesus point here is that the faithful will reign with Him.

It is true that God is preparing us to be the best we can be for Him forever according to the extent of our preparation here and now. For example, a person who dies in infancy will enjoy the essential privileges and blessings of Heaven forever. That person will certainly grow in the knowledge and experience of God; however, that person will not be prepared for the same degree of usefulness and level of responsibility in Heaven as the mature saint who has gone through the character building experiences of the trials and temptations of this present life.

To rule does not necessarily mean to have authority over other people. It certainly does not mean that some will have authority over other redeemed saints. In the eternal arrangement of things it means to rule with Christ over His creation. The redeemed will be God's personal agents in His universal kingdom, each an "envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary" of the kingdom.

The New Jerusalem will be located forever on the new earth, the earth renovated and restored. Psalm 115:16 says, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's; but the earth He has given to the children of men." It has always been God's purpose for man to dwell on the earth, a Paradise earth. Man forfeited his right to live in Paradise and brought God's curse upon the earth, greatly reducing its beauty and productivity to what it is now—beautiful and abundant with everything we need in this mortal life, but still far below its original state. It "groans and labors with birth pangs" (Romans 8:19 - 23), as it awaits the day of redemption (the resurrection of believers and the *palingenesia*—regeneration, renewal—of all things (Matthew 19:28).

The earth belongs to God. "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness" (Psalm 24:1). It has been granted to Jesus Christ, who is the heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). The Father said to the Son, "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of

the earth for Your possession” (Psalm 2:8). Because believers are “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), His inheritance is our inheritance.

Psalm 25:13 says concerning the person who fears the Lord, “his descendants shall inherit the earth.” Isaiah 60:21 states that the righteous “shall inherit the land forever.”

Psalm 37 contains three promises concerning those who will inherit the earth. Verse 9 says, “Those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.” Verse 11 says, “The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Verse 22 says, “Those who are blessed by Him shall inherit the earth.”

In the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus reaffirmed the promise of Psalm 37:11 when He said, “The meek shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

We participate in a measure now in inheriting the earth through evangelism. The Great Commission is Christ’s command to go and disciple all nations (Matthew 28:19, 20). To this end He sent the Holy Spirit that by His power we will be Christ’s witnesses “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), bringing the people to obedience to the King through the gospel (Romans 15:18).

Jesus promised, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places [*monai*, residences]; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2 and 3 NASB).

Jesus’ reference to “mansions” (King James Version)—that is, dwelling places, residences—in verse 2 reminds us that the Father’s “house” is not a massive “one room dormitory.” It contains many residences. In Luke 16:9 Jesus said that if we make “friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon,” they will receive us “into everlasting habitations [eternal dwellings].”

Our full possession of the earth will happen when Jesus Christ returns. He will bring the Holy City with Him. The bodies of deceased believers will be raised incorruptible; living believers will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and we will all go together with Him “to the wedding” (Matthew 25:10). “And so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17 KJV). Forever we will be His bride in the Holy City, His home and ours.

This does not mean that the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, is Heaven itself. The third Heaven is still the third Heaven and always will be. The new earth is part of the universe, the heavens. As was said before, the third Heaven—the Heaven of heavens, Heaven itself—is the place of “the throne of God,” the locus of His immediate executive and administrative presence, the center of His divine and supernatural control of the universe. That will be moved to the New Jerusalem on the new earth. The third Heaven, the stellar heavens, and the new earth will compose one unified whole.

We tend to think in terms of space and distance, especially from our present perspective here on earth. In the “regeneration” (*palingenesia*), such considerations are not determinative. When Jesus ascended to the throne of God, He did not have to travel years and years at the speed of light to get there. He will not have to travel years and years at the speed of light to return from there back to earth. In the resurrection, we will have transformed bodies that will be “conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). The glorified Jesus could walk the road to Emmaus with two disciples, break bread, then disappear (Luke 24:13 - 31). He could enter a room, the doors being shut (John 20:19). When He told His disciples to make the long journey to a mountain in Galilee, He did not have to spend hour after hour walking there Himself (Matthew 28:10).

The supernatural transcends the natural. Although the supernatural can work within the natural, it is not subject to its processes or its limitations. Also, the new, eternal “natural” will have its own liberated physics.

Although the new earth will be our eternal home, we will not be confined to it. Who wants to live forever in a cubicle with “a great multitude that no man can number,” even if it is 1,500 miles in all directions? “Its gates shall not be shut at all by day” (Revelation 21:25). Our glorified bodies, “conformed to His glorious body,” will not be restricted by present physical laws. We will have access to *all* the new heavens as well as the new earth. “We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). Righteousness will dwell throughout the heavens, not only because the angels will be there but also because we will be there, too.

Psalms 113:4 - 6 says, “The LORD is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens. Who is like the LORD our God, who dwells on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?” God is totally transcendent; that is, He is exalted above the universe. At the same time, God is totally immanent; that is, He pervades the universe without being a part of it. He is totally “there” and at the same time totally “here.”

The Throne.

In Isaiah 66:1 God says, “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool.” Jesus said, “Do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King” (Matthew 5:34 and 35). Let us lay aside our earthly “space and distance” frame of reference and think instead of the association between a throne and its footstool. The God who “sits” on the throne has His feet firmly established on His footstool.

In Ezekiel's vision of the stylized and symbolic temple, God said, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever" (Ezekiel 43:7).

We find this same picture in Ephesians 1:19 - 23, where Christ is right now seated at the Father's right hand, with all things under His feet. The Church is His body here on earth, and in the Church His "feet" are now firmly established here on earth. The Church is His body on earth, "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). "The fullness of Him" is an appositional phrase.

So picture the throne of God in Heaven *and* on earth. The "throne of God" joins Heaven and earth in one unified presence and authority. "The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them..." (Revelation 21:3). That is the mystery of John 3:13. Speaking of Himself, Jesus said, "No one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (the weight of manuscript evidence supports that reading).

Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23). This is a living reality right now for us who love Christ and keep His word. By the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of our Father, the blessed Holy Trinity dwells with us and within us individually. That does not mean that God has left His throne in Heaven. He is omnipresent, at once both there and here.

Likewise, when it is said in Revelation 21:3 that "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them," it does not mean that God will leave His throne in Heaven, or that the throne of God is a piece of furniture that has to be moved from one place to another.

God is high and exalted in the third Heaven, His throne; at the same time His presence and authority (throne) is fully present and established on earth, His footstool. The two are one, inseparable.

God fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24). He ruled from His throne in heaven and at the same time walked with Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). The God who is in heaven will also dwell and walk among the redeemed on the new earth forever.

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit..." (Isaiah 57:15 KJV).

"The way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing" (Hebrews 9:8). It *is* now, through Jesus Christ, our High Priest. So we are invited to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). If God's throne is a physical object isolated far off from us in the third

Heaven, we could not come boldly to it. Our access to the throne of God is not just “spiritual” or mystical; it is real and personal. Space and distance have nothing to do with it.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

Ephesians 2:6 says that God has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Believers are right now *positionally* seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. In the ages to come God will “show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (verse 7).

Jesus said, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21). Now, if one thinks in terms of literal space and dimensions, and if all the overcomers together form “a great multitude which no one could number” (Revelation 7:9), *that is one BIG throne!*

As a diamond is firmly held in place by its setting, the imagery of the apocalyptic literature of The Scriptures is and must be firmly held in place by the established “setting” of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the inspired writings of the holy apostles and prophets.

We must remember that the Book of Revelation is apocalyptic, rich in symbolism. The language is symbolic, but what it symbolizes is real, not symbolic of something “merely” spiritual. It is symbolic of a literal, eternal, spiritual reality. Behind and beyond the symbolism lies the reality. *If the symbolism is glorious, how much more glorious must the reality be!*

After the descriptive vision of the Holy City, the angel assured John that the words John had heard are faithful and true, and that God had sent him (the angel) “to show His servants the things which must shortly take place” (Verse 6). The angel is probably the angel of Revelation 1:1, and therefore is referring to the entire Apocalypse, and not just the content of the final section.

The first part of the Apocalypse (Revelation) contains letters to the seven churches, embodying divine principles and commands that apply to the Church throughout the gospel age. The main part of Revelation is taken up with seals, trumpets, and bowls, paralleling each other, and covering features of the entire Church age from the “things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1)—from the perspective of John’s time—to the events of the *eschaton*, the end of the age.

Suddenly Jesus Himself speaks to confirm personally what the angel just said. “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (1:7). This parallels the words of John himself in 1:3, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”

In Revelation 22:8 John responds by attesting to the fact that he was the one who actually heard and saw these things. Overcome by it all, John impulsively fell down to worship

before the feet of the angel who showed him these things. Immediately, the angel stopped him, telling him, "I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God" (verses 8 and 9).

This suggests the possibility that the messenger was not an angel in the strictest definition, but one of the deceased prophets. There is strong manuscript evidence that the original reading in Revelation 22:6 is "the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets." That would support the idea that this "angelic" messenger was the spirit of one of the old prophets. In Acts 12:15, the incredulous disciples did not believe that it was really Peter knocking at the door, but thought it was his "angel."

The angel also said to John, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand" (22:10).

We must keep in mind that the Lord's return and the consummation of the age has been "at hand," (imminent) since His ascension. In Chapter 3 of this book we addressed the difference between "imminent" and "immediate."

Focusing on the final result of God's dealing with the human race both in the law and in the gospel, the angel declared, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still" (22:11).

By that point, people have made the choices that have established their permanent moral character. They have determined their eternal destiny and have conformed themselves to it. By their response to whatever light they had, they have made their reservation either in Paradise or in the Lake of Fire. *What they are to be they will have become.*

The unjust and the filthy have spent their lifetime making and reinforcing the choices that formed their character. They refused to repent. If and when they heard the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, they repeatedly said "no" in their hearts. The calm, quiet "no" of the "nice" person is just as definite as the "no" of the cruel tyrant. Ask them both to humble themselves, repent, and receive and follow Jesus Christ, and you will get the same answer from both, even though one might be polite about it.

Look at those who have grown old in unbelief. Likely you are seeing people who have crashed through every roadblock that God has placed across their highway to hell. You cannot stop them. Probably long ago they grieved away the Spirit of God. They refused to answer "ring after ring" until finally God "hung up" on them. They are lost souls, as good as in hell already. They still could be saved, but they won't because they refuse.

Years ago I made a final, desperate appeal to a man who had only a day or so to live. When I invited him to turn to Christ, he retorted, "Forget that stuff!" I turned and sadly walked away.

Consider how much people can progress in sin in just a few decades. Think what they will become as their darkness and moral depravity continues and progresses forever. If one could get a look into the Lake Of Fire after a thousand, a million, a billion years, imagine the horrific scene. No repentance. Nothing to mitigate the evil and depravity, or prevent its exacerbation. Just intense and intensifying hate, bitterness, and cursing. *Think how horrible it would be just to be a sinner forever!*

Now change the scene. Look at the righteous and the holy. No doubt you have seen people who early in life yielded to the gracious persuasions of the Holy Spirit, turned to God, chose to trust, love, and follow Jesus Christ. By the grace of God they have overcome all opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Nothing can stop them or separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39). They are redeemed souls, as good as in Paradise already. They could turn away from Christ and be lost, but they won't because they settled the issue long ago. They are in Christ's and the Father's hand, and no one can snatch them out of it (John 10:28, 29).

Consider how much believers can progress in holiness in just a few decades. They "grow much heavenward," as the saying goes. Think what they will become as their light and moral progress continue forever. Imagine the heavenly scene after a thousand, a million, a billion years. There is nothing to hinder their unending progress in holiness and their ever increasing joy. *Think how wonderful it will be just to be a disciple of Jesus Christ forever!*

No wonder Jesus said, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

In Revelation 22:12 and 13 Jesus announces, "And, behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

Verses 14 and 15 are a response. "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." The blessedness of those who obey God's commandments and enter the city, and the character and fate of those outside are set side-by-side in stark contrast. This is an emphatic iteration of what the Alpha and Omega declared in Chapter 21, verses 6 through 8.

By the choice they have made, billions of people will be excluded from the holy city, from the tree of life, from fellowship with God, from all the joys and blessings of the new heavens and new earth—from *eternal life*. What a horrible, indescribable, and completely avoidable tragedy!

The new heavens and new earth are a holy realm. No sin, no selfishness, will ever enter there or take place there. Sin will be isolated in perpetual solitary confinement in the eternal "Alcatraz" of the universe. Never again will pride and rebellion be allowed to wreak havoc,

misery and destruction in orderly society. Perfect love will rule, and all will be utmost peace and joy forever.

Will you be there? Is your name written in the Book of Life? Do you have eternal life now? Are you ready to live forever in God's holy presence in love, obedience, fellowship, and service? If not, get right with God. Come to Jesus Christ. Fall in love with Him and begin the eternal romance.

Jesus said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:9). Will you be the next to start a celebration in Heaven? Break away from the crowd of the doomed and seize the gift of eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 16 records Jesus' personal sponsorship of the entire Revelation. "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

In 22:17 the Holy Spirit and the bride (the Church) join in the grand invitation. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." Jesus offered the water of life to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). He offers it to you now.

Then Jesus issued His final warning. "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (22:18, 19).

Do not tamper with the word of God. Do not add to it or take away from it. Divine revelation is complete. The Book Of Revelation is the final component of God's propositional, written revelation. The Bible alone is God's definitive, determinative, and all-sufficient authority for faith and living.

The Apocalypse concludes with Jesus' final promise, and John's inspired response and benediction. "He who testifies these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (22:20, 21).