

***The Feasts
of Israel:
God's Plan of the Ages***

Volume One

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The Feasts of Israel: God's Plan of the Ages

Volume One

An adult Bible study showing how a proper understanding of the major themes of the Old Testament is essential to understand and appreciate the New Testament.

(If you don't feel up to a Bible study, feel free to proceed directly to the story, starting with Volume Two (Old Testament) or Volume Five (New Testament).

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Preface and Disclaimer

God is infinite. I am very limited. God has all wisdom and knowledge. I am just a learner. God's Word is Truth. I make mistakes. I define a mistake as anything at all that does not line up under the authoritative and inerrant Holy Bible, the written Word of God. It is a fearful task I have undertaken, trying to rewrite the entire story of the Bible, while knowing of a certainty that I will introduce errors into the holy Word of God. I am deeply sorry for them, and I apologize in advance.

On the other hand, there are many things in this study that do not line up with the current religious and theological Bible interpretations according to the doctrines of churchmen. I do not apologize for this; rather, it is intentional. My goal is to question all the doctrines which we have received from our forefathers – not necessarily to reject them, but at least to evaluate whether or not they are actually scriptural! In too many places I have found that the Reformation did not go far enough. Doctrines we hold dear are actually perversions from the early Catholic church. They deliberately twisted and paganized every scriptural truth which could have set 'their' people free to walk with God by His Spirit, resulting in the Dark Ages. Intentionally sacrificing truth for power and control, they brutally tortured and killed millions of those who continued to insist upon truth. I consider myself a Protestant, and I vigorously protest any mixture of the Holy with the pagan and the profane.

“Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies...” (Jer 16:19) ... many lies. Lies about the nature and character of God and Jesus, lies about the nature of the Word of God, lies about the nature of heaven and hell, time and eternity, and even our own created purpose in life. These lies have cost us, dearly, to the point where some even refuse to study the Old Testament, preferring the God of loving kindness and mercy of the New Testament as if He were a different God! There will probably be some areas in which you disagree with my corrections. I would enjoy a good debate with you on these things. We may both learn some things if we can debate them in a spirit of love and understanding, using the truth of Scripture as our foundation.

In my effort to understand (and thus help you understand) the Old Testament, I have spent a lot of time (and chased a lot of rabbits) in presenting Old Testament history, culture, and chronology. Though I have done a lot of research, actual facts from 3 to 7 millennia ago are rather limited and conflicting. So I have tried to fill in the gaps with speculation. Some things I say are controversial, which I don't mind at all, unless it starts to become divisive. That, to me, would be tragic. Please, just hear me out, give me your best argument if you disagree, but neither believe nor disbelieve me at all – I am not the authority here! Take it to the Lord in His holy Word and “Search the Scriptures to see if these things are so.” Believe only what the Holy Spirit confirms.

In particular, I have spent hundreds of hours attempting to fit the history of the world into a reasonable chronology, which is used throughout this study as if it were fact. In recent history, I believe I am pretty accurate, but prior to 701 BC it is just guesswork. Once you get into the Catastrophic Era, there are so many variables, so many unknowns, that, literally, 'God only knows'. I always hope that God will inspire me to 'get it right', but He may have chosen you for that task. So I invite you to challenge me on any of my dates if you have better information than I. My best guess is that God created the universe no later than 5106 BC and no earlier than 12,000 BC. I will use the latest date until I find more data to push it back.

This study is not an exegesis of the Word of God. Good pastors use exegesis to bring out what is hidden within the Word, so that all may partake of its treasures. They limit themselves to what is actually there, correctly believing that God has put there all we need for salvation. But my study is an eisegesis. That means that I am reading into the Word things that are not there, things from history, from archaeology, astronomy, and other sciences, from legend, from ancient Jewish Talmudic tradition as recorded in their Midrashim, and from pure speculation.

Though I have bathed it in prayer and done my best to ensure it does not contradict the inerrant Word of God, **this still makes it a work of fiction**, a hypothesis, if you will. Historical fiction takes facts from a time period and weaves a fiction story around them. In the same way my book takes facts from the Scriptures and weaves the story of God's plan of redemption around them, but it is still just a story. It is my limited understanding of God's incredible Plan of the Ages. It must not, therefore, be taken as gospel or used to prove anything to the non-Christian. I titled this work *The Feasts of Israel: God's Plan of the Ages*, since one purpose of the Feasts is to portray for us God's plan for time.

This study is not light reading. It will not be read by those of the 'me' generation who live high on sugar and have a 6 second attention span. It is for the mature Christian, who is curious to know how God may have done it, and who is interested in possible ways of resolving the many seeming conflicts in Scripture. For example, in Genesis 11 we have a list of the generations of Shem, which says (v 12) that Arphaxad became the father of Shelah. But in Luke 3:35 - 36 we see that Shelah was the son of Cainan, who was the son of Arphaxad. Why is Cainan skipped in Genesis? The Bible has many such 'contradictions', as well as things which seem impossible to our rational minds. Where did God get the water to flood the earth to the tops of the mountains? Where did all that water go after the flood? There isn't enough water left in the world to flood the entire earth. How did God pull off the Red Sea crossing after the Exodus, and where and when did it happen? How did the sun stand still for the space of a whole day, or how did it go backward 10 steps on Hezekiah's sundial? Do myths such as the sinking of Atlantis fit in to the Bible story?

Are you at all curious? The answers to these and many other questions are not found in Scripture. Some Bible scholars say, "Don't worry about it. God is all-powerful. Just chalk it up to another miracle." But that seems like too much of cop out. This study attempts to find some answers, and in the process I believe it will teach us more about God's ways, and help the holy Word of God come alive to thinking believers.

You see, many Christians have been raised in a vacuum. The scientific world (and the rest of the world, too) looks on with a mixture of ridicule and disgust, despising us for being so narrow-minded. We need to start thinking outside the box! We need to climb out of the playpen and grow up a little. We need to come out of the scriptural Dark Ages. Traditional interpretations of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, do NOT in fact match with science (especially archaeology). We need to be able to give a reason for the hope that lies within us. Scripture is actually very reasonable; it is just our understanding of it that is lacking. Scripture always precisely complements good science, but we cannot afford to say, "Wherever science does not match the Scriptures it must be bad science." Consider the possibility that our understanding of the Scriptures may be at fault.

It sounds wonderfully spiritual to say, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it." But that is the very attitude that turns away many thinking non-Christians in disgust. They believe the Bible to be a bunch of fables. If we want to reach those people, we need to be able to say, "God said it, I believe it, and this is how and why He could have done it." God did not give the Israelites the Feasts, for example, just to keep them busy. Once you understand what they portray, the gospel starts to become real, living, and even exciting. So yes, in this study I do think outside the box – way, way outside the box! Some of you will not like that, and dis-believe what I say. That is OK, as long as it gets you to thinking, praying, and searching the Scriptures for wisdom and understanding.

I have quoted a lot of Scripture in this study – I dare say some Scripture passages which you have never noticed before. Preachers insist, "Don't quote long passages; it puts people to sleep." Well, I quote long passages at times, and if you fall asleep so be it. My goal is to find out what God's Word says; you can't do that unless you get the context. In the process, I have discovered many passages of Scripture that I had never noticed before, even though I have read the Bible from beginning to end several times. May you be as delightfully surprised as I was, and may you grow to love and appreciate God's holy Word even more as a result. We have been lied to, you and I, and the best way to counter lies is to rehearse, even immerse ourselves with, the truth of Scripture.

Though this is an adult Bible study, covering many difficult biblical subjects, I have tried to lighten it up a bit by interspersing stories here and there. I've tried to tell these stories from the Hebrew perspective, using what I've learned in this study to make the story more accurate. I enjoyed the storytelling so much, that I have now written out a fictionalized history of most of the Bible. Though I'm sure you already know the story, yet did you know that there are discrepancies between the four Gospels? Could they be inspired if they disagree with each other? Also, there are tantalizing questions as to why things happened the way they did. For example, why did the people shout Hosanna to Jesus when he came into Jerusalem on a donkey? What was special about that day, and why were they all gathered there anyway? Who knew of Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He sweated great drops of blood and prayed, "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not My will but Thine be done."? The disciples were all asleep. Is there any significance to Jesus' last words on the cross, "I thirst!" and "It is finished!"? How did Peter, an uneducated fisherman, write the books of 1st and 2nd Peter? Who taught him letters? Did he write anything else in the Bible? Did the apostle Paul ever meet Jesus before the road to Damascus? The Bible is full of delightful mysteries, and I love to dig for them as for hidden treasure. I have found interesting answers to these and more.

Non-believers dare to claim that some portions of the Gospels cannot be inspired, due to the conflicts and unanswered questions. I believe in word-by-word inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures in their original languages. I further believe that understanding the Old Testament helps us to sort out the seeming conflicts in the New. Therefore I've tried to retell the gospel story from the Hebrew perspective, rearranging the narratives around the Feasts of Israel, and harmonizing the Gospels in such a way that the apparent conflicts are reasonably if not delightfully resolved. Though my narrative must be classed as historical fiction, yet it fits the Scriptures better than anything else I've seen. (This New Testament portion of my story is now in Volume Five.)

In reading my book you will discover some unconventional capitalization. Please don't be offended – I do it for a reason. For example, Jesus claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (Jn 14:6) Notice the capitals? I sometimes do it with other things, too, like King and Word and Law. Not always, but I do it when I want to emphasize that they are divine, pertaining to The Holy, far above our kings and words and laws.

Speaking of offending people, I have something in my book to offend just about everyone. For example, I hit the Catholic church pretty hard for their wrong doctrines developed during the Dark Ages. My goal here is to finish the Reformation. I cannot afford to be wishy-washy on it. Yet the Reformation has transformed the Catholic church, too, and I know that God has many precious saints in it. He always has. I hope they will forgive my stirring up their painful history. It needs to be exposed so we can correct our own wrong doctrines that we blindly inherited from them.

Another example is those who believe in some form of the theory of evolution. Again, I hit their faith pretty hard, as it denies the truth of the Scriptures and is used by Satan to destroy the tender faith of many young people in our system of public schools. Please understand that I do not hate the evolutionist. He is simply deceived. He believed what he was taught, and has not yet had the opportunity to discover almighty God the Creator. One of my goals in this book is to open his eyes to Truth with a capital T.

This brings up a very touchy subject nowadays – racism. Evolutionists must also be racist. They secretly like to think that their own race is more evolved than all the others. In my mind, the most racist of all are those who always go around accusing others of racism rather than correcting their own issues. Those most strongly trying to defend the abortion of the innocents and the destruction of the traditional family structure are all evolutionists. Their hidden agenda here is to wipe out the Negro race, and other races which they consider less-evolved, though they are not honest enough to admit it anymore. But what nobody talks about is that the only real solution to racism is true faith in the Creator God who brought forth all peoples and nations from one man, Adam, and who loves each one of us equally, infinitely, and unconditionally.

Many evolutionists are uniformitarians. They claim that the gradual processes of the present are the key to interpret the past. Thus all we see in archaeology “must have happened millions and billions of years ago.” That turns the Bible story on its head! So I tell the story of the cataclysms which caused the Flood and the Ice Age, rearranging the landscape to the jumble of sedimentary layers we see now. It makes a fun story, if you can keep an open mind and not take offense at my hypothesis. It is just fiction, you know.

Another big group I pick on is Islam and the Muslims. I almost hate to, as the vast majority of them are more Christian than some of us Christians. Yet they are bound in a religion that rules by fear and lethal force, and seeks the purity of their faith by simply killing any who won't convert. I hope and pray that this book will help to set them free to meet the God of love and truth, who rules not in fear and force but in mercy and grace.

I will no doubt also offend those with a strong Christian faith, who tightly hang on to the doctrines they were taught. We've been lied to! It is almost impossible to shake us free from those deep-seated lies which form the foundation of our religious kingdoms. Trust me, I'm in the same boat. It hurts to see our pet beliefs come crashing down. But I must do everything I can to shake whatever does not line up with the holy Scriptures, “... in order that those things which cannot be shaken will remain.” (Heb 12:27)

One last group I'll mention here is the biggest and the most sensitive of all, and I'm sure to offend them throughout my book. I have to, because our eternal destiny depends upon this group discovering the truth. I am intimately familiar with this group, as I have been part of it, even immersed in it, all my life. This is the group which God calls sinners and which every one of us joined in infancy. The good news is that while God vigorously hates our sin, He passionately loves us anyway. But the bad news is that God cannot forgive us of our sin until we are willing to at least see it, acknowledge it, and repent of it. To help us do that, I talk about it, a lot, often in very direct and offensive ways. So please be forewarned. **This is an adult book.** I try to 'keep it clean' as much as possible, but some of mankind's descent into depravity cannot be sanitized. I am not only trying to reveal the ways of God, but also the ways of Satan. We should not be ignorant of his schemes, that he gain no advantage over us. (2 Cor 2:11) If it is any consolation, the Bible is pretty direct about sin, too, and that has always been my pattern as I write.

Though I try not to single out any one type of sin over others, some moral vices such as infidelity, adultery, divorce, sexual perversion, sodomy, lust, pornography, and the like have become so prevalent now (and so destructive) that they do sometimes get emphasized. Yet from God's perspective even a 'little white lie' is still heinous and worthy of death. We don't see sin the way God does. His love for us is so great that His hatred against the sins that are destroying us must be just as great. So if I happen to rag on some of the secret sins of which you are guilty, please don't be offended too much. I may not be guilty of the same sins, but my own sins are every bit as offensive to the God I serve. He will bring me through the purifying fire no less than you, because He loves me just like He loves you, dear Reader – and so do I.

Our God is a personal God. He revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ, our Friend and Brother as well as our Savior, High Priest, Judge, Master, and King. He gave us His inerrant Word as our sure foundation. But more than that, He gave us His Holy Spirit to reveal His Truth to our hearts so we can come to know Him intimately. His greatest desire is to have a close love relationship with us, and we with Him. That is my desire as well, and I trust that this study will be another step for each of us toward that goal. But face it, that can only happen when we begin to see ourselves as He sees us, and allow Him to cleanse us, transform us into His own sinless nature, and teach us His wisdom and His ways. God is our Father. No matter how mature we may seem to us, to Him we are like little children. As with an earthly father, our heavenly Father helps us in the maturing process – including the occasional spanking when it is needed. I believe He loves to have us ask questions as a little child and wrestle with Him for the answers, as I have done here. Thus we draw close and learn to think as He thinks and act as He acts.

Let's do that together.

The Feasts of Israel: God's Plan of the Ages

Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu, melekh ha'olam, asher kidshanu bidevaro uvishmo, anakhnu madlikim haneyrot shel yom tov.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has set us apart by His Word, and in whose name we light the festival lights.

Thus begins the first of the *mowadim YHWH* (solemn assemblies of Jehovah, or more literally, appointments with Jehovah) first given to the descendants of Israel about 3500 years ago.

Our story of these Feasts goes back beyond the writing of the Torah, before the first written records, back to ancient Hebrew traditions, back before old man Noah, back to Adam and Eve and their first sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and yes, even back to the seven days of creation. That is because the story of the Feasts of Israel is the story of God's plan of redemption, woven into the very fabric of the universe, portrayed even in the stars, and beautifully told and ceremonially rehearsed year by year in such a way that no one could possibly miss the coming of the Redeemer. *Or could they?*

The modern Christian church has all but ignored these Feasts. After all, they were given to the Jews under the Old Covenant as part of the ceremonial and sacrificial laws given through Moses. Now, God has given us the New Covenant. The Old is becoming obsolete, growing old, and ready to disappear. (Heb 8:6-13)

We Gentile Christians place our faith, hope, and trust in Jesus Christ alone as the mediator of the New Covenant, written upon our hearts and minds by His Holy Spirit. (8:10) This New Covenant saves not by animal sacrifice, but by His own blood, shed only once to redeem us all. (9:11-28) "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ." (Jn 1:17)

The Old Covenant was imperfect. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. The law, since it is only a shadow of the reality in Christ, can never, by repeating the same sacrifices year after year, bring into perfection those who draw near to God. (Heb 10:1-4)

But Jesus the Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, offered one sacrifice for all sin for all time. His death fulfilled the ceremonial law and perfected all those who are washed by His blood, even to the cleansing of the conscience from dead works. (10:10-14) "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there no longer needs to be an offering [sacrifice] for sin." (10:18) All who place their trust in Him are set free from the bondage of the law of sin and death, and are taught by the Holy Spirit to walk by faith, in harmony with the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, written on our hearts. (Rom 8:1-12)

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that we are no longer under law, but under grace. (Rom 6:14) We have died to the law through the body of Jesus Christ, released from the law by death to our flesh nature, to serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. (Rom 7:4-6) No man is justified through works of law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, in whose death I died to the law. I now live by faith in the Son of God. If righteousness came through law, Christ died in vain. (Gal 2:16-21)

Christ redeemed us from the law's curse. (Gal 3:13) Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions, *until Messiah should come.* (v 19) "For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law... therefore the law has become our tutor [lit. pedagogue, guardian to ensure the student's safety on the way to his teacher] to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor [guardian]. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew [law] nor Greek [lawless] ... neither slave nor freeman... neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:21-29)

"But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. [The Feasts!] I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. (Gal 4:9-11)

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery... you have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace... For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself... But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal 5:1-18)

The entire Old Testament system of moral laws, civil laws, ceremonial laws, and dietary laws, including the laws regarding the Feasts of Israel, was never intended to be a final objective. God intended it to be a temporary picture, a "shadow of the good things to come" (Heb 10:1), pointing us to the true reality, Jesus Christ, fulfilled by Him, in and through Him by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Now that we have the full revelation of God in the New Covenant, the Old Covenant is fading away. (Heb 8:13)

So why, if I believe this (and I do), would I ever write a book or teach a class on the Feasts of Israel? I'm glad you asked that question. Please allow me to give you seven answers, straight from Scripture.

First, God does not call these the Feasts of Israel, as in my title and as they are commonly known. He calls them the solemn assemblies of Jehovah or appointments with Jehovah (mowadim YHWH – Lev 23:2), sacred sacrificial processions to Jehovah (khawg YHWH - v6), and holy convocations, readings, and rehearsals. (miqra - v3) They are not really Israel's Feasts; they are YHWH's (Jehovah's), which He gave to help us understand great spiritual truths and to prepare us for what was (and is) to come. This places them in a higher and more important category than the cultural celebrations we tend to think of when we hear the term 'feast'.

Second, the meaning of the word 'feast' (khawg in Hebrew) tells us it is important. We think of a feast as a culinary banquet and evening of entertainment. That is not the Hebrew concept at all. They understood the word to mean a festival in celebration or commemoration of something. The eating and drinking which accompanied it were of secondary importance. Though the word does suggest gala attire, parades, singing, and dancing, it also implies a sacred festival, an expression of worship. The Hebrew word for 'feast' means a public dramatization of an important historical event or religious concept, for the purpose of passing on the traditions, beliefs, and culture from one generation to the next.

Third, God commands the Feasts to be perpetual statutes throughout all the generations of Israel. (v 14, 21, 31, & 41) That means either God made a mistake and changed His mind, or the generations of Israel today are just as obligated to celebrate them as before Christ.

The methods of their celebration are clearly changed by the fulfillment of Christ, the Lamb of God. There now can be no more substitute lamb sacrificed on the altar of the temple, which only pointed forward to Christ, the perfect fulfillment. But that doesn't do away with the celebrations. It only causes them to come alive, making them meaningful and satisfying.

Fourth, Scripture (Ex 23:14-17) puts the keeping of the Feasts on par with the Ten Commandments and other laws following Exodus 20, and even calls them the Ten Commandments. (Ex 34:14-28) They are an integral part of Torah. We'll deal with this subject more later; for now, be aware that there is a deep significance even for us Christians who walk by the Spirit in the New Covenant written on our hearts and are thus no longer bound under Torah. Torah, which we usually think of as merely Old Testament laws, is actually far more. It is the first codified instructions from the Creator of the universe explaining to His children how the universe runs. It was not just a bunch of arbitrary rules to keep them out of trouble.

Torah is not just the law. It is a way of life. You don't 'break' Torah. You either live in harmony with it or you break yourself over it. True, we who walk by the Holy Spirit are freed from its obligations, restrictions, condemnations, and judgments; but that is only because walking by the Spirit is living in harmony with all of the natural and spiritual laws which God wove into the universe from the beginning of creation, of which Torah is but a simplified statement of the most-basic, outward ones.

Fifth, they were not just for Jews, but for all who had embraced the God of the Jews. This is in line with God's commission to the Jews to be a 'light to the nations' (the Gentiles, pagans – Isa 42:6; 49:6). It is also in line with the metaphor God uses to describe us Gentile Christians: wild olive branches grafted into the Jewish Root who is Christ. (Rom 11:17) In fact, we Christians are called the Israel of God (Gal 6:16), Sons of Abraham (Gal 3:7, 29), the true circumcision (Phil 3:3), the children of God's promise to Abraham (Rom 9:8), and even Jews: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom 2:28-29) Being called a Jew is not bad. In Hebrew, the word for Jews is 'Yah-hudim' meaning 'God glorifiers' (from 'Yah' for 'YHWH' and 'hod' for 'glory').

Sixth, although we who are led by the Holy Spirit are indeed free from the Old Testament law, that does not mean the law is taken away. Jesus Himself said that not a "jot or tittle" of the law would pass away until it all was fulfilled, and roughly a third of it remains to be fulfilled. We are only free from the law to the extent that we have died to that which held us captive to it – our sin. Whenever we turn away from the leading of the Holy Spirit back to our sin we instantly put ourselves right back under the law. (Rom 6; Gal 5:13-25) We had better understand the importance and power of the law, so we will think twice about putting ourselves back under it! God's promise that the first Covenant is "becoming obsolete and growing old... ready to disappear" (Heb 8:13) is conditional upon the New Covenant taking over: "I will put My laws into their minds and I will write them upon their hearts..." (Heb 8:10)

In fact, the word used for the 'New' Covenant in many such passages as Matt 26:28, Mk 14:24, Jn 13:34, and I Cor 11:25 is 'kainos', meaning new in the sense of being refreshed, renewed, or restored, as opposed to 'neos' which just means new. Similarly for the 'new man' (Eph 4:24), the 'new Jerusalem' (Rev 21:2), and the 'new heaven and the new earth' (Rev 21:1), it is always 'kainos' and not 'neos'. "... there is nothing new under the sun." (Eccl 1:9) The 'New' Covenant is in reality a renewed form of the Old Covenant, with the shadow pictures replaced with the realities to which they pointed. If we don't learn from the old, how can we hope to understand the new?

Seventh, although the blood sacrifices are clearly fulfilled in Christ, nowhere in the New Testament does God tell us to forget about the Feasts. Just the opposite. Many New Testament concepts assume an understanding of the Feasts, and cannot be understood apart from the Old Covenant. We Christians are called “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), priests to God (Rev 1:6), and a “temple of God.” (1 Cor 3:17) “... you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual temple for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 2:5) We are told to “offer a sacrifice of praise to God.” (Heb 13:15) We are called “the firstfruits among His creatures.” (James 1:18) The church is even encouraged to celebrate the Feast of Passover, though in a new and different way: “... Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed for us. Let us therefore celebrate the Feast, not with the old leaven, or with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Cor 5:8)

In fact, the “Oracles of God” in Hebrews 5:12 (“... you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the Oracles of God...”) specifically refers to the Feasts! The apostle Paul felt that this was one of the greatest benefits of Judaism: “What advantage has the Jew? ... First of all [most important], that they were entrusted with the Oracles of God [Feasts of YHWH].” (Rom 3:1-2) In Stephen’s defense in Acts 7, he told what everyone there already knew, that at Mount Sinai, Moses “... received living oracles to pass on to you.” (v 38) He was not talking about the law, which can only condemn and kill the lawbreaker. He was talking about the living oracles, the Feasts and the tabernacle, which portray in a living, graphic way the coming of the Messiah and the redemption that He brings. He says, “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘God shall raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brethren.’” (v 37)

Stephen’s listeners understood him, because they knew the Feasts. But we don’t! Here is how his listeners heard Stephen’s words: “Moses told you that God would raise up a great Prophet, a great Leader who would be like himself. You thought he was just talking about Joshua. But he was actually speaking of a man much greater than Joshua, of whom Joshua was just a picture. You can see Him portrayed in the tabernacle and the Feasts, the Living Oracles which Moses has passed on to you. Yet just as your fathers killed the prophets before you, you have now killed that Righteous One of whom he spoke.” (see v 52)

How can we hope to understand this if we have no comprehension of the Jewish system of priests, temple, sacrifices, and – the Feasts? In beautiful, clear precision the Feasts present a picture of God’s plan of redemption from beginning to end in all its glory. Serious theological errors and heresies crept into the church during the Dark Ages. We failed to discern them because we neglected the Feasts. I hope to correct that in this study.

“Do not think [as some were accusing] that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest dot or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.” (Jesus, in Matt 5:17-18) To a Hebrew, saying, “the Law and the Prophets” was tantamount to saying the entirety of Scripture, which to us would be the Old Testament. Has it all been fulfilled? No. Much (roughly a third) refers to the victorious return of Messiah in power and glory to establish His Kingdom and rule the nations with a rod of iron for a thousand years. At least until that occurs, according to Jesus Himself, not the smallest dot or stroke can pass from the divine Law.

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the law...” (Rom 7:7) The law still has its place. God is Spirit, and as much as we would like to think that we walk only by the Spirit and not by the flesh, the fact remains that we still do the majority of our living in this fleshly realm. We go about our business barely sensitive (or totally insensitive) to the realm of spirit. Yes, at times I think even we Christians still need that tutor (guardian) who disciplines us when we go astray and brings us safely back to Christ. (Gal 3:24)

I like to think of the Ten Commandments as ten little glimpses into the nature and character of God. No, we are neither bound by nor under the curse of the law of sin and death, but that only applies as long as we are walking by the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:2) It is only those who walk by the Spirit who are not under the law. (Gal 5:16) How can we ever learn to know God, to walk by His Spirit of Life, if we don’t first learn from these “copies of the things in the heavenlies?” (Heb 9:23)

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free... do not be subject again to a yoke of bondage.” (Gal 5:1) In Christ I am free to do whatever I please; only, in Christ my old ‘pleaser’ is dead and buried with Christ, and my new ‘pleaser’ is transformed into a new creation in Christ Jesus, so that I can only please what pleases Him. The old law, which was a burden because no one could fulfill it, now becomes my joy and delight, as the Holy Spirit first teaches me how to obey the true spiritual principles behind it, and then proceeds to actually fulfill it, in me! The old picture is indeed obsolete (Heb 8:13), because now the reality, the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, has taken over our minds, our hearts, and our lives.

I believe the Jewish ceremonial laws are the same. No, we don’t have to obey them to be saved, but neither should we forsake them. We have much to learn about God and His realm through them. Learning of the Feasts could even be a significant protection, guarding us against common presumptions and misunderstandings regarding the New Covenant.

The writer of Hebrews (probably Apollos, about 68 AD), after spending four chapters telling us how the old law is "... only a shadow of the good things to come, not the very form of those things..." (Heb 10:1) concludes: "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Heb 10:19-25)

You may think you understand this passage, but I assure you that you cannot understand it without understanding something of the Feasts of Israel. In fact, the entire book of Hebrews (written as it was to the Hebrews) cannot be understood without understanding something of the Hebrew culture and faith, which centered around the Feasts of Israel. We Christians tend to take verse 25 out of context and try to make it say: "You gotta get to church every Sunday!" But it was written to Jewish Christians who had a centuries-old ingrained habit of keeping the Sabbath holy. It is telling them not to forsake something, as was the habit of some. That 'something' was definitely not their weekly Sabbath gatherings. In their fervency for Jesus they gathered often, even "... daily breaking bread from house to house..." (Acts 2:42-47) But what were some of them getting into the habit of forsaking?

The assemblies! "*Forsake not the assemblies.*" To the average modern Christian, that has little meaning, but to the Jews it meant everything. Three times a year all Jews were commanded to assemble together in Jerusalem to celebrate a Feast to YHWH. (Ex 23:13-17) These were called solemn assemblies, or just 'the assemblies'. The entire Jewish culture revolved around them! But Jewish Christians had been despised and cast out of the Jewish culture. The Jews hated them, persecuted them, and tried to kill them. They were not welcome in the synagogues or at the temple. Especially at the Feasts, which they had seen firsthand fulfilled in Christ, they now felt shut out. Partly in retaliation, and partly out of zeal to move on to the real of which the Old Covenant was but a shadow picture, they began forsaking anything that 'smelled' Jewish. And what could smell more Jewish than the Feasts of Israel?

The writer of Hebrews was saying: "Yes, we are no longer bound by the old law with all its ceremonies and sacrifices, but still, don't forsake the assemblies! You need to learn from these old shadow pictures, especially as 'the day' (of the Lord) approaches. Rehearse them, keep them fresh in your mind, so the day won't catch you unaware."

The purpose of this study is to do just that. The Spring Feasts were all beautifully fulfilled in our Savior Jesus Christ, down to the smallest detail, but the Fall Feasts have not yet been fulfilled. I believe that they likewise will be fulfilled, down to the smallest detail, at the return of our Savior in power and glory. I also believe that a study of the Feasts of Israel will help us to be prepared for His soon returning, throughout Scripture called "the day of the Lord" or "the day of YHWH" or simply "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10). Is it possible that, without a familiarity with the Feasts of Israel, we might be in danger of being as unprepared for Jesus' return as were the Jewish leaders for His incarnation?

The book of Hebrews must have had some effect on the first century Christians, because we have strong Christian evidence in the way the Jews now keep their feasts. Those Jews who have not yet received their Messiah cannot understand them or explain them, but Jewish Christians can easily see Jesus woven beautifully throughout the traditions of their feasts ever since His death. I think a lot of first century Christians had a hand in modifying the traditions of their feasts to include new insights they received from Jesus Christ Himself. (For example, Jesus' Last Supper influenced the Passover Seder.) They had to have been keeping the Feasts for them to have modified Jewish traditions to include Jesus in their own feasts.

The Feasts rehearse the story of God's Plan of the Ages, focusing on the redemption of His people. In the Jewish mind, each Feast looks forward to the coming Redeemer. So this study will focus on the **coming of the Redeemer** in the past, historically; in the present, intimately and personally; and in the future, prophetically.

Jesus came (past tense) as a suffering servant to pay the price of our redemption; He is now coming (present continuous tense) in the hearts of all who believe by the filling of His Holy Spirit to personalize our redemption; and He will come (future tense) in power and glory to complete our redemption by gathering us to Himself, so that we may rule with Him over His creation.

The grand theme of the Old Testament is, "*Messiah is coming!*" Every prophet of ancient times looked forward through the ages to the Coming One. The New Testament changes this theme slightly to "*Messiah has come! Repent and get ready, for He is coming again!*" Thus the entire Bible centers around the person of One who was to come, who did come, and who is coming again. I could almost affirm that the entirety of Scripture was given us for the dual purpose of announcing His coming and preparing us to meet Him when He comes. John the Baptist, called by Jesus the greatest of all those born of women, had one ministry: to prepare the way for the coming of Messiah.

Clearly, preparing us to meet Him is a top priority in God's mind. This is nowhere more clearly portrayed than in the Feasts of Israel.

God's Plan of the Ages is in threes. God promised to meet with man at least three times, in three realms. "Three times in a year all your males shall appear before YHWH your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread [Passover], and at the Feast of Weeks [Pentecost], and at the Feast of Booths [Tabernacles]; and they shall not appear before YHWH empty handed." (Deut 16:16) But to appear before YHWH involves a reciprocal action. His command to appear before Him implies also a promise that He will appear as well. Thus the assurance, "When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory." (Col 3:4)

This occurs in all three realms. *We each, individually, must meet with Christ Jesus three times.* First, we meet Him as our Passover Lamb at the foot of the cross where He was slain as our sacrifice for sin. Second, we meet Him in the power of Pentecost where He fills us with His Holy Spirit and gives us both the desire and the ability to walk in His ways. Third, we meet him in the glory of His holy temple at Tabernacles, where our sins are fully atoned for so that we may dwell with Him and He with us in perfect peace and joy. We do this "every year," implying continually. When you met God last year is insufficient for today!

God established a simple order. "... The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual." (1 Cor 15:45-46) First the old (physical) creation, then the new (spiritual) creation in Christ. (2 Cor 5:17) First evening, then morning. First Adam of the earth, then Adam of the heavenlies. First the shadow pictures, then the reality of which they speak. First the physical lamb slain at Passover, then the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. First the Old Covenant engraved on tablets of stone, then the New Covenant written upon our hearts. First the law, then grace. First the temple in Jerusalem built of stone, then the temple of God which you are, composed of living stones built up into a holy habitation of God through the Spirit.

We like to go straight to the new, but no, that is not God's way. He still starts with the old, and it is only in the ending of the old that we find the beginning of the new. Out of that destined to pass away comes forth that which is destined to remain. From the moment Jesus died on the cross and the veil in the temple was torn in two, the Old Covenant was technically superseded by the New; but it is not so for each of us, personally, until we meet with Him at Passover, at Pentecost, and at Tabernacles, appearing before Him at the Feasts in our hearts, and He with us, just as He commanded.

We in the modern Christian church have been taught backwards. We've been told to disregard the earthly and start with the spiritual, the heavenly. Thus God's way, His truth, has been lost. I hope to correct that in this study, by going back, waaaaay back, to basics.

Please bear in mind as we talk that the Holy Bible, God's written Word, is the foundation of all we say. I rest my faith on the absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures in the original languages. Scripture is literally "God-breathed" and God does not make mistakes.

This is a bit of a touchy subject, believe it or not. The reason is that, although many (if not most) Christians will readily say they believe in the truth and the authority of Scripture, few actually do. Even many great theologians and preachers, who really should know better, are far too quick to hold to all that they have been taught about what the Bible says, rather than to actually read what it says and just, well, believe it. I am continually amazed at those who will stoutly defend the inerrancy of Scripture then turn right around and preach things that directly contradict the clear words of Scripture.

The problem here is that we all start with preconceived ideas, or traditions. That really bothered Jesus. "Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition... you nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.'" "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." (Matt 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-9)

In this book I re-evaluate the traditions we've been taught, judging them against what Scripture actually says.

For example, substituting "the LORD" for YHWH in the Old Testament is an old Jewish tradition, based on their concern that the holy name of YHWH (Yahoweh, Jehovah) might be dishonored or made commonplace. They feel that the name of God is supposed to be a mystery and therefore should not be spelled out. I understand and appreciate their position, but I choose to stick to Scripture, the way it was written, as closely as I can. When I read the Scriptures, they actually say that God wants us to use His name. "Praise YHWH! Praise, O servants of YHWH. Praise the name of YHWH. Blessed be the name of YHWH from this time forth and forever. From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of YHWH is to be praised. YHWH is high above all the nations; His glory is above the heavens. Who is like YHWH our God, who is enthroned on high..." (Psalm 113:1-5) How can you possibly bless His holy name if you don't know it or never even use it?

The most significant Scripture on using God's name is at the burning bush where God tells Moses: "I AM who I AM. Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you... YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever; this is My memorial name to all generations." (Exodus 3:13-15 ff)

THE NAME AND PLACE OF GOD

A full study of the names of God is beyond the scope of this book. However, a brief review is in order, to help set our course for this study.

'God' is just a generic word, which we personalize by capitalizing it when it refers to the Supreme Being of the universe. There are many gods (small g) but only one God (capital G). The equivalent term in the Old Testament Hebrew is 'El', which has been used with some variations by all ancient cultures as their generic word for god.

However, God does not call Himself El. He calls Himself **Elohim**, beginning in Genesis 1:1. Elohim is a term that is plural in form but singular in construction and usage. This Hebrew plural form requires at least three, thus from the beginning it suggests that God is Trinity.

The Trinity is made up of the perfect unity of the three Persons (I prefer to call them Aspects) of the Godhead: **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**. Each of those terms is also generic, which we again personalize by capitalization. Putting 'Holy' before 'Spirit' personalizes it even more, as no spirit is truly 'holy' other than 'the Holy Spirit'.

But each of these Persons or Aspects in the Godhead also have names. The Father is named **YHWH** – Jehovah; He is equivalent to the 'soul' of Elohim. The Son is named **Yashua** – Jesus, who is the 'body' of Elohim. The Holy Spirit is named **Ruach ha Kodesh** – the Holy Wind, or the Holy Breath, who is equivalent to the 'spirit' of Elohim.

Made in the image (likeness) of Elohim, we also have a soul, a body, and a spirit. But these three are one person. So also with Elohim: YHWH, Yashua, and Ruach ha Kodesh are one in three, three in one. To separate Them into Persons or Aspects is necessary for our sakes, to help us understand, but it is also necessary for us to 'put Them back together again' when we are done. Everything in the universe is fulfilled in Christ. Elohim is also 'put back together' in Christ. He also has a name, the name that is above every name in the heavens, upon the earth, and under the earth: that matchless, magnificent, beautiful name **Adonai Yashua haMashiach** (in Hebrew), or Curio Yesu Christos (in Greek), or the Lord Jesus Christ the Messiah (in English).

Thus when we pray to the Father in accordance with Matthew 6:9 we are praying to **the Lord**, our Authority Figure, the Boss, from whom all blessings flow. When we seek salvation from the bondage of wickedness, we invite **Jesus** into our hearts; we turn our lives over to Him, to learn of Him and to follow Him in what He is doing, for He is Ya-Shua – YHWH Saves, the Savior of the world. And when we are ready to walk with Him in His ways, we seek to be led by His Holy Spirit and He gives us "the mind of **Christ**" (1 Cor 2:16), so from then on we are led by "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9 ff), who has then become our **Messiah** by the Holy Spirit.

But in mis-translating YHWH to "the LORD" in nearly all modern translations, we lose the meaning. "The LORD" is not His memorial name. It is just a title, like 'sir' or 'boss'. It is a good title, and I'm not against it. I use it myself all the time. He is indeed the Lord, our Lord. We honor Him to bow before His Lordship. But can we justify changing Scripture for the sake of tradition, even a good tradition?

YHWH condemned the Jews for turning away from Him to serve Baal. "Then it will come about that if they will really learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, 'As YHWH lives', even as they [previously] taught My people to swear by Baal, then they will be built up in the midst of My people. But if they will not listen, then I will uproot that nation, uproot it and destroy it, declares YHWH." (Jer 12:16-17)

Guess who 'Baal' is? It is just a title for the Babylonian or Canaanite gods, the Baals. The Hebrew is 'ba'al' or the plural 'ba'alim'. It means lord, owner, master. The English still call their nobility lords. There is nothing wrong with the word. The problem is how it is used. God makes it clear that He prefers a closer relationship with us than just being our Lord, our Baal. "And it will come about in that day, declares YHWH, that you will call me 'Ishi' [my Husband], and will no longer call me 'Baali' [my Lord]. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, so that they will be mentioned by their names no more... And I will betroth you to Me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know YHWH." (Hos 2:16-20)

"Thy name O YHWH, is everlasting; Thy memorial O YHWH, throughout all generations." (Ps 135:13) His memorial name to all generations is YHWH, or Yahoweh, or Jehovah in our language. It is derived from the Hebrew verb 'hayah' (to be) and is almost identical to the Hebrew 'chayah' (life). In the present tense 'hayah' is 'I AM'. This causative form carries the implication, "I AM the First Cause of all things; I AM the Creator; I AM the self-existent One; I AM Life Eternal. I AM immanent, omnipresent."

As with many Hebrew verbs, 'hayah' weaves the saying of it tightly in to the doing of it, thus making it a very personal verb. It is the opposite of the 'idle word' of Matt 12:36, which is a word spoken but not carried out. 'Hayah' literally means, "I AM all that I AM, to you, personally. I make Myself both known and available to you at this very moment." 'Hayah' carries with it both a sense of timelessness (the eternal present) and an expression of intense activity (personal involvement). It is not a passive 'I am' as in 'I exist', but rather an active verb as in, "I AM here to help you, to save you, to supply your need, to reveal Myself, My Life Eternal, to you." Though invisible and transcendent, He is the "Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation." (Eph 1:17)

What a lovely name! In this study I honor Him by often using His memorial name, YHWH.

Therefore, in strict accord with Jesus' command to baptize "into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19), it is entirely proper to baptize exactly as He said, into His name, Adonai Yashua ha-Mashiach, the Lord Jesus Christ, because His name is the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! (Every New Testament baptism was actually done into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ or some variation of His name, such as in Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, and 19:5)

The Jewish accusation that Christians worship three gods has some basis in the terminology we use and the way we think of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is a profound mystery, but it is deplorable to use that as an excuse for sloppy terminology. When we speak of 'three Persons in the Godhead' we tend to think of three separate people, three individual identities, agreeing with each other or even arguing among themselves. That is wrong. God is not three people; He is one. He proved it to us by making us in His image – one individual, yet with three distinct aspects: a body, a soul, and a spirit. We also are three in one, one in three. In fact, not being in total unity within ourselves, we sometimes do argue with ourselves. For example, I could be participating in a glorious worship service with my spirit soaring and eagerly reaching up for more of God, while my soul is content to sit back, relax, enjoy the music, and be entertained, while my body is anxiously trying to get me to think about the pot roast in the oven back home and the company coming for Sunday dinner.

However, God is so much bigger than we (and in fact we don't understand our own nature very well), that it is impossible to get a full understanding of Him by studying ourselves. It is like studying a bust or picture of George Washington to get to know who he was and what he was like. God knew that, and He really wants us to get to know Him. So He unveiled Himself a little at a time, according to the three Aspects of His nature. We would get to know ourselves much better if we would study Him.

It is easy to see how separating Elohim out into three Persons has led to error. An example is the old Roman Catholic doctrines that portrayed the Father as full of wrath and vengeance, whom Jesus had to try to placate by His intercession, which led to prayers for Mother Mary to try to twist Jesus' arm to intercede for us before the Father, and even praying to the saints to twist Mother Mary's arm, instead of just praying to the Father as Scripture says.

Yet we cannot say that Elohim is one God made of three parts, either. The word 'parts' implies that each part is only partial, while we know that each Aspect of the Godhead is fully, 100 percent, God. That is why Yashua could declare, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." (Jn 14:9). In fact He is even called "the Eternal Father" in Isaiah 9:6. That is also why Jesus could say, "I will come to you," referring to the "Spirit of Truth" who "abides with you, and will be in you." (Jn 14:17-18)

So when I refer to the Godhead, instead of three Persons or three parts, I prefer to use other terms such as the three Aspects of Elohim, or the three Unveilings of Elohim, or the three Revelations of Elohim.

God is three in one, one in three. He chose to separate Himself within time for our benefit, so we could learn about Him, and in learning about Him, learn more about ourselves as well. But His great desire is that we enter His eternity, to actually become one with Yashua by His Spirit even as He is one with the Father. "I do not ask on behalf of these [disciples] alone, but for all those also who believe in Me through their word [that's us]; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us... that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity..." (Jn 17:20-23)

The significance of this is profound, especially when it comes to our study of the Old Testament. Elohim unveiled Himself progressively, revealing a little at a time as we were able to receive it. He called Himself El Elyon – God Most High, the omniscient (all-knowing) God, in Genesis 14:20. He called Himself El Roi – the God who Sees, the omnipresent God, in Genesis 16:13. He called Himself El Shaddai – the almighty, all-sufficient, omnipotent God, in Genesis 17:1. But He didn't reveal His memorial name YHWH until the time of Moses. "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH I did not make Myself known to them." (Ex 6:3)

God did not change with each new revelation. God always has been and will be Elohim, three in one, one in three. His glory and authority as God Almighty fills every Aspect, yet He reveals Himself in three ways. He has always had a Father Aspect (power, rule, care, training, discipline – the correct nature of the soul). He has always had a Son Aspect (supportive, obedient, eager to do Father's will – the correct nature of the body). He has always had a Holy Spirit Aspect (wisdom, understanding, communication, guidance, the Source of moral character – the correct nature of the spirit). It is we who change, as we learn about Him, and through Him learn more about ourselves and what He wants us to become.

We must compare our (fallen, damaged) body, soul, and spirit to His (perfect) nature. When our body tries to rule over us by its passions and desires, we must bring it into subjection, as Jesus subjected Himself to the Father. When our soul tries to control us with our self-centered, prideful nature, we must pray to the Father and seek His training and discipline, for He rules in the power and authority of a nature which is morally perfect. And if our spirit is being deceived and misled by wrong spirits we must learn to know the voice of the good Shepherd and be led by His Holy Spirit, as Jesus and the Father always are. But how can we do this if we have a wrong concept of God? We must start by studying His own revelations of Himself.

All Christians pretty much agree on the three primary unfoldings of this progressive revelation of God: YHWH was revealed at Mount Sinai, giving the Law, teaching, and disciplining in great power. Yashua was later revealed at the incarnation, as the suffering Servant, the meek and obedient Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And Ruach ha Kodesh was revealed at Pentecost as tongues of fire filling, leading, and empowering the saints. But we already know all that, backward and forward. His revelation is complete. So by now we should all be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. (2 Tim 3:17) Right? Uh... What happened here?

In a nutshell, what happened was the leaders of the Catholic church, who led us into the Dark Ages for twelve hundred and sixty years by systematically taking away the Scriptures, holding worship services in a foreign language, torturing and killing those of true faith, perverting every truth whereby people could know God for themselves, and substituting pagan religious rituals for the festivals and sacraments that God had commanded. Wow.

But Elohim is bigger than that, and He is now in the process of restoring all that was lost – again, through progressive revelation. Not all Christians will agree on the three primary unfoldings of this restoration (for reasons which will become obvious), but, for what it is worth, here is how I see them.

First, the **Protestant Reformation** restored the Person / Aspect of Yashua to His rightful place, by restoring the great doctrine of salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Jesus at the cross. Many churches, unfortunately, have settled there. By not keeping up with what Elohim is doing, they which started out so full of life have become little more than dead doctrines and burdensome rituals.

Second, the **Great Awakenings**, culminating in the Pentecostal Reformation, restored the Person / Aspect of Ruach ha Kodesh, the Holy Spirit, to His rightful place, by demanding both sensitivity and obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Now Elohim becomes more personal; no longer just fire insurance from hell or ticket to heaven, but our Friend, Comforter, Wisdom, Guide, Protector, Gift-Giver, Healer, and Constant Indwelling Companion. Many churches, unfortunately, have stopped to camp there. By not keeping up with what Elohim is doing, they which started out so full of life are becoming mostly hot air, full of fervent activities and emotionalism but without the power, authority, training, and discipline of Father YHWH.

Third was the **restoration of the Jews** to their land of Israel and the resurgence of interest around the world in them, their homeland, their culture, their traditions, and their history. This culminates in a restored appreciation for Torah and the Feasts of Israel, the recognition of our Jewish roots, and our adoption into the family of Israel by faith in the promises of YHWH to father Abraham.

This is ultimately leading up to our becoming a **Jewish Bride** which Father YHWH is preparing for His Son, a certain Jewish Rabbi from Nazareth. This restores the Person / Aspect of YHWH to His rightful place as the all-consuming, purifying fire of YHWH descending upon Mount Sinai, where He first gave us Torah. Nobody has had a problem stopping and camping here, because this is the last step (so far). This is what Elohim is doing right now. Besides, no one wants to camp in the all-consuming fire of YHWH. It is too, ahh... hot! But this is what will restore the power and authority of Father YHWH to His people. Nothing less than a pure, holy people, cleansed by the blood of Yashua, baptized in the cleansing fire of Ruach ha Kodesh, and then refined seven times in the all-consuming thrice-holy fire of YHWH, can be expected to bear His name or carry His power and authority in accord with His command. (See Matt 28:18-20; Jn 14:12 ff; 15:7 ff; and many others.)

Stop and think a minute. What is the scriptural nature of a father? Well, he is the head of the house, his word is law; he expects obedience and if he doesn't get it, there is discipline coming. That part certainly fits the picture of YHWH coming down on Mt. Sinai with the law. But much more than that, the biblical father is deeply involved with his children. It is he who is commanded by Torah to "teach them [YHWH's commandments] diligently to your sons, and [you] shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deut 6:7) This is the true nature of a father. He doesn't just send his kids off to school and forget them; he takes upon himself the prime responsibility for their education, particularly in the important things: God's commandments, true wisdom and knowledge, God's nature, character, and ways. It is a family thing. The father teaches his sons the family traditions and to uphold the honor of the family name, just as his father taught him.

We have pretty much abandoned that in our modern society, which is a shame. It is one of the reasons that our culture has lost its moorings from basic morality and common decency. How can you expect those who hate God to teach your children anything good? But YHWH has not forgotten! He is still the eternal Father. He is still the True of which the biblical father is but a picture. He still expects us to sit at His feet and learn of Him, as He teaches us of His nature and character, of His wisdom and His ways, of His laws and His festivals, so we will be able to uphold the honor of His family name.

Don't forget, it is He who chose Israel to be His own people; it is He who instructed them in His Torah, gave them His Sabbaths, commanded them to keep His Feasts, and gave them all the traditions which we so readily ignore and so often despise. In restoring Himself to His rightful place as our Father, He is teaching His sons about our family, our culture, and our heritage as true children of Abraham; adopted perhaps, but true none-the-less.

And His goal? As I said, He is preparing a Jewish Bride for a certain young Jewish Rabbi of Nazareth. What will this Bride be like? Well, I've never actually seen her in all her glory, but I have caught little glimpses of her in Christ's many-membered body, the church. From what I see, when the Father is ready to present her to Yashua, she will be breathtakingly perfect, beyond our wildest imaginings, in **righteousness**, in **beauty**, and in **wisdom**.

In **righteousness**, because Yashua haMashiach has finished His perfect work, having redeemed and cleansed her by His blood and set her free from her slavery to sin. In **beauty**, because Ruach ha Kodesh has finished His perfect work, having developed in her the nature and character of Adonai Yashua and clothed her in the fullness of the seven Spirits of YHWH. In **wisdom**, because YHWH our Father has finished His perfect work in her, having disciplined and purified her in the fires of His love, and having taught her to know and walk by His Spirit in all His ways, loving what He loves and hating what He hates.

This is a big subject, easily worth an entire book all by itself. I regret that I can only summarize it for you here. But I would be remiss in my call as a teacher if I tried to present that tantalizing overview of what God is doing right now, without personalizing it for you, dear Reader. YHWH is the 'I AM'. Everything He does has a personal application, for YHWH is a personal God.

Any building starts with the foundation. *Jesus Christ is our foundation*. "No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 3:11) *Jesus Christ is the beginning*. "He is the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything." (Col 1:18) *Jesus Christ is the fullest possible manifestation of the Father into our physical realm*. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him." (v 19) *And Jesus Christ is the end, the summation, the conclusion of all things*. "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He [the Father] purposed in Him [Christ] with a view to an administration [Kingdom] suitable to the fullness of time, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth." (Eph 1:9-10)

Understanding these basic, fundamental principles of the faith, take now what YHWH is doing in the church and apply it to each believer personally during the course of his or her spiritual life. Each believer must first enter into a relationship with **Jesus** as High Priest and Savior from sin. Second, each believer must enter into a relationship with **Christ the Messiah** as Prophet, learning to know the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit within. And third, each believer must enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ as **Lord**, King of kings and Lord of lords, the Eternal Father and Master of all, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the almighty King and ultimate Sovereign of the universe.

Though I speak of this as progressive revelation to the church, with the final step just now being unfolded as we speak, yet it has been going on in a limited way daily, even minute by minute, in the heart and life of every believer since Jesus spoke those incredible words, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him..." (Jn 14:6-9 ff) Jesus did far more than show us the way to the Father. Jesus is the Way to the Father! As each believer comes into intimate love relationship with Adonai Yashua haMashiach, the Lord Jesus Christ the Messiah, he or she is drawn by love into a deeper and deeper relationship with the eternal Father, and is thereby transformed from glory unto glory, changed into the very image, the very nature and character, of the unchangeable God, YHWH Himself. This is not just a minor side benefit to salvation; this is the ultimate goal of salvation!

Many Christians of the past have mistakenly thought of heaven as the final goal of salvation, making dogmatic claims such as, "You can't get to heaven by good works, only by faith in Jesus," and, "Unless you believe in and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord before you die, you will spend eternity in hell, no matter how good a person you are." Though there is some truth in both those statements, they are misleading, and therefore false. I can point you to over a dozen Scriptures which testify that heaven and hell are places of rewards or punishments not according to our faith, *but according to our deeds*, such as at the Great White Throne judgment. (Rev 20:11) Further, those statements imply that the primary goal of our salvation is to escape the fires of hell and make it to heaven, where we will get all kinds of fabulous blessings for all of eternity. Though that kind of teaching sells pretty well among people who are self-centered and ignorant of the Scriptures, it is also misleading. Our goal as believers is not to "make it to heaven and the mansions of glory when we die."

Jesus never said, "If you will believe in Me, I'll take you to heaven when you die, and give you lots of cool bennies." He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." (Jn 11:25-26)

We tend to ignore that because we can't understand it. How can a person live even if he dies? It is a lot easier to think of dying and going to some place of eternal bliss and blessings. After all, every one of the believers of the past (Enoch excepted) have eventually died, haven't they?

And so, we miss the point, which is simply this: *Jesus is indeed the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the true goal of our faith in Him is a close love relationship with the heavenly Father*. Now, read it again. That is what Life really is. "This is eternal Life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent." (Jn 17:3)

Jesus is the **Way**, and only in knowing Him as our High Priest and Savior from sin can we know the Father. Jesus is the **Truth**, and only in knowing Him as the Holy Spirit, the Prophet who proclaims the Word of God to our spirit, can we know the Father. And Jesus is the **Life**, and only in knowing Him as the Lord of Life, the Creator, Sustainer, and Master of all, the almighty King of the universe, can we know the eternal Father. But it is all about knowing the eternal Father – not just knowing about Him – knowing Him, in an intimate love relationship of which the closest earthly example is the love of a husband and wife for each other. (See Ephesians 5:22-33.)

This is the goal of our salvation, the goal of our very existence: to know the Father in reverence and holy fear, to know Him in all the intimacies of His eternal nature and character, His infinite wisdom and power, His unchanging grace, mercy, and love, and in that knowledge, to worship Him, loving Him for everything that He is, gladly serving Him in everything He is doing, and being transformed into His image. Heaven? Hell? Ha! The terrors of hell and the rewards of heaven pale in comparison to the surpassing glory of knowing and walking with Father YHWH in the Person of Adonai Yashua haMashiach.

A brief note on the pronunciation of God's sacred names. No one today knows for sure how to pronounce His memorial name YHWH, since the vowels were removed from all written records about 300 BC to prevent 'The Name' from being inadvertently dishonored. When the Massorettes (Jewish scribes) later added vowel points to the Hebrew consonants, they used the vowels from the word 'Adonai', making the pronunciation Ya-Ho-Wah, from which we get our Jehovah. Though there is nothing really bad about this pronunciation, it almost certainly is not correct. I really do not think God condemns us for not knowing how to pronounce His sacred memorial name. On the contrary, I believe He would have each of us pray and seek His face for a personal revelation of how He wants us to address Him. I have done that. At the moment I am comfortable with the pronunciation YaH-WHAY, but He has the freedom to change that as I grow in my relationship with Him, and I certainly allow you the freedom to seek Him for a different pronunciation.

The pronunciation of Yashua is more certain. 'Yah' is the short 'poetic' form of YHWH, used in hundreds of places in the Old Testament such as 'Hallelu-Yah' (Praise YHWH), 'Jeremiah' (Hebrew: Yir-me-Yah-hu, YHWH exalts), 'Isaiah' (I-Zay-Yah, salvation of YHWH), 'Abijah' (A-vie-Yah, YHWH is Father), and of course, 'Joshua' (originally 'Hoshea', salvation, but changed by Moses to 'Yah-ho-shua', YHWH is salvation. The pronunciation of these words is pretty evident. Likewise 'Yah-shu-a' (YHWH saves), (with emphasis on the first syllable, to emphasize that our salvation comes from YHWH), is probably correct, though many Christians pronounce it 'Yeh-Shu-ah' to emphasize 'Savior'.

One of the most beautiful passages in Scripture is found in 2 Chronicles 6 and 7. King Solomon has finished the temple. He prays his remarkable prayer of dedication. God is pleased, and He responds:

“Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifice; and the glory of YHWH filled the house. And the priests could not even enter the house of YHWH because the glory of YHWH filled YHWH's house. All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of YHWH upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground. They worshiped and gave praise to YHWH, saying, 'Truly He is good; truly His lovingkindness is everlasting!' ... So Solomon observed the Feast at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him... on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly... Thus Solomon finished the house of YHWH... Then YHWH appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, 'I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens so there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, *and My people, who are called by My name, 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 will heal their land.* Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer *offered in this place* [the temple]. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and heart will be there perpetually.'” (2 Chron 7:1-16, excerpts)

Many have taken verse 14 out of context, saying that all we need to do is humble ourselves and pray and seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways, and God will heal the land of America. Is that true?

Well, yes. The principle is true. But any truth taken out of context runs a certain amount of risk. What is the context here? Solomon and his subjects had determined they were going to obey God and keep His Feasts forever. They built a permanent structure to enable them to do just that. His response to them, if you will notice, was centered on “this place,” the temple, and the Feast of Tabernacles that they were celebrating there. The fact that they didn't follow through, thus fulfilling verses 19 - 22 (among the saddest verses in Scripture) is immaterial. Their intent at the time was to keep the Feasts forever. If you read the whole passage, you will get the feeling that God was immensely pleased at their intent.

What does “seek My face” mean? It is different from “humble themselves,” “pray,” and “turn from their wicked ways.” They are important too, and I don't minimize them. But seeking His face, which involves waiting on YHWH (Isa 40:31), is less understood and even less practiced in this modern space age of instant, disposable everything.

King David, the one God called “a man after My own heart” (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), poured out his heart to God in Psalm 27. “YHWH is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? YHWH is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread? ... One thing I have asked from YHWH; that I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of YHWH all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of YHWH, and to meditate in His temple. ... Hear, O YHWH, when I cry with my voice, and be gracious to me, and answer me. When Thou didst say, ‘Seek My face!’ my heart replied to Thee, ‘Thy face, O YHWH, will I seek.’ ... Teach me Thy ways, O YHWH, and lead me in a level path... I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of YHWH in the land of the living. Wait for YHWH; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for YHWH.” (Ps 27:1-14, excerpts)

I am not at all convinced that any of us even knows what that means, much less does it. We could say, “It means we wait on the Lord, listening for that still, small voice, with open hearts, eagerly, expectantly, willing to obey when He speaks to us. We put aside our own desires and seek first His desire for us. We fill our minds with Scripture so that we will recognize His voice as the Truth, as opposed to all the other voices that come to us to pervert the truth. We keep our hearts tuned to His Holy Spirit, opening up channels of communication with Him by spending time in His Word, meditation, and prayer first thing in the morning, and then checking back with Him at every opportunity during the day. Whenever His will is made clear to us, we set aside our own plans and do His will with all our hearts. We seek to delight ourselves in Him, to learn of Him, to partake of His own nature and character and develop it as our own, to love what He loves and hate what He hates, to reach out to His precious ones in love, kindness, encouragement, service, and fellowship as if we were doing it unto Him.”

And all of that, good and right and commendable as it is, is still too low, too self-focused, too earthbound. I’m not criticizing. I’m in the same boat. That is all I’ve ever known. But in this study of the Feasts of Israel, I’m getting the sense that there is something higher even than that. It is called, “**Seek My face.**” What can we do to bring a smile to His face? How can we delight His heart? How can we, who are so used to expressing our love for Him by merely receiving His love and passing it on, actually take the initiative to give Him a passionate, lavish, love-gift? How do we wait on His pleasure? I know, His Word makes it quite clear that, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 Jn 5:3) I’m really not suggesting that we go back and try to keep all the Old Testament ceremonial laws relating to the Feasts and sacrifices. That would indeed be burdensome, and totally unnecessary now that we are under the New Covenant of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

But wait. “I am YHWH. I do not change.” (Mal 3:6) The Feasts of Israel have been celebrated in some form ever since God killed the lamb to make clothes for Adam and Eve. (Remember, that is what Cain and Abel had their altercation about – Abel offered an acceptable Passover sacrifice, a lamb, while Cain offered vegetables. Gen 3:21; 4:3-5) In fact, that is why God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. We like to focus on His purpose of setting them free from their bondage, but, “Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go, that they may celebrate a Feast to Me in the wilderness.’” (Ex 5:1) It wasn’t the Israelites who wanted to go party. They only wanted their freedom. This whole Feast thing was God’s idea!

It is His nature. Do you think His nature changed with the incarnation of Jesus Christ? “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, yes and forever.” (Heb 13:8) “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” (James 1:17)

The covenant changed. No question about that. The Old Covenant was in place long enough to prove that man could never keep it. Now under the New (renewed, restored) Covenant, God does the keeping Himself. Jesus works within us by His Holy Spirit to atone for our sin, transform our hearts, pour out His grace to give us the strength and the desire to keep it, and send us challenges, trials, discipline, or even miracles to grow our faith. God is at work continually, saving us. But stop to think. What is it we are talking about here? What are we saved to do? We find the answer to that in the celebration of the Feasts of Israel, or more correctly, the Feasts of YHWH.

What do you do when a great king gives a feast and you are invited? Do you just have a good time and ignore the king? Look at all the king’s attendants. They have certainly learned to wait on him. It’s their job. Are they out there just enjoying themselves, or are they hovering around the king eagerly tuned to His every desire? Even in America we have waiters at restaurants; their job is to wait on us, and if they do it well and really please us we give them a bigger tip. Could we learn something from them about waiting on YHWH? What is our job here on earth, anyway? Why were we created? To make a living? Or to wait on YHWH?

What does God get out of all this? What is His Plan of the Ages, His “eternal purpose” which He purposed in Christ Jesus? (Eph 1:3-3:12) Does He redeem us back to Himself just because He loves us and wants to make us happy? I believe it is more than that. Sure, He does want to make us happy, but how about us making Him happy? God created us in His own image. Although that image is distorted by sin, if you look carefully at all the good parts of us, you can get some idea of what God may be like. Myself, I like a good party. I get pleasure out of games, good eats, and fellowship with a bunch of friends. Is it possible that God is a little like that?

YHWH; HIS NATURE AND CHARACTER

It is essential to understand a few other aspects of the nature and character of God before plunging into our study of the Feasts. These are basics. Some are obvious; others may not be. All are crucial.

God is **HOLY**. This is part of His essence. It demands of us a holy response in reverential fear. Coming into His presence flippantly, with unholy thoughts, motivations, or actions, even in ignorance, can and has been a reason for severe judgment and even death. The Feasts, even with all the celebrations and ceremonies, are invitations into the presence of YHWH; not invitations to orgies of gluttony and drunkenness. Come with clean hands and a pure heart. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were among the privileged few who actually saw God on Mt. Sinai (Ex 24:9-11), yet they got drunk and offered incense on the altar in an improper way, and fire came out from YHWH and slew them. (Lev 10:1-2) Thus YHWH said to Aaron, “Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting [to meet with God], so that you may not die – it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations – so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean.” (v 9-10)

God is **JUST**. He has a high, holy standard, His Law, and He will judge those who willfully break it. But He understands our weakness, ignorance, and foolishness. He provides a way for us to hear and understand, and power for us to change and receive Him and His wisdom. We have been lied to. “To Thee [YHWH] the nations [Gentiles, that’s us] will come from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, vanity, and things of no profit.’” (Jer 16:19) We have religious traditions and festal celebrations steeped in paganism and Catholic mysticism, and have never been properly taught about the Feasts of YHWH. Yet God understands and is quick to forgive sins of ignorance. The only unforgivable sin is willful blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 12:31) However, He makes sure that ultimately everyone does hear the Spirit’s call, and gives everyone the opportunity to choose. For those who willfully choose their sin instead of His grace, His justice is absolute and the penalty is death.

God is **LOVE**. If He were only holy and just, we would already be burnt toast, for we fall far short of His perfect standard. But in His infinite love, compassion, grace, and mercy He has given His own Son to pay the penalty for our sin and to redeem us back to Himself. He wants a love-relationship with us, and has freely given us all we need to establish that relationship. The Feasts of YHWH are the story of redemption, the greatest story ever told, the story of the awesome love of God purchasing us back to Himself. This is obvious. What is not quite so obvious is that God’s love extends to the whole world (Jn 3:16, 17) and that His love never, ever fails. (1 Cor 13:8; Rom 8:35 ff)

I believe that God gave us His Feasts partly to teach us of His Plan of the Ages, and partly just because He also likes a good party. He enjoys it when we, “Shout joyfully to YHWH... serve Him with gladness, come before Him with joyful singing, know that YHWH Himself is God... come into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.” (Ps 100, excerpts) Yes, in case you missed it, Psalm 100 is also referring to the Feasts of Israel, in which all males were commanded to assemble and to celebrate joyfully at Jerusalem three times a year.

Are we joyful when we gather to worship? Do we need to be commanded to assemble in celebration? Perhaps we could increase our joy of coming into His presence by studying these celebrations of YHWH to learn how He might want them to apply to us. In the process, perhaps we could also put a smile on His face and delight His heart, by finding out what He enjoys, and when, and how, and just give Him the love-gift of doing it His way, instead of according to the two thousand years of church tradition under which we have labored. Then we will be ready when we come to the greatest feast of all, the celebration at the marriage supper of the Lamb!

To finish this section, I quote from J. Preston Eby, *Looking for His Appearing*, page 4 part 4.

“How precious the knowledge that we have a God who hungers, thirsts, deeply desires to feast with His people – a God who from the beginning has tried to show us that His greatest delight is not in showing His authority, but in enjoying intimate and close fellowship with His children. It is true that He disciplines, that He leads us in paths of sacrifice, fasting, travail, and tears – in their proper place. But He causes the sacrifice to be turned to increase, He exchanges the ashes for beauty, and the tears He turns to laughter! He set a feast of fruits before Adam and Eve, the like of which man has never been able to reproduce, and He communed with them face to face. He dined with Abraham in his tent at noonday. He spread a table in the wilderness for the entire nation of His chosen, and gave them the very bread of heaven. Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding feast. He fed five thousand on a hillside. He did not hesitate to attend feasts or to eat with publicans and sinners. He kept the Feast of Dedication and the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:37; 10:22) during the years of His public ministry. He heartily desired to celebrate the Feast of Passover with His disciples. He established the New Covenant with a feast, a great spiritual feast, wherein He gave the redeemed His own body for their meat and His own blood for their drink. He has promised through the prophet Isaiah that in the latter days He will make a feast, a great feast of spiritual blessings and benefits for all nations, upon His holy Mount. (Isa 25:6) The greatest feast of all – the marriage supper of the Lamb – will usher His people into the most intimate relationship with their Lord!”

Yeah! Let’s party!

Every other aspect of God should be studied only in relationship to His love. If we look at His justice, holiness, righteousness, judgment, or truth apart from His love we do both Him and us a disservice, and we are in danger of growing to fear Him in the wrong way or even hate Him. But **God is ONE**. His love is in perfect harmony with every other aspect of His nature and character – it is the very foundation of all His thoughts and actions toward us.

Jesus said “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” (Mk 10:18) The obvious conclusion is that we, being born in sin, cannot have totally good and pure motivations unless first transformed by divine love. The not-so-obvious conclusion is that Jesus wanted the rich young ruler to acknowledge that His goodness was far above even that of a transformed sinner. As God, goodness is an integral part of His nature. But look at it from the rich young ruler’s perspective. He saw something in Jesus that He had never seen before: He caught a glimpse of divine love personified, with all its goodness, faithfulness, truth, compassion, and every other aspect of God’s character that comes from it. Would to God that we all would see what he saw, and let ourselves be transformed by divine love.

God is a **COMMUNICATOR**. Why is it so easy to believe that God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, and God will walk and talk with us in the New Jerusalem, yet so hard to believe that He wants to walk and talk with us today? Can true love stand being separated from His beloved? Never! True love can and always has made a way to bridge the gulf between us. He speaks softly and sweetly, yet persistently and penetratingly by His prophets, through the Scriptures, and with the quiet, gentle voice of His Holy Spirit within us.

One unique way in which He speaks to us is in His Feasts. They are not only prophetic pictures of His plan of redemption but also glimpses from this shadow world into the vast and glorious realms of Spirit, into the very nature and character of God Himself. In Isaiah 41-46, which may be the greatest statement in Scripture on the sovereignty of God, He offers proof of His own God-hood, as opposed to the idols who are not gods at all. His proof: “Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods.” (Isa 41:23) He then proceeds to do just that, declaring many intimate details about the Persian King Cyrus who would let His exiles go free and help rebuild His Holy City and His temple. (44:28; 45:13 ff) His conclusion: “I am God, and there is no other. I am God! There is none like Me, *declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done...*” (Isa 46:9-10)

This is what the Feasts of YHWH are all about. They are YHWH declaring from the beginning of the nation of Israel His plan of redemption, with His ultimate goal of dwelling in them (including all who are adopted into the family of Israel) and ruling the universe through them.

God is **TRUTH**. He keeps His promises. He says: “... My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure... truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it; surely I will do it.” (Isa 46:10-11) You can back-peddle for Him all you want: “He didn’t really mean to say that – that’s just symbolic, or poetic, or figurative, or metaphorical, or...” and He will go on to fulfill His Word in exact, precise detail, down to the very word and letter, “jot and tittle.” He doesn’t need you to cover for Him. He is God! If you believe He is incapable of fulfilling all the intricate and seemingly conflicting details of scriptural prophecy then your god is just too small. I happen to believe in a very big God, who is quite capable of fulfilling all the details of His prophetic Word, and who has in fact already fulfilled every detail of the Spring Feasts. Likewise, He will fulfill every detail of the Fall Feasts upon His soon return. Scripture doesn’t reveal all these details, at least not on the surface. Some are hidden. He wants us to do some digging, as for buried treasure. As we do some serious digging into the Feasts of YHWH, I believe we will find many things which will help us to understand and appreciate all He has done in the past, as well as to understand and prepare for what He has planned for our future, very possibly our immediate future.

God is **SOVEREIGN**. He is also **OMNISCIENT**, **OMNIPRESENT**, **OMNIPOTENT**, and **ALL-WISE** in His sovereignty; a very big God indeed! Having been made in His image, we catch a tiny glimpse of that in the myth of the all-American ‘self-made man’ – the wealthy land baron who is absolute king of his vast domain, smart, strong, knowing everything that goes on all over his spread, always there when needed, unquestioned authority for miles around, none dare challenge him or face his wrath, and the only way to get ahead is to curry his favor. It makes a good John Wayne movie. But guess what? All God has to do is send a storm, a flood, an illness, a fire, an injury, or even just a speck of sand in the wrong time and place and He can blow it all away. You see, man in all his power and pride is not sovereign at all. He merely receives a limited temporary authority or stewardship from God, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. That land baron would do well to humble himself and plead for God’s blessing.

But God really is the **sovereign** Lord. He really is **all-knowing**; from before the beginning of time He already knew everything that ever would be, down to the secret intimate detailed thoughts and motivations of our own hearts. He really is **always present**; from His dwelling place in eternity there has never been nor will there ever be a time or place where God is absent or asleep. He really is **all-powerful**, perfectly able to do anything He wants both in His creative power and His governing power. His only limitation is that He has limited Himself to never violate His own Word or act contrary to His nature and character (which gives meaning to words like truth, righteousness, justice, and faithfulness).

And God really is **all-wise**. From the creation of the universe to the final conclusion of His awesome Plan of the Ages, everything He has ever been and done – indeed everything He ever allowed us to do – has been (and will always be) in perfect wisdom. Nothing will turn out bad; even the wicked are a good (negative) example. All things really do work together for the good of God's precious chosen ones. (Rom 8:28) Ultimately, every knee really shall bow to acknowledge that YHWH is the sovereign Lord of all, and that all His ways are altogether perfect. (Isa 45:23) See Psalm 139 for a beautiful, personalized statement of God's sovereignty shown in His omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and wisdom. Everything is totally predestined; nothing and no one in heaven or hell or on earth can prevent God from perfectly accomplishing all His good pleasure. (Isa 46:8-11)

God has given mankind a **FREE WILL**. This may seem on the surface to conflict with His sovereignty, but God is far bigger than that. As we begin our study of the Feasts of Israel, we must understand that God does not intend that we give up our free will and bind ourselves back down to Old Testament laws. God gave us a free will because He wants us to be free. Our freedom in Christ is exceedingly precious and beautiful. (Gal 2:4; 5:1,13) No longer like the Children of Israel, who had to be restrained under strict discipline for their own protection, the saints in Christ Jesus who have had their old sin nature cleansed and transformed by the blood of the Lamb and who are filled with and led by the Spirit of God are truly free – freer than any previous generation in history. In Christ we are totally free to go where we please and do what we please, always bearing the fruits of the Spirit (against which there is no law – Gal 5:23) in whatever we do, since we have crucified the flesh nature with its passions and lusts and are living and walking by the Holy Spirit. (v 24, 25)

How is this fantastic freedom compatible with God's perfect, total sovereignty?

Consider God as the **Grand Master** in Chess, and each of us as the bright and promising (and highly competitive) student. We play our best, fiercely assailing Him with every gambit in the book and some that aren't, but He quietly meets every challenge with amused interest, sometimes pointing out where we could have done better, sometimes congratulating us on a good move or exposing a weak move by pouncing on an unguarded piece, but always several steps ahead of us. When the game is over we will bow respectfully and thank Him for the game, *feeling privileged to have lost to the Master*. You see, a very good chess player thinks several moves ahead of the game, ever trying to steer his opponent into a trap by making what seemed like a series of good moves turn out to play right into his hands. He does not control his opponent's moves; yet he tries to retain control by knowing how his opponent will respond in each situation, and using that knowledge to his own advantage.

But God is the ultimate Grand Chess Master. He sees how we will respond in every situation, not just several moves in advance, but throughout all time from the dawn of time. He does not control our moves; we have perfect freedom to choose the best move, or the worst move, or any in between. But in every move God is already way ahead of us, working out all things for our good and His glory according to His perfect Plan of the Ages. One day we each will kneel before Him to thank Him for a good game, feeling privileged to have competed with Him and grateful that He won. *For this is a game that He must win. The Grand Master always wins.* You can fight against Him all your life, wrestle with Him kicking and screaming, argue with Him 'til you are blue in the face, run from Him, hide from Him, ignore Him, hate Him, or lash out in anger against Him; but whenever He wants to, He will catch you and – Checkmate! – you'll find that everything you ever did fit into His perfect plan for you after all.

God is **ETERNAL**. We, being a totally time-based life-form, have a great deal of trouble with that. We tend to put God within our boundaries of time, so that even when we say, "God is eternal" we think of Him living a very long time ago, and continuing to live a very long time from now. This is wrong, and it is harmful to our thinking as well, for it gives us the impression that the eternal Life He offers is just long life, 'forever and ever'. "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing His praise than when we've first begun." It is a beautiful and well-loved song, but it is misleading. The Scripture speaks of ages of time. There may be many other ages following the Millennial Age to come; we are never told how many, or how long they are. But by its very nature time had a beginning and must someday have an end.

"Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and Thy dominion endures through all generations." (Ps 145:13) "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." (Rev 11:15) "... and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom will have no end." (Lk 1:33) But, "Then comes the end, when He [Jesus] delivers up the Kingdom to God the Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power [the Kingdom] ... when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor 15:24-28)

Are these verses in conflict? No, not at all, not when you look at it from the perspective of God's eternal nature. We don't understand eternity. The words often translated 'eternity', 'everlasting', or 'forever' are actually time words. These verses should read, 'throughout the ages of time'. His Kingdom doesn't end when all rule and authority and power are abolished. No, that is when everything and everyone has fully entered into God's eternity, so that God is all in all. The King doesn't need to rule over anyone when all Creation is in perfect, willing harmony with Him!

Look at Jesus, our Example: He is in perfect subjection to the Father. The Father never needs to exercise rule or authority or power over Him. Instead, the Father's power and the authority of the Holy Spirit flows through Him to rule the universe!

The significance of this is profound. God is not a time-based life-form. He is Spirit, an eternity-based life-form. The eternal Life He offers us is not an indefinite extension of our own life. No, no, no! To have life everlasting without having eternal Life would be hell, not heaven! Instead, He offers to transform us, literally 'metamorphosis' us, into a very different kind of life-form: His eternity-based life-form. In the process (and it is a long, difficult process) we do not give up our humanness or our time perspective. We do not check our minds at the door. But we do gain a new perspective: the "mind of Christ." (1 Cor 2:16) This new mind sees from God's perspective in eternity. "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Rom 12:2) "... be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." (Eph 4:23-24)

The eternal Life He offers us is not just for the future. It is true that we will not be able to fully receive it in this age; "... he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age... and in the age to come, eternal Life," (Mk 10:30) but that is only because we are still awaiting the redemption of our physical bodies. (Rom 8:11) However, Scripture assures us that "... God has given us eternal Life, and this Life is in His Son. He who has the Son, has the Life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the Life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal Life... And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal Life." (1 Jn 5:11-20) "... this is eternal Life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (Jn 17:3)

Now you begin to realize that eternal Life is something totally new; a new life-form, not bound to our time-based realm – certainly not sitting on a cloud playing a harp 'forever and ever'. It is something that we can begin to have right now. It is tied up in knowing Jesus Christ, personally, intimately, in a love relationship in which we have Him dwelling in us by His Spirit. Thus we begin to think with His mind and see things from His eternity perspective.

And what is this new eternity perspective that He offers us? Thought you'd never ask! God is the great I AM, the Ever-Present One. He never called Himself the 'I WAS' or the 'I WILL BE'. Time can never reach out and touch eternity, no matter how long you travel into the past or into the future, for time is of a lower realm than eternity.

But eternity can and does reach out and touch time, at all points, and they are always right now! To understand something, our human mind must put it into the past or the future or both, but this new mind of Christ can finally accept things in the present tense! The human mind loves to talk about what God did, or to worry about what God will do; but the mind of Christ lives in what God is to me, in me, and through me – right now. That is the eternity perspective, to see as God sees, in the present.

"For thus says the high and exalted One, who dwells in eternity, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit...'" (Isa 57:15) "I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, without which man would not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end [of time]." (Eccl 3:10-11) Yes! That's it! He comes to put a little 'touch of eternity' in our heart, so we can find out what He is like from His eternal perspective and thus understand what He is doing within our time-based realm.

This is a crucial concept as we discuss the Feasts, because we will be discussing a lot of what God did and what He will do, but for it to have any value to us we must receive it with the mind of Christ as well as with our human mind. Our human mind may love to learn the history or discover our roots, and it may love to speculate on Christ's return, when our bodies are fully redeemed and His Kingdom is finally manifested for every eye to see. But only by the mind of Christ will we be able to take any of that and receive it in the present tense, so that our lives are transformed and our natures are recast into His image.

"But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror [dimly], are being changed [present continuous tense] into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18 MKJV) To broadly paraphrase this wondrous verse: "*Now that the veil over the most holy place in the temple of our hearts has been torn aside, we all are beholding, gazing, contemplating the beauty, the inexpressible glory of the very heart of God (though dimly, that it not slay us) and are being continuously transformed from glory to glory into His very image and likeness, in accord with His divine nature.*"

If this doesn't happen, if we insist by our human understanding to put it all into the past or future tense, then our study of the Feasts of Israel will be just a wasted mental exercise. But if by the Spirit of the eternal God we take this study and learn to know Him of whom the Feasts speak, we shall indeed be transformed, 'metamorphosed'. For everything the Feasts portray, He wants to work in our hearts to make us His sons, led by His Holy Spirit, right now. My continual prayer is, "Lord Yashua, fill me with Your Spirit. Show me Your wisdom here. Teach me Your ways. Lead me in them, that I may be of service to You."

THE NATURE OF CHRIST

We have been talking about the nature of God, and Jesus Christ is fully, 100 percent God (no argument there), so why do I need another section on the nature of Christ? *Because almost nobody understands the crucial difference between Jesus and the Father, or the reason why Scripture calls Jesus “the only begotten Son of God.”* Most people simply put this question into the doctrine of the Trinity and call it a mystery, leaving us in the dark. But for us to understand the Feasts and their wonderful story of **redemption**, we also need to understand the nature and mission of **Christ, the Redeemer**.

Psalms 2 clearly speaks of Christ, the Redeemer, God's Anointed One, when it says: “Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.” That “begotten” can easily refer (prophetically) to the incarnation, when Jesus was born of Mary. But John 1 makes it clear that Jesus existed before the incarnation, and in fact He was the Creator in the very beginning of time. “In the beginning [of the creation] was [already there] the Word [Christ, the full expression of God the Father], and the Word was with [face to face, equal to and intimate with] God, and the Word was [fully, 100 percent] God. This One was in the beginning with God. [Poetic parallel to the first sentence.] All things came into being through Him. Apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. [Two more poetic parallels.] ... And the Word became flesh [later, after He had been begotten of the Father] and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... No man has seen God [the Father] at any time; [but] the only begotten God [the Son], who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained [revealed, rehearsed, unfolded, declared] Him.”

So who created the heavens and the earth? Who walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden in the Ruach of the day? Who spoke with Moses face to face? Who met Joshua with a drawn sword? It is pretty clear from John 1 that in every case He was the pre-incarnate Christ, the “only begotten Son of God.”

Here is where it gets a bit tricky. God is eternal. Jesus is fully God. So when was He “begotten” of the Father? Was Jesus (as some Mormons claim) just the first being created by the Father at the beginning of time, then commissioned to create and redeem others who would mature to become like Him, who in turn would eventually create and redeem still others? No, no, no! That is utter heresy, regardless of how you look at it, for it makes Jesus out to be a created being who achieved God-hood, to show us how we can likewise achieve God-hood.

Jesus is inherently different from His creation. True Christians believe that Jesus is fully God from eternity, and the “only begotten Son” part stems from His entering our space-time realm, whether at His incarnation or at Creation. I believe that too, but I carry it a bit further.

Recall our discussion in the previous section on the eternal nature of God? God the Father is not a time-based being. His nature as well as His dwelling place is eternity, where He “changes not” (Mal 3:6), and with whom “there is no variation or shifting shadow.” (James 1:17) Eternity is the ever present ‘I AM’. Nothing exists in eternity but God, dwelling in utter glorious perfection beyond our comprehension. He cannot grow, or gain wisdom or knowledge, because to do so would be to affirm that He was not quite perfect or not completely infinite in wisdom and knowledge to begin with. Besides, it requires time to change; a time before the change and a later time after it has occurred. So how could God, perfect and complete in Himself, create someone upon whom He could lavish His infinite love? (For love must have a beloved.)

The infinite God created a finite ‘bubble’ within His eternal realm. This occurred “In the beginning.” (Genesis 1:1) Our finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite eternity beyond our little bubble. But we know about that bubble! It is our four dimensions of space-time. At first it was “formless and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” So God said, “Let there be light!” and *He, as the Light of the World, stepped into the bubble*. Yes, the infinite, unchangeable God stepped into a realm where He could change, and make changes. The eternal Spirit ‘expressed’ Himself into our physical and time-based realm.

This expression is Jesus, the only begotten of the Father. “For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily [physical] form.” (Col 2:9) Throughout all time Jesus is the fullest possible expression of the Father in this realm (limited only because time and space cannot contain Him). All mention of God's dealings with mankind in Scripture refer to Jesus Christ. The phrase, “only begotten Son of God” means that Jesus, with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, is the only expression of God the Father within our space-time realm. As such, He is also the only way back to the eternal Father. The Holy Spirit, who exclusively filled Jesus until Pentecost and now fills the saints as well, is the means that God uses to maintain communication between time and eternity.

Jesus changed. He became fully, 100 percent human. He dwelt among us. He grew in wisdom and stature. (Lk 2:52) He died, was buried, and rose again in a new body. He learned obedience through the things He suffered. (Heb 5:8) When He ascended again to the Father, He returned in His Spirit to teach us of Himself and to lead us into all Truth. (Jn 14:16-21) This is not in conflict with “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8) for in His realm He is the Almighty God, the Eternal Father. (Isa 9:6) But He gave that up to enter our time-based realm. Jesus deliberately humbled Himself. (See Phil 2:7 ff.) He has made full use of His humanity to identify with us, who must change to become more like Him, for He also has faced every weakness, temptation, trial, and pain that we must face. (Heb 4:15)

What is His mission? He is the Redeemer, the Savior. So is that His mission, to save us from our sins and redeem us back to Himself? Well... not really. That's just a lengthy detour. His mission is far more glorious. Jesus created this space-time bubble for one purpose, called His "eternal purpose" (literally His "purpose for the ages of time") in Ephesians 3:11. It is to reproduce Himself as an expression of the Father's love; to create and perfect His Bride, His many-membered body, His church, then to marry her and through her bring forth many sons to glory. (Heb 2:10) *Talk about change!* "For the anxious [earnest] longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." (Rom 8:19) Jesus is working throughout the ages of time to perfect us in His image, reproduce His nature in us, unify us, and ultimately bring us with Him to the Father, that God may be all in all.

Our focus has been on getting forgiven of our sins and delivered from the bondage and penalty of sin (death), so that we could live forever with Him in heaven. But living forever is a small thing, and in fact (as I said before) living forever without having His gift of eternal Life would be hell, not heaven. We need to look beyond that, to see that His purpose is to reproduce His own nature and character in us. To the extent we are transformed into His eternal Life-form, we enter His eternity and dwell there with the eternal Father in all His glory and perfection.

So, what is the nature of Jesus Christ? As the full expression of the eternal Father into our space-time realm, His nature is dual. He is both 100% eternal, unchangeable, almighty God, and 100% weak, changeable, man – but a man with a mission and a strength of purpose to fulfill that mission, though opposed by all the powers of hell. This dual nature presents contradictions to our time-based minds. The natural mind cannot understand it. We need to pray for Holy Spirit guidance in the things I am trying to communicate here, as we carry this one step further.

THE NATURE OF THE WORD.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God. (Jn 1:1) Thus the nature of the Word is the same as the nature of Jesus Christ. It also is dual, both 100% divine, and 100% human. It also forms contradictions to our natural, un-Spirit-aided mind. I have a 473 page book titled *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, by John Haley. Here is the reason. "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." (1 Cor 2:14) Just like Jesus could not be received as Messiah by those who would not believe, so the Word cannot be received by those who choose to not believe. There is a veil over both. Only one who is spiritually enlightened can see through the veil. Just as Jesus was accused, slandered, hated, and slain by wicked men, so is the Word also twisted, tortured, and maligned by all who lack spiritual discernment.

In a later section I will deal with the three veils of the tabernacle, one between the court of Israel and the court of the Gentiles, one at the door of the holy place, and one protecting the Holy of Holies. For now I only want to make the point that everything in the Old Covenant is symbolic of spiritual truths, which are veiled. They are only partially revealed in the New Covenant. They will ultimately be fully revealed, 'unveiled', at the end of the age.

In that day, "... YHWH of Hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all the peoples on this mountain... and on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all the nations [Gentiles, pagans, heathen]. He will swallow up death for all time, and Adonai YHWH will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people [anti-Semitism] from all the earth; for YHWH has spoken. And it will be said in that day, 'Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is YHWH for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.'" (Isa 25:6-9)

But for now, Jesus stated: "To you [My disciples] it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them [the crowds, the vast majority of the Israelites and all the Gentiles and pagans] it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matt 13:11-13) For, "He [God] has blinded their eyes, and He hardened their hearts; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them." (Jn 12:40, from Isa 6:10)

Are you His disciple? Has He taken you beyond the first veil of salvation, beyond the second veil of the filling of the Holy Spirit, and beyond the third veil to dwell in the secret place of the Most High? Yes, I trust? Then He wants to teach you what the parables mean and explain to you all those veiled mysteries that are hidden within the Old Covenant symbols. That is what this study is all about.

An example is the virgin birth of Jesus. He was born of a human female, but the holy sperm came directly from the eternal Father in heaven, with no human father; a miracle of the first order with no equal. Thus He is both fully human (from His mother) and fully divine (from God His Father). We all know this is true, but why?

In Scripture the man symbolizes the mind, will, logic, determination, rule, and authority; while the woman symbolizes the heart, emotions, feelings, submission, obedience, and spiritual sensitivity. Trust me, it takes both to be a complete person. Without my wife, I can be harsh, unfeeling, brash, insensitive, reckless, self-reliant, and self-focused. But without me, she falls to pieces over the simplest problem or logical decision.

That is why Christians are the “sons of God” when it comes to ruling and reigning with him in the age to come, yet we are the “Bride of Christ” in submitting to His authority, learning from Him, and being purified by Him.

Jesus didn’t marry (yet). He didn’t need to, as He was already the perfect combination of male (logic, rule, authority) and female (compassion, sensitivity, obedience to the Father), since He received the best traits from both His earthly mother and His heavenly Father. Why is that significant? **Jesus is the Word.** The Word came to us in a unique fashion. “. . . No prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Pet 1:21) These were men who put aside their own will, their ‘male’ logic and authority, and heard with their ‘female’ side: their heart, spiritual sensitivity, and submission to God’s Spirit. In that sense, the Word was born of a human virgin female with sperm from the divine Father as impregnated by the Holy Spirit.

Everything else ever written is a mixture of human (male logic and female heart) inputs with possibly some divine Truth thrown in as well, depending upon the author’s commitment to hearing from the Holy Spirit. But the story of the virgin birth of Jesus tells us something special about God’s Word: it has no human male (logic) input; it was written entirely by the authority of the divine Father communicating His own ‘male’ logic into the ‘virgin female’ heart of the human authors. The Word of God is Truth with a capital T just as Jesus Himself is Truth. Just as the human flesh of Jesus has no earthly equal, for He was “yet without sin” (Heb 4:15), even so the Word of God has no earthly equal, for it likewise is without error, without any mixture of untruth or deception.

Yet just as Jewish scribes and Pharisees were able to try Jesus and find this perfect man ‘guilty’ of the most heinous blasphemies, even so scribes and Pharisees of all ages try the Word of God and find it ‘guilty’ of the most outrageous claims, contradictions, and evil or offensive statements.

This is the nature of the Word. It is a “. . . mystery, hidden from the ages and generations, but has now been manifested to the saints.” (Col 1:26) “. . . the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His [Jesus Christ’s] sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” (Heb 4:12-13)

If you truly study the Word, you will find Jesus. If you study the nature of Jesus, you will discover the nature of the Word. But if you only look at the letter of the law or the humanness of Christ, if you approach the Word with your male logic to employ it for your own purposes, you will crucify Him afresh by distorting the Truth of the Word.

Believing as I do in the absolute sovereignty of God, it must be God’s intent that His Word seems foolish to the unsaved. “For the Word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will put aside.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since *in the wisdom of God* the world in all its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” (1 Cor 1:18-21)

Consider Creation: to those who believe, Creation reveals the glory of God. But to those who are perishing, the evidence for God is contradictory, pointing at times toward evolution, vast ages of time, and the survival of the fittest. In fact, every revelation of God to mankind has within it both the human form and the divine: it reveals, yet it hides as much as it reveals. The Creation, God’s Word, and Jesus Christ Himself, all “speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, veiled, which God predestined before the ages of time to our glory, which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Cor 2:7-8)

Why? It doesn’t seem fair for God to deliberately veil His glory from those who are perishing, while revealing it to those who are being saved. After all, He “desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the Truth.” (1 Tim 2:4) *It only seems unfair because we don’t understand God’s ways. We have been taught falsehoods about His true nature. “. . . Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, vanity, and things of no profit.”* (Jer 16:19)

God is not trying to save the world now. In every age God only saves a few. Jesus didn’t preach to the whole world; He only preached to Israel, and even then He spoke in parables that only His disciples understood. (Jn 12:40) “He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.” (Rom 9:18) This passage goes on to talk about the potter and the clay, and the absolute right of the potter to make both “vessels of mercy” and “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.” (v 22-23)

“Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” (v 13) And that’s even before they were born! This presents us with a huge contradiction with those passages that tell us God is love and He is unwilling for any to perish.

God is perfectly just and impartial, but He has never been particularly concerned about being fair. As far as we know, no one from Adam to Noah had any of the written Word of God, and it is certain that no one from Adam to Jesus had any of the written New Covenant. Yet the requirement has always been the same: the only way to the Father is through personal faith in the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *How could the people of Noah’s time possibly know about Jesus?*

Here is where our neat theological doctrines fall apart. It is because we do not understand the nature of God's Word. No, God is not fair. He did not give to anyone before Jesus the same revelation He gave us. (See Matt 13:17.) Even the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 could not be saved without faith in Jesus. "All these died in faith, *without having received the promises*, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth... All these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God has provided something better for us, *so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*" (Heb 11:13, 39-40)

Jesus assures us that, "... No one comes to the Father but through Me." Yet He has deliberately left a hundred generations with no revelation of Himself (except obscure prophecies), and (if our theology were consistent with itself) no possible way to the Father.

The Word of God is a **progressive revelation** of Jesus Christ. Adam and Eve got a tiny glimpse when God told the serpent that the seed of Eve would bruise his head. Abraham learned a bit more when God told him that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Later, God spoke of the coming redemption of Israel through the prophets: Isaiah, Daniel, and others. Jesus' disciples received more yet, though they didn't understand why Jesus had to die until after He arose. Finally, with the writing of the New Covenant, the church now has a full revelation of the redemption found only in Jesus Christ. So are all previous generations eternally lost? Of course not. It is only our theology that is defective. The book of Hebrews makes it clear: all those heroes of faith are in the heavenlies watching, receiving revelation and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as it becomes available to them through His revelation to us. "They without us are not made perfect." Right now Jesus is primarily dealing with His chosen Bride, so that in the ages to come He and His perfected Bride can reach out to people from all ages with the knowledge of salvation through faith in Him.

This is the nature of the Word. This is why it was given in successive revelations, veiling more than it revealed. This is God's "Plan of the Ages" (Eph 3:11), that God should first prepare a perfect Bride and many-membered body for Christ, while allowing untold millions to die in their sins (Jn 8:24) in blindness, hardness of heart, and utter ignorance of the truth, "so that in the ages to come He can display the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7) *to them through us*. "To preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery, which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church [that's us] to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places [including all who died before Christ]." (Eph 3:8-10)

To close this section, let's take an extended tour through Isaiah 28, which ties together the nature of God, the nature of Christ, the nature of the Word, and the nature of God's Plan of the Ages in one wondrous chapter. First, the context: "And it will come about in that day, that YHWH will start His threshing [His discipline] from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt [the Nile]; and you will be gathered up [return from Exile] one by one, O sons of Israel. It will also come about **in that day** that a great trumpet will be blown. Those who languished in the land of Assyria and those who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship YHWH in the Holy Mountain of Jerusalem [Mt. Moriah]." (Isa 27:12-13)

Keep this in mind as we go through Isaiah 28. It is all prophesied to take place "in that day," the day of the great trumpet, the day of the restoration, the discipline and regathering of God's people who were scattered abroad. "In that day YHWH will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent [the devil], with His fierce and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted [deceiving] serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea." (Isa 27:1) "In the days to come [after YHWH has dealt with the devil] Jacob will take root; Israel will blossom and sprout; and they will fill the face of the world with fruit." (v 6) This is speaking of the end of the age and the Millennium. Nobody can say it has been fulfilled yet. Now, on to chapter 28.

"Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim [representative of all God's chosen people] and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is at the head of the fertile valley of those who are overcome with wine! [Wine is representative of the seductive spirits of the world, who have beguiled the church with beautiful lies, leading her to accept the prevailing culture of death.] *Behold, YHWH has a strong and mighty agent as a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, like a storm of mighty overflowing waters.* He has cast it down to the earth with His hand. [This destruction is not against His people, but against the lies they have believed and the culture of death they have embraced.] The proud crown [the beautiful façade and good name of the church] of the drunkards of Ephraim is trodden under foot. The fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is at the head of the fertile valley, will be like the first ripe fig prior to summer, which one sees; as soon as it is in his hand, he swallows it. [The pride of the church will be gone like a swallowed fig.]

"In that day, YHWH of Hosts will become as a beautiful crown, a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people, a spirit of justice for him who sits in judgment, *strength to those who repel the onslaught at the gate.* [Whom do they repel?] These also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink; the priest and the prophet [church leaders] reel with strong drink, they are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink, they reel when having visions, they totter when rendering judgment. For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place."

This section is further explained in chapter 29, starting with v 9. “Be delayed and wait. [Literal Hebrew: ‘Stupefy yourselves and be stupid.’] Blind yourself and be blind. They become drunk, but not with wine; They stagger, but not with strong drink. *For YHWH has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets, and He has covered your heads, the seer prophets.* [YHWH has silenced His prophets since the church has rejected them.] And the entire vision shall be to you like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to one who is literate, saying, ‘Please read this,’ he will say, ‘I cannot, for it is sealed.’ Then the book will be given to one who is illiterate, saying, ‘Please read this.’ And he will say, ‘I cannot read.’ [Church leaders have different excuses for rejecting YHWH’s prophets, but the end result is the same.]

“Then YHWH said, ‘Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lipservice, but they remove their hearts far from Me and their reverence for Me is but learned traditions, therefore I will again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously! The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their astute men shall be concealed.’ [Note: it is YHWH Himself who has allowed the darkness to cover the church, but He did so for a reason: not to destroy them, but to destroy their false wisdom, human discernment, and foolish reliance on the pagan traditions of men. Now, back to chapter 28, v 9.]

“To whom would He [YHWH] teach knowledge? And to whom would He interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just taken from the breast? [babies] For rule on rule, rule on rule, line on line, line on line, a bit here, a bit there. [This is the way you teach babies; even the words – Hebrew monosyllables – sound like the babbling of a baby.] Indeed He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue; to whom He said, ‘Here is rest, give rest to the weary,’ and ‘Here is repose,’ but they would not listen. So the word of YHWH to them will [continue to] be, ‘rule on rule, rule on rule, line on line, line on line, a bit here, a bit there,’ that they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive. [The proud leaders of the church are as babies to God, ignorant of any spiritual truth and unable to understand even the simplest basic truths. YHWH has tried to teach them, but they will not listen. So He gives them up to disaster and captivity.]

“Therefore hear the word of YHWH, O scoffers, who rule this people who are in Jerusalem. Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol [the grave] we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, for we have made falsehood our refuge [stronghold], and we have concealed ourselves with deception.’ Therefore thus says Adonai YHWH, ‘Behold I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone, a firm, sure foundation. He who believes will not be disturbed.’”

This is a wondrous promise. It means that he who apprehends faith lives by faith and will not panic. He who decides to believe will not be moved. He who determines to go on believing ‘no matter what’ shall not be shaken. He whose faith rests solidly upon this sure foundation cannot stumble over all the lies and religious traditions. He whose blood-washed faith stands firm on the Chief Cornerstone shall not stumble or stagger though circumstances look impossible, though sickness or tragedy falls, though the ‘experts’ in the media and the professional churchmen, legislators, policemen, and doctors all shout hopelessness, death, and despair. Why?

“And I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the level. [In the end, the Truth wins!] Then [My strong and mighty agent, the storm of] hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the [storm of mighty] waters shall overflow the secret place [the lies hidden within the soul will be exposed]. So your covenant with death shall be cancelled, and your pact with Sheol shall not stand. When the overwhelming scourge passes through [your soul], then you will become its trampling. [The scourge is a spiritual thing operating in our hearts and minds.]

“For morning after morning it will pass through, anytime day or night, and it will be sheer terror to you to understand what it means. The bed is too short to stretch out, and the blanket is too small to wrap oneself up in. [You will be shaken out of your comfort zone.] For YHWH will rise up as at Mount Perazim, He will be stirred up as at the valley of Gibeon... [so what happened there? At Mt. Perazim Philistines raided the Israelites, thinking their gods would deliver them, but David, obeying God, easily defeated them and burned all their gods with fire. The Gibeonites deceived Joshua, but God forgave them and then saved them by a spectacular victory in which Joshua told the sun to stand still.] to do His task, and to work His work, His extra-ordinary [strange, unusual] work. [Now what do you suppose that is? And why is it unusual?]

“So now, do not carry on as scoffers, lest your fetters [punishment] be made stronger; for I have heard from Adonai YHWH of Hosts, of **decisive destruction** on all the earth. [Yes, it is destruction that is God’s unusual work. He is longsuffering and unbelievably patient, and His grace and mercy usually triumph over judgment. But there comes a time when mercy is found to be ineffective. We abuse His mercy and live comfortably in our lies and the deceptive traditions of men, ignoring His call to truth and righteousness. Eventually judgment must fall – decisively, tragically, the terrible wrath of God against the deceptions we cling to. With apologies to those who hold to a pre-tribulation rapture, I believe this is speaking of the great tribulation at the end of the age, during which horrible judgments will fall on the entire earth. The wicked will be swept away, but even the righteous will go through the fire, to be purified, purged of the deceptions in their hearts. Many will be tortured and slain, but...]

THE NATURE OF LIFE & DEATH, HEAVEN & HELL, DESTRUCTION, JUDGMENT, SALVATION, RIGHTEOUSNESS & SIN, and TIME & ETERNITY

“Give ear and hear My voice, listen and heed My words. Does the farmer continually plow to plant seed? [No.] Does he continually turn and harrow the ground? [No.] Does he not just level the surface, and then sow dill and scatter cummin, and plant wheat in rows, barley in its place, and rye within its area? [Yes, of course.] For his God instructs and teaches him properly. [Then when it is time for the harvest,] The dill is not threshed with a sledge, nor is the cartwheel driven over the cummin; but dill is beaten out with a rod and cummin with a club. Grain for bread is crushed. Indeed he does not continue to thresh it forever because eventually his horses and cart wheels would damage it. He does not thresh it any longer than necessary. This also comes from YHWH of Hosts, who makes His counsel wondrous and His wisdom great.” (Isa 28)

So – what does this passage tell us about the nature of God? A lot. First, God sees the deceptions and the false traditions that we have been living under, but He is Truth with a capital T! He wants to sort out the truth from the lies even more than we do. Second, He is responsible for straightening things out. He will fulfill His responsibility, one way or another, either by teaching us as babies, rule upon rule, line upon line, or by His sweeping judgments. Third, He has a “strong and mighty agent” which shall “sweep away the refuge of lies” in order to “make justice the measuring line and righteousness the level.” He would prefer to teach us wisdom, but only the meek, the humble, can learn wisdom from teaching. The proud, those drunk with the wine of their own self-importance, may only learn wisdom through judgment. But fourth, we learn that even in judgment, God’s intent is not destruction. He does not thresh us any longer than necessary. His ultimate goal in this judgment is so that “you will [all] be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel.” (Isa 27:12)

So here is the bottom line. The nature of God is love. He is creating a Bride for Himself, upon whom to lavish His love. He will take her through whatever is necessary to mature her and perfect her. Ultimately, He will finish the job and bring her to Himself, for He is absolutely faithful to His Word and infinitely powerful and wise to accomplish it. Because He has given us a free will, we can choose the easy way of meekness to learn wisdom, or the hard way of discipline and judgment, or any way in between. He cannot change. It is we who change. We can in our pride fight Him, hang tenaciously on to our deceptions, and keep to the false traditions of men; or we can humbly seek truth and love wisdom, digging for her in the Word as for hidden treasure. He whose faith rests upon the Cornerstone shall not be harmed, only purified, by the fires of tribulation. That is what God is doing now – perfecting His Bride.

The good news is, that is just the first step in God’s Plan of the Ages. For in the ages to come, the Holy Spirit and the perfected Bride will say (to all who were left behind), “Come! Let the one who is thirsty come! Let everyone who wishes take the Water of Life without cost.” (Rev 22:17)

I am a Universalist – but not the kind who claims “all paths lead to God” or who allegorizes hell and just sends everyone straight to heaven. I fully believe the scriptural view of the “second death” (Rev 20:14) – the destruction of the wicked in the fires and torments of hell, where the “worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” (Mk 9:48, quoted by Jesus from Isa 66:24) Scripture is Truth, and I do not reject or disbelieve any of it.

Yet the traditional doctrine of the eternal torment of all who don’t get saved before death presents us with some major contradictions in Scripture. Some Scriptures do seem to imply eternal torment, but many others state that the wicked will be destroyed, and others state that all will be reconciled back to God. I believe that all Scripture is inerrant and that any seeming contradiction in Scripture is a call to pray for wisdom and Holy Spirit enlightenment. With His help, I believe these contradictions can be resolved through a correct understanding of just a few key scriptural terms, all related. Please give me some time to present my case, and then, “search the Scriptures to see if these things be so.” (Acts 17:11)

A few verses (like Matt 25:46, Rom 1:20, and Rev 14:11) and parables (like Lk 13:24 ff and 16:19 ff) provide men all they need to take an ignorant son of Adam, who by inherited nature is self-centered, blind in spirit, hard of heart, and totally enslaved to sin, and send this poor soul into torment for all eternity. This gross doctrine does the eternal Father of love and justice a great disservice, and prevents many thinking people from ever realizing that “the kindness of God leads you to repentance.” (Rom 2:4)

What a monster an earthly father would be if he, when rejected by his son, would banish him with no hope of repentance, ever; and even more of a monster if he were to cast his rebellious son into never-ending torment! What an incredible libel it is against God’s good character to say that we must love our enemies but He cannot, that we must forgive those who spitefully use us but He cannot, that we must not let the sun go down on our wrath but His wrath abides forever, and that we must overcome evil with good but He must forever permit the horror of evil and its torments to remain, *even at His very throne!*

“If anyone worships the beast and its image, and takes its mark on his forehead or in his hand, he also will drink of the wine of God’s wrath mixed full strength in the cup of His anger. He will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and the presence of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and its image and take the mark of its name. Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commands of God and the faith in Jesus.” (Rev 14:9-12)

Do you sense any conflicts with this picture? We have imagined hell and its torments to be down in some dark hole far from heaven and its delights (as in 2 Thess 1:9). We have imagined a God who cannot even look on sin, completely withdrawing His grace and mercy, His love, joy, and peace, and leaving sinners alone to their torments while He takes the glorified saints up to His throne, cleanses every sin, wipes away every tear, and removes every painful memory. (Rev 21:4) *This passage does not fit that picture!* It clearly states that the fiery torment of the wicked is in the presence of the holy angels (messengers or saints) and the Lamb (at His throne). It further states that the perseverance of the saints is somehow tied to this grim display of the torment of the wicked.

Now try to imagine a heaven where you and all the saints are worshiping around the throne and right there at your feet the wicked, perhaps some of your own loved ones, are writhing in unimaginable agony. If you try to ignore them, you cannot for long because the smoke of their torment is continually filling your nostrils, ever reminding you of their agony and despair. And yes, Jesus wipes away every tear, and erases the painful memories with forgiveness and love; but then you look down again and see your brother or your friend amid the raging fires, knowing that he will suffer that torture for all eternity. Thus once again the regrets hit you. "If only I had spoken to him more boldly. If only I had had enough love. If only I had taken advantage of those brief learning moments, those divine opportunities now forever past." Or, "If only he had not put it off. If only he had thought it over more carefully, and realized the urgency of his decision." Or even, "If only that drunk driver hadn't snuffed out his young life before I had the chance to finish witnessing to him." *If there is eternal torment in the presence of the Lamb and His Bride, there will be eternal regret, and heaven also will be a place of torment.*

To my mind, that picture is in conflict with the entire message of the gospel, and I cannot support it. I do not believe in a god who sadistically tortures the vast majority of His own creation right in our faces for all eternity with no hope of redemption, just to teach us a lesson so we will persevere in faith and obedience. Yes, preaching eternal hell fire may scare some emotional, fearful souls into repentance, but most thinking people will turn away in disgust, unable to actually love or trust such a vile god.

But a correct understanding of a few words in Scripture will confirm to us that our God is the God of eternal love, mercy, and grace as well as the God of perfect justice and holiness. In His great Plan of the Ages, by His awesome wisdom, He created everything for a purpose, and in His infinite sovereignty and power He will fulfill that purpose, step-by-step. The nature of light is that it dispels darkness. The nature of Life, resurrection Life, is that it overcomes death. Jesus is the Life. His Life is the light of men. (Jn 1:4) *And He has the keys of death and hell.* (Rev 1:17)

Scripture is clear that "His anger is but for a moment; His favor [mercy, lovingkindness] is for a lifetime." (Ps 30:5) Even in His wrath He remembers mercy. (Hab 3:2; Isa 54:7-8) "He does not retain His anger forever." (Mic 7:18) Unconditional love, compassion, grace, patience, kindness, and mercy are all aspects of God's character. They not only eternally abide in Him, but also are the character He develops in us as we become like Him. To say that this is 'the age of grace' and that His grace ends when Christ returns for His Bride is a monstrous slur on God's character! It is the destruction of the wicked that is termed God's "unusual task" and His "extraordinary [strange, alien] work." (Isa 28:21) But even there, God is compared to the wise farmer who will not continually plow or thresh forever. (Isa 28:23-29) Like any good farmer, God only plows and threshes as necessary to produce an abundant harvest. I know, hatred, wrath, and righteous indignation against sin are also aspects of God's eternal character, but He is able to love His enemies even while He hates their sin, as He expects of us (Matt 5:44 - 48), and to forgive all our transgressions, when we ourselves become willing to forgive one another. (Matt 5:14)

Jesus teaches that "any sin and blasphemy [even against the Son of Man Himself] shall be forgiven men, except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven... either in this age or in the age to come." (Matt 12:31-32) Though often taken to imply endless torment, this passage actually says nothing about torment. Jesus is explaining the nature of God's forgiveness. He says (though few believe it) that any sin shall be forgiven men except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Why? Without the quickening of the Holy Spirit, the human nature is totally dead and unable to respond to God or do what is pleasing to Him. Jesus says that all of that will be forgiven. He is a righteous Judge. He will ultimately forgive all who sinned in ignorance of the gospel, who never heard the Spirit's call. His constant prayer is, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Lk 23:34)

However, one who is quickened by the Holy Spirit and rejects Him is in a different category. That is deliberate blasphemy. Jesus affirms that to be a sin which cannot be forgiven, either in this age or the next (the Millennial Age). The Millennium ends with Judgment Day. According to Jesus' own words, all who willfully blaspheme the Holy Spirit will stand unforgiven on Judgment Day, and will be cast into hell. In rejecting the One who offered to take their punishment, they demanded to bear it themselves. And bear it they shall, for each and every evil deed.

But on the very thing that many preachers try to make this passage say, it is totally silent. There is no hint here at how long this punishment in hell shall last or how much torment it shall be – only that the sin cannot be forgiven; the sinner must pay for it himself. So, what is the payment for sin? Eternal torment in hell? Not according to the Scriptures. "For the wages of sin is death..." (Rom 6:23)

We must understand the **nature of death** before we go further. There is, of course, physical death. But we are not only physical. We are triune, in the image of God. Like Him, we are spiritual beings. God promised Adam that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would surely die, yet he lived another 900 years. What died when he sinned?

Well, now we need to know about the **nature of life**, to understand what died. The Greek 'aionios' (Strong's 165 & 166) or the Hebrew 'olam' (Strong's 5769) are translated in many ways, according to the bias of the translators, including perpetual, eternal, forever, everlasting, world, world without end, age, and so on. These words are often used like adjectives to describe the nature of life and death. "And these will go away into eternal [166] punishment, but the righteous into eternal [166] life." (Matt 25:46)

According to our nearly universal understanding of 'eternal' as 'forever and ever' this creates a contradiction. The word used here for punishment implies that it is redemptive; therefore it cannot be eternal. Eternal is beyond time, where 'God changes not'. 'Aionios' here should have been translated 'of the ages', as it is always a time word. However, it means more than that. God created the ages for a purpose, and He is working through the ages to redeem man to Himself. 'Aionios' (and 'olam' in the Hebrew) implies that redemptive work within time. If I may coin an adjective, 'aional' punishment is by nature redemptive and 'aional' life is the nature of redeemed life. This requires time to accomplish; yet the goal is entering (present continuous tense) God's eternity. In fact, we can have 'aional' life right now. "... he who hears My Word, and believes Him who sent Me, has [right now] eternal ['aional'] life." (Jn 5:24) This is the nature of life itself. "And this is eternal ['aional'] life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (Jn 17:3) This is clearly speaking not of a length of life but rather a quality of life: the intimate quality of knowing God in a reciprocal love relationship that is Life (with a capital L) as He designed it.

We now have a good working definition of life, and by inference, death. *Life is knowing God in an intimate love relationship.* Before their sin, Adam and Eve were fully alive to God's realm of spirit. *Death is a break in that relationship.* When they sinned, Adam and Eve's spiritual perception, their connection to 'The Holy', died. They became blind to God's realm, bound to the physical and soulful realms. Life is *communion* with God; thus death is *separation* from God. We "... were by nature the children of wrath... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even while we were dead in our transgressions [separated from Him by our sin], made us alive together with [in communion with] Christ..." (Eph 2:3-4) So we learn that the penalty for sin has two distinct aspects: physical death and its torments, and the "second death" which it portrays, death in the spirit realms, known as hell or the lake of fire. (Rev 20:14)

This leads us to the **nature of heaven and hell**. We have this fairy tale idea of heaven, sitting on a cloud in front of the mount of God, playing a harp and singing praises all the days of eternity, and it is quite fallacious and boring. Things in the physical are pictures of greater realities in the spirit realms. The air is all around us. God's heaven, the Kingdom of Heaven, is all around us, here, right now, if only we will stop and take a deep breath of it. Heaven is God's realm, the realm of spirit. We dwell with Him there right now by faith, for He has "raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus." (Eph 2:6) This realm is also called the Kingdom of God, for God fills and rules it. It is not away off somewhere in the clouds; it is here and now, always "at hand" (Matt 10:7), "upon you" (Matt 12:28), even "within you" (Luke 17:21) for any who are willing to humble themselves and enter in by faith as a child. (Matt 18:4)

This is not to say that there is no greater heaven to come. Scripture teaches that at the end of the age our bodies will be redeemed (Rom 8:23), all tears will be wiped away, and we will enter into closer communion with God than is possible in this age. "Further up and further in" as C.S. Lewis says in his *Chronicles of Narnia*. Scripture puts it, "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on forevermore. The zeal of YHWH of Hosts will accomplish this." (Isa 9:7) Though few believe it, heaven will continue to grow throughout the ages of time.

So what does this teach us about the **nature of hell**? A lot. As heaven, in communion with God, grows, so hell, separation from God, must shrink. As Jesus paid the penalty, death, for the sins of all who will receive Him, so those who reject Him must suffer the same penalty, death, for their own sins. The righteous Judge of all the earth has assigned a just sentence according to His Law for every evil deed. This penalty is indeed terrible torment "with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever [to ages of ages] and they have no rest day and night..." (Rev 14:10-11) *I do not minimize hell!*

But the physical portrays the spiritual. Just as physical death is painful, fearful, a terrible enemy, attacking the body fiercely, often for years until it finally succumbs, so hell, spiritual death, is torment of the soul. And just as physical death does not continue on forever, but rather culminates in a door to the spirit realm, so the torments of hell do not continue forever, but rather culminate in the destruction of that evil self-nature and all that Satan spawned, thus opening the door to our communion with God. Then when the penalty for sin has been paid, hell shrinks a little and heaven grows, as the Spirit and the Bride invite all those outside the gates of the Holy City to, "Come! Let the thirsty come! Let everyone who wishes take the Waters of Life without cost!" (Rev 22:17)

The smoke continues to rise from the torments of the wicked as long as there is any sin left in the universe, which for some, will be 'ages' of time. Yet the righteous Judge of us all will not assign an infinite punishment for a finite sin; rather He will mete out precisely the proper punishments, "according to our deeds" (Rev 20:13), to break the hardness of heart and destroy the bent toward sin, delivering each wicked rebel "... to Satan for the destruction of the flesh [nature], that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Cor 5:5)

So, what does 'destruction' mean in Scripture? Many (roughly fifty) passages tell of the *destruction of the wicked*, so "the wicked man will be no more" (Ps 37:10-38), far more than the verses which imply eternal torment. Jesus said, "Fear not those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt 10:28) Paul talked of the "... enemies of the cross of Christ, whose destiny is destruction..." (Phil 3:18-19) But the ultimate result is "... I shall destroy you. Thus you will know that I am YHWH." (Ezek 25:7) The intent of God's judgments is always corrective. The book of Ezekiel is full of judgments, but after most of them God assures us, "then they shall know that I am YHWH." (Ezek 7:27) God created man with an eternal (indestructible) soul. But the soul is only a container for the spirit. If it gets filled with the wrong spirit (the carnal nature) God must 'destroy' it before it can be refilled with the divine nature as He intends us to live.

The most important 'destroy' in all Scripture is: "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (1 Jn 3:8) This explains the **nature of 'destruction'** in God's mind. His goal is not to destroy His people, His beloved. That is Satan's goal! The crude Catholic dogma of hell as a place where the wicked suffer forever in torment, if true, makes Jesus a failure at destroying the works of the devil. It would be a stunning victory for Satan to take the majority of God's creation into hell with him forever. But rest reassured. God will fulfill His eternal purpose in Jesus Christ, for He swears, "I will accomplish all My good pleasure." (Isa 46:10)

Ultimately, all of Satan's works will be destroyed, evil and all its consequences will be destroyed, even death itself will be destroyed, so that God may be all in all. This then is the nature of the word 'destroy' as used in God's dictionary: it never refers to those whom God has 'fathered', the eternal souls in whom He breathed the breath of life by His Spirit. It only and always refers to anything which pushes His precious ones further away from Him, all that Satan 'fathered', sin and all the suffering, torment, and death that results, the works of the devil. Ultimately all that will be destroyed so that God, the "Father of all," can "fill all things" with Himself. (Eph 4:6-10) In the end, death and hell and everything with the slightest taint of sin and corruption shall be thrown into the lake of fire and be destroyed. (Rev 20:14)

This is the "second death." It is not eternal torment; it is the destruction of the wicked. (Ps 9:5, 37:38, 94:23, 145:20; Acts 3:23; 1 Cor 3:17; 2 Thess 1:9) They can't enter the Holy City! "Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the immoral persons, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." (Rev 22:15) They are rebels. They hate God and His ways. They have seen the Light and tasted what God has to offer, but have chosen the darkness of their own evil deeds instead. Therefore their punishment is strictly assigned for each evil deed. "This is the condemnation, that the Light is come into the world, and [they] loved the darkness [of sin] rather than the Light because their deeds were evil." (Jn 3:19) All that will be destroyed. I can assure you that Jesus will not fail in this, the primary purpose of his incarnation.

"... by the Word of God the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was **destroyed**, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His Word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and **destruction** of ungodly men." (2 Pet 3:5-7) In both cases the Greek root implies a complete, total destruction; there is no endless torment here. Yet we know that the earth was not destroyed in the Flood; it was just purified, washed clean, then restored. Likewise, I believe, will the wicked, the rebellious and hard of heart, be destroyed in the terrible fires of hell, in torment, suffering the wrath of God upon their sin and paying the full penalty of every misdeed. Every hurt they have caused will return upon them in full measure until that wicked sin-nature within is destroyed. Then finally they will be able to repent and be cleansed and restored. They deliberately rejected Christ's sacrifice; now in the death and destruction of that rebellious self-nature they will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father. (Phil 2:10-11)

This teaches us the **nature of God's judgment**. It is the punishment or discipline of a loving Father; firm and just, but also always corrective and redemptive; never the monstrous, cruel anger or sadistic eternal wrath which is such a slander against God's character.

Do you understand why God insists "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith YHWH?" (Deut 32:35 as quoted in Rom 12:19) Have you ever looked at the context of these passages? "See now that I, I am He, and there is no god beside Me. It is I who put to death *and give life*. I have wounded, *and it is I who heal*; and there is no one who can deliver from My hand." (Deut 32:39) And "... be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says YHWH.' But if your enemy is hungry, *feed him*; if he is thirsty, *give him a drink*, for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but *overcome evil with good*." (Rom 12:18-20) This is what God expects of us because this is His own nature and He wants us to become like Him.

Yes, sometimes it takes God's wrath to break through man's arrogant self-nature so he can begin to see his need of a Savior. But only God can take vengeance. If we try to take vengeance ourselves, we are too quick to hate the person rather than the sin which binds him, for "the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." (James 1:20) But God is the righteous Judge. He is the only one who can exact vengeance in His full wrath and righteous anger without compromising His character of love, mercy, and compassion. The burning coals He heaps upon the head of each of His enemies in judgment, are the pangs of conscience. It torments him to finally realize that all his life, even while he raged against God, God still feeds and clothes him, sends him the sunshine and rain, gives him health and strength, and pours out His abundant love.

"Will He be angry forever? Will He be indignant to the end?" (Jer 3:4) No. It is His love and mercy that endures forever. "Give thanks to YHWH, for He is good; for His lovingkindness [mercy] is everlasting [endures forever]." (Ps 136:1) "Give thanks to Him; bless His name, for YHWH is good; His lovingkindness [mercy] is everlasting; His faithfulness to all generations." (Ps 100:4-5) God is love. (1 Jn 4:16) Divine "love never fails." (1 Cor 13:8) He is always willing to leave the 99 safely in the sheepfold and search 'til He finds that single lost sheep that went astray. (Lk 15:4) "Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish [be destroyed]." (Matt 18:11-14) "The Lord is not slack regarding His promise... but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish [be destroyed] but for all to come to repentance." (2 Pet 3:9) This then is the **nature of God's judgments**: they are full of wrath against the sin nature that enslaves us, but are mixed with love and mercy in the desire that the sinner be awakened and brought to repentance, whether in this age or in the ages to come.

God has been judging ever since the first sin. God is called "the Judge of all." (Heb 12:23) "He is YHWH our God; His judgments are in all the earth." (Ps 105:7) But the judgment of God is not a bad thing – it is a good thing! Fearful, yes, but, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all it contains; let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy before YHWH, for He is coming; He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness." (Ps 96:11-13; also see Ps 98:4-9) This is essential for us to understand. God's judgment is always good. When our wickedness is judged, we are purified and enabled to receive His righteousness. The **nature of fire** is that it purifies. When we hear the word 'fire' we just tend to think of the fires of hell. But "... our God is a consuming fire." (Heb 12:29)

Judgment comes in two ways: **discipline**, which God grants to each of us often, and **punishment**, which is reserved for rebels, assigned on Judgment Day at the Great White Throne. (Rev 20:11)

God will judge us, one way or the other. If we are able to receive it, He will discipline or chasten us; "Those whom YHWH loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." (Heb 12:6) If we reject His loving discipline, God may ultimately release us to the fires of hell, to experience the full measure of His wrath against sin. But it is all the same fire, the unquenchable consuming fire of God Himself, which destroys the works of Satan.

The discipline of the saints is training, testing, and proving. It has nothing to do with sin, as our sins are all erased by Christ's sacrifice. But there is no sacrifice for willful sin. (Heb 10:26) The judgment of the wicked is punishment for sin, always in strict measure according to their deeds. "... and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." (Rev 20:12) The doctrine of eternal torment completely negates this basic biblical principle, as it implies that every sinner gets an infinite punishment, whether angry nihilist or ignorant pagan. This is a terrible slander against the righteous Judge of all the earth.

Recognizing the impossibility of their position, the Catholics categorized some sins as 'mortal' (deserving eternal torment) and others as 'venial' (pardonable, perhaps through time in 'purgatory'). But Jesus insisted that all sins shall be forgiven except blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which is willful rejection of the Holy Spirit's call after knowing the Truth – that cannot ever be forgiven. (Mk 3:28; Matt 12:31-32; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-27; 1 Jn 5:16)

Every sin will be punished. Christ already bore the punishment of all who rest their faith in His perfect blood sacrifice. But the rebel must pay sin's wage for himself. He will find that the cost is awfully high. "For the wages of sin is death..." (Rom 6:23) Death, as I said, that transcends the physical to the spirit realm, isolating him from the heavenly Father. Scripture affirms that rebel to be "... dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1) even while he lives.

Jesus the Christ was not; He never sinned. He had close communion with the Father all throughout His life. He was alive in a way that we cannot even understand, except by revelation of the Holy Spirit. Yet He took our sin upon Himself and paid our penalty: death. So when did He die? The instant He took our sin, for the holy Father cannot look on sin. Jesus died while He lived, in incredible torment, at the moment when He proclaimed, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46)

Afterwards He "yielded up His spirit" (v 50) and descended into hell (Hades). If eternal torment were the wages of sin, Jesus would still be there and our faith in His resurrection would be in vain. He was there only three days, "tasting death for everyone." (Heb 2:9) Thus Jesus satisfied God's Law to pay the full penalty for the sins of the whole world. (1 Jn 2:2) He was not "abandoned to Hades." (Acts 2:31) When the Law was satisfied, God saved Him by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 10:40; Col 2:12)

Let's look closely at the sequence here. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that, the judgment." (Heb 9:27) Many insist this verse implies that after physical death there is no hope of salvation, only of judgment, but the verse does not say that, *and that is not what happened*. Here is what happened, and it illustrates what happens to every rebel who dies in sin. Jesus died in the Spirit as a sinner, a rebel, forsaken by a holy God, having taken on Himself every sin ever committed. With His last words, "It is finished!" His physical body died as well. "... after that, the judgment." Jesus descended into hell, where he was punished for every sin of mankind, thus paying the full penalty of the Law. But the judgment of God for Him (with the sins of the whole world on His shoulders, but no sin of His own) was just 3 days in hell. All our sins that He bore were destroyed, to be remembered no more. (Jer 31:34) When the Law was satisfied, God resurrected Him. He became the "firstborn from the dead." (Col 1:18) Thus Jesus became 'the Way' to the Father (Jn 14:6) for anyone who dies in sin! This was an incredible victory, as it opened the way to many such victories. Jesus had won the "keys to death and hell." (Rev 1:18)

Jesus came to bring good news to the afflicted and set the captives free. (Isa 61:1; Lk 4:18) But He could do something with those keys that He could not do before. "Having been put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit, [after 3 days the Father restored Him] He went in the Spirit and made proclamation [preached] to the spirits in prison [hell], who had once been disobedient... in the days of Noah..." (1 Pet 3:19-20) What do you think He told them? "It is finished! The door to the Father is finally open, for any who will put their faith in Me."

This passage would make no sense at all if one's eternal destiny were sealed at death (per Catholic dogma). I'm sure many believed Jesus' preaching and were saved. But I'm also sure some did not. The hardness of human hearts can be profound. Those who, having seen the Light, chose darkness instead, are no doubt still in hell awaiting the final judgment at the Great White Throne. (Rev 20:11) There they shall be judged according to their deeds and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (the second death) to pay the full penalty for their own sins.

For some, the penalty will be less, for they primarily sinned in ignorance, blindness, and hardness of heart. For others, who raged against God and enjoyed the torment of others during this life, the penalty will be more, much more. It is the law of sowing and reaping. (Gal 6:7) Every pain he caused his fellow man, every grief he caused the Father, shall come back on him in the perfect vengeance of the righteous Judge of all, who will "recompense to every man [precisely] according to his deeds." (Matt 16:27) "That slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act according to his will shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it and committed deeds worthy of flogging will receive but few." (Lk 12:47-48)

"If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, and the judges decide their case, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, then it shall be that if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and be beaten in his presence with the proper number of stripes according to his guilt. *He may beat him forty times but no more; lest he beat him with many stripes more than these, and your brother be degraded in your eyes.*" (Deut 25:1-3) God's Law reflects His character. He also will punish rebel sinners "in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev 14:10) "and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you [strictly] according to your deeds" (Rev 2:23) *but no more!* Then after the penalty of every sin is fully paid, each soul will find that death no longer holds him in bondage. For him, death and hell will be destroyed, and the One who holds the keys of death and hell (Rev 1:18) shall restore him to the place of service that the Father intended all along. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order... that God may be all in all." (1 Cor 15:22-28)

Jesus descended into hell, tasted death for everyone (Heb 2:9), then ascended back into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand. This happened in time, but it involved His translation between the physical and spiritual realms. He gives us examples to help us understand. A seed sown in the ground must die to bring forth new life. Water baptism is another symbol of our death to sin, burial, and new life in Christ. I believe that everything in this physical realm is a shadow picture of the reality in the spirit realm.

The Bible speaks of three heavens: our atmosphere ("the birds of the heavens" – Jer 4:25); outer space ("the heavens declare the glory of God" – Ps 19:1); and the dwelling place of the holy God ("Our Father who art in heaven" – Matt 6:9, "far above the [physical] heavens" – Eph 4:10, "... the third heaven... caught up into Paradise." – 2 Cor 12:2-4) Similarly, the Bible speaks of at least three hells: 'Sheol' and its New Testament counterpart 'Hades', the abode of the dead; 'Gehenna', the fiery refuse pit ("... fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" – Matt 10:28); and 'Tartarus', the prison for those awaiting Judgment Day. ("For God did not spare the angels [messengers] when they sinned, but cast them into Tartarus and committed them to chains of darkness, reserved for [awaiting] judgment." – 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6)

'Sheol' in the Old Testament Hebrew is both the grave ("there is no mention of Thee in death; in Sheol who will give Thee thanks?" – Ps 1:5) and the abode of the damned ("the wicked will return to Sheol, even all the nations who forget God." – Ps 9:17) 'Hades' is the most common word for hell in the New Testament Greek. Again, it is used both for the abode of the dead ("... death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them..." – Rev 20:13); and (more commonly) the place of torment of the wicked. ("In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment..." – Lk 16:23)

These are all very real spiritual places. Do not try to just allegorize them away. I believe each of these spiritual places has physical counterparts designed to illustrate the spiritual reality. Study the physical to help understand the spiritual. On earth, we make our own heaven or hell by what we do and how we do it, what we believe, and how we relate to others. Our choices to rejoice in spite of trials, or to be bitter, angry, and miserable in spite of blessings all around us, put us in a physical equivalent of heaven or hell. So to paint you a picture of heaven and hell, I could do no better than to paint a picture of the earth with all its troubled and blessed inhabitants.

Yet the spiritual realm is the reality of which we in the shadowlands see only a dim picture. The heavens are more glorious than we can envision, staring at the twinkling stars and galaxies. Likewise, Hades or Sheol, and down to Tartarus and Gehenna, are more vast and complex than the realms we inhabit on earth. They are beyond our experience or our ability to imagine, and cannot rightly be simplified into clouds of eternal (but boring) bliss for the saints, and fires of eternal torment for the damned.

So, now we have a much clearer picture of the **nature of heaven and hell**. In my fiction story (see Vol. 5) I describe it in seven levels. The middle one is the physical realm where we live. The upper three are the 1st heaven (space and the air above us—Matt 6:26), the 2nd heaven (spiritual realms of angels and demons which overlap the first) and the 3rd (highest) heaven where God dwells in perfect holiness. (2 Cor 12:2) The lower three are 1st Hades (where Jesus first meets and welcomes those who die); 2nd Hades ('Abraham's Bosom', the abode of the dead); and 3rd Hades (the Abyss, the lake of fire and brimstone). The upper ones need little elaboration, but talking about the lower three is avoided like the plague today, so they are poorly understood by the majority of Americans.

I tell stories illustrating this in other volumes, but let me give you a summary here, using old Joe as our example.

Joe has just died. If he had no psychic bonds with earth he would go straight to the 'Welcoming Park' in 1st Hades to meet with Jesus. Most people have a lot of psychic bonds that must be broken before they are prepared to meet Jesus, thus the 'long dark tunnel' that so many experience when they die. This meeting with Jesus is not Judgment Day; it is simply Joe's opportunity to evaluate the state of his soul with stark clarity for the first time.

There are two paths out of the Welcoming Park. If Joe has learned to love righteousness, he'll choose the steep, narrow path that leads to Paradise, but if he loves his sin, he'll choose the broad, level way that leads to Tartarus. But all that is still in 2nd Hades. That's what most people miss. God does not cast anyone into the lake of fire (3rd Hades) until Judgment Day, but rather He grants everyone the freedom to make his or her own choices, in the spiritual realm just as in the physical realm.

So if Joe never learned to love the Light, he may flee down the broad path. Satan is usually waiting there to entice him farther, even down into the pit. So by his own choice Joe may end up in torment as a slave to Satan in the Abyss, just as he may have been on earth. Satan is Master of the Abyss – until the end of the age when he's bound and cast into it! He delights in tempting souls to join him there, and many follow him. Alternately, if Joe insists on being his own god, he may be enslaved to his lawless 'self nature. To protect others in Hades, he may have to be imprisoned in Tartarus (the Dungeon), awaiting Judgment Day.

But there's more to Hades than the dark regions where God's Light doesn't shine. Let's say that old Joe chooses the narrow path. It goes through the fires of conscience (1 Cor 3:15), then to 'Abraham's Bosom'. (Lk 16:22) That is a place of greeting one's ancestors and feasting with the Lord. (Lk 23:43) I'm sure it also contains a nursery for those who die in infancy, ignorance, or incompetency. I call it all 'Paradise', though it is not the Paradise in the 3rd heaven that the apostle Paul visited. (2 Cor 12:2)

So, my fiction story has the Welcoming Park with the two paths into 2nd Hades, one to Paradise and the Nursery for those learning to love righteousness, the other to the Dungeon restraining the violent. Then across the great chasm I have a drawbridge leading to the Abyss, guarded by the dragon. All the dead wind up somewhere in Hades, but until Judgment Day 'where' is always their own choice.

All are tormented there, though that is mostly their own pangs of conscience and feelings of remorse. But none are really punished there, even in the Abyss, because none have yet been judged. Their torment is simply the natural consequences of their own foolish choices by the law of sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7), just like it was on earth. It is discipline designed to teach wisdom and open one's eyes to the folly of his ways. But it is not punishment for sin, any more than a cut finger is punishment for your carelessness in handling your pocket knife.

Thus the nature of Hades until Judgment Day is one of choices, learning, growing in knowledge and wisdom, and suffering consequences, just like in the physical realm. The physical is a picture of spiritual. Hades just continues where the physical life left off, encouraging or disciplining us to become all God intended. The meek are enlightened, repent, and receive the word of reconciliation. Rebels only continue to harden their hearts in their rebellion.

However, on Judgment Day everything changes. God's Word assures us that all sins will be forgiven so everyone can be restored to the Father – the time spent in Hades will prove effective to open every heart to accept the claim of God on his or her life – with one exception. Those who were enlightened by the Holy Spirit but still rebel have committed the unforgivable sin. (Matt 12:32; Heb 10:26) They cannot be pardoned. They are cast into the Abyss, the lake of fire (Rev 20:15), to be punished for their sin.

Please bear in mind that the lake of fire was created for the devil and his angels. (Matt 25:41) Its purpose was to punish them when they violated God's Law or harmed God's people without occasion (due cause) or permission. But after their sentence (remember God's punishment is always redemptive) they are set free, as was Jesus after 3 days, and even Satan himself after 1000 years. (Rev 20:7) Now on Judgment Day God takes all those rebels who have chosen Satan and his ways, and assigns them to partake of his punishment: the lake of fire.

As the master of the Abyss, Satan had perverted its purpose, making it a place of pointless torment. This is why I spent so much time on the nature of God as the consuming fire and His goal of destroying all the works of Satan. The good news – and this is very good news indeed – is that on Judgment Day the purpose of the Abyss is restored to be what God intended, as a place of redemptive punishment – still torment, only it is no longer pointless. Its purpose is to burn up and destroy all that is not of God, Satan's works, so all God's precious ones can be set free.

Scripture does not specify what this punishment will be, except that it is always “according to their deeds.” (Matt 16:27) The nature of Hades must undergo a change to accomplish this, and it is substantial. He who was lord of the Abyss is now bound there. (Rev 20:10) Hades itself is cast into the Abyss. (v 14) Finally, everyone not recorded in the Book of Life is also thrown into the lake of fire. (v 15) The Abyss is no longer Satan's playground to sadistically torment those who chose his ways; it is God's punishment for sin, strictly according to each evil deed. In my fiction story I describe it as many individual cells, each carefully designed and tuned to punish the specific crimes of the one sentenced there. The righteous Judge of all the earth will punish justly, and to accuse Him of blindly casting every sinner into the same infinite eternal torment is a heinous slander against His good name.

The **nature of righteousness and sin** now also becomes clear. Righteousness is living in harmony with the King and the laws of His Kingdom. Sin is living for self, in rebellion to the King and His laws. Simple, right? I wish it were that simple. Those statements are true, but are not the total truth. The part I left out is crucial. The sinner is in rebellion because that is in his nature; he can live no other way. Since Adam's first sin, we have all been born with a 'sin nature', called the 'carnal (flesh) nature' or 'fallen nature'. “Do you not know that... you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness?” (Rom 7:16) The sinner sins because he is “dead in trespasses and sins.” (Eph 2:1) Those whose nature is “in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom 8:8) We cannot escape until God invites, entreats (but never forces) us to accept His free gift of “adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5), for it is He who “delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son.” (Col 1:13)

What is the **nature of this salvation**, and how do we get saved? That has got to be one of life's most important questions. The words 'save' and 'salvation' are used a lot, but seldom understood. Are we saved just because we repeated a little prayer when we were kids? Or was that the beginning of a process of salvation? Many Christians can point to the date that they first believed in Jesus Christ and invited Him into their heart as the time they got saved. Scripture affirms, “... you shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” (Matt 1:21) So tell me, are you *that* saved? Or do you still struggle with sin and unbelief in your life? Are we saved only from sin's guilt, while still bound under sin's power our entire lives? Are we saved because of certain steps we took, while the rest of humanity, who didn't take those steps in this life, is forever damned? What about those who took those steps, then later turned away? Are they now forever lost? Is there no hope after committing the unforgivable sin, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? (Matt 12:32)

There has been an ongoing dispute between those who believe in 'predestination' and the 'eternal security of the believer' (the Calvinists) and those who believe in 'free will' and are ever fearful of 'losing their salvation' (the Arminians). A correct understanding of the term “saved from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9) solves this dispute. Yes, salvation is a process; “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing [the lost] foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor 1:18) When did this process began? “He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world [cosmos], that we should be holy and blameless before Him.” (Eph 1:4) And when will it be complete? “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil 1:6) For “He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, ever living to intercede for them.” (Heb 7:25 MKJV)

Now are you getting the picture? Who is doing the saving here, anyway? Us? “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, *for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do his good pleasure.*” (Phil 2:12-13) “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and even that [the faith] not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship...” (Eph 2:8-10) “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, *being justified as a gift by His grace* through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 3:23 & 24) Jesus is the Savior! He started this great work of salvation before the world was formed, He is at work in us now, and He will ultimately complete it, no matter how long it takes.

So the Arminian is right if he speaks only of this life, but the Calvinist is ultimately right at the end of the ages. The unscriptural fallacy that caused the dispute is the Catholic dogma which insists that your eternal fate is sealed at physical death, and after death there is no hope of repentance or salvation.

That this doctrine is fallacious is demonstrated by a verse often used by its proponents. Jesus said, "... unless you believe that I Am [Messiah] you shall die in your sins." (Jn 8:24) He is insisting that, "You can't be saved by merely trusting that the sacrifices point to some future Messiah. *You must believe that I am He.*" There is "no other name... by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) If death sealed your eternal fate, then no one could be saved who died before Christ, for "apart from us they [who died before Christ] should not be made perfect." (Heb 11:40)

God is at work. He is the potter, creating both vessels of honor and vessels created for destruction. (Rom 9) He put the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Satan – Gen 3:1) not in ignorance of what he might do, but in full sovereign knowledge and intent (in infinite wisdom and love) to use Satan for His own purpose. Theologians try to cover for God here, but He Himself admits, "I am YHWH, and there is none else. I form light and create darkness; I make peace *and create evil.* I am YHWH who does all these." (Isa 45:6-7 MKJV) "I myself have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings out a weapon for his work. *I have created the destroyer [Satan] to ruin [destroy].*" (Isa 54:16)

Evil did not come from God; He is perfectly holy. But in creating the free will He created the certainty that some would choose wrongly. We do have a free will. We can choose the hard way or the easy way or any way between. But ultimately Calvinist predestination wins out and we become all the Master Potter created us to be. So live in the reverential fear of God like an Arminian, but trust God for your eternal security like a Calvinist!

This predestination is clearly taught in Romans 9: "... that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls... Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated. What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then, *it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.* For Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' *So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.* You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?' On the contrary, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, to make from the same lump a vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God, to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy which He prepared for His glory, even us, whom he also called out from among the Gentiles as well as the Jews?"

Paraphrasing bluntly: to display to the universe His full nature and character, God created some to show His mercy and grace, and others to show His wrath and power, just like a potter making some vessels for the display case and some for the fireplace. We cannot say that He is unjust, *unless we insist on a doctrine of eternal torment for those whom God created for wrath, blinded, and hardened.*

"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them, for since the creation of the cosmos His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what was made, so that they are without excuse." (Rom 1:20) Sure the wicked should have turned and sought God, and if they had, they would have found Him and He would have healed them. But He not only closed their ears, blinded their eyes, and spoke to them in parables or dark sayings (Matt 13:10-15), He also hardened their hearts so that only the "remnant would be saved." (Rom 9:27) "He has blinded their eyes; He has hardened their hearts; lest they see with their eyes and perceive with their hearts and be converted, and I heal them." (Jn 12:40, quoted from Isa 6:10)

It sounds like there is indeed injustice with God, until we realize that these people are "vessels of wrath created for destruction." They are busy doing exactly what God made them for; they are fulfilling God's purpose of the ages by demonstrating to the universe the awfulness of evil and its consequences.

To really appreciate light and color and beauty you must first see a little darkness and ugliness. To understand and appreciate God and His righteousness you must first catch a glimpse of Satan and his evil. The stark contrast helps you to love all that God loves and hate what He hates. God created Satan and the vessels of wrath who choose to follow him for that purpose. They are busy fulfilling their created purpose by demonstrating to the universe the dire consequences of every nature opposed to God.

So the **nature of sin** is absolute bondage from which there is no escape. He makes sure there is no escape, until He decides to begin His redemptive work. The **nature of salvation** is *God at work*, choosing, opening blind eyes, softening hard hearts, justifying, purifying, transforming into the divine nature. The **nature of righteousness** is simply the extent to which this process is complete.

Let's return to the **nature of time and eternity**. By translating the Greek 'aionios' (Strong's 166) or the Hebrew 'olam' (Strong's 5769) into 'eternal' or 'everlasting' or 'forever' in some places, the early Catholic church was able to change the God of Love into a vengeful god who threatens you with eternal torment if you don't buy the dogma of the pope. They did this to gain control over the people, to increase their own wealth and power.

But as we said, 'aion' or 'olam' is an indefinite period of time, an age or an eon. These words are used in Scripture many times in a sense where it cannot mean eternal. If it does, it leaves unresolvable conflicts and contradictions in terms. "Eternal times" (2 Tim 1:9), "eternal destruction" (2 Thess 1:9), and "eternal punishment" (Matt 25:46) are self-contradictory. Animal sacrifices and dietary laws are required to be kept "as a statute forever" (Lev 16:29-31; 23:14, 21, 31, 41; 2 Chron 2:4), yet the New Testament says that these were "a symbol for the time then present... imposed until a time of reformation." (Heb 9:9-10) "When He said 'a New Covenant', He made the first obsolete." (Heb 8:13) Psalms 104:5 claims the earth lasts "forever and ever," but Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away." (Matt 24:35) The mystery "hidden from the ages" (Col 1:26) is correctly translated from 'aionon'. It wouldn't make sense to say "hidden from the eternities"!

Few Christians today would argue this point. It is perfectly obvious that the word translated 'forever' in the majority of cases in Scripture does not mean eternal; it just means an age, a period of time. In some cases (as in Col 1:26), translators recognized that and rendered these words 'age'. However, here is where they will argue. Most Bible scholars claim that these words can mean 'eternal' depending on the context, and that it is obvious from the context those places where a period of time is intended, and where it must mean 'eternal'.

Yeah, right. That is saying, "These words must mean 'eternal' wherever my theology dictates it." Well, I am sorry to be so blunt, but that is intellectual dishonesty. Theology must not dictate Scripture; Scripture must dictate theology. Please let the Bible interpret itself. If 'aion' or 'olam' cannot possibly speak of eternity in some places, it seems quite possible to me that they don't ever speak of eternity. Perhaps they are always 'time' words.

A right understanding of the nature of time and eternity is essential. *Time is given for change.* God alone is eternal; that is a part of His nature, and He "changes not." (Ps 102:26-27; Mal 3:6; James 1:17) He is the self-existent One, perfect and complete in Himself. In His divinity, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8) even though in His humanity, "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Lk 2:52) God had to create time before He could make changes; there must be a time before and a time after the change. God entered time in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the **God of Time**.

The Bible has little to say about eternity. It is a book about time, with a purpose of bringing God's sons to birth and maturing us within time. About all we really know of eternity is that it is the nature of Father God, for whom all of time is right now. Eternity is not endless time. Eternity touches time 'now' at every point, but time can never reach out to touch eternity, no matter how many ages flow by.

Eternity is timelessness, a whole new life-form, a state of being in which God is the 'I AM'. In eternity, God is "all in all," (1 Cor 15:28) "over all, through all, and in all." (Eph 4:6) But the Bible is primarily about time. Most words translated 'eternal' or 'forever' or 'everlasting' refer to time, even most words referring to God. "Abraham... called on the name of YHWH, the *everlasting* God." (Gen 21:33) should be translated, "... the God of time" or "the God who governs and works within time." The God of eternity humbled Himself, limited Himself, to enter our realm of time. He did this not for His sake, for He has it all, but for our sakes, to change us within time, so He could lift us up and work His own eternal nature within us.

The Bible has a lot to say about time, especially in the New Testament. If we correctly translate the Greek 'aion' and its derivative 'aionios' as 'age' or 'ages' or 'of the ages', we find that, "God... in these last days has spoken to us in His Son... through whom He made the ages" (Heb 1:2), "But of the Son He says, 'Thy throne, O God, is to the age of the ages'" (1:8), "By faith we understand that the ages were framed by the Word of God" (11:3), "... by command of the God of the ages" (Rom 16:26), "... who has saved us and called us with a holy calling ... according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time [Gk: pro chronon aionion]" (2 Tim 1:9), "Who gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us out of this present evil age..." (Gal 1:4), "that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace..." (Eph 2:7), and many other references.

But the one thing about time that almost nobody understands is that not only the ages of time, but all that God created within time, heaven, hell, the cosmos, all we know in our space-time continuum, will come to an end someday. Jesus Himself affirmed that, "Heaven and earth will pass away..." (Matt 24:35) Even the Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven, where the King of kings rules in His saints "forever and ever" (literally to the age of the ages – Rev 22:5), and the "all authority... in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18) shall all come to an end. "Then comes the end [of the Kingdom], when He delivers up the Kingdom to God the Father, *when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power...* when all things are subjected to Him... that God may be all in all." (1 Cor 15:24-28)

And yes, this is the very passage which teaches us that, "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive, but each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, after that those who are Christ's at His presence..." (vs 22-23)

This then is **God's Plan of the Ages**: He created all things in, through, and for His Son Jesus Christ, in whom all things hold together. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to **reconcile all things to Himself...** things on earth and things in heaven [without exception] ..." (Col 1:19 ff) The only question remains: *Will He succeed, or will He fail?*

There is a reason I must correct the misunderstandings of the scriptural doctrine of the torments of hell. I am about to teach on the Feasts of Israel, and among the Feasts we actually find two firstfruits. Christ, the Passover Lamb, fulfilled the first of the two. It occurs on the first day of the week after Passover (Lev 23:10-11) and involves waving to YHWH a 'sheaf' of the firstfruits of the grain harvest. The saints (the true church) fulfill the second. It occurs at Pentecost. (v16-17) It involves waving two loaves of fine flour, baked with leaven, symbolizing the church (both Jew and Gentile/Ephraim) mixed with leaven (unbelief).

Most theologians stop here, snatching the church up to heaven while the rest of humanity is forever abandoned to the torments of hell. But, as we shall learn, *the Feasts of Israel do not stop here*. There is a long summer (an 'aion' of indefinite time) during which the church is called to reap the harvest for the Kingdom. When the harvest is done, the Feast of Tabernacles (the Feast of Ingathering) occurs. I'll tell that story later; for now I'll skip right to the glorious conclusion. The three Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles correspond respectively to the redemption (complete salvation) of Jesus' many-membered **Bride**, His **brothers** the church, and His **servants** the remainder of humanity. That is the good news. In the end God wins. Satan loses and all his works are destroyed, every last one. God's perfect will, His eternal purpose, *God's Plan of the Ages*, is achieved as a trophy of His infinite love and grace.

Here is where most people miss it. Most Bible passages, especially Jesus' parables, allow for only two categories, saved or lost, wheat or tares, good fish or bad fish, sheep or goats. Within these two, the truth is veiled so that those who are perishing will not comprehend the grace and glory of God. But I see at least four categories in Scripture, and within those, many variations, for each person is unique. Scripture teaches that we are predestined to one of these four categories (Rom 8:29; 9:18; Eph 1:5 ff), but within each category, we earn rewards or punishments according to our own freewill choices.

Category 1: the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; the **Bride (wife) of the Lamb**, who "made herself ready" (Rev 19:7); the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb (James 1:18); the 144 thousand blameless "virgins" (free from spiritual harlotry or idolatry) "who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." (Rev 14:1-5)

Category 2: all "who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor 15:23); all those invited to the wedding feast; the **sons of God**, led by the Spirit of God (Rom 8:14); the faithful bondservants of God from the past; the true church, the spiritual body whose head is Christ; those "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many **brethren**" (Rom 8:29); and those martyred for Christ who "love not their lives unto death." (Rev 12:11) They rise in the "first resurrection" as "priests of God" and reign with Him 1000 years. (Rev 20:4-6)

Category 3: all of the lost throughout the ages who sinned in **ignorance, blindness, and hardness of heart**; all who die without hearing (or understanding) the gospel; they don't know Christ, yet He forgives the ignorance of all those who don't blaspheme His Holy Spirit (Matt 12:32); "the spirits in prison who once were disobedient... in the days of Noah..." (1 Pet 3:19-20); the thirsty ones to whom "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" (Rev 22:17)

Category 4: all religious people who know the gospel and are quickened by the Holy Spirit, but **blaspheme the Holy Spirit** (Matt 12:32) to "go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth" (Heb 10:26); those who "have tasted the good Word of God and the power of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance..." (Heb 6:4-6); "those who have received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image" (Rev 19:20); those who "love the darkness" because their deeds are evil. (Jn 3:19)

Clearly Categories 1 and 2 are 'saved'. Categories 3 and 4 are 'lost'. But as I said, there are many varying rewards and punishments within these categories. All people, good and bad, are judged "according to their deeds." (Rev 20:12 and many others) "For no man [saint or sinner] can lay a [lasting] foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man [good or bad] builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious jewels, wood, hay, or straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day [of Christ] will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it [the lasting foundation] remains, he shall receive a reward. But if any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss, *but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through [hell] fire*. Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God [blaspheming God's Spirit], God will destroy him [in the lake of fire] for the temple of God is holy and that is what you are." (1 Cor 3:11-17)

Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ; there is no other way to the Father. But nowhere in Scripture is anyone judged for lack of faith; we are always judged according to our deeds. "He who believes in the Son [faith] has eternal Life; but he who does not [believe? no...] obey the Son [talking about deeds] shall not see Life, but the wrath of God [judgment in hell] abides on him." (Jn 3:36)

Faith is a big issue with God. Without faith we cannot please Him or enter His rest. (Heb 3:19, 11:6) But no one goes to hell for lack of faith. That's because faith is a "gift of God." (Eph 2:8) No one can even begin to have saving faith until God's Holy Spirit pours out His abundant grace, quickens him (touches his dead soul with Life), and opens his spiritual eyes and ears. Yes, man has a free will and can do anything he pleases, except he can only act according to his nature. And only God can transform his nature.

What is God doing right now? He is not 'saving the lost from hell'. He is preparing His Bride. His love for her is so strong that His love for everyone else looks like hate. "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (Rom 9:13) He has poured out His love, grace, mercy, and discipline on His Bride; she will be perfect at the wedding, for "His Bride has made herself ready, and it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (Rev 19:8)

That is what I called **Category 1**, the "prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," (Phil 3:14) for which the apostle Paul worried that he might be disqualified. (1 Cor 9:27) This is a small subset of Christ's church, possibly only 144 thousand. They are all Israelites, "12 thousand from each tribe" (Rev 7:4; 14:1), but this includes Gentiles who are joined to Israel by faith. (Rom 9-11) "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved." (Rom 9:27) The majority in the Christian church who may be saved but still love the world, compromise with sin, and trust in the rapture to perfect them are probably not part of the **Bride of Christ**.

However, "each in his own order, Christ [and] the firstfruits [His Bride – they are spiritually one person in God's eyes], after that those who are Christ's [the church] at His coming ..." (1 Cor 15:23) The church is **Category 2**. They are still saved at the return of Christ, for they are invited to the wedding feast; but not as the Bride. They are invited to become Christ's **brothers, sons of His Father**. These are the "great multitude which no one can count from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes..." (Rev 7:9) These are all those throughout the ages who believed God by whatever faith He gave, including those whose faith in Christ was perfected in Hades after death. At His return Christ will complete their salvation (Rom 8:23-30) and reign in and through them over the earth for 1000 years. (Rev 20:4) Note that at the wedding, Christ and His Bride become scripturally 'one', yet the spiritual 'body of Christ', the church (Col 1:18), remains many-membered, comprised of both categories 1 and 2.

Category 3 is initially by far the largest group: all who died throughout the ages without any saving faith; all who died in ignorance or infancy or mental incapacity; all who died in sin or hardness of heart yet haven't committed the unforgivable sin; all who are "without excuse" (Rom 1:20) because they failed to see God in His creation; and all who simply haven't yet been quickened by the Holy Spirit to 'hear' the gospel. Those in Category 3 still living shall be ruled with a rod of iron, or smitten with the sharp sword from the mouth of the Lamb. (Rev 19:15; Ps 2:9; 150:5-9) It is only through the fire, the wrath of God against their wickedness, that anyone sees his need for salvation. These are 'lost' – but their final verdict is still pending. When the fire has finished its work, the thirsty will be invited by the Spirit and the Bride to "Come!" (Rev 22:17)

They remain in hell (separation from God) until they accept the invitation; then they become bondservants of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But, unlike the true church, they are not adopted as sons at the first resurrection. They missed it! Instead, they learn the joy of service to the King. All God's children begin as servants, especially the Bride. No shame there. But those from Category 3 never become part of Jesus' Bride or His brothers the church; they remain His faithful servants throughout all the ages of time.

On Judgment Day at the Lamb's Great White Throne (Rev 20:11) all the dead (mostly from Category 2 or 3 at this point) are restored to life. The Judge opens the books which record all our deeds, good and evil. He also opens a separate book, the Lamb's Book of Life. It is all about faith rather than deeds. It records the names of all who have placed their faith in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. At this judgment Scripture says that all shall receive rewards or punishments according to their deeds, good or evil, with one exception: the evil deeds of those in the Lamb's Book of Life are on His account. He took their punishment – their sins are remembered against them no more.

At this point, I believe there is a vast harvest for the Kingdom of God. As He is separating the sheep from the goats, He will find many sheep in Category 3; sheep who have served Him without ever knowing Him, by serving "these brothers of Mine." (Matt 25:37-40) With open hearts they shall receive the gospel, find grace to believe in the Lamb of God, and be saved. But others, the goats, hard-hearted, proud, self-centered rebels and religious experts, will be unable to humble themselves to receive the gospel and will blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Thus at the Great White Throne judgment, all those in Category 3 will either bow as servants of the King, or continue to harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit and thus join Category 4.

Category 4 is all who knowingly reject the gospel and blaspheme the Holy Spirit, setting themselves up in pride as gods, in league with Satan, the god of this world. These 'goats' shall summarily be thrown into that proverbial lake of fire and brimstone, "the eternal [aionial] – redemptive through the ages] fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41), where they will be judged according to their deeds. Please note: they are not judged according to their lack of faith, for they were never given the grace to have any faith. Instead they are judged according to how they treated Jesus within His brothers. Instead of aiding the suffering saints, they hardened their hearts or even directly caused their pain. Every pain they ever caused shall return upon them. (Gal 6:7) "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin [no possibility of atonement for sin], but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment..." (Heb 10:26) They must pay the full penalty of every sin for themselves. They have no recourse except to pay the wages of sin: death. (Rom 6:23) "... The soul who sins will die." (Ezek 18:4) It is God's Law.

Every book or Scripture describing this torment is inadequate, beyond our comprehension. Yet the one thing I cannot accept is that this torment goes on endlessly, throughout the 'ages of eternity', with no hope that the righteous Judge of all the earth will ever be satisfied that, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30) as Jesus prophesied in His last breath on the cross. We can understand a father whose son has sinned repeatedly finally saying, "For this sin I cannot forgive you; you must be punished!" But however long the punishment, intended to break the son's obstinacy and rebellion, any earthly father will still hold out the offer of reconciliation if the son repents. Only a sadistic monster continues to torment forever with no hope of restoration.

Likewise the God of Love, though pouring out His full wrath against sin in the torments of the lake of fire, will still hold out the hope of restoration when all wickedness and hard-heartedness is destroyed and the penalty for every sin is paid in full. Every other sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven. (Matt 12:31) But those in Category 4 cannot be forgiven; they must pay for their own sins through the fire, until their self-nature is destroyed and they can bow the knee and acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

Look again at the parable of the sheep and goats. (Matt 25:32 ff) Jesus only seems to be addressing Categories 3 and 4. Categories 1 and 2 would have known they were ministering to Him in His saints. But those in Category 3 do not know Him. They are invited into the Kingdom not on the basis of their faith, but because of their good deeds to the saints. This seems to violate the basic scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. This is at the Great White Throne judgment after the Millennium. The sheep are people who died without ever knowing the gospel. But Jesus knew them, and accepted their good deeds as a ministry to Himself. It seems obvious to me that at the judgment they readily believe in Him and accept Him as their Savior and Lord, seeing for the first time that He is the One for whom they had longed all their lives. So it is still salvation by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; *except now their faith comes after death*. When they see Jesus face to face they gladly bow the knee, confessing Him as Lord, to the glory of the Father.

But the goats are a different story. They are religious bigwigs. They convinced themselves they were serving the Lord! Due to similar wording ("Depart from Me") I believe the goats are the same people He condemns in Matthew 7. "... you will know them by their fruits [deeds]. Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord! did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons and perform miracles?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matt 7:20-23) As with the sheep, judgment is about deeds, but for the goats, their deeds are evil and they knew better! That is Category 4 all the way.

These are people whom Jesus wanted to know. He may as well have said, "I was never able to get to know you, because you resisted – pushed Me away." He preached the gospel to them, quickening them by His Holy Spirit. They understood the truth and believed it, but only for their own benefit. They wanted all God has to offer, but on their own terms with self firmly on the throne stealing His glory. In so doing, they resisted (quenched) the Holy Spirit. This is deliberate, defiant sin, which is the very definition of blasphemy in Scripture. "The one who... [sins] defiantly [willfully, knowingly], whether native-born or alien, that one is blaspheming YHWH..." (Num 15:30)

"It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, who tasted of the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who tasted the goodness of God's Word and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to renew them to repentance..." (Heb 6:4-6) This is the unforgivable sin. "If we continue sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment..." (Heb 10:26, 27) Those who reject Christ's atonement have no sacrifice for sins, even sacrificing their own blood, for it is impure. So they have no alternative but to pay the Law's full penalty in the lake of fire for each and every sin.

But remember, all must go through the fire. "Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. And He will sit [in judgment] as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present offerings in righteousness to YHWH. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to YHWH, as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment..." (Mal 3:2-5) "Each man's work will become evident; for the day [of judgment] will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire will test the quality of each man's work." (1 Cor 3:13) Everything that can be shaken will be shaken, for the kingdom we receive is built on perfect righteousness. Everything that can burn will burn, for "... our God is a consuming fire." (See Heb 12:26-29.)

It is always the same fire – God Himself. The difference is that the 'saved' receive and accept the fire of God and are cleansed and purified by it, while the 'lost' resist it, hate it, flee from it, harden their hearts to it, and therefore must be immersed in it until all their hardness of heart is destroyed in it. But it is all the same fire, coming from the throne of God "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." (Rev 14:10) This is an unquenchable fire. *Who could quench God?* It will burn with great power and authority throughout the ages until all that is not of God's own nature is burned up and totally destroyed. "Then [and only then] comes the end, when He [Jesus] delivers up the Kingdom to God the Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power." (1 Cor 15:24)

At that point the fire will have finished its job, all His enemies will finally be in perfect subjection (this is willing submission – remember, there is no more need for rule, authority, and power) and the many-membered son will be likewise in perfect subjection, harmony, even unity with the Father, “that God may be all in all.” (v26)

Let’s go back to continue our discussion on the **nature of hell**. When our bodies die, they just go to the grave, not to the spirit realm we call hell. These dead bodies are just dead. They cannot know or praise God or do good works for Him. “There is no mention of Thee in death; in Sheol who will give Thee thanks?” (Ps 6:5) “The dead do not praise YHWH, nor do any who go down to silence.” (Ps 115:17) “Sheol cannot thank Thee; death cannot praise Thee; those who go down to the pit [grave] cannot hope for Thy faithfulness.” (Isa 38:18) These dead bodies will all be resurrected, either at the first resurrection (Rev 20:5) to reign with Christ, or the final resurrection to face the Great White Throne. Though dying may be a torment, once in the grave dead bodies are in peace; there is no torment there. But we know that hell, ‘spiritual death’, is a place of torment. (Lk 16:23) Thus our souls do not die with our bodies; they go to Hades awaiting judgment – rewards and punishments according to our deeds.

Hades, contrary to popular conception, is a ‘many-splendored place’. It is a vast realm, abode of all departed souls from the beginning of time, both good and evil. King David, speaking by the Holy Spirit, said of his dead son “... I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” (2 Sam 12:23) God said of many of the patriarchs when they died, “He breathed his last... and was gathered to his people.” (e.g. Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29, 33) Did you think that spoke of a gathering place at the cemetery? Not at all. It speaks of going to Hades, the realm of all departed souls. That their souls are still alive there is affirmed by Jesus, who said, “I am the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. God is not God of the dead, but of the living.” (Matt 22:32)

But Hades is not heaven. Before Jesus, no one who died could get to heaven, because the way to the Father was not yet opened. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father but through Me.” (Jn 14:6) Like it or not, I believe that statement is literally true. I imagine that one of the first things that Jesus did after His triumphant resurrection is to take His newly won keys of death and hell and unlock the door from Hades to the Father. That doesn’t mean that everyone in Hades went through the door. Most still could not, for “they without us are not made perfect.” (Heb 11:40) Those in Hades still must hear the gospel, receive it, understand, repent, and be cleansed and perfected before they can go through the open door to the Father. This is a (sometimes lengthy) process. Not all in Hades will submit to that process, even though Jesus Himself came down to preach to them after His resurrection. But God has many tools in Hades to aid the process. *One of them is torment.*

Jesus was tormented for three days in Hades (usually called hell); His torment was both His separation from the Father (for the first time in His life) and His bearing the full punishment of all the sins of humankind on His shoulders. In such pain, those three days must have seemed like ages! Though Jesus may have suffered there more than anyone else, I believe that all suffer there, even very good people. There is always the suffering of seeing the consequences of some of their innocent blunders done in ignorance – the foolishness that caused others pain. There is also the regret of missed opportunities or the pain of seeing loved ones making wrong choices and suffering for it. For the wicked, there is the pain of recognizing the consequences of their sin and feeling the full measure of their guilt and shame. Jesus experienced all of this pain in Hades. Because He endured it, He understands our pain. He is able to help us through it, forgiving, healing, restoring, comforting, strengthening, teaching, and reconciling us to the Father.

For someone to claim this can occur on earth but not in Hades is to say that all generations before the resurrection of Christ and all who die as babies are eternally lost, or that Jesus lied when He said He has the keys of death and Hades and He is the only way to the Father. They must invent ‘some other way’ for those who never got the chance to know Jesus in this life. I believe that Scripture reveals a big enough Savior that His incredible salvation and irresistible grace extends to Hades and the life to come.

The old Catholic dogma of hell as a place of eternal torment, a living death in eternal darkness and separation from God’s light and life, dies hard. It has been in our blood, in our bones, for nearly two thousand years. The Reformation never touched it. The Great Awakenings and Pentecostal revivals rarely challenged it. We instinctively read it into Scriptures where it is not mentioned. Verses on the ‘unforgivable sin’ spark an immediate response based on the assumption that payment for such a sin is eternal torment, although that is not discussed in any of those verses. When a criminal is released from prison after doing his time, the warden never says, “You are free to go, for your sin is forgiven.” He says, “You are free to go, for your debt to society is paid.” But in that heavenly prison, before the righteous Judge of all the earth, we somehow feel that no debt, even for sins in ignorance, can ever be paid. If we don’t accept the atoning blood of Jesus before we die, that’s it. We are toast. Burnt toast. Forever and ever with no hope of restoration. Even knowing that Jesus paid the penalty for all our sin with but three days in hell doesn’t help us. If it is unforgivable, the payment must be infinite, eternal.

Jesus Himself said, “... hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” (Mk 9:48) That clearly speaks of the eternal nature of hell. He also proclaimed, “... woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be good if he had not been born.” (Matt 26:24) All of this clearly refutes my doctrine of ultimate reconciliation... uh... right?

Actually, wrong. Those verses do not address the length of time required for punishment of sin. We read that into them based on our presuppositions. Don't forget: physical things portray the spiritual. The fire represents God and His judgment from without, burning up the wood, hay, and stubble, and purifying the gold and silver. God cannot be quenched, but will deal with everyone according to his deeds. The worm also represents God, in His judgment from within: those pangs of conscience, guilt, and shame that we try so hard to quell. That worm cannot die. God will eventually bring us face to face with our own wickedness and cause us to bow in repentance before the King of kings to the glory of God the Father. Yes, for any sinner who hardens his heart and blasphemes the work of Holy Spirit in his life, it would be better if he had never been born. He cannot be forgiven. He must suffer the torments of hell. Those who die in the womb in innocence need no torment to learn to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive His great salvation. That is far better! (Though still not as good as a life lived for God.) I urge you, do not harden your heart and choose the place of torment! But the end result is the same. Hell with all its torments is just one tool that God uses to accomplish His perfect will, which is to fill all things with Himself. (Eph 4:10)

Now the **nature of heaven** also becomes clear. Heaven is also a many-splendored place – the realm where Adam and Eve walked and talked with God before the Fall. God created us to dwell in heaven throughout the ages of time, even while our weak, limited physical bodies dwell on earth. The spirit realm called heaven is more real than the shadow-land called earth. In heaven we are free – physical weakness is gone, physical limitations are removed. We are not primarily physical; we are primarily spirit. Heaven is the real, of which earth is a dim picture, designed to train us for heaven. Heaven is our real 'home'. We will never feel quite at home until we get back there.

But, just as Adam and Eve before the Fall, being in heaven does not remove us from earth, nor do we have to die to get there. Heaven is where angels dwell. The third heaven is where the throne of God is – the highest heaven, touching the Father's eternity, timelessness – but always right here, right now, with but a prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name..." (Matt 5:9)

This space-time realm has only one connection to that highest heaven: the man Christ Jesus. But heaven has all connections back to the physical realm, in every time and every place. When we truly dwell in heaven, in "the secret place of the Most High" (Ps 91:1), we are most alive (and most useful to the Father) here on earth. But as I said, heaven is a many-splendored place. Heaven is always, "further up and further in" as we spend all the ages of the ages getting to better know the fullness of God's love, mercy, grace, justice, holiness, faithfulness and... all of His infinite nature and character. For at its core, heaven is knowing God and sharing the image of the divine.

Note please that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed [abolished] is death." (1 Cor 15:26; 2 Tim 1:10; Isa 25:8) What are the wages of sin? Death. (Rom 6:23) Why is death finally abolished? *Because all penalty for sin has finally been paid in full!* Those who preach an eternal torment in hell as the punishment for sin must also preach eternal death and eternal separation from God, turning God's Word into a lie and claiming that God will never succeed in "swallowing up death" or becoming "all in all." Their weak, limited god is lucky to win a few, conceding to Satan the vast majority of humanity whom he will delight in tormenting in hell for all eternity.

But the God of the Bible is infinite, all-powerful, and all-wise, in unfailing love. Jesus says, "Of those whom Thou has given Me [His **Bride** and all His **brothers**] I lost not one." (Jn 18:9) The Father adds, "As I live, says YHWH, every knee shall bow to Me, [thus becoming His **servants**] and every tongue shall give praise to God." (Rom 14:11; Isa 45:21-23) "Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, YHWH? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the Word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. They will say of Me, 'Only in YHWH are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him; all who were angry with Him shall be ashamed. In YHWH all Israel's offspring [and us by adoption] will be justified and will glory."

God is much bigger than we have been taught. In His dwelling place in eternity, God cannot change, so He created a realm where He could change – the realm of time and space – so that He could prepare a Bride for Himself. In the same way, God Himself cannot countenance evil or "be tempted by evil" (James 1:13), yet by giving us a free will He allowed wrong choices. This led to Satan, temptation, and evil with all its ugly consequences. He uses them as tools to purify His saints and teach them about Himself and His nature of consuming fire, full of wrath against evil.

"This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world to all the nations [ethnos – people groups], and then the end shall come [not before]." (Matt 24:14) Jesus is presenting a great spiritual principle here. The apostle Paul expresses it: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now strictly charges all men everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness..." (Acts 17:30-31) The principle is this: God understands our weakness, foolishness, and ignorance, and 'overlooks' it. He takes the responsibility to ensure that everyone, even from previous ages, has a chance to hear the gospel and is given enough light by the Holy Spirit to accept or reject it, whether in this life or in the life to come, before Judgment Day. In that day, no one will inform the Judge, "No fair! I didn't know!"

“So then faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ [through the Holy Spirit] ... there has come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice... That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day...’ I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! ... if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ... *For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; thus all Israel will be saved...*” (Rom 10 & 11, excerpts)

Jesus started with His inner circle of disciples, then sent them out to the “house of Israel,” and finally opened the door to the Gentiles. Just so He is now preparing His Bride, whom He will send out to call His brothers (all Israel plus the adopted church) to the wedding feast. Then He will rule the earth through them, finally calling, “Whoever is thirsty, come!” Jesus said, “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall go in and out...” That is, ‘in’ to His presence; ‘out’ to reap the harvest for His kingdom.

Now we can understand what the apostle Paul feared when he said, “I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Cor 9:27) In what context is Paul worried about being disqualified? “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:14) The apostle Paul was not afraid of being cast into the lake of fire or losing his salvation. Neither was he afraid of losing his reward for his faithful service in ministering to Christ in His brethren. He was afraid of missing the prize for the highest call of God in Christ Jesus: *the call to be a member of the Bride!*

As I said, the Feasts of Israel talk of two firstfruits, then the great harvest. They tell the story of redemption in exquisite detail, in picture form so that even the young can understand. But when the Catholic clergy outlawed the Sabbath, the Feasts, the Bible in the language of the people, and everything else that came from Israel, saying that the ‘universal church’ had replaced Israel in the Scriptures, they totally lost the picture. Deliberately distorting God’s beautiful Plan of the Ages, they changed God into a monster threatening them with eternal torments in hell fire if they did not submit to the dictates of the pope.

But it is only “all Israel will be saved;” (Rom 11:26) and “all the offspring of Israel will be justified, and will glory.” (Isa 45:25) We are saved only when we are grafted into the root, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. *Unless and until we become part of Israel, we cannot be saved.* We had better learn a little about our Israeli heritage, or we will not understand what God is doing in us.

As I said, Jesus and His pure Bride fulfill the picture of the Firstfruits at Passover. At Pentecost there is a second firstfruits: two loaves mixed with leaven, baked in the oven, and waved before YHWH. This portrays the church, the two loaves of Jew and Gentile, mixed with the leaven of love of the world, baked in the oven of great tribulation, and thus set apart for God. It is, “all those who are Christ’s at His coming,” those who are invited to the wedding feast. (Category 2) *But remember, the church is still a ‘firstfruits’.* The vast harvest is yet to come after the long summer, just before that final Day of Atonement (Judgment Day) and that awesome Feast of Ingathering, Tabernacles.

Traditional (Catholic) theology says this final harvest is only those we are able to connect to the gospel before they die. This puts a pretty heavy burden on us. Gospel for Asia (which supports 13,000 native missionaries in 8 Asian countries) reports that there are still 3 billion people in Asia who have never heard the gospel, and 80,000 of them die each day. 500,000 villages in India alone have never had a gospel witness. Many of them speak a language or dialect that has never had a Bible translation. Gospel for Asia has worked very hard to reduce these statistics. They are now establishing 6 new missions a day, and working to sponsor as many as 100,000 native missionaries.

I applaud their efforts! But consider what happens to the 80,000 a day who die without hearing the gospel. That is 30 million a year going to eternal torment in hell because we didn’t reach them in time? Just think of the horrible feelings of guilt we would have during our eternity in heaven knowing that a few billion souls are in eternal torment because of what we failed to do; why, it would make heaven into an eternal torment, too! And that’s just Asia. Worldwide, that gives the devil about 100 million a year, roughly 100 billion souls, to torment for all eternity.

Bear in mind, these are not people who’ve heard the gospel, rejected Christ, and blasphemed the Holy Spirit. These are people who were born in sin, blind and hard of heart, steeped in paganism all their lives, and perished in utter ignorance of the precious Truth of Jesus Christ. Yes, I know, God can reach down and save them from their pagan culture. There are some miraculous stories of a few individuals for whom He did. But the vast majority of them just died; many in infancy; and many pre-born.

And no, I don’t believe in the Catholic ‘free pass into heaven’ for those who die before the ‘age of accountability’. Even though sins committed in ignorance will be forgiven, the Bible clearly affirms that no one can come to the Father in heaven except through faith and baptism into Jesus Christ the Redeemer. You can make all the excuses you want for the pre-born, infant, mentally handicapped, infirm, or anyone else who never had a chance to understand and accept the gospel, but as long as you believe in eternal torment in hell, that is where they will all go *if physical death extinguishes God’s grace.*

What a pitiful, weak god! Is this God's glorious Plan of the Ages, to snatch up a few million souls but abandon the vast majority for Satan to gleefully torment throughout the vast ages of eternity? I do not hesitate to call that a monstrous slander against the grace, mercy, power, and wisdom of the God of unfailing love. It is no wonder so many have trouble believing in Him. It is a rare soul who can accept, much less love, someone who so sadistically tortures his own children. But Catholic dogma does not limit the God of the Bible. The righteous Judge of all the earth will reward each individual according to his deeds, whether good or evil. (2 Cor 5:10)

A major criticism of Universalists is that their teaching 'takes the pressure off' people; it removes the urgency to be saved. After all, if everyone is eventually saved anyway, why not just live it up? This is a serious (and valid) charge, and it deserves a careful answer. Yes, there will be some who, when the fear of eternal torment is removed, will put off salvation, preferring to live for self and expecting the God of grace and love to let them squeak through the gates of heaven anyway. But let's analyze that. It is questionable whether these people would be really saved if they did say the sinner's prayer through fear of eternal torment. Their goal is not loving or serving God. Their goal is preserving self. Jesus assures them that: "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it." (Matt 16:25) Yes, religious leaders who are trying to build their own kingdoms and bring 'their' people into bondage to themselves often do so by feeding their fears of eternal torment. It works! Many people only go to church out of fear of the torments of hell and fear of losing their ticket to heaven. Without that pressure they'd be gone in a heartbeat. *So tell me, were they ever really saved?*

God never intended for us to live in that kind of fear. The charge that the Universalist does whatever he pleases with no fear of eternal torment is correct. Jesus said, "The Truth shall set you free." (Jn 8:32) Jesus died to "deliver those who through fear of death [and its torments] were subject to slavery all their lives." (Heb 2:15) The apostle John elaborates, "By this, love is perfected in us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He [Jesus] is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear..." (1 Jn 4:17-18) Fear may motivate, but it rarely inspires. Love inspires! God wants us to live in love, not fear. He gave us a free will because He wants us to walk in freedom. I don't deny that a healthy fear of God's wrath is useful to keep us from evil, but to serve God only out of fear of punishment is self-serving hypocrisy. I assure you, God's way is better.

A man of integrity does what is right because that is what is in his heart; a sinner does what is wrong because that is what is in his heart; both are doing 'whatever they please'. God works with either, using loving discipline to change hearts and draw people to Himself by His grace, goodness, mercy, and love. It is not the fear of God, but "the kindness of God leads you to repentance." (Rom 2:4)

The only kind of person God cannot deal with is the hypocrite who believes himself to be good enough and puts on an outward show to cover his faults. "So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth." (Rev 4:16) God wants us to live as we please, in true freedom. For either the 'hot' or the 'cold' He works to correct our nature by careful rewards and punishments as any good father, to develop His character in us so we will please to do what pleases Him, not out of fear or coercion, but out of loving obedience and respect, like any son of a lovingly firm father would learn to do.

It saddens me that so many (especially theologians who claim to know and believe the Scriptures) are eager, even zealous, to defend the dogma of eternal torment, but so few are willing to just sit down and go through the Scriptures. We say we really believe the Scriptures; so let's read them and believe what they say. I know it is difficult. God has deliberately veiled His Truth so we have to seek earnestly for it. But if we only seek for Truth through the translations and teachings of those who are biased by medieval Catholic dogma, we are asking to be misled.

So here is the **bottom line**, straight from Scripture. Jesus affirms, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Rev 22:13) It all began in Christ, it exists through Christ, and it will all be reconciled back to Christ. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." (Col 1:16-20; Rom 11:36)

When I first heard of this truth over 30 years ago, I reacted against it too, but rather than argue, I went to God's Word in prayer and asked the Holy Spirit for His interpretation. I urge you, dear Reader, to do the same. But in reading most Bible translations, I caution you to watch out for the words 'eternity', 'forever', 'everlasting' and so on. In nearly every case, the words thus translated are actually time words, and properly should be translated 'age', 'ages', 'of the ages', or 'from or unto the ages'.

Yes, God is eternal, but the Bible rarely speaks of Him as anything but the God of Time. From eternity He had a glorious plan for this realm of time and space. I call it God's Plan of the Ages, and it is being fulfilled in, through, by, and for our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Col 1:16 ff)

Please bear in mind that these ages may be long or short. With Jonah (and Jesus), the 'forever' that they spent imprisoned was exactly three days (though I'm sure when they were in the middle of it, it seemed a lot longer). "Water encompassed me to the very soul, the great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars [typifying hell] was around me forever, but Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O YHWH my Elohim." (Jonah 2:5-6; Matt 12:40) Not one theologian will leave Jonah or Jesus in hell forever, and once you understand that they are using the very same words to try to put the wicked into hell forever, you will no longer be fooled.

So, do the ages of time last throughout eternity? No. All created things, heaven, hell, the universe, this body, even our resurrection bodies, will someday, in the vast ages to come, have an end. 'Forever and ever' does not mean eternal. Even the Kingdom of God comes to an end (according to 1 Cor 15). Only 'everlasting Life' is eternal, and it is always right now. When the ages of time have reached their end, we will discover that Satan and all his works are destroyed, and all that God ever fathered has fully entered God's eternity life-form. Thus God shall be all and in all. So let's try to keep our terminology straight and not confuse the ages of time with God's dwelling place in eternity, in which He is 'all and in all' right now.

In summary, (paraphrasing many Scriptures) the Word, Jesus Christ, only begotten of the Father, framed the ages of time and expressed Himself into time as the Life and Light of the universe, the Truth, and the only Way to the Father. In Him, through Him, and for Him all things were created, for it was the Father's good pleasure for the fullness of deity to reside in Jesus *and through Him to reconcile everything back to Himself*, after making peace through the blood of His cross. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive, but each in his own order. God subjected His creation to futility in hope that by it His sons will be matured and proven. Then they are set free to share in His ministry of reconciliation. Each person is created with a purpose: some to be a member of Christ's Bride, others as His brothers or servants; some to display His grace, others to illustrate His Law and the bitter fruits of evil; some to portray His unfailing love, and others to make known His wrath, vengeance, and justice. All shall fulfill their created purpose according to His sovereign will, as well as according to their freewill choices, for, *but for God's grace, we can only choose according to our nature.*

A few in this age are saved by faith and baptism into Jesus Christ the Redeemer. Now that the Mystery of God (His plan for salvation) has been unveiled, those who are being saved are baptized, their nature is transformed, and they are invited to dwell in communion with the Father in the heavenly realms, even during this life on earth.

But they are the exception. Most people (all before Jesus) are lost, for Jesus is the only way to the Father in heaven. When they die their bodies go to the grave and their souls go to hell (Hades) awaiting judgment. Though bypassing physical death, even Enoch and Elijah went to Hades. *Jesus is "the firstborn from the dead"* (Col 1:18), the first to triumph over death and open the way from Hades to the heavenly Father. Hades is a many-splendored place where innocents and the righteous are met by their loved ones at "Abraham's bosom" (Lk 16:22), comforted, and taught about the Kingdom, but the wicked are imprisoned until Judgment Day. Evil deeds do have consequences. On Judgment Day at the end of the Millennial Age, all shall be revealed. Good deeds will be rewarded, and any evil deeds will be reprov'd unless covered by the blood of Jesus.

The righteous Judge will remove the darkening veil, open every eye, dry every tear, and forgive every sin, except one. Willful blasphemy of the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. Those who heard His call, tasted of the glory of His Kingdom, and knew the truth, yet still chose their own ways, must pay for themselves the Law's penalty for their evil deeds – death. They are cast into the lake of fire made for the devil and his demons. Throughout the ages the fire burns and the torment continues until every trace of the devil's evil work in them is destroyed, for this is why Christ came: to "destroy the works of the devil." (1 Jn 3:8)

Through all this, just as Jesus assured Peter, He will build His church. (Matt 16:18) He builds upon the same rock of revelation which the Father revealed to Peter: *that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), only begotten Son of God, and the only way back to the Father.* This church He is building has power. She has the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever she binds or looses on earth is also bound or loosed in the heavenlies. Jesus promises that the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against (overpower) her...

Wait. Gates don't attack. They just keep people from going in or out. The church Jesus is building is outside those gates; she dwells in the heavenlies with her Savior and Lord. *The gates of hell are keeping her out!* And those rebels who chose to serve the wrong god, *the gates of hell are holding them captive!* But they cannot prevail against the church. She marches down there with the keys of death and Hades. The ancient doors open wide, and the King of Glory within His many-membered Bride comes striding in. She has a mission: to seek and to save that little lost sheep. She has the full authority of God in Christ, who is reconciling the world to Himself. The ancient serpent guarding the gate, Satan, is crushed under her feet (Rom 16:20) and all his captives are set free. (Isa 61:1)

One God and Father of all, who is **over all and through all**, expressed Himself into space-time as Jesus Christ, who descended and then ascended far above the heavens, that He might fill all things to become all in all, that all His Creation should be restored to His Eternal Purpose. God's desire that none should perish but that the world should be saved through Christ will be accomplished. Ultimately every enemy will repent and accept the Truth. Thus the offspring of Israel, including Abraham's "many nations" (Rom 4:16-17) adopted into his family, will be justified. Finally every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance to that Name above every name. When all His enemies are His bondservants, the last enemy, death itself, will be swallowed up and destroyed in the lake of fire. Then preachers will not have to teach anyone to know YHWH for *all shall know Him from the least to the greatest.* God's infinite mercy, grace, and kindness toward us in Christ will be on display to all the universe, for He will remember our sins no more. This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For all you dear ones who believe any less, I'm sorry. Your god is just too small.

JEWISH SOCIETY

The nation of Israel from the beginning has been an agricultural society. Many stories and parables in both the Old and New Testaments tell of things very familiar to the farmer. The Feasts also are agrarian in nature, and cannot be understood apart from a brief study of the agricultural seasons in the land of Israel. Harvest times were significant events in the Jewish culture. There are 3 each year:

The **barley harvest** began in the middle of the month of Nisan (the first month – our April/May), corresponding to the Spring Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the Firstfruits (of the barley harvest). Ruth gleaned in the field of Boaz during this harvest. (Ruth 1:22-2:23)

After the barley harvest, the **wheat harvest** began. That was finished 50 days after Firstfruits, about the first week of the month of Sivan (the third month – our June/July). The Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) is called Hag haAzereth, meaning ‘Feast of the Conclusion’ of the grain harvest. Pentecost is grouped as a Spring Feast along with the three Passover Feasts, as it concludes what Passover began.

The third and final harvest is the **ingathering of the fruits of the tree or of the vine**, in the month of Elul up to the 7th month, the first of Tishri (our September/October) which began the Fall Feasts: Rosh haShanah (the Feast of Trumpets), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and finally on Tishri 15-21, Sukkot (Tabernacles).

Israel has been a semi-arid desert-like land only when God’s chosen people were exiled or under judgment. Traditionally, Israel is a land of abundant rainfall, but it comes at only two seasons:

First, the **early or former rains** come in late fall and winter (our October through February). These are the heavy winter rains, tapering off toward spring. Jewish farmers understood their importance in refilling aquifers after a long, hot summer, in watering the fruit trees and vineyards and in preparing the ground for the spring planting. Farmers plowed the land in the fall, and then planted winter crops of barley and wheat so they would be ready for the spring harvest. But plowing could not be done on the hard, dry, dusty soil of summer. So part of the joy of the Fall Feasts was anticipation of the Autumn rains which signal the beginning of the agricultural year.

The spring rains (during our March-May) are known as the **late or latter rains**. They bring the barley and wheat to full maturity just before the harvest. They are followed by a long, hot summer (from May through mid-October) during which it is almost certain that no rain will fall. (S. of Sol 2:11) The withholding of the spring rains was a most severe judgment of God, as once the rainy season was past there would be no rain for five months, during which any crops would wither and die. Conversely, an abundance of spring rain was (and is to this very day) considered a sign of God’s approval and blessing upon the land. (Zech 10:1)

In promising restoration of God’s blessings upon Israel after they return to Him and are restored to their land, He prophesies: “So rejoice, O sons of Zion. Be glad in YHWH your God; for He has given you the early rain for your vindication. He has poured down for you... the early and the latter rain as before... Then I will make up for you the years that the swarming locust has eaten... My great army which I sent among you. And you shall have plenty to eat and be satisfied, and praise the name of YHWH your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. Then My people will never be put to shame. *Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel...*” (Joel 2:23-27) This glad prophecy is being fulfilled even now, as the early and late rains are being restored in the land of Israel, after being largely missing for the roughly two thousand years that the Jews were scattered and exiled among the nations.

But the most fascinating prophecy of all is in Hosea. YHWH says: “I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away. I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver. I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face. Then in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me. Come, let us return to YHWH. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. *He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him.* So let us know, let us press on to know YHWH. His going forth is as certain as the dawn. *And He will come to us like the rain, like the latter rain and the former rain to the earth.*” (Hosea 5:14 - 6:3) Note that many versions, including my beloved NASB, mistranslate that last phrase to say “like the spring rain watering the earth,” which misses the point. The literal Hebrew in the original says, “*like the latter and the former rain,*” as it is in the KJV. Score one for the good old KJV! That last phrase is the key to the whole passage, as it hints at the dual nature of Messiah’s coming.

This is clearly a prophecy of Messiah’s return for the restoration of the last days. Implied is that there would be two days (two thousand years) of “wounding,” but after two days, during the third day, the restoration would begin. I believe this was fulfilled after the crucifixion of Messiah in 31 AD and the dispersion of the Jews from their land in 70 AD to their restoration as a Jewish nation in 1947-48 AD.

Perhaps I should say, is being fulfilled. Those two thousand years are not yet up. Coming back to their land is just the beginning; the restoration process still has a long way to go before the Jews are ready to receive Messiah. Though back in their land, yet it could still be said of many of them that “their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, and they do not know YHWH. Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him; Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also has stumbled with them. They will go with their flocks and herds to seek YHWH, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn from them...” (Hos 5:4-7)

Yet the promise remains: “In that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and will make them to lie down in safety. [He now personalizes it.] I will betroth you to Me forever; yes I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in loving kindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know YHWH.” (Hos 2:18-20)

So how will they (we) know Him? When He comes to us like the rain, like the **latter** and the **former** rains. This is a prophecy of the dual nature of Messiah’s return. He first came to us like the latter (spring) rains, as portrayed in the four Spring Feasts. Yashua fulfilled the Spring Feasts in many precise details at His incarnation. But then there has been a long, hot, dry summer, during which the fruit and vineyard harvest has blossomed and grown. I believe the harvest is now ripe, but we still need the early (former) rains of Autumn. I believe a careful study of the Fall Feasts will tell us how the Master of the Vineyard will come to collect His share of the harvest, a great harvest for the Kingdom, at the end of the age. (Matt 21:33 ff)

WHO ARE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THE JEWS?

I use the terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Children of Israel’ or ‘Israeli’ rather liberally throughout this study. This could cause confusion, as these terms can mean different things. The most literal meaning of ‘Jew’ is those descending from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and parts of Levi and Simeon who made up the southern kingdom (commonly called the Kingdom of Judah). They were deported to Babylon in 586 BC, and returned 70+ years later by the permission of King Cyrus following the prayers of Daniel. It is these who settled in the land of Judea, rebuilt the temple, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem about 100 years later under Nehemiah, and came to be universally known as Jews (i.e. from Judea, the southern half of Israel).

A second possible meaning is all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the patriarchs of the Children of Israel. This obviously includes the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, usually called the Kingdom of Israel (from the northern half of Israel, often called Samaria and Galilee). They were conquered by Assyrians in 710 BC and scattered throughout Europe, Asia, and Asia Minor. Assyria repopulated Samaria with people from these other nations, deliberately mixing the peoples and cultures so they could never get back together and revolt. Thus no one really knows who or where these ‘ten lost tribes’ are, although there has been a lot of speculation (and I’ve done my share). God only knows, and in His time He will draw them back to their land. It is quite possible that you and I could be included in this category. This is actually a very large (and fun!) subject. I will discuss it later at more length, though it really needs a book by itself.

A third possible meaning includes all those who have been either born or adopted into the family of YHWH, the God and Father of the Jews, by faith in His Son, a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth named Yashua (‘YHWH Saves’ – Jesus). He was proved to be the Jewish Messiah when Father God raised Him from the dead after 3 days and 3 nights in the tomb. The Scriptures make it very clear that “... it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham... If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3:7 & 29)

Technically, I suppose I should restrain myself to the first meaning listed above, or at best the second meaning, though that may add more questions than it answers. But in my heart I prefer the third usage. I consider myself a Jew by faith in the greatest Jew of all, our Savior and Lord. This is what makes this study so personal. I’m not just studying some ancient foreign culture. I am finding my own roots! Jesus insisted, “... salvation is from the Jews.” (Jn 4:22) How can we understand and appreciate the great salvation that God has provided if we have no comprehension of the Jewishness of it all? If you are ‘in Christ’ then, like it or not, you have Jewish roots. To discover your roots, I believe you need to study the Feasts of Israel.

ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE CHURCH?

Before I can deal with anything Jewish, I must deal with the general topic of anti-Semitism. And yes, Virginia, there is indeed anti-Semitism in the Christian church. It began shortly after Christ ascended to the Father, and thrives unabated to this day.

It is easy to assume it ended with the infamous Communist, Nazi, and pagan anti-Semitism of yesteryear. The Communists are well-known for their ‘pogroms’. From Czarist Russia to the present, Jews have been tortured, despised, and killed, accused of being Christ-killers and of murdering Christian babies to drink their blood for their Passover. (The last time this was in the news in Russia was in 1992.) Similarly in Lutheran Germany even before Hitler, Jews were demonized by caricature, portraying them with horns, pointed tail, and a foul stench, and labeled ‘*untersmenschen*’ (sub-human).

Michael Brown wrote: “This is a typical account: April 26, 1343. A ritual murder accusation is raised against the Jews of Gernersheim, Germany. Thereupon, the town’s whole Jewish community is burned at the stake.” and “In Central Eastern Europe, among both Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians... there are almost more examples of the accusation [of ritual murder] between 1880 and 1945 than in the whole Middle Ages.”

Justin Martyr (In *Dialog with Trypho, a Jew*) taught that everything that had belonged to Israel was now the property of the church; that is, the church had replaced Israel as God’s children, God’s chosen people.

Augustine, the most influential Catholic theologian, called Jews “sons of Satan.” Jerome and Augustine both called the Jews “accursed by God.” Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch, claimed that “Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism; but Judaism on Christianity.” Ambrose, bishop of Milan, Italy, praised the burning of a Jewish synagogue, as an act “pleasing to God.”

The Epistle of Barnabas says that “the covenant is not both theirs [the Jews] and ours [Christians]; it is ours alone.” Eusebius, believe it or not, called Abraham “an early Christian.” He called the Jews “lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits... murderers, destroyers, men possessed by the devil.” Tertullian and Origen both called the Jews “Christ-Killers” and “Dei-ciders” (God-Killers).

Likewise Chrysostom, Cyril, Hyppolitus, and others of the respected church fathers put out public statements against the Jews. They deliberately allegorized many of the clear teachings and prophecies of Scripture to exclude the Jews, to deny the literal millennial reign of Christ from Jerusalem, and to transfer all the promises of God from the Jews to the Roman Catholic church.

Martin Luther became rabidly anti-Semitic in his declining years, raging against the Jews in terms that might have made even Hitler blush. To quote from one of many rants: “The Jews deserve the most severe penalties. Their synagogues should be razed to the ground and their homes destroyed. They themselves should be exiled, to live in tents, like the gypsies. Their religious writings [The Old Testament and the Talmud] should be taken away from them. Their rabbis should be forbidden to teach the law [Torah]. They should be forbidden to take any profession. Only the hardest, most strenuous work should be allowed to them. Their fortunes should be confiscated from them...” The good Lord took Luther home four days after he wrote this sermon. I wonder why? It is unlikely that Hitler would have been as successful as he was in the Nazi holocaust against the Jews if Luther had not so thoroughly prepared the way, though Luther himself is not so much to blame as the entire thrust of Catholicism for more than a thousand years before him.

Christian author Luisa de Walker includes Judaism among the cults, along with the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Christian author Schnoebelen claims it is “the woman” (backslidden Israel) “which has introduced false doctrine into the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, and the Protestant church.”

Many if not most modern Christian churches today teach that Jews cannot be saved unless they renounce their Judaism and become Christians. They base this on the Scriptures which talk about the Old Covenant becoming obsolete, replaced by the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood, no one can come to the Father except through Jesus, and Jesus’ denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees as, “brood of vipers,” “hypocrites,” and “white-washed tombs.”

All the Scripture promises regarding Israel, they say, are conditional. Since the Jews didn’t meet the conditions, God is no longer obligated to them. As in Jesus’ parable of the Master of the Vineyard (Matt 21:41), He brings the wicked tenant farmers to a wretched end, and rents out the vineyard to others who will pay Him the proceeds at the proper season. Which is, ahem... us Gentiles.

“For He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly [by faith]; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. So his praise is not from men, but from God.” (Rom 2:28-29) It seems pretty clear-cut. Judaism is out; Christianity is in.

So, does God really hate the Jews? Has He forever cast them out? Does He take pleasure in their abuse, torture, and death? Are they only reaping their just punishment for killing their Messiah? Are we justified in hating them, abusing them, and despising everything that is Jewish? Should we insist that they renounce their Jewishness and become Christians like us in order to be saved?

I think not.

“I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be... there has come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice... those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened, just as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not, and ears to hear not, down to this very day... I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous... if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but *life from the dead?! ...* But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became a partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you... They were broken off for their unbelief, and you stand only by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you... for God is able to graft them in again... This [is a] mystery... a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come; *thus all Israel will be saved... for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.*” (Rom 11, excerpts) Paul also told the Ephesian Gentiles that while they once were excluded from Israel, without hope and without God, Jesus broke down that barrier to make both groups one. (Eph 2:12-15) It sounds like the apostle Paul believed in a God who keeps His promises.

Jesus did, too. “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the Regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging [not the Gentile church, but] *the twelve tribes of Israel.*’” (Matt 19:28)

I refuse to believe that God made a mistake on the Jews and gave up on them as a bad job. I refuse to believe that all the scriptural promises regarding the Jews are broken because the Jews were not good enough. And I refuse to believe that we must re-interpret the entire Bible to mean something it does not say just because the Jews failed God.

First, are we any better than they? How many times have we failed God and turned aside to our own way, crucifying Him afresh, presuming upon His infinite grace? If God so lightly gives up on His people, how long will it be before He gives up on us? If He can't keep his covenant with the Jews, how do you know that He can keep all His promises to us?

Second, nowhere in the New Testament are we ever given license to be prejudiced against, despise, hate, or abuse anybody. Instead, Jesus insisted that we love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who despitefully use us, pray for those who persecute us, and judge not, that we be not judged.

Third, the Jews living today are not the same ones who crucified Christ any more than you or I have caused His death by our own sin. Scripture makes it clear that though we may suffer for our father's sins, that is only according to natural law (in the sense that everyone, even God, suffers when anyone sins, and the closer we are to a sinner the more we feel the consequences of his sin). That is not God's judgment. God's judgment is just, in strict accord with each man's own sins. Ezekiel chapter 18 deals at length with this. YHWH says, "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul [person] who sins will die... The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself... Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each of you according to your own conduct, declares Adonai YHWH ... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares Adonai YHWH. Therefore repent and live."

Fourth, the New Covenant of which we are so proud to be a part was actually made between YHWH and the Jews. Both Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 clearly specify, "... I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah..." And when Yashua instructed his disciples in this New Covenant, taking the cup of wine at Passover and saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the New Covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins," (Matt 26:27-28) everyone in that upper room was a Jew. Yashua's ministry was almost exclusively to Jews, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Only a few non-Jews are mentioned: some Samaritans, the Canaanite Syro-Phoenician woman from Tyre, the Roman Centurion whose servant was sick, plus a reference to "other sheep have I, who are not of this fold."

Fifth, although some of God's promises to Israel were conditioned upon obedience and faithfulness, there are (at least) three covenants that God made with the Jews which are stated in Scripture as unconditional and everlasting: 1) God's covenant with Abraham, promising to make of him a great nation, blessing all those who bless him and cursing any who curse him (Gen 12:2-3; 15:1-6; 17:1-13; Heb 6:13-18); 2) God's covenant to Abraham and to his offspring giving them the entire land of Israel (Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:7-21; Ezek 16:60); and 3) God's covenant with David, promising that his kingdom and royal dynasty would endure forever. (2 Sam 7:12-16; Isa 7:13-14; 55:3; Ezek 37:21-28; 1 Chron 17:11-14; 22:10; and others)

Sixth, please consider what God is doing right now. He is preparing a Bride for Adonai Yashua haMashiach, the Lord Jesus Christ. *She must be a Jewish bride!* Yashua was not some blond-haired blue-eyed Aryan Christian boy as some of our artists like to portray Him. He was and is a Jew. So were the twelve apostles and nearly all the writers of Scripture. Sometimes we forget that. All through Scripture Jews are sternly warned against intermarriage with the surrounding nations. God's Law reflects His own nature and character. It is inconceivable that YHWH would come down, cast aside the Jewish Bride He worked so hard to prepare, to set up His Jewish Son with a Gentile bride.

"But Zion said, 'YHWH has forsaken me, and Adonai has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. Your walls are continually before Me." (Is 49:14-16)

"For your husband is your Maker, whose name is YHWH of Hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth. For YHWH has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you, says YHWH your Redeemer." (Is 54:5-8)

"For YHWH's portion is His people; Jacob [Israel] is His allotted inheritance. He found him in a desert land, in a howling wilderness, a barren waste. He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the apple of His eye." (Deut 32:9-10) "... he who touches you [Zion] touches the apple of His eye... Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell among you, declares YHWH. *Many nations will join themselves to YHWH in that day and will become My people* [i.e., will become Jews]. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that YHWH of Hosts has sent Me to you. *And YHWH will possess Judah as His portion [inheritance] in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.*" (Zech 2:8-12)

“Thus says YHWH Adonai, ‘Behold I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols or their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes and observe them. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; so they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever. And David My servant will be their prince forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will give to them, and multiply them; and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Thus the nations will know that I am YHWH who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary [temple] is in their midst forever.’” (Ezek 37:21-28)

There are many others, but you get the idea, I’m sure. I absolutely reject that **replacement theology** which claims that the Christian church now replaces Israel in all God’s precious and wonderful promises. Words have meanings. You would be incredibly arrogant to insist that you believe the Bible is divinely inspired, and then tromp through it changing the clear meanings of the words as if you were God. The promises were and are to Israel, for all who will believe and receive Yashua the Jewish Messiah. We among the Gentile nations who repent and receive the Jewish Messiah are then adopted into YHWH’s chosen family, the family of Israel, by faith. Yes, you heard me right. We must become Jews before we can be a part of the Bride of Christ, for a Jewish boy can never under God’s Law marry any but a pure Jewish bride.

Paul assures the Romans (for eleven chapters) that God is not just a God of the Jews, but of the Gentiles also (3:29) and that the true Jew is the one who is circumcised in heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter of the law, in the flesh. (2:29) But in all that he still takes the time to reaffirm the Jewishness of our faith.

“What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect! First of all, that they [the Jews] were entrusted with the oracles of God [i.e. the writers of Scripture are nearly all Jews]. What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God [and His promises, His eternal infallible Word] be found true, though every man be found a liar...” (3:1-4)

And shortly after the famous verse “... we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly awaiting our adoption as sons...” (8:23) Paul affirms, “I am telling the truth in Christ; I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belong the adoption as sons, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the temple services [this too was important to Paul], and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom came the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” (9:1-5)

Oh, I know. The Scripture makes it clear that only “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant within them will return...” (Isa 10:21-22; Rom 9:27; 11:5) Isaiah 6:13 implies that the remnant will be a tenth. Revelation 7:4-8 and 14:1 imply that the remnant may be as few as 144 thousand, or 12 thousand from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. So I am not saying that every single Israelite will be saved *in this age*. Salvation is based upon individual acceptance of Messiah. The incredible prophecy that “... all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26) points to the end of the ages, after everyone has been reconciled and adopted into God’s family, Israel. But this is what God is doing right now: calling, purifying, and maturing a many-membered Jewish Bride for Yashua. When she is ready, He will come for His wedding.

I, though a “wild olive branch,” have been grafted into this pure olive root. (Rom 11:17 ff) Though I may have been a pagan, a heathen, a Gentile by birth, I have been adopted into the Jewish family of Zion. I would be ten times the fool to demand that the Jews renounce their Jewishness and accept my pagan Gentile roots! *Rather, I renounce my pagan roots, cultures, and traditions, including all my Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions if they don’t measure up to the Word of God. I determine to learn all I can from my new Jewish roots, so I will be prepared when I meet my Jewish Bridegroom.*

“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to YHWH say, ‘YHWH will surely keep me separate from His people.’ ... the foreigners who join themselves to YHWH, to minister to Him, and to love the name YHWH, to be His servants, *every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant [Torah]*, even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. The Lord YHWH who gathers the dispersed of Israel declares, ‘Yet others [the foreigners of many nations] I will gather to Him, to those already gathered.’” (Isa 56:3-8)

Allow me to close this chapter on anti-Semitism with a quote from *The Mystery: A Lost Key – Israel and the Gentile Church: A Life and Death Issue for All Believers*, written by a Messianic Jew, Marvin Byers. In chapter 14, brother Byers goes to great lengths explaining how the abundant grace which we receive in Christ is tied to the mystery of His joining together the two, Israel and the Gentile church, into one new body. He concludes:

“Is there a simple biblical key that explains why grace comes through the mystery, or in other words, through a believer’s identification with Israel? The answer is yes. At this point, we understand that the mystery is more than an intellectual position. It involves the faith and conclusion of Ruth, where we know and believe in the depths of our heart that we are fellow citizens of Israel if we are in Christ. In A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicea, the Gentile church chose to no longer identify with Israel. During that council *Replacement Theology* became the official position of the Gentile church of that day. They considered themselves to be the new heirs of all of God’s promises and the new chosen people. They believed that they had actually taken the place of Israel in all of God’s plans. Were there any consequences? There were many, and they were serious in light of what Paul explains in Romans. He writes that the Gentiles, as branches from a wild olive tree, were grafted into Israel, God’s olive tree: ‘If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.’ (Rom 11:17-18 NIV)

“When the so-called ‘Gentile church’ withdrew itself from Israel, God’s olive tree, they lost just one ‘small’ blessing in their spiritual lives – the nourishing sap from the olive root. The sap is the blood or life of the tree. No wonder the church died and entered the Dark Ages! No branch can live without sap, and the Gentile branches died when they were separated from Israel and formed their ‘Gentile Club’. No wonder there is still a lack of grace, power, and authority in the church today. The body of Christ will continue to lack these blessings until this error is corrected, both corporately and privately. The Gentiles do not support the root of the olive tree, but the root supports them. Throughout the Bible, the root is Christ. He supports, and provides life, *to the only olive tree that He has planted – Israel*. He does not give life to an independent group of Gentile branches that have chosen to separate themselves from the olive tree.

“It is time for all Gentile believers to recognize the place that God has ordained for them and to return to it through the faith and identification with Israel that the New Testament reveals. Every branch that is willing to do so will discover that new life and new grace will begin to flow within, the very life and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!” *And I add my amen! Well put, brother Byers!*

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of YHWH has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but YHWH will rise upon you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about and see! They all gather together; they come to you. Your sons come back from afar. Your daughters will be carried in the arms. [The return to Israel after the dispersion.] Then you will see it and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice. The abundance of the sea will be turned to you. The wealth of nations will come to you... Who are these who fly like a cloud [in jet planes], and like doves to their lattices? Surely the coastlands will wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish will come first, to bring your sons from afar, bringing their silver and their gold with them, for the name of YHWH your God and for the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you.

“And foreigners will build your walls, and their kings will minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you [the dispersion], then in My favor I had compassion on you. And your gates will not be closed day or night, so that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings in procession. *For the nation or kingdom which will not serve you will perish. Yes, the nations will be utterly ruined.* The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the juniper, the box tree, and the cypress together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary [temple]; and I shall make the place of My feet glorious. And the sons of those who had afflicted you [in the persecutions, the pogroms, and the holocaust] will come bowing to you. All those who had despised you [anti-Semitism] will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; and they will call you [the Christian church? No!] *the city of YHWH – the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*

“Whereas you have been forsaken and hated with no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting pride, a joy from generation to generation. Then you will know that I, YHWH, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob [Israel] ... And I will make peace your governors, and righteousness your rulers. Violence will not be heard again in your land, nor devastation or destruction within your borders [finally!]; but you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise. No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have YHWH for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory. Your sun will set no more, neither will your moon wane; for you will have YHWH for an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be finished. Then all your people will be righteous; *they will possess the land [of Israel] forever [to the end of time]*, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified. The smallest one will become a clan, and the least one a mighty nation. I, YHWH will hasten it in its time.” (Isa 60)

There. God just told us what He will do for Israel. Will we believe His sure Word and cooperate with Him?

WE NEED EACH OTHER

There are roughly 1300 denominational 'branches' in the United States alone. Each of these probably thinks that they and they alone have 'the Truth', and that if everyone would join their denomination then we could all "be one, just as We are one." (Jn 17:22) So which denomination really has 'the Truth'? Obviously, mine, of course. If it didn't I wouldn't be here. You all had better knuckle under and join my church if you want to really get it together.

Surely you see the fallacy there! None of us has the whole Truth. We all "know in part, and prophesy in part." (1 Cor 13:9) We need each other! We need to develop an open-hearted humility so we can learn from one another.

For example, Presbyterians criticize the Pentecostals for living totally by their emotions and feelings, allowing themselves to be so carried away by the spirit that they neglect the foundational truths of the Law of God and the solid doctrines of the Word. That is a valid criticism; I've been there. But the Pentecostals criticize the Presbyterians for having a dead orthodoxy, spending all their time dissecting the Word, with no emotion, no moving by the Spirit, no gifts of the Spirit, no dancing before the Lord with all their hearts. That too is a valid criticism; I've been there, done that, too. And Roman Catholics could teach both groups about the reverence and holy fear of God. Most Christians recognize that we need each other. But to say that we also need the Jews – now that is carrying it a bit too far. After all, they are unsaved. Until they receive Jesus and get themselves Christianized, we have nothing to learn from them. Right? Well...

Speaking to a Samaritan woman, Jesus said, "An hour is coming, and now is, when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (Jn 4:23-24) Someone has said: "If you worship in truth but not in spirit, you dry up [Presbyterians], and if you worship in spirit but not in truth, you blow up [Pentecostals], but if you worship in both spirit and truth, then you grow up [Southern Baptists]." Well, that has some truth to it (and you can probably guess from the way my story ended that I currently fellowship with Southern Baptists). Everyone knows this passage, but almost nobody sees the previous five words of Jesus: "... **salvation is from the Jews.**" (v 22) Why? *They don't want to hear it.* In their minds it is utter heresy to think that we could receive anything of value from people who aren't even Christians!

Maybe the best way I can help you past that is to tell a story. This is the true story of Dawn Bissell, from the April 1986 Guideposts magazine (page 27). Dawn was being treated for severe depression in a large hospital outside Chicago. Spending the Easter weekend in the psychiatric ward with no family or friends, she was feeling very lonely. Even most of the patients had gone home for the weekend.

But there was one who had not: Mr. Meyer, a quiet and kindly Jew in his 80s. Dawn knew that Jews celebrate their Passover instead of Easter, but, desperate for fellowship, she screwed up her courage and knocked on his door, intending to ask him about his Jewish Passover rituals.

"Come in," said Mr. Meyer. "I was just about to begin my celebration of the Passover meal."

Dawn apologized for disturbing him, but then blurted out, "I'm a Protestant, Mr. Meyer, but I've been wondering about your Jewish customs. Should I come back another time?"

"No, please stay," he said. "I would be very happy to have someone to share my Passover with. It shouldn't be a lonely time." He then gave her his prayer book, which he knew by heart. It was written in both Hebrew and English, so he encouraged Dawn to follow along and give the responses at the proper places. About this time another lonely patient (a Roman Catholic) came knocking at the door. Mr. Meyer invited her to join as well.

Mr. Meyer led them through the ritual, sharing with them his consecrated wine and unleavened bread. They learned that the Passover Seder speaks of deliverance. Together they relived Israel's deliverance from the bitter slavery of Egypt and their travails as they journeyed to the freedom and rest of the Promised Land. Dawn savored the words of the ritual: "God brought us forth from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to light. Therefore let us sing before Him a new song. Hallelujah!"

To quote Dawn's own words: "As our Passover supper drew to a close, I no longer felt desolate. We three – a Jew, a Catholic, and a Protestant – had together made an exodus from loneliness and self-pity. We spent the rest of the evening talking and laughing. I felt delivered. I could feel God's own loving hand leading me back to health and happiness."

What happened here? For one evening Dawn put away her prejudice and condemnation of Jews and humbled herself to learn from Mr. Meyer. God had to put her in a pretty desperate situation before she could hear, but she got a lot more than just 'teachings about Jewish rituals'. *She met YHWH in the Feast, and it changed her life.* (A real meeting with YHWH always changes our lives!) God designed the Feasts of Israel, and this was His purpose: so we could meet with Him and have intimate fellowship.

We who claim to have the Holy Scriptures as our only standard of faith and practice, we who maintain that the Scriptures are the infallible Word of the Living God, we who claim to know the Truth which sets us free, we who want to win the world for Jesus, had better take a second look at all those Old Testament Scriptures which form the basis of Jewish customs and celebrations. Maybe we too could humble ourselves enough to learn from them, and in them have an encounter with YHWH.

THE TEN LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Marvin Byers has written a wonderful book comparing the Feasts of Israel with the seven days of creation, the seven men of faith in Genesis, and the seven items in the tabernacle of Moses, and relating it to the seven steps in our lives from salvation to Christian maturity. He titles it *Six Days and a Day – The Creator’s Blueprint to Make Us Like Jesus*. I’ve received a lot of wisdom and insight from brother Byers, as in the quote below. (from page 28)

“The goal or inheritance that Genesis sets before us is to grow up into the maturity and character of Christ – to be transformed into His likeness. Only when we are like Him can we experience true spiritual rest. The world urgently needs to see the beauty of Jesus in and through the church. Manifestations of our flesh and our own sinful ways can only bring death to others. Consequently, unless we understand how to reach the place where we are “filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19), His purposes will be frustrated. The Lord warns us, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” (Hos 4:6a) How many Christians have the necessary knowledge to progress from being a spiritual baby to a mature, spiritual father?

“In the church today, there seems to be much talk about winning the world, but very little is shared on the kind of Christian life that will succeed in doing so. We want to *preach* the gospel without *living* the gospel. We want to be involved in delivering others when we don’t really have liberty ourselves. (2 Pet 2:19; Jn 8:34) We want to give birth to many spiritual children, but we don’t have time to enter the chambers of the King and participate in a love relationship with Him. Only that relationship can cause children to be conceived and birthed in the spiritual life, just as happens in the natural life.

“In short, we want to be someone without becoming someone in Him. We want to be someone in man’s eyes without becoming someone in His eyes – without being like Christ. We want spiritual success without paying the price it requires, and without choosing the way that leads us there. We are so busy building the Kingdom that we don’t have the time to read the blueprints that show us how to build it His way. Of course, the enemy doesn’t mind if we busy ourselves for the rest of our lives building a 100 story skyscraper for the Lord. As long as it does not have the right foundation, he knows that it will ultimately come crashing down, as so many works and their respective ministries have done over the past few years. Jesus tells us that only a house built on the right foundation, the Rock, will last. Woe to any spiritual house built on the sand of man’s opinions and ways. (Lk 6:46-49)”

What is the right foundation? What is building the Kingdom God’s way? What is meeting the King in His chambers to enjoy spiritual intimacy with Him? Well, He answers those questions Himself in the Holy Scriptures:

He invites us to meet with Him and learn from Him in the Feasts of Israel.

This is a big, complex, and controversial subject, which in my mind has wrongly achieved cult status in some circles. I do not want to push it, because I believe that only God can solve the problem of the identity of the ten lost tribes. They really are lost.

But I do want to mention it and go over some of the Scriptures involved, dear Reader, because I think God could use this discussion to speak to your heart regarding your own Jewish roots, whether only spiritual, or possibly physical as well.

Recall the 144 thousand, the remnant from each of the 12 tribes of Israel who are sealed and protected during the great tribulation. (Rev 7:4-8) If you read the list, you will notice that Dan and Ephraim are missing from the count, but both Joseph and his son Manasseh are included, Nobody knows why, and there is much speculation here. Some guess that Dan and Ephraim are completely lost or obliterated. That cannot be. God is far too big for that. He never loses anything, and their restoration is promised in His Word. So I have some other suggestions.

Dan is prophesied to be a serpent that bites the horse’s heels so the rider falls back. (Gen 49:17) Does that remind you of Satan’s tactics? Some say that when Dan turned to idolatry (Jud 18:30 ff), God put a curse upon them and excluded them from His covenant. Therefore some people speculate that the antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan, and none from Dan will ever be redeemed.

But that directly contradicts Ezekiel 47 and 48, in which Dan is given a portion in the restored Israel of the Millennium, and has a gate in the New Jerusalem. (See also Rev 21:12.) My feeling here is that while Dan may indeed be the tribe from which antichrist comes, and may be excluded from the Bride of Christ, yet God’s covenant to him can never be broken because God won’t let it be broken. God is bigger than that. I see no conflict between Dan being missing from the firstfruits (Rev 7:4), yet still being a part of the great harvest of the Kingdom.

Ephraim is another (much bigger) story. There is a lot of prophecy in Scripture about Ephraim being restored in the end times. Before we get into the Scriptures you need to be aware that after Israel was split into two kingdoms in 931 BC, the southern kingdom (made of Judah, Benjamin, part of Levi, and Simeon) was usually called by the name of its largest and strongest tribe, Judah, (from which we get the names Jew and Judea). In the same way, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, Israel, were often called by the name of its largest and strongest tribe, Ephraim.

The land allotted to the tribe of Ephraim is just north of Benjamin, which is next to Jerusalem. Thus Ephraim was in a prime area, close to the temple and the worship that YHWH commanded. In other ways also, Ephraim was ideally situated and abundantly blessed.

Being a strong tribe, Ephraim could and should have led the other northern tribes in staying close to YHWH. But alas, a tragic tale is told in 1 Kings 11 and 12. Wise King Solomon turned his heart away from YHWH to his many foreign wives. He did evil in the sight of YHWH, and served the Ashtoreth and Chemosh and other gods of his foreign wives. YHWH then split up Solomon's glorious kingdom, giving the northern ten tribes to Jeroboam of Ephraim.

Through the prophet Ahijah, God promised Jeroboam that, "If you listen to all that I command you, and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you." (11:38)

Sadly, when Jeroboam became king of the northern kingdom (called the Kingdom of Israel, as opposed to the Kingdom of Judah in the south), though he had God's blessing and the full support of the people, he was not obedient to this prophecy. Instead of keeping the people from idolatry, he made Israel to sin by leading them into idolatry. Jeroboam set up two golden calves, one in Bethel (a few miles north of Jerusalem), and one in the far north at Dan, saying, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." (12:28) Jeroboam also created his own system of feast days (12:33) and appointed his own priests from among the common people rather than from the Levites. (13:31) Thus he is condemned in Scripture as "Jeroboam son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." (22:52)

To make a long story short, God was not at all happy with Jeroboam or with Ephraim. Hosea the Prophet was commissioned to warn them, which he did: "Ephraim is joined to idols!" (4:17) "Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke!" (5:9) "As raiders wait for a man, so a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem [Jeroboam's capital city]; surely they have committed a crime. In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's harlotry is there, Israel has defiled herself." (6:9-10) "When I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, and the evil deeds of Samaria." (7:1) "Ephraim mixes himself with the nations [pagans]; Ephraim has become a cake not turned [half-baked]." (7:8) "Ephraim has hired lovers [prostitutes, spiritual unfaithfulness]." (8:9) "Ephraim has multiplied altars for sin." (8:11)

God appealed to them through the prophet: "... it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; But they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bonds of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; I bent down and fed them." (11:3-4) "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel?" (11:8) "I have been YHWH your God since the land of Egypt; you were not to know any god except Me, for there is no savior besides Me." (13:4) "I will ransom them from

the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death." (13:14) "I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely." (14:4) "O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? It is I who looks after you... from Me comes your fruit." (14:8)

But alas, Ephraim (meaning the northern ten tribes of Israel) refused to heed Hosea's warning, sank quickly under the weight of their own idolatry and immorality, and fell captive to Assyria in 708 BC. Unspeakably cruel, the Assyrians under Sargon II tortured and killed most of them, destroyed Samaria, took 27,290 of them captive, and resettled Samaria with captives from other captured nations. Those 27,290, the 'ten lost tribes', were taken north, probably first up to the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh, and then farther north into Turkey and beyond. From there, we lose them.

However, considerable research has gone into tracing their journeys. One possible way of tracing them is by studying the names of areas and peoples. The Assyrians did not call them Israelites. They called them after the name of one of the worst of their kings: Omri. This became Gimirri in Assyria, Kimmeri in Greek, Cimmeri in western Europe (such as the Cimbric Peninsula – former name of Denmark), Cymru in Wales, and Crimea in Russia.

Though the tribes were eventually scattered from each other, members of each tribe stuck together for mutual support. Yair Davidy (an orthodox Jew in Jerusalem), has written a book *The Tribes*, which is a most-informative account of the northern tribes' dispersion. He estimates their present-day primary locations / concentrations in: Ephraim - Britain; Manasseh - America; Reuben - France; Simeon - Celts and Jews; Levi - the Jews; Yehuda (Judah) - Jutes and Jews; Zebulon - Holland; Issachar - Swiss and Finns; Gad - Sweden; Asher - the Scotts; Benjamin - the Belgae and Normans; Dan - Danes and Celts; and Naphtali - Norwegians. The book's jacket explains: "*The Tribes* proves that most of the ancient Israelites were exiled and lost their identity. [In other words, even they do not know where they came from.] Their descendants eventually migrated to Western Europe, where they formed distinct ethnic groups and nationalities. Proof is provided from the Bible, the Talmud, history, archaeology, mythology, and linguistics. National symbols and ethnic characteristics are also analyzed."

A second primary method of tracing them is by means of traditional faiths and persecutions. Everywhere they went, they were persecuted, tortured, and forced to move on. The places where they settled have traditionally been known for scenes of bloody religious struggle. The worst of these was the Thirty Years War, in which Catholic armies tried to exterminate both Protestants and Jews from central Europe. One rather strong theory which I tend to like is that the **Protestants** descended from the ten northern tribes, in contrast with the Jews from the tribes of Judah, Levi, and Simeon of the southern kingdom.

Why Protestants? Well, bearing in mind that this is just a theory, I believe that the Holy Spirit has through the ages been calling the ten lost tribes back to Himself. Pretty much every culture has a religious bent to it. However, most peoples are quite content to muddle along in the traditional religious exercises of their forefathers. But the religious wars I mentioned involved people who were not content to go along with the official religion of their area – such as the Roman Catholic religion of the Dark Ages, the Anglican state church in England, or the Lutheran state church of Nazi Germany. They could see that the state church kept people from God, and they had in their heart a deep desire to go back to the truth (and freedom) of God's Word. Thus they 'protested'.

God vows in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8, "... I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah..." This New Covenant, the Law of YHWH written on our hearts, is of course claimed by us Protestant Christians in the United States. But where do we fit in the prophecy? We are not of the house of Judah, the southern kingdom, the Jews. *Could we possibly be a part of the house of Israel, Ephraim, the northern kingdom, the ten lost tribes?*

Here is an interesting statistic that I can't prove, but which may ring a bell in your heart. Protestant church groups can be classified according to their degree of attachment to the Scriptures, ranging from those who believe every word of Scripture, to those who focus mainly on the New Testament and deny the relevancy of the Old, all the way to liberals who only believe the verses which happen to tweak their fancy at the moment. Is it just a coincidence that these groups can also be classified according to their degree of support for Israel and the Jews, in pretty much the same degree as their trust in the truth of Scripture, especially the Old Testament? Could it be that God has planted in our hearts this deep trust in His Word, even the Old Testament, and this love for the Jews and Israel, because we conservative Protestants are the long lost northern brothers of the Jews from the southern kingdom?

Scripture indicates that God Himself is responsible for restoring the Israelites – all twelve tribes – to their land in the last days. How does He do it? By working His desires for them into their own hearts, calling them back. Could He not simultaneously be working in the hearts of their 'non-Jewish' brothers of the northern kingdom to support them as they work to restore the Promised Land?

Back to the passage in Revelation 7, in which the twelve tribes of Israel are sealed for their protection from the great tribulation. Could it be (this is pure speculation) that the reason Ephraim is not mentioned there is that Ephraim is in a separate, special place, far removed from the calamities of the great tribulation, way off in another continent on the other side of the earth from Israel?

Could it be that Ephraim (including the ten lost tribes) are the United States – or at least those 30 to 40 percent of the U.S. population who are conservative Bible believers and are in support of Israel and the Jews?

But wait, you say. The great tribulation is worldwide. True, but if you will read carefully, it is always "a third of the earth was burned up," and "a third of the sea became blood," and "a third of the waters became wormwood," and "a third of mankind was killed by these three plagues," and so on. It seems obvious to me that the greater part of the tribulation centers around the land of Israel. Isn't it possible that the United States, which has been alone among all the nations of the world to continue steadfast support of Israel and the Jews, may be in a special place which God has reserved for protection from some of the most terrifying judgments of the tribulation?

Why would God do such a thing? Well, for one thing, He has promised to "... Bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." (Gen 12:3) Except for our leaders foolishly trying to force Israel to 'trade land for peace', I think the United States, more than any other nation in history, has earned this blessing. Another reason may be found among the many scriptural prophecies relating to Ephraim. Let's look at a few of them.

"But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was first-born... When Joseph saw that his father had laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to his father, 'Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.' But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people and he also shall be great. *However, his younger brother shall be greater even than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.*'" (Gen 48:14-20)

This is a remarkable prophecy, which could not be fulfilled by Ephraim's being lost forever. But it certainly could be fulfilled by Ephraim becoming the United States, *the melting pot of nations*. In the original Hebrew, the phrase "multitude of nations" is literally "the fullness of the Gentiles." This phrase clearly speaks to the end times. "... A partial hardening has happened to Israel *until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*; and thus all Israel will be saved..." (Rom 11:24, 25) and "... Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the *times of the Gentiles* be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24) One way God could fulfill these passages is by gathering those lost 'nations' of Ephraim into the United States and using us to assist Israel as it is restored. I believe that God's blessing upon our land is directly related to how well we do that. And those of our leaders who are snubbing Israel and favoring her enemies are asking for God's curse upon our land.

Moses also mentions Ephraim in his prophecy: “As the first-born of his ox, majesty is his, and his horns are the horns of the wild ox; With them he shall push the peoples all at once [all together] to the ends of the earth. Those are the ten thousands of Ephraim; and those are the thousands of Manasseh.” (Deut 33:17) This could have been fulfilled by Ephraim’s ‘multitude of nations’ being pushed together at the ends of the earth from Israel – North America.

A possible reference to the United States is in Isaiah 18. “Alas, oh land of whirring wings [jet planes] which lies beyond the rivers of Cush [Ethiopia], which sends envoys by the sea... at that time [the end times] a gift of homage [worship] will be brought to YHWH of Hosts from a people tall and smooth [shaven], even from a people feared far and wide, a powerful and oppressive nation whose land the rivers divide, to the place of the name of YHWH of Hosts, even Mount Zion.” (v 1-2, 7) As the United States stands with Israel in their restoration to their land, God may see it as this prophesied “gift of worship...”

Jeremiah 30 – 31 has another remarkable prophecy about the restoration of Israel to her land. “In the latter days you will understand this. At that time, declares YHWH, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people... I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you [back from the dispersion] with lovingkindness. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin daughter of Israel... again you shall plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria [Ephraim] ... Watchmen on the hills of Ephraim shall call out, ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to YHWH our God!’ ... I am bringing them from the north country, and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth... [the United States?] and they shall return here... for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born. ... Thus says YHWH, a voice is heard in Ramah [a city of Benjamin, Rachel’s 2nd son], lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel [Ephraim’s grandmother] is weeping for her children... because they are no more. Thus says YHWH, restrain your voice from weeping ... *they shall return from the land of the enemy*, and there is hope for your future, declares YHWH. Thus your children shall return to their own territory. Surely I have heard Ephraim grieving ... ‘Bring me back, Lord, that I may be restored, for Thou art YHWH my God.’ ... Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly still remember him. Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, declares YHWH.”

The great restoration passage in Zechariah 10 also includes Ephraim: “And I shall strengthen the house of Judah [the Jews], and I shall save the house of Joseph [Ephraim and Manasseh], And I shall bring them back... *Ephraim will be like a mighty man*... I will whistle for them to gather them together, for I have redeemed them, and they will be as numerous as they were before. When I scatter them among the peoples they will remember Me in

far countries, and they with their children will live and come back. And I will bring them back... until no room can be found for them.” (v 6-10)

Likewise in Ezekiel 37: “The word of YHWH came again to me saying, ‘And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, “For Judah and his companions, the sons of Israel.” Then take another stick and write on it, “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and his companions, all the house of Israel.” Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand... Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. Thus they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms...” (v 15-22)

Finally, look at the great millennial restoration passage in Isaiah 11. “... the wolf will lie down with the lamb... and they shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain. For the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea. Then it will come about in that day that the nations [Gentiles? the nations of Ephraim?] will resort [be restored] to the root of Jesse [our Jewish roots], who will stand as a signal [banner, rallying point] for the peoples [ethnic groups] ... Then it will happen on that day that YHWH will again recover *the second time* with His hand the remnant of His people who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands [coastlands] of the sea [the USA?] And He [YHWH] will lift up a standard for the nations [Gentiles? Ephraim?] and will assemble the banished ones of Israel [the northern kingdom – the ten lost tribes!] and will gather the dispersed of Judah [the southern kingdom] from the four corners of the earth. *Then the jealousy of Ephraim [against the Jews, persistent anti-Semitism] will depart, and those who harass Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will no longer be jealous of Judah, and Judah will no longer harass Ephraim.*” (v 6-13)

This remarkable passage speaks for itself, completely refuting any who claim the lost tribes can’t be found. They will one day be gathered back to the land of Israel “the second time.” (The first restoration began in 537 BC with Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.) But how will God do that? My theory (and a lot of people share my feelings) is that God is now using Ephraim from afar to assist Judah in being restored to the land of Israel, to provide for them and protect them against their enemies until they can defend themselves. The United States is the only nation really doing that now, and it is mostly conservative Christians who are driving it. Then (according to my theory) after the great tribulation, when the Jews finally receive their true Messiah (Adonai Yashua haMashiach) “the jealousy of Ephraim will depart” and we Christians (at least those of us who actually are from the ten lost tribes) will also be restored to Israel.

Cute theory, I know. I don't mean to tell God how He must do it. All I know for sure is that He will restore all twelve of the tribes of Israel, for He is a mighty big God, and His Word cannot be broken.

“God has spoken in His holiness: ‘I will exult, I will portion out Shechem [capital of Ephraim] and measure out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is Mine, and Manasseh is Mine. *Ephraim is the helmet of My head* [My protection]. Judah is My Scepter [the royal house]. Moab is my wash-bowl [a means that God used to judge and cleanse Israel]. Over Edom I shall throw My shoe [i.e. God's ultimate judgment against Edom – see Isa 34:5]. Shout aloud [in terror] O Philistia [the Philistines were often enemies of Israel – see 2 Sam 8:1], because of Me!’” (Ps 60:6-8, repeated in Ps 108:7-9) This remarkable prophecy could refer to the protection which the United States (Ephraim) has given to Israel and the Jews (Judah) in these last days.

JEWISH LAW: TORAH

The Feasts of Israel are part of Torah. ‘Torah’ (meaning ‘teachings’) is generally defined as the teachings of YHWH through Moeshe (Moses). YHWH gave these teachings for Israel's good, so that He could bless them in the Promised Land, protect them from their enemies, and come to dwell with them in holiness. We Americans have a difficult time with that, from our perspective of government ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people’, and ‘liberty and justice for all’. Before we can appreciate Torah from the Jewish perspective (or better yet, from God's perspective), we need to step back and reconsider our views on law.

As I discussed in the first few chapters, a conflict exists in many modern Christians' minds between law and grace. We Americans are raised to be goal oriented. We approach religion with the dual goals of being saved from sin and death and gaining heaven and eternal bliss. Since salvation and our admittance into heaven are of grace through faith, not through the works of the law lest anyone should boast, we tend to ignore or even despise Old Testament law.

As I said, this attitude is in dramatic conflict with both who YHWH is, His nature and character, and what He reveals in Scripture as His intentions for His people. As the ever-present ‘I AM’, YHWH is far less interested in our past salvation experience or future rewards as He is in our present empowerment to walk free from sin into intimate relationship with Himself in the blessings of holiness. His intentions toward us are not to free us from sin's guilt and punishment so we can live as we please, but rather so we can come into intimacy as a pure Bride for His Son.

So Torah is far more than a bunch of do's and don'ts. It is a tool YHWH uses to bring us to Himself. And yes, when we arrive, that tool can be set aside; it is no longer needed ... unless of course we retain the tendency to stray – then maybe that tool should be kept handy, just in case.

Once upon a time there were two powerful kingdoms: the Kingdom of Darkness, and the Kingdom of Light. The Kingdom of Darkness was ruled by an evil tyrant. He delighted in tormenting his subjects and confiscating the fruits of their labors. Thus his land was filled with hate and violence. But the neighboring Kingdom of Light was ruled by a wise and kind King, who truly loved His subjects. His delight was to protect them and bless them, so in their prosperity He could share their joy and rejoice in their gratefulness.

A high, strong stone wall separated the two kingdoms. The wall was named Torah. All the people in the Kingdom of Light loved this wall, because they knew what was on the other side. The wall protected them and their children from the evil Prince of Darkness, and kept them within the bounds of their own good King's blessings.

The people in the Kingdom of Darkness hated the great wall. They also knew what was on the other side! They craved the legendary prosperity and happiness there, though they could not understand their source (as they could not comprehend such basic concepts as ‘kindness’, ‘righteousness’, or ‘gratefulness’).

Since their evil prince violated their homes, abusing them and taking their stuff, they did the same for one another, and thought it grossly unfair that they could not do likewise to their ‘rich’ neighbors in the Kingdom of Light. So they raged at Torah, and beat against it, and called loudly for its destruction. But though some even committed their lives to tearing it down or crossing it, it was too big and too strong; none could make a dent in it or get even a short way up its high, steep walls.

But the good King YHWH was not totally happy with the big stone wall named Torah. One day He called all His people together and told them, “I have decided that I am going to tear down Torah. Level it. Destroy it completely. It has been up long enough, and has served its purpose.”

All the people gave a great cry, “No! Don't tear down Torah. We love Torah! It guards us and our children from the Prince of Darkness, and keeps us within the bounds of Your many blessings.”

King YHWH responded, “I must tear down Torah. My only Son and Heir is nearing the date of His wedding. It will be the grandest wedding in history. Everyone must be free to attend the celebration. There are many within the Kingdom of Darkness who will also want to come to the wedding feast, but they can't, because Torah blocks them. So for their sakes it must be torn down.”

The people wailed and cried out, “No! No! Good King, please reconsider! The Prince of Darkness and his armies hate You and want to destroy Your Kingdom and all of us. They don't care about Your Son or His wedding. If You tear down Torah, they will all come flooding in and bring great harm and misery into Your Kingdom.”

“Do you not care about the people behind Torah? How do you know they don’t care about My Son?”

At this, all the people had to stop and think. It was true; they had not cared about those behind the wall. Not a whit. They didn’t even know them.

“I care about them,” King YHWH continued. “I believe that many of them would love to learn of our ways and share in our blessings in the Kingdom of Light, if only they could get past Torah. And all the rest, My enemies who hate Me, My Son, and My Kingdom – they are no match for My armies. I will simply cast them into My dungeon. Now, are you ready for Me to destroy Torah?”

The people fell on their knees and desperately cried out, “No! Please good King! Don’t tear down Torah. We love Torah! It is beautiful; our joy in the morning and our delight at night. It reflects the glory of Your castle to our eyes, and hides our eyes from the misery of the Kingdom of Darkness. It keeps our feet from wandering into the slime pits of the evil Prince of Darkness, and gives our children the freedom to walk throughout Your Kingdom on all Your highways of righteousness without fear. Please, we beg You, don’t destroy Torah!”

Good King YHWH smiled. This was what He wanted. Now He knew that His people really appreciated Torah for what it was, rather than just for the protection it gave. “OK, My beloved people, I hear your request. I will postpone the destruction of Torah until after the wedding, after all the people whom I love are safely trained in the ways of the Kingdom of Light, after all My enemies are in the dungeon, and after we have cleaned up the slime pits of the Kingdom of Darkness. But until then, we must have a gate in Torah, so that those who want to come to My Son’s wedding may enter. Who will volunteer to build and guard the gate?”

The people looked back and forth at each other. No one stepped forward. Everyone was thinking the same thing: “No siree Bob; not me! I can’t face the evil Prince of Darkness in his own kingdom! I don’t have a chance against the hoards of wickedness. I’m not strong enough to withstand the lure of their deceptions and temptations. Yes, I’d love to serve the King, but I’m not good enough.”

Then the King’s Son, Yashua haMashiach, spoke up. “I volunteer, Father. I will construct the gate. And it is My privilege and My right to interview and train each one who enters, before I invite them to My wedding celebration. It is also My right to cast into the dungeon Your enemies who would dishonor Me and try to disrupt My wedding.”

King YHWH smiled at His Son, standing beside Him. “Yes, My Son. It is indeed Your right and privilege. I was hoping You would volunteer. I accept. I commission You to build the gate and keep it secure against all My enemies. You are to allow no one to enter who would harm us or commit treason against our great Kingdom of Light. Now, You will need helpers...”

King YHWH turned back to His people. “Who will volunteer to help Yashua haMashiach in this monumental task? He will need bricklayers and builders; he will need strong people to help guard the gate; people skilled in war to help fight back our enemies; wise people to aid in His interviews; knowledgeable people to help train new recruits in the ways of our Kingdom of Light; counselors to help with their problems; generous and kind people to demonstrate our ways of love to them; fun-loving people who will teach them the joys and delights of our Kingdom; respectful, firm people to teach them discipline, honor of the King, and love of Torah.”

Everyone loved and trusted Yashua. With Him in charge, their attitude changed. Waves of happy people surged forward. “I will! I volunteer for...! I can do... I can help with... It’s a joy to work with Your Son. I’ll do whatever I can... I love Yashua! For Him I can do anything!”

“Yes, Yes!” King YHWH held up his arms for silence, laughing joyfully at their eagerness. “Thank you all for volunteering. And you all shall have a task to do. Everyone may have a part in preparing for what shall be the grandest wedding celebration in the universe. Thank you for loving Me and My Son Yashua haMashiach. Thank you for loving My Kingdom of Light. And thank you for loving Torah...”

Yes, this is just a parable. As with all parables, it has its limitations. But it illustrates some important concepts. First, Torah is a good thing, a means of God’s blessing and protection on our lives, a thing to be loved and respected, not hated or despised. Those who love and obey Torah tend to be ‘rich neighbors’ compared to those who hate it. Torah reflects God’s own ways – which truly are ways of life, health, and prosperity.

Second, there really are two kingdoms, and Torah really is the boundary between the two.

Third, those in the Kingdom of Darkness really do hate Torah and try to tear it down. To them it is just a bunch of do’s and don’ts which curtail their freedom and make them feel guilty. They have no comprehension of its benefits.

Fourth, no one can enter the Kingdom of Light either by keeping Torah or by tearing it down.

Fifth, the door from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light is not Torah; it is the Lord Jesus Christ. However, He does not destroy Torah to bring people into the Kingdom; He merely provides a way, a door, for them to come through it. By faith in Christ the Law is satisfied.

Sixth, only a person dwelling in the Kingdom of Light ruled by God is able to appreciate Torah for the blessing and protection it is.

Seventh, though Torah will someday be torn down, it will not be until everyone in the Kingdom of Darkness is brought into full loving subjection to good King YHWH. (1 Cor 15: 23-28)

Eighth, those in the Kingdom of Light do not focus on Torah, they focus on the King – His beauty and blessings. But they do still appreciate Torah, as just one of many blessings from the King’s hand. Torah should be at our backs, supporting and protecting us, never in our faces, confronting us, unless we turn our backs to the King.

However, there are many more things that this parable doesn’t address. Torah is the covenant that YHWH made with His people through Moses. It is indeed a covenant of blessing based on obedience. But it is more than that. We need to be clear here on just what it is and what it is not before we go on.

Torah is actually three distinct yet related things.

First and foremost, it is **teachings** from God about who His is, what He is like, how He made the universe, and what He expects of us in our relationship to His world, His people, and Himself. Torah contrasts God’s ways of truth and righteousness leading to life, with Satan’s deceptive ways of sin and death. It is like an owner’s manual for a fine car; those who made it know best how to treat it. If you want it to give you many years of faithful service, you read the manual and follow its schedule of maintenance. If you ignore the manual and its ‘laws’, the car will eventually be damaged. Torah defines a standard, called ‘righteousness’, and lays down the consequences for falling short of this standard. If you ignore Torah and its standard (its laws) you too will eventually be ‘damaged’.

Second, Torah is a **covenant** between YHWH and His people Israel. YHWH takes these teachings and turns them into a legal document, conditionally binding upon both parties. This is a giant step beyond merely teaching. You can walk away from teaching and accept or reject it as you please. (Though if you reject it, you may have to learn its wisdom the hard way – through suffering.) But once you have entered into a covenant, you’re stuck with it. You cannot walk away. The penalties for breaking it are more severe. In this sense, Torah is the national constitution for the state of Israel (physically as well as spiritually).

I say ‘conditionally binding’ because each person has to deal with it individually. Although YHWH has signed the covenant and cannot go back on His Word to His people as a group, we individually are free to accept or reject the covenant, and having accepted it, to obey it or break it, and its blessings are conditional upon our choices. Please do not misunderstand me here. I am not talking about salvation. I am simply talking about the blessings of obedience to Torah. It is as simple as Torah’s instruction on hand-washing. You can wash your hands before you eat and stay healthy, or eat with dirty, germy hands and get sick. So the conditions are not based on God’s following through on His promises in the covenant; not at all. They are totally based on our own individual choice to accept the covenant, obey its legal requirements, and reap the benefits.

Please note at this point that Torah is legally binding only upon the nation of Israel. But before you say, “Whew. That lets me off the hook.” remember our three definitions for the nation of Israel: the Jewish nation in the Near-East (and I include all the Gentiles who have permanently attached themselves to the Jews there, whether through marriage, settlement, or religious choice); all the physical descendants of Abraham, whether or not in the land of Israel; and all those who have become Israelites and descendants of Abraham by faith in the promises of YHWH (that’s us Christians).

But there is a **third** aspect of Torah which goes beyond being divine teachings or a legal covenant. Torah is also a ‘ketubah’, a Jewish **betrothal contract**. A covenant can be an impersonal thing, though there are certainly personal ramifications for our individual choices to keep it. But a betrothal contract is far more intimate; far more personal. We’ll talk more about that in a later section. For now, understand that the traditional Jewish wedding is merely the culmination of years of betrothal, during which both the bride and the groom prepare for their wedding. Their betrothal contract is considered binding, like a marriage contract – certainly more binding than marriage seems to be in our American post-modern culture.

Traditional Jewish thought is that YHWH betrothed Himself to Israel at Mount Sinai, and that Torah is the binding betrothal contract. “Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am YHWH your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” (Ex 6:7) The word ‘take’ in this and other passages is the word used for the groom to ‘take’ a woman to be his wife.

Jewish weddings have five primary ingredients: a betrothal contract (which may be written or verbal), a ‘chuppah’ or canopy under which the bride and groom meet, a special endearing name given by the groom to the bride, a shared cup of wine, and a ring as a permanent sign of the covenant. When YHWH betrothed Himself to Israel, He gave Torah as the betrothal contract (verbal, then later written – Exodus 19 and following); the wedding canopy was the thick cloud in which He met with them (Ex 19:9); He gave Israel a special endearing name (‘Segula’, meaning ‘treasured possession’ in Exodus 19:5); the cup of wine was shared at the Passover celebration and in the daily offerings in the tabernacle (Ex 29:40); and He even gave them a ring: Shabbat, the Sabbath, which circles around every seven days as a permanent sign of remembrance between YHWH and Israel. (Ex 31:13-17)

Now, if all this is getting just a bit too personal and threatening to our traditional Christian theology, there are two more aspects of Torah that we need to discuss, both involving what it is not.

First, Torah is not the covenant of promise which YHWH made with Abraham.

This is a crucial distinction. There are two primary covenants which YHWH made in the Old Testament. (Not to belittle the many other important covenants He made.) The first and most important is not Torah. It is an earlier covenant that God made with Abraham. It was initiated when YHWH told Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and in blessing I will bless you, and make your name great; and so shall you be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen 12:1-3)

A little later YHWH expanded on this when He said, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you, and your exceeding great reward... Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them... so shall your descendants be.’ Then he [Abram] believed YHWH, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (Gen 15:1-6)

This covenant was finally completed when YHWH said to Abram, “I am El Shaddai [God Almighty]. Walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly ... No longer shall your name be Abram [exalted father], but your name shall be Abraham [father of a multitude], for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you and kings shall come forth from you. *And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. And I will give to you and your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.*”

Then God initiated the sign of the covenant, which is circumcision. “... thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (Gen 17:1-14)

This **covenant of promise** is an entire book in itself, and is beyond the scope of this study on the Feasts of Israel. So I will restrain myself to merely mention a few key aspects of it. YHWH’s covenant with Abraham was based first on faith, and only secondarily on obedience. (Rom 4; James 2:14-26; and others) It was an everlasting covenant. It is still in effect for all who are of the circumcision. This sign is a physical cutting, symbolic of a spiritual separation from the pagan world and its evil ways. Its promise was not only blessing, but permanent possession of the Promised Land, which is symbolic of everlasting life in the heavens. In short, YHWH’s covenant of promise portrays what we know as salvation by grace through faith – New Testament stuff. It is far higher than Torah’s covenant of obedience.

Before we move on to the second thing Torah is not, let’s look briefly at that **covenant of obedience**, the second of the two primary covenants YHWH made in the Old Testament. (Ex 19-20; Deut 5-6) Obedience is what Torah is all about – law, and the blessings of keeping it and curses of breaking it. But it is conditional on and built upon the first covenant, the covenant of promise. The first covenant is received by faith, resulting in obedience. The second covenant is received by obedience, resulting in blessing, *but it cannot be fully received by those who have not received the covenant of promise.* They are inter-dependent.

Abraham never did see the fullness of the blessings promised to him. Moses never made it into the Promised Land. This points to a spiritual truth. The first covenant, salvation by grace through faith, must be accepted before the second covenant, the blessings of the promise through obedience. That much should be obvious to those of us who have spent a lifetime focusing on salvation by grace through faith. But the converse is also true. Once we have received that precious first covenant, it is time for a good look at the second, which is where the real blessing lies.

Modern Christians have a hard time with that. Grace and faith are so much easier (and more fun) than Torah’s law, teachings, obedience, discipline, and all that old hard stuff. Well, I urge you: all that old hard stuff is the road to maturity in your faith. *The Scriptures never present grace by faith as an alternative to obedience of the law. They present grace by faith as God’s enablement for us to keep His laws from our heart, rather than just an outward, legalistic bondage.* Even Moses and Abraham could never fully understand this, without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Which brings us to the **second** thing that Torah is not. *Torah is not just a physical list of outward laws that everyone has to obey.* The Pharisees of Jesus’ time made it so, and it became a terrible bondage against which Jesus spoke out boldly. Instead, every outward law, ceremony, or teaching was a physical glimpse of a deeper spiritual truth, opening windows into God’s nature and character and the spiritual rules by which His universe is ordered. Thus, if we obey the letter of the law but miss the spiritual significance, the whole thing is wasted on us. So, although we can only really learn from Torah by ‘doing’ it, the outward, legalistic obedience is not the true standard. The inclinations and motivations of the heart are the real issues here.

Abram is called “the Hebrew” in Genesis 14:13. ‘Hebrew’ is an interesting word; it comes from Heber, Abram’s great-grandfather five generations removed. (Eber – Gen 11) Hebrew names have meanings. ‘Hebrew’ is now considered to mean ‘one who has crossed over’, referring to the Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea. But 215 years before, Joseph (called “the Hebrew slave” by Potiphar’s wife – Gen 39:17) brought his family into Egypt. And 215 years before that, Abram obeyed God and ‘crossed over’ the Euphrates from Ur to the land of Canaan.

Thus 'Hebrew' implies a transfer of allegiance as well as a change of geographical location. That is actually what the Red Sea crossing symbolized. Israel left the realm where Pharaoh was their king and transferred allegiance to King YHWH. It was the same when YHWH told Abram to leave his kindred in Ur for the land of Canaan. (Acts 7:3)

This concept is crucial as we consider in more depth that covenant of obedience, which is embodied in Torah. Obeying Torah is not just a Jewish cultural obligation. Rather, it is an outward sign of an inward transfer of allegiance from Egyptian paganism to serving YHWH. So in that sense, we Christians are also 'Hebrews', since we have transferred our allegiance from America's prevailing humanistic atheism to serve the Living God.

In the Old Testament, the sign of allegiance is obedience. "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice, and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own special treasure among all the peoples, because all the earth is Mine; thus you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex 19:5-6) Again, when YHWH commissioned Joshua He said, "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, to be careful to do according to all the law [yes, Torah] which Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law [Torah] shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do [yes, obey] according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous; then you will have success." (Josh 1:5-8)

And in the New Testament, the sign of allegiance is still obedience. "Do not think [as some accused] that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest dot or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is fulfilled. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever keeps [obeys, follows] and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. *For I say to you, unless your [deeds of] righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not even enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*" (Matt 5:17-20) Jesus said, "if you wish to enter into Life, keep the commandments," and then quoted five of the Ten Commandments. (Matt 19:17) "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not a heavy burden." (1 Jn 5:3) It is fascinating to me that in both Old and New Testaments 'love' and 'obey' are inseparable; "If you love Me, you will keep [obey, follow, do] my commandments." (Jn 14:15, compared to Deut 6:5-7; 10:12-13; and 11:1)

It is easy to see that the Old Testament references to obedience to the law are speaking of Torah. It is a little harder to remember that these famous New Testament passages are also speaking of Torah. For example, that popular passage where Paul and Silas were preaching in the synagogue to the Berean Jews, and "these were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11) Guess what? Yes, the Scriptures they examined daily were Torah (actually the Tenach, from TNK, which is an acronym for the Torah, the Neviim [Prophets] and the Ketuvim [Writings], together comprising the entire volume we know as the Old Testament).

Then there is the well-known passage in which the apostle Paul encouraged young Timothy, "You, however, continue in the things which you have learned... that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture inspired by God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work." (2 Tim 3:14-17) How many of us realize that the only Scripture that young Timothy had up until this time was the Old Testament? Timothy didn't know that the letters Paul wrote would later be recognized as Scripture. He thought Paul was referring only to Torah (the Tenach).

Another famous illustration is the conclusion of the great Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matt 7:22-23) And you have just missed it completely, not having been trained in Hebrew law and culture. Here is how His listeners on the mountain actually heard Jesus' warning: "*Depart from Me, you who do not comply with [obey, do] Torah!*"

Here is one more illustration out of so many in the New Testament. "... In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the **perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it** [lives by it, puts it into practice every day], not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does." (James 1:21-25) This is a valuable passage, particularly for those with the 'sit 'n soak' style of worship. If we merely hear the Word of God but do not put it into practice in our daily lives, we delude ourselves.

So what is this “perfect law, the law of liberty?” I would like to think it is just the New Testament law of love, the “Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus” referenced in Romans 8:2. But the Greek word used here for law, in both the Romans and James passages (and in most of the New Testament) is ‘nomos’. It can mean any law but specifically points back to the Law of Moses, Torah.

You see, Torah is the foundation of all law. The law of liberty, the law of love, the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, are all one law, and Torah is its foundation. Is it possible to live by the law of liberty, while ignoring the foundation upon which it is built? Maybe, but I’ll bet I know what the saints in the first century church thought when they read that letter from James. They thought, “Wow! The perfect law, the law of liberty! I like that! He’s right, you know... when you keep Torah from your heart, obeying the spiritual principles behind it rather than just the outward do’s and don’ts, it does set you free! It does bring the Lord’s blessing upon everything you do, exactly like YHWH promised in Deuteronomy 28.” They assumed (with good reason) that James was talking about a New Testament way of keeping the Old Testament law.

Stop and think about how Jews tend to look at us Christians. We claim to believe and follow the Word of God, yet most of the time we act as though the entire Old Testament law was thrown out and replaced by the New. To a good, observant Jew, that is like saying that YHWH made a mistake when He gave the law on Mount Sinai, so He had to scrap it all and start over. Regardless of what we think of their theology, Jews actually do believe in YHWH as the almighty, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal King of the universe, *who does not make mistakes!*

There is a big difference between saying that the Old Testament law was scrapped, and saying that it laid the foundation for and pointed to something even better in the New, and that in the keeping of the Old, we learn how to keep and appreciate what YHWH had planned for us all along. God makes no mistakes! Only as we learn from the Old are we able to keep the New.

We do need to be careful here. As I said in the first two chapters, because the Old Testament law is a picture of which Christ is the reality, we cannot keep the letter of the law, with all its ceremonies, sacrifices, and detailed rituals. God made sure that we could not, by first ripping the veil in the temple in two when Christ died, then later allowing the temple to be destroyed entirely, which forced the total termination of the old sacrificial system. Though a huge tragedy, God used it to set His people free to seek Him in a whole new way – to seek to walk by His Spirit.

Like them, we too each need to go to Jesus Christ and ask, “What about this second covenant of obedience to the law? You said not the smallest dot or stroke of the law shall pass away, until all is fulfilled. How can I show You that I love You by my obedience to Your desires here?”

He loves to answer that prayer by filling us with His Holy Spirit, guiding us, and giving us wisdom from above, thereby fulfilling in us the higher law of which Torah was but the outward physical picture.

In a very real sense, you cannot break Torah. You may think that because you are a Christian and are free in Christ, you can ignore and break those Old Testament laws with impunity. But I assure you, the more you break them, the stronger they become. Ultimately you may find them still standing firm while you lie broken beneath them. When you begin to suffer the consequences of your misdeeds, and cry out to God, “Why me, Lord?” He may answer, “You didn’t hear Me when I whispered gently to you through life’s joys and pleasures. You didn’t hear Me when I spoke sharply to you through life’s difficulties and troubles. Now will you hear Me when I shout through your suffering and tragedies? *I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.* Now that I finally have your attention, will you allow Me to fulfill it in and through you?”

If it is any consolation, although the first covenant is everlasting, the second is not. It is a stepping stone to the New Testament believer’s walk by faith in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. The covenant of obedience to Torah is old, obsolete, fading away and ready to disappear, (Heb 8:6-13) being replaced by God’s laws put in our minds and written upon our hearts. This is a renewed first covenant, enacted on better promises (v 6), as it is sealed by the blood of Jesus Himself.

This New Covenant is the best, strongest, wisest, and ‘everything elset’ covenant ever made. It is still the first covenant of promise made to Abraham by grace through faith, except it is now remade to Abraham’s descendants (by faith) exactly as promised. Everything is still there, the Promised Land and all its blessings, the fruitfulness, YHWH’s walking with us as our ‘El Shaddai’, and all of us being His people, His inheritance, His ‘Segula’ (Treasured Possession). But one thing changed in this New Covenant – *there is no more need for that second covenant of obedience.* This renewed first covenant is so perfect that it does away with the need for the Torah, at least from the outward, legalistic obedience standpoint.

But let’s not throw Torah out until it has completed its job. Like the stone wall in my story, Torah will continue to have a valid function in our lives as long as we are subject to wickedness and temptation all around us. *When the Kingdom is fully come, when we all walk in perfect maturity according to the fullness of the Holy Spirit within, there will be no more need for law.* But honestly – are we there yet?

This is an important scriptural principle which too many modern Christians have missed, thinking they can live free in Christ while ignoring and even despising the Old Testament. Because we know our salvation depends totally on faith, not on keeping the law, it is easy to walk away from the law entirely. We do that to our peril.

In his letters to the Romans and Galatians, the apostle Paul (Heb: Rabbi Sha'ul) clearly teaches the profound truth that a legalistic keeping of Torah (God's teachings through Moses) is not required for salvation. Paul's letters were distributed and read throughout the first generation church, by both Jewish and Gentile Christians. They caused a problem: when Paul returned to Jerusalem (thirty years after Messiah's ascension), the elders there were worried. James said, "You see, brother, how many thousands [lit. Gk: myriads] there are among the Jews of those who have believed, *and they are all zealous for the law* [Torah]; but they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses [the Mosaic law, Torah], telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the [Jewish] customs." (Acts 21:20-21)

So here is Paul's opportunity to explain himself. What does he say? "Yes siree Bob. That's right. Torah is dead and gone, kaput. All you jokers who are 'zealous for the law' can forget it. We've got something better now: faith in Christ Jesus! Torah is obsolete and extinct."

No. We don't know what he said, because he isn't quoted here. *But we do know what he did.* James suggested that Paul take a Nazirite vow of purification according to the law (along with four others who had just taken such a vow), to show the world that "there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that *you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law* [Torah]." (v24)

As far as we know, the eminent 'Rabbi Sha'ul' didn't argue, or try to defend himself, or try to explain away his writings, or tell James that he was all wet. He just did what the elders at Jerusalem asked.

The ramifications of this passage are profound. Bear in mind that Torah is not just the Ten Commandments. It is all the teachings of God through Moses. The very word Torah means teachings, not law, and it comes from a Hebrew root which carries the connotation of shooting an arrow and hitting the mark. Acts 21 is telling us that being zealous for Torah, walking orderly, and keeping Torah are a proper way of life for the New Testament Christian.

"For the commandment [Mitzvah, law] is a lamp; the teaching [Torah] is light; reproofs for discipline are the Way of Life." (Prov 6:23) "He who keeps the law [Torah] is a discerning son... But he who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination." (Prov 28:7, 9) Psalm 119 has twenty-five references to Torah, such as "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law [Torah] of YHWH!" (v 1) "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law [Torah]." (v 18) "Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Thy law [Torah]. I have chosen the faithful way..." (v 29-30) "So I will keep Thy law [Torah] continually, forever and ever. Thus I will walk at liberty..." (v 44-45) There are lots more in Psalm 119.

But the best is, "O how I love Thy law [Torah]! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Thy precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Thy Word. I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances, for Thou Thyself hast taught me. How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path." (v 97-105) No wonder God called King David a man after His own heart. *David loved and walked by Torah!*

I have a pet theory, which I can't prove from Scripture, but it's so cute I can't resist sharing it. During Pentecost the Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God on tablets of stone and given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. My pet theory is that also during (a much later) Pentecost near the end of His ministry, Jesus ascended Mt. Hermon with Peter, James, and John where He was transfigured before them, *fulfilling the reality of which Mt. Sinai was the picture.* (Matt 17:2-8) The 'law' given by God on Mt. Hermon was, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" This new law, the law of love, the law of liberty, the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, *needs only one commandment: "Hear Him!"* Bear in mind, in the Hebrew culture the command 'hear' means more than to just listen; it means to listen intently, take it to heart, and let it change my life. We hear Him through the still, small voice of His Holy Spirit. Thus the law of liberty, the New Covenant which is being written upon our hearts, is the command to be always listening to and obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. "For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death [the Ten Commandments]." (Rom 8:2) "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not [bound] under the [Mosaic] law." (Gal 5:18) Why? Simple, because if you "... walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." (v16)

The **Ten Commandments** then become what they were intended to be: guides to lead us to Christ, so we can "Hear Him," get to know Him, and learn to love Him and follow Him through His Holy Spirit. Let's imagine briefly what He might be saying through them.

1.) "You shall have no other gods before Me." I am the infinite, almighty, eternal, all-wise, all-knowing God, your Creator. I sustain all things by the Word of My Power. I AM the beginning and the end. Before anything was, I AM, and all things have their conclusion in Me. Face Me. Look at Me. Keep Me before you always for I am the only true God. Everything you ever wanted or needed is found in Me – everything else will fail to satisfy. All your hopes and dreams are fulfilled in Me. I am Life and Truth; all things in your shadow realm are but pictures pointing to Me. I am your Father and you are My child. I love you!

2.) “You shall not make for yourself an idol...” I alone am worthy of your worship. You can fully trust Me, and rest your ultimate honor, respect, and reverence upon Me. Anything or anyone else you might center your affections or place your trust upon will fail you and could bring you great harm, My beloved. You are in My image – My nature. I designed you to live by My Spirit; anything less is not life but death! My adversary claims that you can live by your own desires for good or evil, but that is iniquity. It will hurt you and your kin, even to the 3rd or 4th generation, and it ends in death. Real life is knowing Me and trusting My Spirit to guide your choices. If you do this you will reap the blessings of obedience even to a thousand generations.

3.) “You shall not take the name of YHWH your God in vain.” My eternal memorial name, YHWH, and My name in your realm of space-time, Adonai Yashua haMashiach, are the most beautiful, most powerful, highest and most precious words you can utter. Use them with reverence and awe, with love and expectation, and I shall meet with you, fellowship with you, and reveal Myself and My power and love to you through My names. I AM the self-existent One; My names reveal all that I am to you in this moment. All that you ever needed or desired is available to you as you call upon My name. Be cautious that you do not drag My names down into lower realms of iniquity, selfishness, and wickedness or use My names as a curse, for that would fall back on your own head and hurt you, My beloved.

4.) “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” Ahh My beloved! The Sabbath is your connection to **The Holy**, the perfect, back to the beginning before sin entered the world, when all My creation was very good. As such, the Sabbath is also your connection to the eternal Rest I have prepared for you, for you cannot enter My Rest unless you are drinking deeply of The Holy! Let it fill you and guide you, for that is how I created you to live. On My sanctified Sabbath, cease your frantic labors – hard labors, only made necessary because you live in the realm of sin and under the power of the adversary. Cease. Be still. Know that I am YHWH who sanctifies you. Look to Me on My Sabbaths. My Light shall dispel your darkness, My Life shall break the power of sin and death, and I shall bring you safely into My Rest. This is not a rest of sloth or stupor, but a rest of loving delight, joyful obedience, and fruitfulness.

5.) “Honor your father and your mother.” Your earthly parents are a picture of Me. When you were young, you could not see Me or appreciate Me; you were too small and too limited in your perception. Your parents then were god to you, by My authority and according to My perfect plan. Now that you have grown, you see their weaknesses and failures to perfectly portray Me. Forgive them, so that I can forgive you for your own failures, and love them in spite of their failures as I have unconditionally loved you. Search for ways that they did correctly portray Me and honor them for that. Seek for My counsel through them, and respect them for it even when you disagree with it.

Care for them in their declining years, as they cared for you in your infant years. In so doing you are sowing seeds of lovingkindness, which shall bear for you a rich harvest of blessing, protection, fruitfulness, prosperity, and long life.

6.) “You shall not murder.” I am Life; it is My nature. All life has its source in Me. I gave you dominion over lower forms of life, but human life, which I created in My own image, is sacred. Your reverence and respect for human life honors Me. Your life on earth, which is but a dim picture of the glorious life I have planned for you, is completely in My hands: your conception, birth, life, physical death, and entry into My realm is all according to My perfect plan. Murder is blatant disregard for My plan and My authority. A murderer must be swiftly executed by lawful authorities, or life is cheapened and I am despised.

7.) “You shall not commit adultery.” I am faithful and true, and My promises everlasting. To reflect My nature, to display My image, you also must keep your vows. When a man and a woman voice their marriage vows to each other, I join them in holy matrimony and attach blessings to their steadfast love and faithfulness: good health, true joy, and My gift of children to further increase My Kingdom. Your faithfulness to your spouse is a beautiful picture of My faithful relationship to you. But unfaithfulness or sexual perversions – any use of your sexuality outside the bond of marriage – destroys this picture, brings dishonor to My holy name, and brings terrible harm to you, My beloved.

8.) “You shall not steal.” I am the King. Everything originated in Me and is upheld by the Word of My Power. I grant each person stewardship of some of My possessions – to some is given more and to some less, according to My perfect plan for each one. One who steals from another steals from Me and denies My authority as King. He will find that the things he stole will become a curse to him, even if he only takes from the rich to give to the poor. Instead, I urge you to work hard, but be content with what I give each day. As a faithful steward, guard and maintain each possession I entrust to your care. But be sensitive to My Spirit to know when it is time to pass it on. The things of earth will all burn up soon, so their only value is the brief blessing and comfort they can be to My precious ones.

9.) “You shall not bear false witness.” I am Truth and the Father of it. If you lie or act with intent to deceive, you turn your back on Me and join forces with the god of forces, the father of lies, My adversary. His lies will fail. Trust Me in this. Live in truth with open, transparent hearts before Me, that you may participate in My victory.

10.) “You shall not covet.” I am your provider; all that you need, with delights and pleasures besides, I put within your grasp, if you are diligent to receive them. If for a time I allow you to suffer lack, it is to test your faith, refine your character, discipline your negligence, or to give others the opportunity and joy to meet your need. Trust Me in this, and you will never entertain covetousness, greed, or lust.

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL: THE SABBATH

In summary, though keeping Torah clearly cannot save us, it is intended to give us wisdom, to instruct us in the ways of life and blessing, to guard and protect us from the false ways that end in suffering and destruction, to point us to Jesus Christ, and to teach us to know Him, His character, and His ways.

Galatians 3:23 and on, properly understood, is a good summary in itself. Wealthy Jewish families would hire a pedagogue (a guardian or bodyguard, usually translated tutor) to conduct their child to and from his teachers. The purpose of this guardian was twofold: first to protect the child from dangers along the way and second to discipline the child if he goes astray so he gets safely to his teacher. "Therefore the law has become our tutor [pedagogue] to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." (3:24-25) When we are sitting at the feet of our Teacher, Jesus Christ, the guardian (the law) is not needed. Yet how important is that guardian on our way to the feet of Christ!

Are you sitting at the feet of Christ, fully tuned to His plans and purposes for you, continuously led by His Holy Spirit, and never doing anything but what He shows you is His highest and best will for you at the moment? Then for you the law has passed away. Torah is no longer needed. It has been fully fulfilled in Christ, and "... you have no need for any one to teach you; but His anointing teaches you all things, and is true and not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." (1 Jn 2:27) You do not need this study; rather I need to come and learn from you, because I sure haven't 'made it' there yet.

However, for those of us who are not yet perfected, I believe that this study on the Feasts of Israel (which is a large part of Torah) can be a significant benefit in bringing us to the feet of Jesus, to learn from Him and to know Him, His laws, and His plans and purposes for His Creation and His chosen people Israel.

I am an Israelite by faith in the greatest Jewish Rabbi of them all, Yashua haMashiach Adonai, Jesus Christ the Lord. This study is a personal exploration into my 'Jewish roots'. I do not put any trust in keeping Torah to save me; rather, I put my trust in Rabbi Yashua to save me, to fill me with His Holy Spirit, and to teach me how to keep Torah in a way that is pleasing to Him, so that He can fulfill it in me. Perhaps no one else will ever read this book. That's all OK. Its benefit to me is worth all the time I spent writing it.

"The law [Torah] of YHWH is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of YHWH is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of YHWH are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of YHWH is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of YHWH is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of YHWH are true, and righteous altogether; sweeter also than honey, and the drippings of the honeycomb; moreover by them is Thy servant warned; and in keeping them there is great reward." (Ps 19:7-11)

Yes, the first of the solemn assemblies (Feasts) is the weekly Sabbath, the seventh day. (Lev 23:2-3) It is not one of the seven, and many lists of the Feasts of Israel skip it, but consider: it is listed as one of the Feasts in Leviticus 23. It is called a holy convocation, one of YHWH's appointed times. It points back to something in the past (the seventh day of creation) for the purpose of getting us to remember what God did. It also points forward into the future for the purpose of teaching us what God will do in the thousand year Millennial Rest. It is an earthly shadow picture of a great spiritual truth, the eternal spiritual Rest we find in salvation. God commanded us to celebrate it, and even to be joyful in it. It had its own special sacrificial ceremonies, pointing to Christ, the Lamb of God, and thus its Old Testament pattern is all fulfilled in Christ. All of that is quite similar to any of the seven Feasts of Israel.

However, there is a big difference, and it is the reason the Sabbath must be in this introductory section, separate from our discussion of the Feasts. The Feasts of Israel are a perfect seven because, beginning at Passover and ending at Tabernacles, *they tell the beautiful story of the redemption of mankind from sin*. It is a perfect story, complete, finished in the seven Feasts. The Sabbath is not part of that story; God gave it for a different purpose. The Sabbath was given before there was any sin, thus before there was any need for redemption.

Yet we still need to tell the story of the Sabbath, as we must understand it before we can understand the Feasts. Each of the Feasts starts and ends with a 'High Sabbath' regardless of when the regular Sabbath falls. From the beginning, Sabbath meant more than 'rest'. It also meant 'remember!' It is a memorial of God's completed works. We tend to have short memories, thus the Sabbath was weekly. Even if Adam and Eve had never sinned, God's people would still observe the Sabbath in memorial of His perfect works, completed from the creation of the world.

But especially in this age of sin, we need the 'rest and remember!' all the more. Now we must pause to remember not only God's perfect creation, but also His perfect redemption, which is why the Sabbath is integrated into each of the Feasts as well. If we neglect the Sabbath, just as if we neglect the Feasts, we are in danger of forgetting all the wonderful things God has done for us, and thus becoming self-focused, failing to be thankful or to give Him glory, and forgetting His precious promises.

We first must clear up a few misconceptions about the Sabbath. It is still what we call Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as it always has been. No scriptural justification exists for a Christian Sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week. The Sabbath is celebrated according to the way God reckons time: from evening to evening. (Lev 23:32) Thus it begins on our Friday evening at sundown, and ends on our Saturday evening at sundown.

Though God gave the Sabbath law at Sinai, keeping the Sabbath predates Sinai (Ex 16:23), as in fact God sanctified the Sabbath on the seventh day of creation. (Gen 2:3) There is no scriptural evidence that God exchanged the sanctity of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. The Catholic church tried that, and it was one of the things that led to the Dark Ages and the divorce of the church from her Savior. We'll get into that a bit later.

There is also no historical evidence and virtually no possibility that a day has been lost. Early men could still count to seven. If they had lost a day before Sinai, God would have corrected it when He gave the law. Since then there have been far too many Jews religiously keeping every Sabbath all over the world for anyone to have changed the day without them making a monumental fuss. Jesus, the apostles, and every first century Christian mentioned in Scripture always kept the Sabbath, though not always how the Pharisees wanted.

You can argue with me 'til the cows come home, but the fact remains that the seventh day Sabbath is at the heart of Torah. If you are bound by Jewish laws you really have no honest alternative but to rest from your labors from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown.

First century Jewish Christians had a tough time with this one. It was a part of their nature, a part of their blood. It was at the heart of Jewish law, in the center of the Ten Commandments. It was the focus of Jewish cultural life; the entire rest of the week revolved around it. Yet some, in their efforts to distance themselves from Old Testament Judaism, felt obliged to give up the Sabbath, too.

Gentile converts to Christianity were caught in the middle. The Judaizers tried to impose upon them Jewish culture, traditions, laws, and ceremonies. Paul wrote the book of Galatians to correct the doctrines of the Judaizers, especially their demand to circumcise Gentile converts according to the Law of Moses. (Gal 2:11-14 ff)

The apostle Peter chastened the Judaizers, saying: "... Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ... Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols [idolatry] and from fornication [sexual immorality], and from what is strangled and from blood [unhealthy eating habits]. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he [the Mosaic law] is read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (Acts 15:7-21) And the letter that the apostles sent to Antioch was even stronger, in that it applied the sanction of the Holy Spirit to Peter's three rules. (v29) However, they were not given as commands, but as recommendations: "... if you keep yourselves free from such things, you shall do well [and avoid causing an offense to others]."

Now, this is a very interesting passage, not only in what it says, but also in what it does not say. *Note that there is no requirement to keep the Jewish Sabbath*, nor any of the other civil, ceremonial, or moral laws of Moses, although there is the clear assumption that they are attending and learning from the regular Sabbath readings of Moses in synagogues in every city. They understood our freedom in Christ! The true Christian is not under bondage to the Sabbath, but he can still learn in and from it.

This, too, is my position. I am "... not under law, but under grace." (Rom 6:14) As long as we are walking by the Holy Spirit in the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, we are under no obligation to the laws of Moses. (Romans 8:2-4) That includes the Ten Commandments, at the heart of which is the law of the Sabbath. But we must learn from them, so we will get to know the Holy Spirit and learn to follow Him. For if we fail to follow the Holy Spirit, and follow our own fleshly lusts instead, we put ourselves right back under the law. (Gal 5:1-18)

This is why I must start this study on the Feasts of Israel with sections on Torah and on the Sabbath. *The Sabbath is the very best illustration in Torah of our present relationship to the law under the New Covenant.* The law has not been done away with. Oh no! It is still just as binding (and condemning) as ever! If you break it, you will find yourself being broken over it. That is its job: to bind and condemn lawbreakers. But every aspect of the law finds its perfect and complete fulfillment in Christ. So as we dwell in and walk in Christ, He keeps the law in and through us. Thus the Sabbath command to rest from our labors and remember His creative work is perfectly fulfilled when we submit to the Lordship of Christ, resting by setting aside our own labors, choices, and desires on His holy day, and allowing Him to accomplish His creative work through us.

"One man regards one day [such as the Sabbath, or a Feast day] above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord... But you, why do you judge your brother?" (Rom 14:5-10 ff)

I am "fully convinced in my own mind." The Jewish Sabbath is a picture of the millennial Sabbath Rest, which will be a thousand years of continuous Sabbath. *Therefore I tend to treat every day alike, every day a Sabbath to YHWH, every day a day to set aside my own pleasures and do the Father's will as I am led by the Holy Spirit.*

Whether He leads me to rest, work, play, worship, or whatever, on any day of the week, I just try to follow Him the best I can. But that is my personal conviction. I must not try to impose that on you. All I must do is encourage you to know Yashua, the Lord of the Sabbath. It is His day! "... He [Yashua] said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" (Lk 6:5) I feel that the easiest way to get to know Him is to be especially tuned to the still small voice of His Holy Spirit – on the day He sanctified at Creation.

However, regardless of my personal convictions, there still needs to be a day when we can agree to meet together for corporate worship. So which day is best? Does it even matter? I don't think so. I am happy to meet with others in the body of Christ whenever we choose to meet, even if it is the day the sun-worshippers co-opted for themselves. God honors the intent of our hearts to worship, and will gladly meet with us whenever we seek Him with our whole heart.

“Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or the Sabbaths, things which are a shadow [picture] of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Col 2:16-17) Do you love the Savior? Do you want to get to know Him? Then learn of Him from the shadow pictures pointing to Him, but don't allow anyone to judge you or try to put you under obligation or bondage to them!

The Sabbath is the first of the solemn assemblies listed in Leviticus 23, and it is also by far the most significant. The other Feasts are only discussed in 3 or 4 places in the Old Testament, and just mentioned in passing in the New. The Sabbath is discussed in dozens of major passages in both Old and New Testaments.

I'll start with the famous passage in Ezekiel 20. “I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, *by which, if a man observes them, he will live*. Also I gave them My Sabbaths [YHWH's, not the Jews' Sabbaths] to be a sign between Me and them, *that they might know that I am YHWH who sanctifies them*. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes. They rejected My ordinances, *by which, if a man observes them, he will live*; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned...” (v 11-26)

To what does Ezekiel refer when he says, “I gave them My Sabbaths?” The obvious answer is the fourth of the Ten Commandments, from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. But there are many other places, too, such as Exodus 31:12-18, where YHWH says to Moses: “You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, *that you may know that I am YHWH who sanctifies you*. Therefore you are to observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to YHWH; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, *to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant*. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever, for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.’ And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.”

“... put to death?” Pretty strong words! Aren't you glad we are no longer under the bondage of the Old Covenant? But what about this 'perpetual covenant' stuff? Was any of the Old Covenant intended to last forever? Look at the famous millennial passage at the end of Isaiah. “For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me, declares YHWH, so your offspring and your name will endure. And it shall be from new moon to new moon [the Feasts] and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me, says YHWH.” Yes, Scripture affirms that the Sabbath will endure until the end of time, just as it was sanctified at the beginning of time on the seventh day of creation.

Another beautiful passage is in Isaiah 56, which talks about the blessings of keeping the Sabbath, for Jew and Gentile alike. “Thus says YHWH, ‘Preserve justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed. How blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who takes hold of it; who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and keeps his hand from doing any evil. ... the foreigners [that's us!] who join themselves to YHWH, to minister to Him, and to love the name YHWH, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.’ The Lord YHWH, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, ‘Yet others I will gather to Him, to those already gathered.’” (Isa 56:1-8) This assures us that the Sabbath blessing is not just for Jews, but also for all praying peoples who keep the Sabbath holy.

A complete discussion of the Sabbath would require an entire book. I'll try to condense that to just one chapter on its origin, customs, purpose, and future.

God created the heavens and the earth in (I believe) six literal earth-days, and the seventh day He then declared a permanent 'holy-day'. (Gen 2:3; Ex 20:8-11) It was the world's birthday, set apart to be a continual reminder of God's work of creation, when it was still 'very good'. God's command was to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” In remembering the Sabbath, we also remember 'The Holy', the unfallen state of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the reason God created them, and the original blessing and commission He gave them.

God's first recorded words to Adam and Eve are, “Be fruitful. Multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen 1:28) This commission has never been fulfilled, and indeed cannot be fulfilled in our sinful state. God foresaw the fall of mankind and our need for sanctification in order to do His will.

“God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Gen 2:3) Now stop and think. Do you really think that the seventh day had something wicked about it that required it to be “sanctified?” Of course not. This was before sin had entered into the world. It was for mankind’s sake that He sanctified it. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27)

God sanctified the Sabbath because He knew mankind would fall into sin and need a connection back to ‘The Holy’. As we, week by week, remember that first Sabbath in all its perfection and glory, we also remember what we were created to be and do. Then when we remember our commission and see our absolute inability to fulfill it, we begin to long for ‘The Holy’ to be restored to us and in us. Thus we begin to “labor to enter into His Sabbath Rest.” (Heb 4:9-11 ff)

The millennial Kingdom will be a thousand years of Sabbath Rest. The earth has now had six thousand years of sin and its consequences (probably more, see endnote). They have been a bitter burden, and multiplied sorrows. As God sanctified the seventh day of creation, He also promised to sanctify the seventh millennium, so those who “remember His Sabbath day to keep it holy” shall see the fulfillment of all their longings. Just as God let us see the full consequences of our sin, so God will show us the full consequences of holiness— Rest, in a thousand years of peace under His perfect government, with the devil bound and the downward pull of sin broken. (Rev 20:1-6)

I hope and believe we are very near that millennial Rest. September 11, 1999 began the Hebrew year 5760, designated the ‘Year of Repentance’ by Jewish sages. Add to that the 70 years of the Babylonian exile (between the destruction of the first temple and the completion of the second) and the 165 ‘missing years’, and you have 6000 years now passed since Adam and Eve, at the very least.

Since from God’s eternity perspective a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day, (2 Pet 3:8; Ps 90:4), we have had roughly six days of hard labor, the fulfillment of the curse God gave Adam. (Gen 3:17-19) Now it is about time to celebrate that seventh day Sabbath, a day of rest from all our labors— the ‘seventh millennium’. *I now believe the ‘seventh millennium’ is actually overdue. In mercy, not willing that any should perish, God seems to have postponed it. (see endnote)* Also note that in this context, Adam did indeed die in the very day that He sinned and ate from the forbidden tree. (Gen 2:17) His total lifespan was 930 years, which was still the first (thousand year) day.

Even more important than the dawn of the Millennial Rest is Hosea’s prophecy: “... He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him.” (6:2) This is different from Jesus’ prophecy: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... He was speaking of the temple of His body.” (Jn 2:19, 21)

Jesus’ prophecy was fulfilled by His resurrection after exactly three days in the tomb. But Hosea’s prophecy says “after two days.” This is a much bigger, more significant prophecy. I believe it is being fulfilled before our very eyes! It is a veiled reference to the two days (two thousand years) during which Jerusalem was trampled underfoot of the Gentiles. In the third day (the Millennium), the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, will be (is being) raised up to live before Him – the spiritual fulfillment. Its physical fulfillment is the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, their recapture of the Holy City in 1967, and their becoming once again a powerful, blessed nation under YHWH their King. This process is not yet complete. The twelve tribes of Israel have not yet all gathered in the land of Israel, those who have gathered have not yet all accepted their Messiah, and they do not yet have all the land God promised them. But then, the two thousand years are not up yet, either, and won’t be until 2070. I’ll deal with this in a separate chapter. At any rate, it may prove a very exciting time as we enter this third millennium from Christ.

Some Jewish rabbis believe that we are right at the end of the age, the ‘70th week of Daniel’, that we will soon see the fulfillment of the final Feasts of Israel, and that over the next seven years all of the end-time Scriptures regarding Messiah’s return and establishment of His Kingdom from Jerusalem will be fulfilled. I do not believe in setting dates, yet it is surely better for us to be eagerly anticipating and prepared than skeptical and asleep. (1 Thess 5:1-11) “Seek first the [millennial] Kingdom and His righteousness [that is The Holy, the sanctified Sabbath] and all these other things will be added unto you.” (Matt 6:33)

Mankind has a long history of error and failure. God never fails. God never makes a mistake. God never starts something without following through and finishing it. “Remember this, and be assured; recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established! I will accomplish all My good pleasure!’ I call a bird of prey from the east, and the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it. Listen to Me, you stubborn-minded who are far from My righteousness! I bring near My righteousness; it is not far off, and My salvation will not delay. I will grant salvation in Zion, and My glory for Israel.” (Isa 46:8-13) God sanctified the seventh day for a purpose, and He will fulfill that purpose. You can bank on it.

In fact, It seems that God sanctified the number seven as well. He commanded the Israelites to keep the seventh month (Tishri – with the Fall Feasts) and the seventh year holy. (Ex 23:10-17) He also commanded the seven-times-seventh (49th) year to be a Sabbath year rest, to prepare for the year of Jubilee, the 50th year. (Lev 25:8)

As far as I can see from Scripture, this cycle of work six, rest on the seventh (day, month, year, or millennium), was never changed by God. Jesus and His apostles certainly kept the Sabbath (though not in the legalistic bondage of the Pharisees). There is no scriptural command either to stop keeping the Sabbath or to sanctify Sunday. On the contrary, the apostle Paul asked the church at Corinth, “On the first day of every week [Sunday] let each one of you [individually] put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.” (1 Cor 16:2) He wasn’t even talking about the day of rest. He knew he’d only be there a short time, and he didn’t want it wasted collecting money. So he told them how to deal with secular stuff. “Gather it after the Sabbath is over each work week, so it won’t intrude on our fellowship time when I come.”

The only time in Scripture when a Christian meeting occurred on Sunday is in Acts 20:7, when the apostle Paul had one long late meeting Saturday night which stretched on past midnight to Sunday morning. Here again, it was not because they were in the habit of meeting on Sunday; just the opposite. Paul had to catch his ship in Assos on Sunday. He had about 25 miles to walk! Sunday was not at all a day of rest in Paul’s mind. Their Sabbath fellowship extended until it was time for him to depart.

Every other mention of Sunday (the first day of the week) in the New Testament involves the day the disciples learned that Jesus had risen from the grave, such as when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:1-18) or to His disciples in the upper room. (Jn 20:19) They could not have learned it on the Sabbath evening, because they were “resting according to the commandment.” (Lk 23:56)

Claiming that we should worship on Sunday morning ‘in honor of the Resurrection’ creates some problems of its own. The old Roman Catholic tradition of Jesus dying on Good Friday evening and rising from the dead on Easter Sunday morning forces serious conflicts in Scripture. The worst of these is Jesus’ own words: “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the Prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matt 12:38-39)

There is no way to count “three days and three nights” between Friday at sundown to Sunday at dawn. Hebrews count their day beginning at sundown. So from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown is one full day. From then to dawn Sunday is one night. One full day plus one night cannot equal three days and three nights! Hebrews are not stupid. Yes, a Hebrew day can mean any part of the day, but a day and a night must be a full 24 hours. *The Catholics therefore have nullified the only sign that Jesus promised the Jews to validate His ministry.* If He was not in the earth for three full 24 hour days, then in His own words He was not the Jew’s Messiah and they should be looking for another.

Did the Catholics just misunderstand Hebrew culture, or was it deliberate anti-Semitism? Jesus was in the earth three full days and nights – from about 6 PM Wednesday through about 6 PM Saturday Roman time. We’ll tell that story in a following chapter. The only point I want to make here is that trying to sanctify Sunday morning in place of the Sabbath because of Jesus’ Resurrection, simply doesn’t wash. Jesus arose just as the evening ended the Sabbath.

The reference to “the Lord’s day” in Revelation 1:10 has no scriptural relationship to Sunday. It could refer to the Sabbath, as Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:8; Lk 6:5) and the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord. (Ex 20:10) But it probably does not, as John almost certainly would have then used the word ‘Sabbath’. It is much more likely that John was talking about “the day of the Lord” (referred to in Joel 1:15, Isa 13:6 & 9, and 1 Thess 5:1-5), since that is the subject of the entire book! In that context, his “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day” probably means, “I was taken up in the spirit to the future ‘day of the Lord’ and I’m about to tell you prophetically what I saw then.”

What about the unfortunate fact that some (but not all) first century Christians did change to the first day of the week for their worship gatherings? According to Justin Martyr (who first called the Christian church ‘catholic’, meaning universal), Sunday worship was common among Christians by about 155 AD. Clement, a Christian teacher in Alexandria, wrote that Sunday was called ‘the Lord’s day’ by 200 AD. No scriptural authority is given for this change, so we’ll have to dig a bit deeper into history.

For thousands of years pagans have worshiped the sun on ‘Sol Invictus’, the Roman ‘Day of the Invincible Sun’. Starting with Nimrod, ancient Sumerians, Chaldeans, Akkadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Medes and Persians, Hittites, Greeks, and Romans all worshiped the sun – on **Sun-day** of course. With all their many gods and goddesses, they also honored a different god for each day of the week, and often for each month of the year as well. (As do we, for every day and month name except the four months September through December, which are the Roman numerals seven through ten.)

But Hebrews tried to keep their language pure, as God had told them. “Do not mention the names of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth.” (Ex 23:13) The Sabbath is the only day with a name. Sunday is simply the ‘first [day] of the week’, and similarly with all the other days of the week. When ancient Hebrews talked about or wrote the names of false gods, they would deliberately pervert the idol’s name by combining it with another appropriate word. For example, Nimrod’s actual name was Enmar. The Hebrews refused to write it or speak it. They took his consonants NMR and combined them with the Hebrew ‘merad’ (meaning rebellion) to get Nimrod. Similarly, his wife Astarte (Ishtar) was combined with the Hebrew ‘bosheth’ (meaning shame) to make Ashtoreth.

I find no evidence of idol worship before Enmar. It all started with him and his lewd wife Ishtar. "... Nimrod... became a mighty one [potentate] on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before [in the face of, against] YHWH..." (Gen 10:8-9) He was a rebel from the true God. He claimed to be a god himself, a direct descendant from the supreme god Bel, god of the elements and of fire. He instituted the worship of the sun, moon, and planets: He was Mars, god of war. Ishtar was Venus, goddess of love and fertility. Their son Lugalbanda, (and later her infant son Damu or Dumuzi) became Saturn, the god of vegetation, hunters, shepherds, fishermen, and so on. I'll tell the full story later, but in essence, they worshiped the father Bel by paying homage to Ishtar and her infant. This was the origin of the traditional Madonna and Child cult. Many other Catholic symbols, including the halos over their heads and the thin sun-disk wafer they use for the Lord's supper, originated from this ancient pagan worship. For example, the symbol of the Christian cross (with variations, including the Egyptian ankh, the peace symbol, and the Nazi swastika) began as a T for Tammuz, with a halo (representing the sun disk) above his head. Hebrews combined Damu with 'taznuth' (a Hebrew word for fornication) to get Tammuz.

Originally the halo didn't mean 'holy' like it does today. It meant 'dedicated' or 'submitted' to the sun. Hebrews lift God's Law above their heads to show their submission to it. Sun worshipers did likewise with the sun disk, lifting it on a stick above them.

Our English word 'east', toward the sunrise, is derived from the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring Eostre (Ostara) which in turn came from the name of the Madonna, Ishtar. Her worship was always, "with your face to the rising sun." All the 'goddess of fertility' cults originated about 3300 BC when Ishtar and her husband Enmar claimed to be gods. Enmar was emperor of the land of Shinar (ancient Sumer). He built two infamous towers: E-Anna, a fabulous golden temple for Ishtar, and Bab-ilu (gate of god), intended to be a planetary observatory for his religion. The Hebrews combined Bab-ilu with 'balal' (to confound, confuse) resulting in Babel. (It is between Uruk and Eridu, not at Babylon, which came much later.)

The pagans did their best to pervert the Sabbath. They called it Dies Saturni (Saturn's day) in honor of Damu. After Nimrod died in his stricken tower, Damu became their chief god. Now the consort of Ishtar, she claimed he was her husband Nimrod returned to her from the gods. (Ishtar's scheming originated the reincarnation heresy.) Then a wild pig gored Damu while hunting. He died on February 14th (now Valentine's day). Ishtar was broken-hearted. She demanded 40 days of fasting and mourning for him (Lent) followed by the Feast of Ishtar (Easter) at sunrise to 'welcome him back on the rays of the sun into the spring greenery'. Of course at the feast they dined on wild pig, roasted over the fire. So Ishtar's vengeance became our traditional Easter Sunday pork roast.

Damu was worshiped as the 'Giver of Life' at the winter solstice, which became the Roman feast of Saturnalia. They decorated a tall evergreen tree with silver and gold, pointed to the sky to encourage Sol to return. They had a week of feasting and sexual orgy, slew an infant and drank its blood on Damu's birthday, December 25th, and then climaxed the event by proclaiming that Damu was the 'Pangenitor' who impregnated Earth with new life to end the winter. He ultimately became our Santa Claus.

These pagan festivals have largely taken the place of the Feasts of Israel in our modern calendar. The Scriptures briefly mention some of these pagan customs with which the Hebrews wrestled, such as in Jeremiah 10:3-4 (the Christmas tree), and Ezekiel 8:14 (Lent) and 16 (Easter). In fact, one indisputable error in the King James Version of the Bible (sorry for you KJV-only fans; only the original is inerrant) is the rendering of the word Pascha (Passover) as Easter! (Acts 12:4) All more-modern translations have fixed this error, including the King James II.

From Enmar on, every civilization has wrestled with the worship of these celestial idols. I'll talk more about why in a later chapter, but basically the visible gods in the heavens, especially the planets which at the time were in catastrophic orbits and did dramatically affect their lives, caused them to fear and worship celestial bodies more than the true God who is Spirit. I believe that Enmar and Ishtar were inspired by Satan himself, who had read God's story of redemption in the stars and who decided to make his own counterfeit first. The story of Damu and Ishtar is a remarkably close parallel to the story of Jesus and His mother Mary, up to the reputed salvation of the world wrought by Damu's 'resurrection' (reincarnation).

First generation Jewish Christians worshiped on the Sabbath, many of them in their synagogues right along with the Jews. They still kept the Feasts and followed the same traditions as they had since the time of Moses. The difference between them was that the Christians had accepted Jesus as the one to whom all those Feasts and traditions pointed. Note the numerous places in the book of Acts where the apostles taught on the Sabbath.

However, we do find significant changes in the first hundred years. Some Jews revolted against the Romans, which resulted in them getting treated even more harshly. The Romans didn't distinguish between rebellious Jews and the peaceful Christians; they just started persecuting everyone who kept the Sabbath. Not that they cared that they kept the Sabbath, but it became a convenient mark to identify the troublemakers in the empire.

So as early as 60 AD Christians had begun to distance themselves from the Jews, to avoid Roman persecution. The early Christian leaders didn't care about politics; they were having enough trouble sorting out the truths they had received and trying to defend the faith against various doctrinal deviations such as the Gnostics.

What upset the Romans was that neither Jew nor Christian would acknowledge Caesar as god. (In fact, they wouldn't acknowledge any of the pagan gods and wouldn't bow down to any of their idols. They were even accused of atheism!) So in major centers of Roman power Christians compromised with the pagan culture and began keeping Sunday instead of the Sabbath, just to keep a low profile to avoid Roman persecution. Especially in Rome, where most of the Christians had converted from pagan cultures and there wasn't a lot of Jewish cultural influence anyway, it was easy for them to change to Sunday-keeping. They didn't have centuries-old tradition of Sabbath-keeping, and all those pagan cultures from which they had been saved observed the day of the sun for worship.

In the mid 2nd century Justin Martyr wrote: "On the day called the day of the sun all who live in the [Roman] cities or in the [surrounding] country [suburbs] gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles [the New Testament] or the writings of the prophets [the Old Testament] are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts [us] to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray." (This is the earliest recorded Christian worship service outside of the Scriptures.)

But it wasn't just the Romans who were persecuting Christians. The Jews also hated them (as Jesus had warned them) and pagans began to hate them too. The more they withdrew, meeting in secret, the more they were hated. Rumors were even spread that they were cannibals (eating the flesh and blood of Christ) and that they had wild sex orgies (their 'love feasts' and their 'greeting with a holy kiss'). By compromising with paganism (meeting on the day of the sun) they had hoped to avoid persecution, but it did not help them. When in 64 AD a terrible fire destroyed much of Rome, the people, who all hated Nero (the Roman emperor at the time), blamed him for starting the flames. To deflect the blame he accused the Christians, taking advantage of the fact that so many hated them already. A terrible persecution of Christians thus began. The apostles Paul and Peter were most likely killed during this time.

Then in 66 AD the Jews in Jerusalem revolted, inviting the wrath of the Roman armies under Titus. He destroyed the Holy City and the temple in 70 AD. Every synagogue in Palestine was burned to the ground. Many in the Christian church in Jerusalem (who were still keeping the Sabbath and had been meeting in Jewish synagogues) remembered the warnings of Jesus to flee the city (after a reminder in a prophetic vision) and thus escaped the carnage. But the Jewish leaders considered their escape an act of treason and (years later when they were able to re-establish their synagogue worship) they decided to bar all Christians from their fellowship. Now Christians were scattered and hated by pretty much everyone. Any Jew who wished to be a Christian was rejected by his own people. The split was complete. We still suffer for it today.

So by 110-120 AD many of the church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Ignatius (the Bishop of Antioch), and even faithful Barnabas had vigorously turned against the Jews and all their Feasts and traditions. They had the truth and the Jews did not; therefore they felt justified in despising anything Jewish. I'm sorry, but I think they had a bad attitude here. If they had followed Christ's command to "love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you" (Lk 6:27) they would have been fine. But in despising those who hated them, and in their pride of thinking they could accept or reject or change the commands of Jesus (see Matt 23:3) as they chose, *they lost something really precious: the Feasts of Israel, including the Sabbath.*

Bear in mind, the canon of the Scriptures had not yet been solidified. The memoirs of the apostles (the Gospels) and the letters of Paul, Peter, John, Apollos, Barnabas, James, and others were widely read, but had not yet been canonized as Scripture. 'Canon' means 'measuring rod' – the standard by which everything else is judged. The first century church did not have a canon of Scripture and did not even know they needed one.

Then along came the Gnostic teacher Cerdo and his disciple Marcion. They taught that the god of the Old Testament was full of wrath and cared only for the Jews, while the Christians had a different god, full of love and grace for all. So the Old Testament as well as the parts of the New that seemed to favor Jews were rejected, leaving only portions of Luke and the ten letters of Paul. Paul was elevated to sit at the right hand of Christ, to be worshiped as the supreme head of the church. Marcion considered Paul to be the enemy of the law and the spokesman for the church. Marcion played on the widespread hatred of the Jews and their laws and traditions, and his 'freedom in Christ' became very popular.

Well, this is utter heresy! The church had to deal with it. As much as they hated the Jews at the time, they could not totally throw out "the law, the prophets, and the sacred writings" which Jesus Himself had accepted and used throughout His ministry. They knew the old was the foundation of the new! So they made a tragic compromise, under which we are still living today. They (rightly) upheld the Old Testament to be inspired Scripture (some outside of Judea even included the Apocrypha), but they allegorized it all: everything referring to the Jews or their traditions, which before had simply been accepted at face value, now was given a second 'higher' and 'more spiritual' meaning, referring to the church. *Thus early Christians adhered to the principles found in Scripture, but felt free to change the clear words of Scripture to suit their developing theologies.* Many sophisticated scholars came forward to advance this 'Replacement Theology'. One of the greatest of these scholars was Origen of Alexandria, who spoke of deeper levels of Scripture and said that only those gifted with the grace of the Holy Spirit in the word of wisdom and knowledge could find these hidden meanings.

Sadly, the compromises continued. Christianity had been a religion of the Spirit, ever since Jesus had sent the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, to guide His followers as He had promised. (Jn 16:13-15) Then along came Montanus around 156-172 AD. He preached a higher standard for the church, greater discipline, and further separation from the world, which the church at that time desperately needed due to compromises with paganism. But Montanus took the high call of following the Holy Spirit to excess. He and his two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, prophesied in a state of ecstasy, as if their words were the directly inspired word of God. They were God-given instruments of new revelation, lyres across which the Holy Spirit swept to play a new song. They insisted that any opposition to the new prophecy was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. They suggested that not only was the Old Testament period past, but even the Christian period centering in Christ Jesus had now ended; that Christ was no longer central to the faith, and the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ was obsolete. Now, true salvation could only be found by following the Holy Spirit wherever He leads, which was, of course, ahem... only through them.

This was another obvious heresy which the church leaders had to confront. Again, their solution was a tragic compromise under which we are still living today. It started innocently enough. The church elevated the major original apostolic writings as uniquely authoritative, and said that all other works of faith and action must be judged against their standard. *This in itself is absolutely correct and necessary.* God does not make mistakes. Scripture itself says that the household of God is based upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ the cornerstone. (Eph 2:20) Just as the New Testament writings were based squarely upon the solid foundation of the Old Testament, so anything that has come since then can be accepted only if it stands foursquare on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments.

But do you see the compromise? The church leaders chose the memoirs and letters they deemed authoritative (apostolic), then **closed the canon!** Not only Montanus and his two prophetesses were wrong, but now everyone who speaks or writes by the Spirit of God is wrong. As Tertullian bitterly commented, *“The Holy Spirit was chased into a book!”*

This had tragic and far reaching consequences, under which the church has struggled ever since. Whereas before, the Holy Spirit was free to speak to each individual according to the grace given and to lead him into all truth, now all truth was bound up in the closed volume of the canon. It now was called the Biblos (singular) rather than the Biblia (plural). Thus the function of the Holy Spirit was reduced to no more than interpreting and applying the Bible. The God who has always sought to fellowship and communicate with His people was silenced. Now, truth-seekers must go to Bible scholars to hear from God.

Many Christians (especially Bible scholars) will not agree with me here when I claim that *this was the greatest tragedy ever to befall the church.* They see the benefits of having a closed canon (on which, by the way, there were considerable disagreements until the councils in North Africa at Hippo in 393 AD and at Carthage in 397 AD). After all, the closed canon gives a solid basis for defending against heresy, and provides a stable foundation for the church to grow. It keeps the theme of redemption central and balanced, preventing extremists from going too far astray. Besides, if they gave the Holy Spirit full control of His church, who knows where He might lead? (God only knows.) I agree with all that. I have seen the excesses of the Pentecostal movement, who preached a return to the Holy-Spirit-led congregations of the first century church.

Besides, don't we have Scripture itself saying that the canon is closed? Doesn't the final chapter of Revelation say that if anyone adds anything to the canon, God will add to him all the plagues written in it?

Actually no, it doesn't. Read it again. “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book [the book of Revelation]; if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book.” (Rev 22:18) Similarly, “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of YHWH your God...” (Deut 4:2) and “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you and you be proved a liar.” (Prov 30:5)

No, you don't add to the word of God through Moses, or Solomon, or the apostle John. But if that meant that God stopped speaking when Moses died, then Solomon could not have written inspired Scripture, and if He had stopped speaking after Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs, then we would not even have the New Testament. God hasn't changed. He still speaks. We just need to learn how to hear Him. The Law of Moses, the Old Testament prophets, and the apostles are foundational, for the Holy Spirit will never contradict His own Word through them. You can't add or take away from His inspired, written Word. But He can (and wants to) still speak directly to and through you.

Unfortunately, so can Satan and his demons. That is why we need the foundation of the written Word – so we will learn to know the voice of the good Shepherd by His total consistency with the Word He has already spoken.

So here is what actually happened near the end of the 2nd century AD. Bible scholars and teachers took over for God. With the closing of the canon, the Holy Spirit was silenced. Church leaders held final authority over what God was saying and doing. The split between clergy and laity had begun, with all its devastating consequences. This, and this alone, led to the tragedy of the divorce of the Bride from Her Savior, separated by professional pastors, priests, bishops, cardinals, and finally, the pope.

Suddenly church leaders held a power they had never had before: the exclusive power to interpret the Word of God for the 'laity' (as common people came to be known). People could not be trusted to interpret the Word for themselves, since the Holy Spirit was now banned from inspiring individual believers. During the second century AD bishops were established over each city, who ruled over the pastor and the 'presbyters' (elders) within local churches. And by the beginning of the 3rd century AD the hierarchical pattern was established. The foundations for the papacy were complete. These powerful church leaders were originally hailed as a benefit and protection for the church, but such great power inevitably corrupts. Under Constantine, these very leaders made compromises that threw the church into the Dark Ages for 1260 years.

The Roman Empire officially adopted Mithraism (sun worship) during Aurelian's reign (270-275 AD). Emperor Diocletian (285-305 AD) killed a lot of Christians, burned a lot of Scriptures, and dedicated a temple to Mithra at Carnuntum in 307 AD. In 312 AD Constantine claimed conversion to Christianity, and 'stopped the persecution', instead heaping political favor and public benefits upon Christians. So did the sun worship stop? Actually, no. Constantine held the title Pontifex Maximus as the pagan high priest, continued to conspire against and murder his rivals (and his family – not exactly a Christian trait), and continued all the elements of sun worship as before. His coins bore the inscription 'Sol Invicto Comiti' (Committed to the Invincible Sun). When in 321 AD he officially set aside a day of rest for his empire, he prohibited Sabbath keeping (and all the other Jewish Feasts) and established Sun-day worship, not even as the 'Lord's day', but under its pagan name Dies Solis, the 'Day of the Sun'. His edict read, "On the venerable Day of the Sun, let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all the workshops be closed." Well after he made his Sunday proclamation, he set up a bronze statue of himself on top of a tall column as the sun god, Apollo, in Constantinople (old Byzantium, now Istanbul). Its remains still stand, but it is now known as the 'burnt column', for 'Apollo' was struck by lightning from YHWH and destroyed from the top of the column.

I know I am treading controversial ground here. Many have written enthusiastically of how much Constantine helped the Christian cause. Church historian Eusebius, a contemporary of Constantine, represented the new emperor as the ideal Christian ruler, and proclaimed the start of a new age of unimpeded worldwide salvation opportunities. Now that the church could preach publicly and could meet and grow unmolested, surely the divinely inspired moment had arrived for the total infusion of Christianity into all areas of life. And all this came right at the very hour when the Roman Empire provided the world with political, economic, and cultural unity. Now under Constantine, the final conversion of the world seemed to be imminent. So, how's that workin' out?

I doubt that he ever actually converted to Christianity. Historians claim that Constantine had a dream as he was approaching Rome to try to dislodge his rival Maxentius (who had a superior army). In it he was shown the 'sign of the cross' and instructed, "In this sign you will conquer." He made a laburnum (military standard) emblazoned with the sign of the cross. He carried it in front of all his battles, and was indeed successful in making himself the head of the Roman Empire. But whenever people tell this story, they usually leave out a few things. First, the cross was not yet a symbol of the Christian church. Before Constantine the symbol used to identify Christians was the fish symbol, since the Greek word for fish was also an acrostic of the first letters of the Greek names for Jesus Christ. Using a cross to symbolize Christianity started with Constantine. He invented it, perhaps from his dream.

But his laburnum was not the simple Christian cross we know. It was actually a combination of two symbols from the Mithraic cult. First, the ancient 'T' with the halo (sun disk) over the top, from Tammuz. Then inside the halo were the Greek letters Chi (looks like an X) and Rho (looks like a P), supposedly the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ. Again, this was not a Christian symbol. But it looks remarkably like the ancient Mithraic 'sword and crown' symbol.

What's more, Constantine was not actually the one who halted the persecution of Christians, as is commonly believed. His predecessor, Galerius, upon his deathbed, realized that all his efforts to stamp out Christianity had failed. So in 311 AD, he reluctantly signed the edict that officially ended the persecution. When Constantine took over Rome the next year, he already knew from Galerius that the Roman persecution of Christians was ineffective and counterproductive, so he merely tried a different tack to control them – a tack which proved quite successful.

What Constantine did when he gained power turned out to be far more dangerous than merely persecuting Christians. He merged Christianity and paganism! At first he put Christians on an equal footing with pagan idolaters (in the Edict of Milan in 312). Later, he openly encouraged Christianity, ultimately establishing Christianity as the official state religion, of course with himself as its head and his own edicts in place of Scripture. Constantine therefore paved the way for the Roman Catholic papacy.

Thanks to Constantine's compromises, the Catholic church quickly grew prosperous and powerful. Being now a 'friend of the world' it was no longer persecuted by the world. It was now very easy to be a sun worshiper and a Christian. All Jewish feasts (including the Sabbath) were outlawed and soon forgotten, replaced by pagan festivals. The Catholic church celebrated Sunday morning Mass, Christmas (the Christianized Child-Mass), Lent, Easter, and Halloween pretty much the same as the pagans had celebrated them for thousands of years.



Constantine's laburnum



Mithra's sword & crown

Instead of Venus, Mars, Saturn, Apollo, and Zeus, they now made graven images to the saints, angels, and the holy family. But they still bowed to them, kissed them, burned incense, offered flowers, lit candles, and prayed to them as sun worshipers had done ever since Nimrod. Beyond the requirement to attend Mass and give offerings, little was required of the people by way of rest or holiness on Sunday, so it became primarily devoted to personal pleasure.

And the Christian leaders who now held power over the people to interpret Scripture? It was very easy for them to reinterpret God's Word to line up with Constantine's compromises. They went along with the program, gladly receiving political power as well as religious power by enthusiastically supporting Constantine. Eusebius (270-338 AD), a noted bishop of the Catholic church and a reputed father of church history, declared, "All things whatsoever it was our duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day." And in AD 364 the Council of Laodicea officially settled the Sabbath question for the Catholic church: "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [the Sabbath], but shall work on that day... if, however, they are found Judaizing [keeping any of the Jewish festivals], they shall be shut out from Christ."

Many Christians continued to rest on the Sabbath, as these two famous fifth-century church historians noted: Socrates wrote, "Almost all the churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient [heathen] tradition, refuse to do this." Sozomen wrote: "The people of Constantinople, and of several other cities, assemble together on the Sabbath as well as on the next day [Sunday]; which custom is never observed at Rome." Coptic Pope Athanasius of Alexandria wrote about 340 AD, "We assemble on Saturday, not that we are infected with Judaism, but only to worship Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath." As late as 590 AD, Pope Gregory, in a letter to Rome, denounced as prophets of the anti-christ those who still maintained that work ought not to be done on the seventh day Sabbath.

Thus as the Catholic church grew more powerful, spreading its tentacles throughout the civilized world, Sabbath-keeping was forcefully eradicated and officially replaced with the Sunday morning Mass. The Roman Catholic Doctrinal Catechism clearly states: "Question – Have you any other way of proving that the church has power to institute festivals of precept? Answer – Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her – she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday, the seventh day, a change for which there is no scriptural authority."

Now freed from persecution, the Catholic church quickly became the persecutor. History records a violent attempt to eradicate all vestiges of Judaism.



Ancient depiction of the Sun-God Tammuz, carrying his cross.

If you look carefully you will see the cross is a 'T' for Tammuz, with a sun disk over the top, like the Egyptian Ankh.



Traditional Mithraic celestial cross. This is a sun disk with an 'X' over it. Mithra is standing on the sun.

Do you think I'm exaggerating? This was a period when the Holy Scriptures were banned from the common people, only priests were allowed to read the Bible (and then only in Latin, which was foreign to the 'laity'), and anyone who dared question the church's edicts or refused to attend Sunday Mass was labeled a heretic. Heretics were hunted down, imprisoned, and tortured until they recanted, or if they would not recant, they were torn apart, cut in pieces, boiled in oil, or burned alive. The number of people tortured and killed during this Inquisition makes Hitler's holocaust seem like a Sunday school picnic. We are appalled that the Nazis could be so heartless in their methodical genocide of 6 million Jews. But the Catholic Inquisition is known to have brutally tortured to death over 68 million 'heretics' and the actual numbers are far greater, since much of their work was done in secret. The aggregate amount of human suffering under Catholics worldwide probably exceeds by a hundredfold that caused by the Nazis. So where is the outrage?

The primary focus of the Inquisition of the Dark Ages was against all who would not accept the Catholic church's supposed right to change the very Law of God according to the dogma of the pope, who claimed to be infallible in his edicts of the Catholic faith. Both Jews and true Christians are in this category! 'Heretics' were forced to sign an oath to spare their lives. It was a vigorous repudiation of everything Jewish. It called down lifelong curses and eternal damnation for observing Jewish laws. You still think I'm kidding? Here is one form:

"I do here and now renounce every rite and observance of the Jewish religion, detesting all of its most solemn ceremonies. In the future, I will practice no rite or celebration connected with it, promising neither to seek it out, nor perform it. I promise that I will never return to the vomit of Jewish superstition. Never again will I fulfill any of the offices of Jewish ceremonies to which I was addicted, nor ever more hold them dear. I will shun all intercourse with other Jews and have the circle of my friends only among the Christians. We will not associate with the accursed Jews who remain unbaptized. We will not practice carnal circumcision or celebrate the Passover, the Sabbath, or the other feast days connected with the Jewish religion. I renounce the whole worship of the Hebrews, and I absolutely renounce every custom and institution of Jewish laws. In one word, I renounce absolutely everything Jewish. If I wander from the straight path in any way, and defile the holy faith and try to observe any rites of the Jewish sect, or if I shall delude you in any way in the swearing of this oath, then may all the curses of the law fall upon me. May there fall upon me, and upon my house, and all my children, all the plagues which smote Egypt. To the horror of others may I suffer in addition the fate of Dathan and Abiram, so that the earth shall swallow me alive. And after I am deprived of this life, I shall be handed over to the eternal fire in the company of the devil and his angels, sharing with the dwellers in Sodom and with Judas,

the punishment of burning. And when I arrive before the tribunal of the fearful and glorious Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, may I be numbered in that company to whom the glorious and terrible Judge, with threatening mien, will say, 'Depart from Me, evildoers, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

There was one more thing that Constantine did that set the stage for the papacy. In 330 AD he moved his imperial emperor's residence from Rome to what he termed 'New Rome', which had been called Byzantium on the Bosphorus in the northwest corner of Turkey. He renamed it Constantinople, and ruled the entire Roman empire from there. At the time, the Christian leaders in Rome were his loyal subjects, so in his absence, Constantine (and his successors) gave the Bishop of Rome a lot of political power, eventually even above his Italian emperor.

At first the Bishop of Constantinople was considered equal with the Bishop of Rome, but in 382 AD, Damasus, Bishop of Rome, declared, "The holy Roman church takes precedence over the other churches, not on the ground of any synodal decisions, but because it was given the primacy by the words of our Lord and Redeemer in the gospel, when He said, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.'" This was the first mention of the primacy of the Roman church. Partly due to his claim for scriptural authority, and partly because the Roman Empire in the west was too weak to oppose him, the Roman Bishop literally took over the western half of the Roman Empire.

This was solidified by the next Bishop of Rome, Leo, who by great courage, intrigue, and negotiating skill, saved the Roman Empire from the attacks of the Vandals under Gaiseric of Scandania and the Barbarians under Attila the Hun. Emperor Maximus, who was rather weak anyway, was killed fleeing from Gaiseric, and his entire army was disorganized and mutinous, further solidifying Leo's power. When that was all over in 455 AD, Bishop Leo arrogantly proclaimed himself the 'Pontifex Maximus'. The papacy had begun, and with it came the split between what became known as the Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Orthodox church in Constantinople.

Many modern Christians think of the antichrist as a future world ruler who will fight against Christ. I have two problems with that. First, 'anti' in this case does not mean simply against or opposed to, as it has come to mean in our culture. It also means **in the place of or instead of**. For example, antitype does not mean 'against the type'. It means 'in place of or in fulfillment of the type'. Second, Scripture affirms that, "... even now many antichrists have arisen..." (1 Jn 2:18) implying that the term antichrist may refer to a religious movement or a whole succession of people. *I believe it refers to the Roman Catholic church, which has already come and which stands in place of Christ.* Let me explain.

First, a disclaimer. God has many of His own precious saints in the Catholic church. Many good things have come from them, and many godly people have been born and died within the Catholic fold. I myself have worshiped in Catholic services, and have met the Lord and felt the moving of His Holy Spirit there, leading and drawing His people to Himself. *I do not condemn all Roman Catholics.* Only God knows their hearts.

However, I must report what actually happened. The Catholic papacy fulfilled every single one of the scriptural characteristics of the antichrist. The pope proclaimed himself the Vicar of Christ. Inscribed in his miter is the title *Vicarious Filii Dei*, meaning in place of the Son of God. This title has a Roman numeral value of 666. Over the centuries Catholics have worshiped the pope as Christ on earth, Christ in the flesh, Jesus Christ hidden under a veil of flesh, God on earth, and other such acclamations. When a priest says the Mass, which supposedly changes the bread and wine to the actual body and blood of Christ, he is said to be the creator of his Creator; thus speaking great blasphemies. His power was given to him by the Roman emperor, the fourth beast of Daniel 7:7 and the dragon who persecuted the woman in Revelation 12. He is the little horn of Daniel 7; if you read the chapter you will see that the papacy fulfills every single characteristic of the antichrist. He was a “little horn” who became “larger than his associates.” He speaks great boasts. He arose in power after most of Europe had been overrun by 10 barbarian tribes, and by 538 AD he had subdued three tribes who had opposed him (Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Heruli) and had pretty much gained control over all of Europe. He was a “different kind of world power” (v 24); other rulers were religious, but none since Ishtar were primarily religious. He waged war against the saints (those of true faith) and overcame them for 1260 years – from 538 to 1798 AD.

In 1798 Napoleon’s General Berthier deposed the pope (Pious VI) and took him prisoner to Paris, where he died. By 1809 Napoleon had annexed the papal states, thus inflicting the “mortal wound” of Revelation 13:3. After continued struggles, the papal states came to a complete end in 1870. The pope wound up with no sovereign power except in the Vatican. *Yet look at his power today!*

“And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, *and he will intend to make alterations in times and law*, and they [the saints] will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” (3 ½ 360 day years of years = 1260 years) What alterations did the papacy make in times and law? A better question is, what did he not change? The Law of God is immutable and cannot be broken or changed, but popes over the years have sure tried. They not only did away with all of YHWH’s Feasts, His Sabbaths, His calendar, and His methods of reckoning time (substituting Roman and pagan feasts and timekeeping), but also they have tried to change the very Law of God as summarized in the Ten Commandments.

Every one of the Ten Commandments has been altered by the Catholic church. Actual abuses by the Catholic church would fill volumes, but let me give you a brief summary.

You shall have no other gods before Me,” except, of course, the pope, who now stands in the place of God for you. “You shall not make for yourself a graven image... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them...” except of course, for the images of the saints and the relics of the early church, to which you must bow, pray, and venerate. “You shall not take the name of YHWH your God in vain,” except when the ‘holy father’ uses God’s name to justify his corruption and abuses of power. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” except that is now the venerable Day of the Sun. “Honor your father and your mother,” except your own parents are not holy enough to honor; instead you must honor the holy mother (Mary) and holy father (your ‘celibate’ priest, bishop, or pope). “You shall not murder,” unless you are torturing and killing a ‘heretic’. “You shall not commit adultery,” except for centuries the clergy swept under the rug all the immoral and even homosexual abuses by ‘celibate’ priests against confessors, children, and nuns. “You shall not steal.” The Catholic church’s vast wealth did not all come from voluntary contributions, I can assure you; there was some degree of coercion and fear manipulation there, including various religious taxes (pay or be excommunicated), political power for a fee, indulgences, and other money grabbing schemes. “You shall not bear false witness,” unless you are condemning a ‘heretic’ or covering the church’s own sins. “You shall not covet.” Well, when you are a powerful pope or a bishop or cardinal, you don’t call it coveting, you simply call it yours by divine right and take it.

But the worst thing the Catholic church did was to keep the Word of God from the common people. They read from the Latin Vulgate and held Mass in Latin, which most people did not understand. They prohibited the common people from reading the Bible for themselves, knowing that if they did, the Truth would set them free from the tyranny of the church. That alone should tell you what their goal was: not leading the people to God, but keeping them from God. Until the publishing of the Wycliffe Bible (1380-82) and the Reformation, the people were kept in ignorance. The Catholic church, of course, condemned Wycliffe’s Bible (they even dug him up and burned his bones out of spite), and in 1414 they published an edict that all who read the Bible in their mother tongue should forfeit land, cattle, life, and worldly goods forever.

Some of the vile blasphemies and boasts of the pope have now been corrected, but many have not. Here are a few examples. The pope still claims the right to be the intermediate between God and men, though Scripture insists, “There is one... mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim 2:5) He still claims that salvation is by faith plus observance of Roman Catholic edicts, rather than only by faith. (Rom 3:19 - 4:5; 5:1; 10:9)

He still insists that only trained clergy can interpret God's Word, though the Holy Spirit was given us for this very purpose. (Jn 14:26) He still claims infallibility in matters of faith and morals, while Jesus said, "No one is good [infallible] except God alone." (Mk 10:18) He still claims for himself and his clergy the right to be called 'holy father', a right Jesus gave to God alone. (Matt 23:9) He still claims that mother Mary was sinless, always a virgin, and should be prayed to, while Scripture affirms that "All have sinned..." (Rom 3:23), that Jesus had brothers and sisters (Jn 2:12), and that we should pray directly to God the Father (Matt 7:9) in Jesus name. (Jn 14:13) But cheer up. At least he lets us read the Bible, and he no longer sells indulgences (pardons from the guilt of a willful sin).

Martin Luther called out the pope as the antichrist, and identified the Roman Catholic church with the whore of Babylon. (Rev 17 & 18) The church's response to Luther's Reformation created some new problems. To combat him, church leaders developed a futurist interpretation of the book of Revelation in 1560 AD, which paved the way for the pre-tribulation rapture heresy. Futurism was brought into the Protestant churches in 1826, and the secret pre-tribulation rapture in 1831. The Reformation did correct some errors and abuses of the Roman Catholic church, but didn't even address the vast majority, including Sunday worship, their anti-Semitic replacement theology, and their futurist interpretations of Scripture (which tend to put all God's promises into the past or the future, leaving nothing for the saints in the present). I estimate that about two-thirds of Roman Catholicism's deliberately twisted doctrines have been retained (never abandoned) by us 'Protestants'. *How sad.*

However, don't worry. God never loses control. He is even now restoring all that was lost. I believe our sovereign God allowed Sunday worship for several reasons. First, it illustrates our freedom in Christ from the Old Covenant, the law. Second, it encourages us to seek the principles behind God's laws rather than blindly keeping the letter of the law. Third, it makes us more dependent on the leading of the Holy Spirit, since no scriptural direction is given regarding Sunday worship. And fourth, it sets us free from religious obligations (which can be burdensome) on the Sabbath, leaving us free to 'seek His face' on His holy day.

The purpose of the Sabbath, and in fact the essential meaning of the word, is rest. However, before you stop listening and fall asleep, it is not talking about that kind of rest. "If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, Holy of YHWH, honorable, and shall honor it, *desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and from speaking your own word*, then you shall take delight in YHWH, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of YHWH has spoken it." (Isaiah 58:13 & 14)

This is certainly not a lazy rest of indolence or pursuit of selfish pleasures! Just the opposite. This is the rest of putting aside our own plans and labors and learning to follow the Holy Spirit to simply do the will of the Father, as Jesus did during His entire earthly ministry. (Jn 5:19 ff)

So what did Jesus do on the Sabbath? Let's look at a few Scriptures: "... as was His custom, He [Jesus] entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read..." (Lk 4:16) "They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach." (Mk 1:21) "He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there with a withered hand. And they were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Rise, and come forward.' And He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm, to save a life, or to kill?' But they kept silent. And after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored, sound as the other." (Mk 3:1-5)

What did the first century disciples do on the Sabbath? "... and on the Sabbath day they rested according to the commandment." (Lk 23:56) "According to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures." (Acts 17:2) "He was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." (Acts 18:4)

No, there was no lazy indolence or pursuit of selfish pleasures there. They did keep the Sabbath, but not as the letter of the law. Rather they understood and kept the spirit of the Sabbath, which I will try to define for you.

Bear in mind, this is just a human definition of a deep spiritual principle. It is hard for the human mind to grasp it, being spiritually discerned. Even some Seventh Day Adventists, who have majored on understanding and keeping the Sabbath, have missed this principle, and in consequence have turned their Sabbath-keeping back into a legalistic bondage reminiscent of first century Pharisees. (I'm not condemning all Adventists; many understand it and are true and faithful worshipers.) But if you grasp this principle, you can keep the Sabbath on any day you wish. In fact, you may learn to keep the Sabbath on every day of the week, in preparation for the millennial Sabbath Rest – a thousand years of continuous Sabbath!

To understand this principle, you have to step back and look at things from God's point of view. What does He want out of all this? Why did He create us, anyway? Is He just after a bunch of religious fanatics to bow and scrape and pamper His ego with an eternity of slavish worship? No, no, no! I am sorry. It hurts me to even suggest that. It is so far beneath our loving Lord. If he had just wanted slaves to worship Him, He would not have created us in His own image or given us a free will.

What God really wants, and I am going to be bold here, is to reproduce Himself in a many-membered body out of whom He will form a Bride for His Son. He is a Father, and He wants sons who have been transformed into the nature and character of Christ. What is His nature and character? First, God is 'The Holy'. He wants us to be holy even as He is holy. You cannot seek His Kingdom of righteousness without also first seeking His righteousness. (Matt 6:33) Second, He is Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control, and He is at work reproducing His nature in each of us.

There can't be much fellowship between a person and a worm. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they achieved worm status before God, and broke the bond of fellowship that He desired. But God was not content to leave it so. Remember, He does not fail in all His plans and purposes! He had already prepared a way, from the foundation of the world, to restore us to fellowship with Him. It is basically a two step process. The first step, every Christian knows well: salvation by faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and identification with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection as pictured in water baptism by immersion. Paul calls this being "justified." (Rom 8:30) Justification restores the *possibility* of fellowship, but it does not instantly put us on intimate terms with God.

Enter the Sabbath (trumpets, cymbal crash, high flute trills)! Part of the curse of sin was the need to earn our living by the sweat of our brow, but on the seventh day the command was to rest from our labors and to remember 'The Holy', the sanctified Sabbath, the original state of fellowship between God and man in the Garden of Eden. God's original purpose in creating us was not to save us from sin. That was just a detour, allowed by God to mature us so that we would learn to love righteousness and hate evil like He does. Once we are past the detour and back on the main highway, (hundreds of sweet violins, supported by some mellow cellos and a deep string bass) we still have the wedding to prepare for!

How does a young starry-eyed bride prepare for her wedding? It's not just the kissin' 'n huggin' and it's not just the wedding plans, trust me. She spends every possible waking moment with her beloved, talking, encouraging, getting to really know him, learning his likes and dislikes, and finding out how to please him. Her love grows hands and feet, as she learns to express it in sensitive, practical ways of caring and service.

That is the spirit of the Sabbath. It is a brief vacation from our own personal pursuits, plans, and purposes to reestablish connection with The Holy, and discover His plans and purposes for us – learning how to please Him!

God is love. He earnestly desires a Bride for Christ, upon whom He can lavish His love. But a true love relationship goes both ways! How can we learn to love Him if we never spend time with Him?

This then is the Sabbath, as clearly as I can express it: *one sanctified day in seven which God, from the creation of the world, especially designed to retune our hearts back to The Holy, so that we could learn, week by week, how to set aside our own labors and desires and live by the leading of the Holy Spirit in intimate fellowship with Himself.*

God dwells in a high and holy place, and in the hearts of those who walk humbly and contritely before Him. He is The Holy, yes, but He is also love. He earnestly desires a holy people who will love Him enough to want to dwell with Him, not just one day in seven, but all throughout the ages of 'forever'. Yes, the Sabbath is just a training period, necessary during this age of sin to pull us away from the bondage of having to make a living. His goal is (at least) a thousand years of Sabbath Rest, during which we will reign with Christ as priests of God. (Rev 20:6) And after that, we have the ages to come, in which He will display throughout the universe the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:7)

Paul calls this being "glorified." (Rom 8:30) It is the final step in God's restoration of the bond of fellowship between us and Himself, as Adam and Eve were before the Fall. (v 21, 30) It is also called 'sanctified' or 'perfected' in several places such as: "It was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for this reason He is not ashamed to call them His brethren... For by one offering *He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified...* But you have come to... the festal gathering and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous [justified] men made perfect [sanctified, glorified]." (Heb 2:10-11; 10:14; 12:22-23)

Yes, being glorified is tightly tied to the Sabbath Rest. It may sound arrogant, but this is actually God's plan for us. Look at these passages from Romans, and watch for the glory. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death... All who are living by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God... The [Holy] Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with Him *in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing [manifestation] of the sons of God.* For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Rom 8:1-21)

“We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; *and whom He justified, these He also glorified...* (Rom 8:28-30)

“What if God, to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy which He prepared for His glory, even us, whom He also called out not from among the Jews only, but also from among Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea, ‘I will call those who were not My people, My people, and her who was not beloved, beloved. And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, you are not My people, there *they shall be called sons of the Living God.*’” (Rom 9:22-26)

Now you begin to get the idea what it means to “enter into His Rest.” (Heb 4:1-11) Just as the Son of God did many mighty miracles during His time in the flesh, so the sons of God are becoming like Him, preparing to join Him and do even “greater works than these.” (Jn 14:12)

Jesus put it like this: “I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one... *Sanctify them in the Truth; Thy Word is Truth. As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask in behalf of these [Jews] alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word [that’s us]; that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, are in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou has given Me I have given to them; that they may be one just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them as Thou didst love Me.*” (Jn 17:15-23)

Now that is fellowship! That is glory! Those of us who are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” are taken a step further, so that we no longer “fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23-24) “I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, *that they might know that I am YHWH who sanctifies [makes perfect, glorifies] them.*” (Ezek 20:12)

That does not mean there is no more possibility of sin in our life – as long as we have a flesh nature we will have the freewill choice to walk by the flesh or by the spirit. (Rom 8:12-13 ff) Just because the bond of fellowship is restored does not mean we have no more growing to do. Throughout the ages we will grow in the wisdom and knowledge of our infinite Creator. But it does mean that the Sabbath is the key to walking by God’s Spirit in glory.

But wait. The Sabbath is a ‘law’ thing. How can I talk about fellowship, justification, sanctification, and glory? No one can ever be justified by keeping the law. (Gal 2:16; 5:4; Rom 3:20-24) In fact, the Sabbath is at the very heart of the law, the fourth of the Ten Commandments. Penalties for breaking it were very severe. A man found gathering firewood on the Sabbath was put to death at the direct command of YHWH! (Num 15:32-36) And this is where a lot of people miss it. Yes. For a sinner, the law can only condemn. It is indeed a bondage, and it always results in death, because the sinner cannot keep it.

But for the saint, the one who has died with Christ and been raised with Him to walk in newness of Life (Rom 6), the law has no more power to slay. “He who has died is freed from sin,” (v 7) and is therefore no longer under the bondage of the law. Remember my big chapter on Torah? Now that old law takes on a whole new perspective.

“Why the law [Torah] then? It was added because of transgressions... until the Seed [Messiah] should come... Is the law then contrary [opposed] to the promise of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up [bound] all things under sin [by the power of the law], so that the promise [of freedom] by faith in Christ Jesus might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. [Old Testament people could not have perfect faith – the law kept them under bondage until the coming of Christ.] Therefore the law has become [with the coming of the Redeemer] our tutor [lit. Pedagogue, guardian to ensure the student’s safety on the way to his teacher] *to lead us to Christ*, that we may be justified by faith. But now that [perfect] faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew [law] nor Greek [lawless], there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3:19-29)

As with the rest of the Old Testament law, the Sabbath has changed for the New Testament saint. It no longer binds, condemns, and slays. What does it do? It leads us to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, by the power of His Holy Spirit. We could never keep the law, but He can and does keep it through us, when we are willing. As I said in my chapter on Torah, the law has become a beautiful picture of the very nature and character of Christ, revealing His glory and drawing us into a deeper relationship with Him. Especially the law of the Sabbath! There simply is no better time to tune our hearts to seek YHWH’s face and to be led by His Holy Spirit “into all the Truth” (Jn 16:13), than on His sanctified Sabbath. That’s what it was made for!

Here is how it can work in actual practice. Joe is a new believer, just baptized and on fire for God. He eagerly attends church and reads his Bible, but he doesn't understand much and is troubled by his inability to walk free from some 'besetting sins'. So he is constantly going to his pastor or an elder with questions. One day a wise elder who understands the principle of the Sabbath responds to one of Joe's questions like this: "Joe, that's an important question. I'm going to do you a favor and not answer it for you. You need to know God's will, so your faith rests on the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, not on me. So I'll tell you what to do. Take a 'Sabbatical' from everything else, work, play, family, your own plans, even church meetings. Wrestle with the Lord Himself for an answer. Go before Him in earnest prayer. Open His Word with the constant prayer that He will interpret it for you. Spend as much time listening for Him as you do talking to Him. Appreciate His great love for you as you voice your love for Him in worship. Determine to spend however long it takes for Him to show you His will in this area. Tell Him that you'll gladly submit to His will when He reveals it to you. When He speaks to you (and He will), ask Him to confirm it through His Word, so that you won't be misled by demons trying to impersonate His voice. When you think you really know what He wants you to do, come back to me and I'll go over it with you to help confirm it. And don't forget John 10 – Jesus is the good Shepherd. His sheep do hear His voice! They follow Him because they know His voice!"

Does this have to happen on the seventh day? No, of course not. I do believe that the seventh day is particularly anointed for tuning our hearts to hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, for God made it so. But He will respond to any who seek Him with a whole heart, on whatever day(s) they seek Him. Does this mean we have to gather for worship on the seventh day? Again, no, of course not. He delights in our worship in spirit and truth on whatever day we give it. In fact, in a way it may be best that we not gather together on the Sabbath, at least, not on a regular schedule. That tends to stifle the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is too easy to blindly stick to the program, the printed bulletin, when the Spirit may be leading differently this time. Corporate worship is very important – too important to neglect. But it does require a schedule so at least everyone knows when to meet together. Sunday is a fine day for that.

But the Sabbath! Ahhh... I like to just trust the Holy Spirit for my Sabbath schedule, to rejoice at whatever things He puts before me, doing them with all my heart as unto Him, spending His day listening for His voice, eager to follow when I hear it, not anxious about 'getting things done' or frustrated at interruptions that may come. From Friday evening through Saturday evening, I try to let God plan my schedule, accepting joyfully whatever He sends, whether work or play, helping others or being with my family, serving the community in the garden or joining them in a picnic or hike.

Two things I try to avoid on that day: working for pay, and shopping (which causes others to work for pay), but even there, if the Lord clearly leads in that direction, He is Lord of the Sabbath! I would rather follow His Spirit as best as I can, than argue with Him about what constitutes 'breaking the Sabbath'. I'm sure Jesus didn't argue with the Father about doing His works of teaching, healing, and other miracles on the Sabbath. In fact, He even gleaned on the Sabbath (Lk 6:1-5) which made the Pharisees furious. But Jesus had a perfect relationship with the Father by the Spirit, so the law could not put Him in bondage.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of YHWH your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant or your cattle or your traveler who is in your gates. For in six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Ex 20:8-11)

He is saying, "The Sabbath is a day of remembering, back to that first glorious Sabbath when there was no sin to mar the perfection of My creation. Remember the joyous fellowship that we shared, the garden I planted for you, the obedient animals I placed under your dominion, the food plants and trees bearing bountifully, the ground bringing forth of its strength for you. Remember the delight in walking with Me by the stream in the cool breezes of the day. Remember My joy in looking over all that I had created, when I could still say 'Behold, it is all very good!' Remember, Sabbath by Sabbath, and ponder, for as you are continually reminded of the first Sabbath, you will also catch a vision of the last Sabbath, My Rest I have prepared for you. That vision is important, for you do not stumble into My Kingdom by accident; only those who have the eyes to see it and the heart to desire it will obtain it."

JEWISH TIME

Any study of the Feasts of Israel must also deal with Jewish time, which is unique in all the world. Our time is based on Roman reckoning, in which a day begins at midnight and time is set predictably and uniformly by the clock and the calendar. But in Jesus' day, Jewish time was based on human observations of the sun, moon, and stars, and the seasons, and was therefore deliberately imprecise and constantly varying.

Jewish rabbis have over the years done many things to solve the problems caused by imprecise time, but for the purposes of this study, we need to go back to the days before clocks and calendars. God had a purpose in giving them an imprecise time; He didn't want us to know "the day or the hour" (Matt 24:36-44), so He set up the times in such a way that we could not know the date in advance.

This made the ancient Jews very dependent upon their rabbis, always looking to them to say when the day, week, month, festival, or year began. In modernizing Jewish time, the rabbis basically ‘shot themselves in the foot’. Modern Jews no longer have to look to their rabbis – consequently many don’t. Jewish society has therefore become much more secularized, independent from God as well as from their own spiritual leadership.

The **Jewish day** officially begins at sundown, which is when the first 3 stars become visible in the evening sky over Jerusalem, as reported by 2 reliable (male) witnesses. Unofficially, it begins when the rays of the sun are no longer visible upon the hills, or, if the sun is not visible because of clouds, when the chickens go to roost. The night was not traditionally broken down into hours; instead they divided it roughly into three or four ‘night watches’. The first hour of the day was therefore at sunrise, roughly corresponding to our 6 AM. From then, there were twelve hours in the day, with the twelfth at sunset, roughly corresponding to our 6 PM. Jerusalem used to lie near the equator, so these hours were consistent. But now that the equator has tilted south, the daylight varies more than four hours between summer and winter. The longest day is 14 hours 12 minutes and the shortest 9 hours 48 minutes by Roman time. In Jesus’ day using Jewish time, the length of the hour varied along with the seasons.

The **Jewish week** has always been divided into seven days, of which only the seventh has a name: Shabbat; the Sabbath. Shabbat has always held primary importance. On the sixth day, ‘the day of preparation’, extra work is done to ensure that no work will be required on the Sabbath. (Note: ‘day of preparation’ refers both to our Friday, and to the day before a holy day, such as the day before Passover.) For those privileged to live within earshot of the temple, the priests sounds three short blasts on the trumpets at the ninth hour (about 3 PM), warning of the approaching Sabbath. At that time, all work ceases except their Sabbath preparations. They put on festive garments, set the table, and gather for the Sabbath feast. Moments before sundown, the leading woman of the house stands before two Sabbath candles (one representing creation and the other redemption) and recites a Shabbat blessing, such as:

“Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Author of Peace, who made the Sabbath holy and called upon us to honor it. *Enter our home this night.* Grant us and all our loved ones rest on this Sabbath day. May the light of the candles drive out from among us any spirits of anger or fear, replacing them with Your Spirit of love and joy and peace. Send Your blessing that we may walk in the ways of wisdom by Your Word and Your Light. *Enter our hearts this night.*” She lights the candles, covers her eyes with her palms, and says, “Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth Your light out of darkness.” She then uncovers her eyes, and the first light she sees is from the candles, for the sun is now set.

At the twelfth hour (about 6 PM) the three short blasts on the priests’ trumpets sound a second time to indicate that the Sabbath has begun. The father or patriarch of the house then takes the lead by voicing a blessing over the house and each person in it, and over the ceremonial hand washing. Next he pours the cup of Sabbath wine to overflowing (symbolizing the overflowing joy of the Sabbath) and recites the kiddush (prayer of sanctification): “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine...” Finally he leads in reciting the Hamotzi, the blessing over the bread: “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” After this, everyone sits down to the best meal of the week, with the finest tableware and the most beautiful setting the family can afford, with nothing to do all day but enjoy each other and their loving Creator.

Thus ends the Jewish week, with love, joy, peace, rest, beauty, family fellowship, the best food and wine, and a grateful acknowledgment of God’s blessing and provision for everything. *Somehow, I think we in the Western culture are missing out, in our loss of the Jewish Sabbath traditions.*

The **Jewish month** starts when the first sliver of the new moon is sighted over old Jerusalem, again, as reported by two reliable (male) witnesses. The first month of the year is the first new moon after the vernal equinox (sacred calendar), or after the autumnal equinox (the civil new year), which is also the seventh (most holy) month of the sacred year. Jewish months are lunar, with a minimum of 29 days and maximum of 30 days (if the first sliver of the new moon is not sighted over old Jerusalem by the two witnesses on the evening after the 29th day).

This results in a 354 day year. It was traditionally adjusted by the high priest on 29/30 Adar if at the sighting of the new moon they could see that the barley harvest would not be ready for the Firstfruits offering. They would then announce a second month of Adar (called Adar Sheni – 2nd Adar), so that when Abib (Nisan) began a month later the firstfruits could be harvested.

This system caused problems after the Israelites were dispersed a long way from Jerusalem, especially when it came time to celebrate the Feasts. The ancients developed an elaborate system of signal fires on hilltops across the desert to communicate Feast days to their exiled brethren. But their enemies would at times deliberately light fires at the wrong times to confuse them.

Rabbi Hillel II ‘fixed’ this problem in about AD 360. He established the modern Jewish calendar, which simply added Adar Sheni on the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th years on a 19 year cycle. This eliminated the need for eyewitnesses on the sighting of the new moon before sounding the trumpets to start the new month. Sadly, it also destroyed the symbolism of “not knowing the day or the hour” of the Redeemer’s coming as prophesied by the Feasts, and made the people less dependent on their rabbi.

Hebrew weekdays are named after the day of the week (first, second...) except the 7th day, Shabbat, which means rest. Hebrew months used to be similarly named (the seventh month, etc.) but they are now named after the Babylonian words for various agricultural and weather-related things, with one exception: the month of Tammuz, the Hebrew name for the Babylonian sun god.

YHWH commanded: "Do not mention the names of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth." (Ex 23:13) But they forgot that during the exile. Before you condemn them for that, bear in mind that *all* the days of our week as well as eight of our months are likewise named for pagan gods. (September through December are Roman numerals seven through ten, which roughly correspond to the Hebrew months seven through ten.)

The **Jewish year** (5760 starting on September 11, 1999) supposedly dates from the creation of the world (or alternately, as some Jewish authorities maintain, from the creation of man or from the original sin of Adam and Eve). The traditional year of the creation of the world, which is Tishri 1, 0001, thus becomes our September 3762 BC. Ancient Hebrew tradition, from at least 400 years before the time of Christ, is that mankind will rule the earth for 6000 years; then Messiah will come, subdue his enemies, and rule for the 7th thousand. (See endnote.)

I would love to believe that tradition, or perhaps modify it slightly to bring the Messianic Age closer, but it just isn't true. It was a guess, probably made about the time of Ezra after the completion of the second temple and before his death in 440 BC. It could have been done by Ezra himself, but nobody knows. He used all his biblical and historical sources, ages of the patriarchs from Genesis, king lists from Kings and Chronicles, reign lengths of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian kings, everything he could get his hands on, and added them all up. Sadly, he was missing a significant amount of information. His count came up over 1300 years too short.

History was not well documented in those days. They didn't have computers or the internet. They had to relay things verbally, or copy them by hand. Worse, any written records from the Catastrophic Era had been lost by the repeated catastrophes. Mankind, struggling to survive, no longer dated things in years from Adam. Now he dated things according to Chronos and the passes of the planets. His calendars recorded years from the Flood (Gen 11), or the Earthquake (Amos 1:1), or the regnal year of the king (2 Chr 34:3), or the Exile of Jehoiachin. (Ezek 1:2)

Besides, the calendar had dramatically changed. After the Flood and subsequent catastrophe with Saturn, Earth had enjoyed a perfect 30 day month and 360 day year for over 2000 years (due to the planets being locked together in resonant orbits). With the loss of that in 701 BC, the new calendar had to account for an odd fraction of days per year and the slowing down of the solar system.

It took over ten years for the new non-resonant system to settle down. The Chinese were the first to re-calculate the calendar, in 689 BC. Babylonians were not long behind. It was first achieved in the West when Greek astronomer Meton published his Metonic cycle in 432 BC. Rabbi Hillel II put the remaining polishes on the Hebrew calendar in about 360 AD, to get it nearly to the form it is in today. The Earth is still slowing down, though gradually. The last major change in the calendar was in 1582, when 10 days were skipped to get it back in line with the seasons.

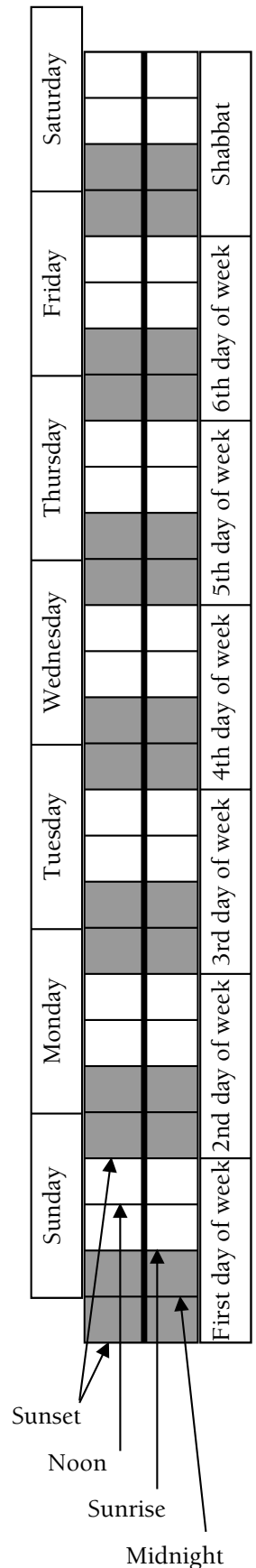
A side note on the birth of Jesus the Messiah: nearly all Bible scholars agree that He was not born on December 25. Catholics picked that in a compromise with pagans, who had been celebrating that date for thousands of years as the birth of the sun god, Damu / Dumuzi (biblical Tammuz, known in various cultures as Saturn, Mithra, Adonis, Xipe Totec, Horus, Bacchus, etc). For example, at the time of Christ most of the Roman world celebrated the feast of Saturnalia on December 17 through 25 with unrestrained license, orgies, and gift giving, crowned by their high holy 'Dies Natalis Invicti Solis' (the Day of the Nativity of the Unconquerable Sun), December 25. This was the highest of the Black Sabbaths. For thousands of years it was called, not Christmas, but Child-Mass, since on that day a human child was sacrificed and his blood drunk in celebration of the rebirth of the sun. Allegedly, this encouraged spring and summer to return. As late as 354 AD, December 25th was a holy day on pagan calendars, and it was not fully Christianized until the fifth century AD.

Instead, a careful study of the Scriptures relating to the birth of John the Baptist (primarily in Luke 1) concludes the following approximate dates. Gabriel announced the good news to Zacharias on Sunday, June 2 (Sivan 8) 4 BC at the Feast of Pentecost (first day of the course of temple service known as Abijah or Aviyah – Luke 1:5 & 8). John the Baptist was born precisely when Elijah was expected at the Passover Seder on Nisan 15, 3 BC. Gabriel made his announcement to Mary on Tevet 2, 4 BC, the last day of Hanukkah (the Festival of Lights) when Elizabeth was in her sixth month. That night Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit. 280 days later, Mary gave birth in a sukkah (booth) that Joseph made from an old sheep pen in Bethlehem on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri 15) thus fulfilling the primary meaning of the Feast: Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus was circumcised eight days later, the evening after the Last Great Day of the Feast, Tishri 22. This corresponds to Jesus' conception on December 19, 4 BC, and His birth on September 25, 3 BC.

Though these dates are not certain, at least they fit with all known facts surrounding Jesus' birth, while the date of December 25 is most certainly wrong, fits with none of the facts, and is without question a serious compromise with paganism. But Christians in America are largely ignorant of this, because they have 'forsaken the assemblies' – ignored the Feasts of Israel.

The Hebrew Calendar

	Month	Dates	Holiday	<i>Applies after 1582 - see note below</i>		
				Roman	Start Dates	2001 Start
1.	Nisan	14	Passover		Mar 21-Apr 24	Apr 8
		15-21	Unleavened Bread		Mar 22-May 1	Apr 15
		16	Firstfruits	→	April	
2.	Iyar					
				May		
3.	Sivan	6	Shavuot (Pentecost)		May 14-Jun 13	May 28
				June		
4.	Tammuz					
				July		
5.	Av	9	Tisha B'Av (Fast)		Jul 14-Aug 14	Jul 29
				August		
6.	Elul					
				September		
7.	Tishri	1	Rosh haShanah (Trumpets)		Sept 12-Oct 13	Sept 18
		10	Yom Kippur (Atonement)		Sept 21-Oct 22	Sept 27
		15-21	Sukkot (Tabernacles)		Sept 26-Oct 27	Oct 2-9
				October		
8.	Heshvan					
				November		
9.	Kislev	25-	Hanukkah (start)		Nov 26-Dec 26	Dec 9
		2/3	Hanukkah (end)	December	Dec 4-Jan 3	Dec 17
10.	Tevet					
				January		
11.	Shevat					
				February		
12.	Adar	14	Purim		Feb 22-Mar 25	Mar 9
				March		
13.	Adar Sheeni		Second Month of Adar, added roughly every three years.			



On 10/4/1582 the calendar was adjusted by skipping 10 days to 10/15. Thus prior to 1582, Nisan 14 was 10 days earlier on our calendar, equivalent to Mar 11 - Apr 14.

Date BC	Summary of my own personal guess at important historical dates		
5106	Creation, latest possible date. Could be 12,000 BC	1032	David & Goliath. 1030 – David marries Michal
5040	The Fall. Nyx goes nova. Catastrophic Era begins	1025	Samuel dies age 97. David marries Abigail
3540	Sinking of wicked Atlantis – warning of the Flood!	1021	Saul age 60 and sons killed by Philistines at Mt. Gilboa. David becomes king in Hebron
3450	The Deluge (Flood of Noah), Ice Age begins		
3300	Nimrod/Ishtar start the first false religion	1014	David age 37 becomes king in Jerusalem
3180	Tower of Babel destroyed; people groups split	1007	David age 44 takes Bathsheba
3100	Civilizations flourish to the Americas. Noah dies	1002	Solomon born of David (49) and Bathsheba
2715	Moon formed from Earth's crust after Saturn pass	990	David's census – the plague (1 Chron 21)
2700	Continents begin drifting apart as Ice Age ends	984	War w/Philistines. David age 67 gets tired
2610	Great Rift Valley opened up – Peleg born 2606		David begins gathering material for temple
2430	Old Kingdom begins in Egypt – Great Pyramids	980	Solomon age 22 co-regent w/David age 71
2010	Old Kingdom ends – worldwide catastrophe		marries Pharaoh's daughter, allies w/Egypt
1959	Abraham born of Terah in Ur	972/71	David dies age 80. Solomon begins temple
1881	God's 3rd call of Abraham age 84 (Gen 15)	964	Solomon's temple finished
1860	Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	951	Solomon's palace finished. Worldwide fame
1859	Isaac born of Abraham age 100 and Sarah age 90	931	Solomon dies age 71. His kingdom divided
1857	Middle Kingdom begins in Egypt – Mentuhotep II		Rehoboam in Judah; Jeroboam in Israel
1799	Jacob and Esau born to Isaac (69) and Rebekah	913	Abijah age 36 reigns in Judah
1722	Jacob age 77 marries Leah and Rachel	911	Asa reigns in Judah
1707	Joseph born of Jacob age 92	910	Nadab reigns in Israel
1690	Joseph age 17 sold into slavery in Egypt	909	Baasha reigns in Israel
1679	Amenemhat III Pharaoh in Egypt (2 yr co-regency)	886/85	Elah, Tibne, and then Omri reign in Israel
1677	Joseph age 30 ruler in Egypt w/Amenemhat III	874	Ahab reigns in Israel
1670	1st year of great famine	873	Jehoshaphat age 32 reigns in Judah
1668	Jacob age 130 and family go down to Egypt	870	Elijah kills prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel
1597	Joseph dies age 110. Egypt mourns	859	Greeks defeat Troy w/Trojan horse
1543	Neferhotep I, the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph	853	Jehoram co-reg. in Judah. Ahaziah in Israel
1531	Moses born – put in Nile	852	Ahaziah dies. Joram reigns in Israel
1491	Moses age 40 flees to Midian	848	Jehoshaphat dies. Jehoram reigns in Judah
1451	The Exodus. Pharaoh Dudimose is killed	842	Ahaziah reigns in Judah
	Amu (Amalekites) conquer Memphis and Avaris	841	Jehu reigns in Israel, Athaliah reigns in Judah
1410	Joshua. Israel enters Canaan. Jericho falls	835	Athaliah killed. Joash age 7 reigns in Judah
1401	1st Jubilee celebration – 50 yrs from Exodus	813	Jehoahaz age 41 reigns in Israel
1374	Israel enslaved to king of Syria (Mesopotamia)	801	Hazael dies. Ben-Hadad III king of Syria
1366	1st Judge – Othniel age 74, over Israel 40 yrs	799	Jehoash age 32 son of Jehu reigns in Israel
1325	Israel enslaved by Eglon king of Moab 18 yrs	796	Amaziah age 27 son of Joash reigns in Judah
1307	Ehud kills Eglon. Israel defeats Moab	792	Jeroboam II co-regent in Israel
1280	Jabin king of Canaan subdues N. Israel	790	Azariah (Uzziah) age 16 reigns in Judah
1275	Deborah judges Israel	783/82	Jeroboam II reigns in Israel – prophet Jonah
1260	Barak and Deborah defeat Sisera	752	Zechariah reigns in Israel. Amos and Isaiah
1224	Israel oppressed by Midian and Amalek	751	Shallum, then Menahem reign in Israel
1217	Gideon defeats the Midianites	750	The Great Earthquake (Amos 1:1)
1176	Abimelech kills 70 sons of Gideon, rules Israel	747	Rome founded. Era of Nabonassar in Babylon
1174	Abimelech slain. Tola judges Israel	741	Pekahiah reigns in Israel
1151	Israel oppressed by Philistines and Ammonites	739	Pekah reigns in Israel
1133	Jephthah subdues Ammon, judges Israel	738	Jotham age 37 reigns in Judah
1127	Ibzan of Bethlehem judges Israel	735	Ahaz age 20 co-regent in Judah
1122	Jesse born to Obed. Samuel and Samson also born	719	Hoshea reigns in Israel
1120	Elon the Zebulunite judges Israel 10 yrs	716	Hezekiah reigns in Judah
1112	Samuel age 10 gets word from God for Eli age 70	710	10 tribes of Israel exiled into Assyria
1110	Abdon son of Hillel judges Israel 8 yrs	701	Mycenaean civilization in Greece destroyed
1102	Abdon dies. Samson age 20 judges Israel 20 yrs		Hezekiah & Sennacherib -> 365 day year!
1083	Ark taken by Philistines. Eli dies age 98	696	Manasseh age 12 co-regent in Judah
1082	Samson dies. Samuel 13th judge at Ramah 57 yrs	654	Amon age 22 co-regent in Judah
1079	Philistines subdued at Mizpah (1 Sam 7:10)	640	Josiah age 8 reigns in Judah
1051	David born to Jesse age 71, youngest of 8 boys	608	Jehoahaz, then Jehoiakim reign in Judah
1041	Saul age 40 defeats Ammon, made king in Gilgal	597	Jehoiachin, then Zedekiah reigns in Judah
1038	Saul offers sacrifice at Gilgal. His end prophesied	587	Babylonian captivity officially begins
1036	Saul defeats Amalekites but spares Agag	446	Artaxerxes decree to rebuild Jerusalem
1034	Samuel age 87 anoints David age 17 future king	NOTE:	Many 'reigns' actually begun as co-regencies

Talking about the coming of Christ and the rapture of the saints, the apostle Paul writes: “*Now as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you...*” (1 Thess 5:1) The word he uses here for seasons is *kairos* (Strong’s 2540), which can be translated as a due season, a set or proper time. It is similar to the Old Testament Hebrew ‘*mowadah*’ (Strong’s 4150), which also means a fixed time or season, a festival, an appointment, an assembly convened for a definite purpose. Its plural, ‘*mowadim*’, is the word used for the Feasts of YHWH.

What the apostle Paul was saying, which we Gentile believers tend to miss, is that 1st Century Jewish believers at Thessalonica knew the times and seasons, because they understood God’s calendar and kept His Feasts. But we 20th Century Gentiles do have need of things to be written to us (thus this book), because we do not know the times and seasons. Not just December 25, but every single date on our calendar, every feast and celebration, our sabbaths, our days of the week, our months, our years—everything is wrong. We can’t even get the time of day right!

For example, many people worried that Jesus would return for the rapture or His judgment would fall at the stroke of midnight, January 1st, 2000, because it began the new millennium. Well, guess what? Nothing happened. We don’t know God’s times and seasons! Midnight on the first day of a month dedicated to the Greek god Janus, 2000 years from when some Roman Catholic pope decided that Jesus was born, doesn’t start anything on God’s calendar. It is not the beginning of a day, the beginning of a week, the beginning of a year, the beginning of a millennium—it has utterly no significance for God’s prophetic timing.

What is worse, even going back to the current Hebrew calendar does not help us much, because it also has been perverted. Hebrew chronologist Rabbi Shimone Schwab stated that at least 165 years have been lost from the Hebrew calendar, and probably much more due to data that was lost during the Catastrophic Era. (My own guess is that at least 1346 years were lost.) Hebrew months are also uncertain, as they no longer use sightings of the moon or verify that the barley will be ready for Firstfruits as Torah commands. Time must be awfully important for the devil to have worked so hard to confuse it!

“Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, *and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.*’” (Gen 1:14) From the very beginning of creation God’s calendar could be seen in the heavenlies. This does not mean you should look to astrology for details about your personal life! That is an unscriptural perversion held over from the Catastrophic Era when movements of the planets did seriously impact people’s lives. But if we understood the times and seasons and could read God’s calendar in the heavens like the ancient Hebrews, we would be alert and preparing for Messiah’s soon returning.

Jesus says to “**be on the alert**, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.” (Matt 25:42) We tend to turn that around, to say, “Since we can’t know the day or the hour, we’ll forget it and go our merry way, and what will be, will be.” That is wrong. All through Scripture we are warned to be alert and prepare, by purifying ourselves. We are given signs, legal prerequisites which according to the Word of God must happen before Messiah returns, and we are told, “When you see these things, recognize that the Kingdom of God is near,” and “When these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Lk 21:28-31)

We are given examples: The parable of the fig tree – when it puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near – and the travail of a woman with child. (Matt 24:8; Rev 12:2; 1 Thess 5:3) With both examples, we can’t know the day or the hour, but we sure do know the times and the seasons! You can watch the figs grow and mature; you can watch the woman’s womb expand and you know she is counting the days to her delivery. You know just about when to expect the harvest, or the birth of your baby, and you prepare for it. You are alert and ready!

So allow me to paraphrase 1 Thessalonians 5 as it might have been written to modern make-believers: “Now as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you are in deep yogurt. You do not have the foggiest idea what time it is! You don’t seem to realize that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night! Will it find you sleeping? While you are saying “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon you suddenly, just like birth pangs upon a woman with child, and you shall not escape.” (v 1-3)

One of the purposes of this study is to change this. God wants us to know the times and seasons, so the day of the Lord does not surprise us like a thief in the night. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day [of the Lord] should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of the light and of the day... so let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober... for God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining [lit: laboring to obtain] salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (v 4-9) A study of the Feasts of Israel will help us know the times and seasons, from God’s perspective. “But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son...” (Gal 4:4) Again, in the fullness of time, God will send forth Yashua for His Bride, as revealed prophetically in the Feasts. The world wasn’t ready for Him last time. Will we be ready this time?

I have spent a prodigious amount of time trying to determine for myself what time it is, and I’d like to give you a taste of some of the difficulty I faced. It is impossible to mathematically calculate where we are on God’s calendar. You actually have to go to Jerusalem and take sightings of the moon. But I could not do that, so I bought a computer planetarium, and programmed it to view the western sky from the top of the temple mount in old Jerusalem.

MIRACLES

I then spent about a hundred hours watching sunsets and recording my data. I know a Jewish rabbi who recently went to Israel to calculate new moons for the current calendar. He found that the new moon could be sighted relatively easily about 8 to 12 minutes after the sunset, if it was illuminated about 1 percent or more and if it was at least 6 to 8 degrees above the horizon at the time. So I set up my planetarium that way and charted new moons.

I found that I could easily come within a day of the correct beginning of each Hebrew month, and usually could tell right when the Adar Sheni would have to come as well. My planetarium would tell me the day of the week, and would correlate it to both Gregorian time (correctly accounting for the lost ten days from 10/4/1582 to 10/15/1582) and Julian time (which is supposedly the number of days since our 1/1/4713 BC). So I went back to 26 – 35 AD and looked for years in which Nisan 14 (the date Jesus was crucified) fell on a Wednesday (the day He was crucified). That occurs twice, in AD 28 and AD 31 both after a (probable) Adar Sheni. One of those should be the year of Christ's crucifixion.

Going back even further, I studied the heavens around the years 5 through 1 BC. I discovered what strikingly resembles the "great sign in the heavens" of Revelation: "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman [Virgo] clothed [hidden from view] with the [setting] sun, and the [new] moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve [rather than the usual ten] stars." (Rev 12:1) It appeared to the Babylonian Magi on Tishri 1, 5:03 PM, Sept. 11, 3 BC our time. The twelve stars crowning her head included both Mercury and Venus, as well as ten easily visible stars between magnitude 3.6 and 5.4. Studying the movements of the stars, planets, and comets all around this date, I was excited to discover a plausible explanation for the 'star of Bethlehem', which I will relate when I tell the story.

I spent hundreds of hours integrating this with data from the Bible, secular history, the Talmud, and legends until I got a reasonable chronology of the history of the world. I use my chronology in this study as if it were fact. I invite any of you to challenge me on it if you understand the Catastrophic Era better than I. Bear in mind that I am actually attempting to account for the day the sun stood still for Joshua (Joshua 10), and the day it moved back 10 degrees on Hezekiah's sundial. (Isaiah 38) I am exploring way beyond uniformitarian views of time and celestial mechanics, which are actually only correct back to 689 BC. Though there is much that I don't know, at least I believe my chronology gets us closer to the right ballpark.

I then wrote a historical fiction story of the Bible using my proposed chronology. I originally included it at the end of this book, but it got way too big for a single volume. So I added four more volumes titled *God's Plan of the Ages*. I try to tell the entire story of God's work within our physical realm, from before Creation to the end of time.

Before I delve into the ancient history I must define miracles. Albert Einstein claimed that, "There are only two ways to live. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is." Frankie Murray, curate in a Catholic Museum in Ireland, said, "We see people looking for weeping statues. But they miss the every-morning miracles – like the sunrise and sunset." Willa Cather wrote, "Miracles... rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perception being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is about us always." Life itself is a miracle. A simple plant cell is more complex than a city. All life on earth is totally dependent upon the everyday common miracle of photosynthesis. I was asked to leave a church once for believing in miracles; they claimed miracles were given to the first century apostles to validate their authorship of the New Testament, but now that it is written, the gifts of the Holy Spirit have passed away. They told me, "We don't pray for supernatural healing in this church. God gave us doctors and medicines. He expects us to use them."

Well, pardon me, but I still believe in miracles. Every prayer is a miracle, even if God answers, "No." Every speck of life, in all its abundance and variety, is a miracle. And each good choice I make with the free will granted by my loving heavenly Father, is also a miracle.

But it does depend on how you define the word. If you define a miracle as something full of wonder, beyond our understanding or control, then yes, everything is indeed a miracle. I am staring at my pinky finger, which I injured just one hour ago unloading a truck. Already the wound has closed, the bleeding has stopped, and it is well on its way to being healed. I wiggle it in amazement. Though my own carelessness caused the injury, it did not rebel. I did not have to tell it to heal or make it heal. I stare in wonder, vaguely aware that I understand maybe 1% of what causes that finger to serve me so faithfully. It is truly a miracle!

But many hold to another definition of miracle: an act of God or something of supernatural origin that violates or goes beyond established laws of nature. I have a problem with that definition, first because it implies that God has to break His own laws to do a miracle, and second because it implies that the everyday miracles like a finger that works for me is not an act of God. With that definition, I do not believe in miracles, because I don't believe that God ever violates His own laws (though they are beyond our limited understanding), and I believe that everything, even to my cut finger, is an act of an infinite, sovereign, loving God who is intimately involved in every detail of His creation. So I agree with CS Lewis: "Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see. Miracles do not, in fact, break the laws of nature."

Did God work a miracle in healing my pinky finger? Yes! Of course He did. The amazing functionings of our bodies cry, "Miracle! Miracle!" every day, for those with eyes to see and hearts to appreciate. But did God break any of the laws of nature which He wove into His creation from the dawn of time? No. Though we are only now beginning to understand the incredibly complex ways in which our bodies heal, yet science can pretty well tell the story in strict accord with natural laws.

The initial creation, the first six days, after which God said, "Behold, it is very good!" – that was truly a miracle of the first magnitude. God spoke, and made the universe out of nothing by the word from His mouth. Then "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." (Gen 2:3) This is repeated in the New Testament, "... His works were finished from the foundation of the world [cosmos]. For thus He said somewhere concerning the seventh day, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.'" (Heb 4:3-4) Does that mean that God wound it all up like a clock and went off and left it? Not at all. "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.'" (Jn 4:34) He is still involved. In fact I believe that in His infinite sovereign power, God is intimately involved in the movement of every molecule, every atom, and even the spin of every electron in the universe, causing everything, *everything* to work out for His glory and the good of His people.

But (according to my second definition) that is not a miracle. God is a God of precise order, a God of law, of cause and effect, of sowing and reaping, and He doesn't break His laws lightly. I believe that in those first six days God wove into the universe a complete set of natural and spiritual laws, and His control over the universe is now maintained in strict accord with those laws. I believe His creative work was finished in the first six days, and since then He very rarely (if ever) speaks a word which zaps something new into existence. (See Eccl 1:9-10.) In fact, the only really new thing since Creation was when the Father sent His Word into the womb of a virgin to be born of her; a truly first class miracle if there ever was one! For all the rest, well, *God uses means*. We just call it a miracle when we are astounded at the means or the timing.

We rarely see the complex interactions between the spirit and physical realms. We know little about spiritual laws, which are more real and more scientific than the physical laws which govern our space-time realm. But both physical and spiritual laws are all what I would call '*natural law*' (I use that term to include what most call '*supernatural*' law). Hold your finger over a hot stove and it gets burned, no matter how hard you pray to be spared. If you invite demons to show their powers at a seance, don't be surprised when they take over and drive you to despair and suicide. It is all according to natural law. That is what demons do. You asked them in; they're just doing their job.

It never ceases to amaze me how Christians seem to think they are immune from God's natural laws. They eat like pigs and abuse their bodies, then pray for healing when they get sick, as if God were some magical genie in the sky who can keep us from the consequences of our own foolishness if only we invoke the right incantation. Yuk.

What about the miracles in the Bible? Well, as I said, I don't believe that they violate God's natural laws. We read about people being supernaturally healed, even raised to life. Elijah and Elisha did many top-notch miracles. Jesus, and His apostles after Him, worked many miracles among the people. *I believe that in every case they involved the natural laws of the spirit realm superseding the physical laws to which we tend to be bound.*

Scripture tells us that angels have charge over each of God's precious ones. (Matt 4:6; 18:10) We all have heard stories of the car hurtling toward the cliff; the driver cries out to Jesus, and the car is somehow stopped in time. (That happened to us on the steep, winding, snowy road down Mt. Rainier.) Or, of the defenseless Christian walking through a bad part of town, accosted by a band of ruffians, who suddenly flee in terror. We know there are angels watching over us. Though unseen most of the time, they can come to our aid and even make themselves visible. These are grand miracles from our point of view, but not from God's perspective in the spiritual realm. The angels are merely acting in strict accord with their commissions under God's spiritual laws. If I drive to the store, nobody calls it a miracle; but it is! A billion miracles of things working in harmony to get me there safely. But let an angel push a car out of the way of an oncoming train, and everyone calls it a miracle. The angels are just servants of God. Anytime any of us successfully does God's will it is equally a miracle, but if nobody gets there in time, God never suspends His laws of time, gravity, friction, or inertia, or causes the train to de-materialize right through the car without hurting it, or some such miracle. No. God uses means, whether me, or an angel, or... He has many tools. A flat tire or some other delay, and they 'miss the train'.

Certain aspects of God's nature and character are at stake here. Steadfast faithfulness comes to mind. How would you like a god who periodically suspended his laws of gravity, inertia, or friction at a whim, just for a few seconds? Can you imagine the traffic accidents that would occur? Or his laws of aerodynamics; nobody would dare to get in an airplane! But thank God, He is faithful and true and His Word abides forever. You can count on His laws, all of them, to simply work, all the time, whether you like it or not. This too is a miracle, that all the myriads of laws governing the universe are so consistent. We can depend on them to make complex machines like airplanes or spacecraft, and expect good results as long as we carefully follow all God's applicable laws. And if something crashes we usually discover another one of God's universal laws with which we somehow failed to remain in harmony.

But what about raising Lazarus from the dead? Surely that was a miracle which required the total suspension of natural law, was it not? I mean, the dead body had been decaying, putrefying for 4 days! Yes, that was a first class miracle, but I still don't believe it involved the breaking of God's universal laws. To understand it, you just need to understand the nature of Jesus Christ, the Author of Life.

Jesus is Life – not has life, but is Life. “In Him was Life, and this Life was the Light of men. And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overpower it.” (Jn 1:4-5) In the beginning, God said, “*Let there be light!*” and expressed Himself and His Light and Life into the universe in the form of physical and spiritual laws, around which the entire universe revolves. “God saw that the Light was good, and God separated the Light from the darkness.” (Gen 1:4) Now, at that point, there were no sun, moon, planets, or stars. What were the light and darkness that evening and morning of the very first day? *God is the Light.* His own nature and character, in all His mighty power and wisdom, grace and glory, beauty and law, are the Light in this universe. What is the mysterious force that binds the protons together in the atom and holds the electrons in their precise orbits around the nucleus? What is the force that binds the atoms together into elements or molecules and the molecules into compounds? The Word of God. Nothing else. Jesus, the Word of God, is what gives form, structure, and beauty – yes, God's glory! – to the universe. “*He [Jesus] is the radiance [light] of His [the Father's] glory and the exact representation of His [glorious] nature, and [He] upholds all things [everything in the universe] by the Word of His Power.*” (Heb 1:3)

Jesus said, “I am the Light of the World; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life.” (Jn 8:12) On the first day of creation, God laid out two roads: the way of Life, or the way of death; Light or darkness; law versus chaos; righteousness versus evil. He separated the two, contrasting them. Any way in harmony with His own nature is light; any way in opposition to His nature is darkness. To say it another way, in the beginning Jesus impressed His own nature of Light and Life into the universe in the form of natural law, extending Light and Life to keepers of His law, and granting darkness and death to breakers of His law. The very day / night cycle implies that breakers could receive the dawn of light and life if they repented to become keepers, while keepers would receive darkness and death if they became breakers.

God's transformation of my dark, sinful nature into the image of His eternal Life is a huge miracle. But did it break any natural laws? Nope. It is simply God invading my life in the person of Jesus Christ by the power of His Holy Spirit, shining light where there was darkness and transforming this body of corruption and bondage into a body of light, freed from sin to reflect His glory. This great salvation is a first-class miracle from my perspective, but the most natural occurrence in the world from His.

And the healings, raising the dead to life, casting out evil spirits? Again, the most natural thing in the world to happen wherever the Light of the World, the Author of Life, appears. This is the way He made the universe. Wherever He goes, Light must overpower the darkness. But tell me, when a man gets saved, invaded by the Light and Life of the universe, does he automatically get healed from all his diseases? Not usually. People who are saved later in life after years of living in ways of darkness and death must often struggle with the natural consequences from their misdeeds for a long time while God teaches them to hate the darkness and gives them grace to overcome it by loving and walking in the Light of Life. The Author of Light and Life doesn't just want you healed; He also wants you to receive His nature, to know His wisdom and ways, and to learn to live in harmony with His laws.

Many scientists have spent lifetimes codifying natural law. That's good. Understanding natural law helps us to have more enjoyable and productive lives. However, in our arrogance, we now think we understand the realm in which we live enough to no longer need God? That is an exceedingly dangerous place to be. In fact, the laws of the spirit realm, the laws of the Kingdom of God, often seem to directly contradict what scientists term ‘natural law’. In the Kingdom, you must die to self to really live, you must give to receive, you must serve to rule, you must mourn to be happy and blessed, you even must be full of wrath and hate toward a person's sin to be truly compassionate and loving. In the natural realm without God, we really don't know how to live, how to be successful and happy. Things we naturally think will make us happy – wealth, worldly pleasures and friends, rich foods, and all the fun, games, and charades we play – end up making us miserable, lonely, or sick. Have you ever wondered why there is so much suffering in the world? How could a good, loving God allow so much sickness and pain? Well, I have bad news for you. He not only allowed it; He created it, in love! (This is an important and rarely understood topic. I will explore it further in my chapter on the purpose of pain.)

Did it never occur to you that the God of Light is also the author of darkness? (Isa 45:6-7) If all were only light, we would never seek Him. If we were always happy and blessed we would never seek to know (or work to keep) His laws. If breaking His natural laws didn't hurt so much, we would always be trying to see how much we could get away with. But when He permits the darkness and the pain, we see our need of the Light and cry out to Him.

So in the next great sickness or tragedy, instead of praying for a miracle, pray for God to invade your life with His Life and Light. He will answer, for He loves that kind of prayer. He may not give you a miracle healing, though. Instead, He may give you His wisdom and teach you His ways, so that you will no longer walk in ways of darkness, ways of the god of this world, ways that, *according to His own natural law*, lead inexorably to sickness and death.

Your healing will still be a miracle; in fact, an even greater miracle than if He had zapped you with instant health while you were still walking in darkness; for now your nature will be changed from glory to glory into His nature of Light and Life, and you will find yourself walking in ways of health and wisdom that you previously could not even comprehend.

So where is the real miracle? The miracle is that our awesome, almighty God does everything strictly in accord with the laws He wove into the universe at the time of Creation, without breaking His own laws or violating His own Word – ever. That is the greatest miracle of all. And how do we obtain miracles in our own lives? Get to know the Author of Miracles. Learn of Him, receive His wisdom, and live in harmony with His natural law – all of it, both physical and spiritual. This is a life of continual miracles: precise consequences of your deeds, for good or for bad, from the hand of a loving God who is using it all to fully mature you into His own nature and teach you His ways.

And where is the miracle in that? Only that He can take anything that you do, whether good or evil, and use it to complete all His own eternal plans and purposes for you in Christ Jesus; yes, even give us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and wisdom and maturity for our own ignorant, foolish, self-centeredness. We are quick to quote, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28) but slow to ask, “*How does He do it?*” Could He use even the pain and suffering resulting from my failures to create His highest and best in me?

Marvin Byers, in his wonderful book *Six Days and a Day – The Creator’s Blueprint to Make Us Like Jesus*, says it like this: “Jesus explains that a house built on the Rock is built by the man who comes to Him, hears how He wants the house to be built, and then follows His instructions. Therefore, a house on the sand is built some other way. Any other way is man’s way – a way that will never prosper in the end. We are sometimes so busy working *for* the Lord that we fail to spend time *with* the Lord to receive His instructions. Moses spent 80 days on the mountain with the Lord before he even began to build God’s house, the Mosaic tabernacle. God solemnly warned him to build it precisely in accordance with the pattern and vision he had received from the Lord. Some well-known ministries have crashed recently. Would they have continued to prosper without eternal loss if their leaders had just laid the foundation and built their ministry according to direct guidance from the Lord? These ministries did not end because God forsook them or failed them, or because He is a hard God who gets angry and smashes anything that is not built His way. To the contrary, God’s heart is one of great compassion, mercy, and love. He wants all our works to endure and to receive an eternal reward. Nevertheless, He has established the laws of the Kingdom just as He established the laws of nature.

“Regardless of how sincere little 3-year-old Johnny is when he leaps from the second floor window with a sheet tied to his back, convinced he can fly, he is going to have a hard landing. God did not fail him. Rather, he tried to break one of God’s laws of nature, and that law broke him. If we build according to our way and not His, God will not judge us in anger, but instead, *He will mercifully let us go from failure to failure until we discover why we need to repent of our ways.* As any true father will do, He will also weep for us in our times of distress. The Lord pleads with us to come to Him and get the understanding of His laws and ways that we desperately need to mature. If, in our rush to have spiritual or ministerial success, or because of our love for the world, we ignore His invitation, then His law will eventually break us.” (page 29)

The Feasts of Israel tell the story of redemption. It is a story full of miracles! Can we open our eyes and see them? We tend to look at the miracles of Scripture and intone, “Cool. God did a miracle,” then leave it at that. That is a shame. It leaves us ignorant of God’s eternal character, ignorant of His laws of the universe, His spiritual laws, His wisdom and ways, the means He uses to accomplish His miracles. When we spot a miracle, He doesn’t want us to just say “wow” and go our mundane way. He wants us to ask how He did it, to search out His ways, to dig for wisdom as for hidden treasure, so we can get to know the Author of Miracles, and yes, even participate in His eternal works.

Only when we understand how God worked in the past will we be prepared for what He is doing now. Thus, in my belief that everything is a miracle and yet from God’s sovereign perspective nothing is, I now shall discuss some first class biblical miracles and the means – the natural laws – that God may have used to accomplish them.

CATASTROPHISM AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

This is a huge subject, but please bear with me. It is essential to understanding the Old Testament. For further information read Donald Patten’s books *Catastrophism and the Old Testament*, *The Mars - Earth Conflicts* (used as my primary reference, published by Pacific Meridian), *The Long Day of Joshua and Six other Catastrophes*, and *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*. Though Don Patten’s books are primarily scientific rather than religious, he has a good Christian worldview and a healthy respect for the authority of the Bible, in contrast with other catastrophists such as Immanuel Velikovsky and Alfred DeGrazia, who approach the same ideas but with a rather agnostic perspective. Velikovsky wrote *Ages in Chaos*, *Earth in Upheaval*, and his most famous work, *Worlds in Collision*, (all published by Doubleday) which I found fascinating, though a bit irreverent, as he attempts to do away with any need for the supernatural and miraculous. DeGrazia’s books I have read include *Chaos and Creation*, *The Lately Tortured Earth*, and *Solaria Binaria*.

We do not know what the world was like at Creation. The Bible gives clues, but leaves out more than it tells. Our uniformitarian bent presupposes it was much like it is now, but a lot of secondary evidence (such as legends from many ancient cultures) says otherwise – for example, the legends of the two suns and the time before there was a moon, shocking tales in total agreement with Scripture.

This is fiction. I do start with the Holy Scriptures as my firm foundation, but then I attempt to ‘fill in the blanks’ using legends, ancient histories, archaeology, and my own guesses. Though I believe my hypothesis fits all the known facts, it is still unproven, and probably improvable. And there’s a lot I don’t know. But at least it makes a great story.

In the beginning, I believe everything was perfect, or, in God’s own words, “very good.” There were no steep, rugged mountains or deep valleys, no rushing torrential rivers, no salty oceans, no rain or snow, no summer or winter, no dark storm clouds, no frozen wastelands or hot deserts. A firm sub-crust mantle covered the molten core. Above it lay a warm subterranean ocean. A tough, flexible crust with an upper crust of fertile topsoil surrounded the ocean. Flexing of the crust as the earth turned made the ocean bubble up in springs, feeding gentle streams flowing into warm fresh-water lakes. A powerful geomagnetic field extended well out into space. A thick layer of transparent water vapor surrounded the earth. Both of these protected us from harmful cosmic radiation, greatly increasing our longevity. The water vapor canopy also had a greenhouse effect, keeping the earth at an even tropical temperature of about 80° F, all around the globe. That plus more air at least doubled Earth’s atmospheric pressure, dramatically improving the breathing efficiency and thus the physical and mental capacities and the growth potential of all life. Lizards grew into dinosaurs; snakes had legs and could stand more than 8 feet tall; dragonflies had two foot wing-spans. Great fire-breathing dragons and other big flying reptiles ruled the skies. We who struggle to earn our living by the sweat of our brow have trouble with this. We tend to toss it off as idealistic nonsense. Our god is too small. We cannot understand the Old Testament unless we catch a glimpse of how perfect the Creation was and learn about the catastrophes which changed it into what it is now.

Adam and Eve lived within a worldwide ‘hyperbaric chamber’. The high-pressure oxygen-rich air more than doubled their physical strength; their mental capacity was increased by an order of magnitude; injuries would heal in just a few hours; and their lifespans approached 1000 years instead of 100. All life was far more abundant than we see now. Thick lush green foliage literally covered the earth. The tiny Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve first lived could easily have been expanded within the first 10 generations to cover the land with billions of happy people and their gardens. Scripture does not tell us how long this perfect state lasted. People think of it in terms of days, but it also could have been many years. My guess is 66 ½ years.

Earth was a bit larger then, and heavier, with a gravity about 10% greater. However, this was more than offset by the thicker air and therefore considerably greater strength and larger size of all species. Man was capable of moving greater rocks or logs than we can even comprehend today. The heavier, slower-spinning Earth resulted in a little longer day at creation – I am guessing 32 of our hours. Adam, needing only 6 hours of sleep, had lots of time to study the stars. The speed of the two suns circling Earth was faster, giving Adam a 350 day (50 week) year before the Fall. Sol then orbited Earth at about 73,000 mph about 130 million miles away. (We now orbit Sol at about 66,500 mph and about 93 million miles away.) Yes, everything is running down and wearing out just as the Second Law of Thermodynamics promises.

Modern geological research indicates that radioactive heavy metals such as uranium are limited to the surface of the earth’s crust. Considering their high density, this is unreasonable unless you accept that God’s original design for Earth did not include them. They were formed during the Catastrophic Era by the impact of great meteors upon the ground after the Flood. I believe one of the reasons for the antediluvian’s long life was his total protection from radiation and its cellular mutation effects.

We know about the gigantism in animals and plants because they left us fossils. Dinosaur fossils have been found all over the globe, including Antarctica. These were cold blooded reptiles and were primarily vegetarian; they flourished before the flood because of the year-round spring-like weather and abundant vegetation, but most of them died out within a few hundred years after the Flood during the ensuing Ice Age. The only ones who survived are those who learned to hibernate during the winter. But they never reach the size they did before the Flood.

Other large fossils have also been found all over the globe, both of extinct species and big versions of animals now only indigenous to temperate zones, such as the lion, tiger, camel, hippopotamus, horse, rhinoceros, tapir, and even a 13 foot elephant. Even up to the North Pole we find gigantic mammoths with ten foot ivory tusks, great saber-tooth tigers, mastodons, and others: a fossil of an extinct bird 10 feet tall, a buffalo-sized guinea pig, teeth of a shark whose mouth opened 10 feet, sea turtles 10 feet long, snail shells a foot in diameter, a lobster six feet long, a frog ten feet long with a 20 inch head, a straight-shell cephalopod fifteen feet long, a prehistoric bat as big as a sheep with a head like a crocodile and wingspan of 15 feet, and flying reptiles with wingspans over 20 feet. Professor Wallace, in *The Geographical Distribution of Animals*, concluded that, “It is quite clear, therefore, that we live in a zoologically impoverished world from which all the hugest and fiercest and strangest forms have disappeared.” Huh. So much for Darwin’s ‘survival of the fittest’. Clearly, most of the fittest, the biggest and best, did not survive, while many of the weak, tiny, and fragile did.

Another evidence of an antediluvian paradise is great coal beds found in every continent including Antarctica. Coal seams have been found up to 100 feet thick, requiring an estimated 1000 feet of vegetation. Within these coal beds we find innumerable imprints of giant leaves, huge insects, and great trees. It is startling for some to note that the pre-Flood trees, whether found fossilized or in coal, have minimal annual rings; the constant tropical weather back then provided for nearly continuous growth.

A determined evolutionist may assert that it takes millions of years to form coal or oil. If you start with his uniformitarian assumptions, that may be your conclusion. But if you take a paradise world covered over 95 percent of its surface with luxuriant tropical growth, then wash it all off the face of the ground with a great flood and cover the resultant tangled masses with thick layers of hot silt, coal or oil could be formed in a hundred years. The facts are clear: all coal beds were formed under water-deposited sediments, accompanied by uncountable marine fossils as well as land fossils. Every coal bed ever found shrieks 'catastrophe'. Frankly, so do all those sedimentary layers. To interpret them by uniformitarian principles is, to be generous, lacking in intellectual integrity.

Though this is not a study on evolution, I cannot resist a bunny trail here about the age of the earth. Admittedly some aspects of the universe seem very, very old. But to say that God created the universe with the appearance of age, just to fool the unbeliever, is a cop out. God is Truth; He does not deliberately try to fool us.

Some things, such as the bedrock which forms the foundation of the earth's crust, and the soils which seeds must have to grow, were created with the appearance of age in order to function properly. "God planted a garden toward the east in Eden..." (Gen 2:8) And like any good gardener, I'm sure He used rich humus, which to us would look like well-aged, decayed vegetation.

Assuming that God did not make the speed of light infinite in a vacuum, He could have created stars with their light already reaching the earth, so man could see them "for signs and seasons." (Gen 1:14) Scoffers ask, "If stars were created with a fake light 'history', how do we know that God didn't create us all 1 second ago, also with a fake history that we remember as if it were real?" Well, that would be a good joke on us, but it is self-inconsistent. It would require a very powerful and wise God, but would make Him out to be a deceiver.

For one who is willing to accept that the Bible is the best ancient record of our beginnings, the inconsistencies disappear. Only things that were necessary were created with the appearance of age. Everything else was new, on the order of 10,000 years ago. 'Scientific' dating methods implying an old earth such as radiometric (radioactive decay) dating are wildly inaccurate and dependent on false assumptions about conditions before the Flood.

An example is the potassium - argon dating of igneous (volcanic) rock. Radiometric dates of ten-year-old lava from the 1982 Mt. St. Helens eruption ranged as high as 2.8 million years old! Dr. Stephen Austin, a trained geologist/evolutionist studying Grand Canyon's sedimentary layers "deposited over millions of years," became a Christian and a Creationist when he saw their similarity to the layers at Mt. St. Helens, deposited and carved in just days.

The *7 Wonders Museum & Bookstore*, 4749 Spirit Lake Highway, Silverlake, Washington 98645, is currently hosted by Lloyd and Doris Anderson (ph 360-274-5737) (www.creationism.org/sthelens). They demonstrate that the eruption of Mt. St. Helens: 1) rearranged mountains beyond recognition in just 9 hours, 2) formed canyons like the Grand Canyon in just 5 months, 3) formed badlands in just 5 days, 4) formed layered strata in just 3 hours, 5) formed river systems in just 9 hours, 6) formed upright polystratic fossils (through several layers of strata) from sinking logs in just 20 years, and 7) changed Spirit Lake into a laboratory which is demonstrating a new model for rapid coal formation under catastrophic conditions.

Other evidences of a young universe are abundant:

1) The fine structure of spiral galaxies. Spiral arms are well defined, indicating that stars near the galactic edge have made no more than one or two orbits. If the universe were billions of years old, this structure would be gone.

2) Earth's geomagnetic field, the electrostatic charges of the planets, and even the plasma (ether) of space are decaying. By uniformitarian principles they would have been impossibly large 10,000 years ago. Evolutionists point to geomagnetic reversals frozen in lava from before 701 BC, but they have no viable mechanism to reverse or recharge the field. Catastrophism has such a mechanism.

3) The sun is shrinking. Extrapolating back in time only 1 million years would make the sun twice as large, and impossibly hot for the earth to survive.

4) Meteorite fragments on earth. There are plenty near the surface, but none in the strata of the 'geologic ages'. This of course is consistent when you realize that those strata were laid down during a single worldwide Flood.

5) Countless short period comets, all continuously disintegrating as evidenced by their long tail. Why are there any left? The maximum lifetime of a short-period comet is estimated at roughly 10,000 years.

6) Space dust, such as that from disintegrating comets. Its rate of deposition was calculated to result in 50 to 180 feet of dust on the moon, which has no atmosphere to burn it up. Some worried that our lunar lander would sink out of sight! Instead they found only an inch or so of space dust.

7) Carbon 14 is found in everything, even diamond. Its short decay half-life of only 5730 years would have totally eliminated it within just a few million years.

8) Helium in Earth's atmosphere. It is a by-product of radioactive decay, it enters the atmosphere from the Sun, and it outgasses from the earth's core through its crust. Very little escapes through the atmosphere into space. So it should be increasing. Yet there isn't much helium here. Dr. Melvin Cook, foremost scientific expert on helium, believes that we should have up to a million times more helium in our atmosphere if the earth were billions of years old. This indicates a young earth of about 10 to 20 thousand years; no more than 1.8 million years.

9) Concentrations of minerals in sea water are too low. Calculating the amount of inflow into the oceans of many common minerals from all the world's rivers, the oceans could not be more than a million years old.

10) Leaching out of the chlorine, calcium, and other common minerals from land. It should have all leached out by now if evolutionist's billions of years were true.

11) Not enough sedimentation at river deltas. For example, the Mississippi deposits a mile of delta every 16 years, making that river only about 5000 years old.

12) Sedimentation on sea bottoms is way too thin. It gives an age of the oceans of less than 5000 years.

13) Water-laid sandstone strata (layers) displaying 'millions of years of evolution' are sometimes tightly folded together, with no cracking or crushed fossils. Creationists know that the sedimentary layers were folded when they were all still soft mud, shortly after the Flood. Evolutionary theory requires the older layers to be solid rock at the time they were folded, which is impossible.

14) Some sharp, steep mountain ranges indicate their recent origin: no more than 10 - 20,000 years.

15) Raw, organic soft tissue (including bone marrow and flexible blood vessels) have been found in dinosaur bones supposedly 68 million years old. In South Dakota's Hell Creek Canyon, a Tyrannosaurus Rex femur bone was broken open revealing bloody tissue with the organic cells still intact. We could clone that T-Rex! Soft tissue inside a bone could not survive more than a few thousand years, even under ideal conditions (quick burial and rapid bone fossilization). To say that soft tissue could remain flexible over 68 million years is not reasonable, and any 'scientist' who says so is not being intellectually honest. This T-Rex was contemporaneous with man. He could have been buried during Noah's Flood, but I think he's even younger.

16) All attempts to find any 'missing links' between species have failed, especially the ape to human link. Many have been proposed, yet to date all have been discredited. Humans are alive today who are deformed by rickets, arthritis, or syphilis; they're not missing links! Instead, fully human skeletal remains have been found from as far back as the 'age of dinosaurs'. The average Neanderthal had a larger brain capacity than modern man.

17) The so-called 'geologic column', a fictitious chart showing the evolutionary eras together with types of rocks and 'index' fossils from each era. Its form was essentially frozen by 1840, though most evidence uncovered since then contradicts it. It is one of the most blatant lies foisted upon school children, because 1) it does not exist in order anywhere in the world, 2) it is based on hypothesis but presented as truth, 3) it uses circular reasoning (the index fossils date the rock layers, which are then used to date the fossils found in them), 4) the vast majority (85%) of the earth has only 3 or less of the 10 geologic eras shown in the column in 'proper' order (even the Grand Canyon only has five), and some percentage of every geologic period lies directly above the Precambrian 'basement'. 5) there are numerous areas in which so-called 'younger' layers are below 'older' layers in perfect conformity, up to thousands of square miles, 6) no erosion can be found between layers supposedly millions of years apart – each layer conforms perfectly to adjacent layers just as if they were all laid down together in the same flood, and 7) in the real world, the sedimentary layers rarely match any significant part of the chart, with complete gaps where there should be millions of years, trees which stood undecayed through multiple layers covering 'millions of years', fossils in the wrong layer or spanning several layers, and even human artifacts buried in layers supposedly millions of years old.

The whole thing is a farce propagated by 'scientists' who so desperately wanted to believe in evolution that they ignored the obvious evidence that conforming strata were laid down by a worldwide cataclysmic flood, with everything sorted out due to well-understood hydrologic principles according to mass, density, size, buoyancy, etc.

Instead of honestly, openly dealing with these contradictions to evolution, modern so-called 'scientists' are deliberately suppressing this information, falsifying data, refusing to discuss or even consider it, and working to keep it out of textbooks and research articles. A scientific hypothesis should remain open for discussion when new information comes along, but the theory of evolution has now become a religious dogma for many, even though there now is a huge amount of conflicting evidence.

Honest scientists are now questioning every aspect of the theory of evolution. Not just the many missing links between species (which should have been found years ago if they existed at all), but also newly analyzed anatomical and gene maps of the supposedly 'related' species.

A hundred years ago it was easy to say we came from primitive primates – after all, we look like them and have similar functions, skeletal structure, etc. But now we know from DNA analysis that our organs are more like a pig and our blood more like a frog. And those 'vestigial organs' and 'junk DNA' that 'scientists' insisted disproved Creation? Well, it now turns out that they have essential functions more complex than the latest computer.

I find it fascinating that the same ‘scientists’ who warn so loudly about imminent catastrophes that the world is facing as a result of mankind poisoning the atmosphere, or destroying the ozone layer, or causing another ice age by our smog, or melting the ice caps with the greenhouse effect and flooding the earth, or wiping out rare species by our carelessness, also believe that such catastrophes are limited to our immediate future, and that for the previous *5 billion years* our solar system remained perfectly stable, conducive for the gradual evolution of life as we know it, and improving itself all the while. So now they say that we ‘human beans’ are about to destroy it all in one generation? *Yeah, right.* Now back to our discussion of paradise.

“... YHWH Elohim had not sent rain upon the earth... but a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground.” (Gen 2:5-6) The word for ‘mist’ can also mean a ‘flow’, which I believe gives a more accurate picture. The earth’s crust was a strong, flexible shell, enclosing a large amount of hot, fresh water. (Salt water oceans did not exist until those subterranean waters washed through the topsoil at the flood, dissolving out the salts.) With the pull of Sol on one side and Nyx (the night sun) on the other, the earth’s spin caused its crust to flex twice a day, just as with today’s oceanic tides. This made the water under the earth rise up through the aquifers to water the face of the ground twice a day. Also, the warm thick air could hold a lot more moisture, allowing for a heavy dew to form as the earth’s surface cooled at night.

A hint of the pre-Flood paradise is found in the study of birds. Some birds were never created to fly, such as the penguin (whose wings are made to swim), and the ostrich, moa, and elephant birds (whose wings are designed for balance and cooling). But most birds and some reptiles and mammals could fly quite well in the thick moist air of the pre-Flood world. The weak flyers of today which flap frantically just to stay aloft, such as chickens, turkeys, grouse, pheasants, and quail, seem to give evolutionists a great argument against creation – until you realize that before the Flood, when there was a lot more air in our atmosphere, they were no doubt excellent flyers.

I believe some heavier flying species like pterosaurs, pteranodons, the rhamphorhynchus, the pterodactyl, and the various species of dragons including the massive great red dragon became extinct because they could not fly in the thinner, colder, dryer air after the Flood.

Another hint is found in a study of plants, soils, and fertilizers. We went on a July 4th day-hike in the hills. I noted that even under ideal conditions (areas that are level, well-watered, in full sun, and with deep, rich, loose topsoil), wild strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and huckleberries are few, small, and tart. I don’t believe God made them that way. He called them ‘very good!’ I believe they were huge and sweet before the Flood, when the air was thick and moist and the soil was rich with minerals.

That principle could apply to all the many imperfect characteristics which supposedly demonstrate the process of evolution. Examples in man include our notoriously weak back, weak ankles, and poor eyesight, hearing, and sense of smell. Animals have similar inherent weaknesses, implying to the evolutionist that they are still evolving and could not have been created by a perfect God. In every case, the perfect pre-Flood conditions could have solved the problems, so God really could have seen “all that He had made, and behold it was very good.” (Gen 1:31)

The restored earth of Revelation 21-22 is said to have “no longer any sea.” (21:1) I believe that God is so big that He never fails in what He starts out to do. Though man failed, resulting in a 7000+ year ‘detour’ of sin with its related curse on the earth and need for redemption, yet God’s Plan of the Ages will be fulfilled. I believe the restored heavens and earth will be like the original before man’s fall into sin, which implies no sea at Creation.

Similarly, “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low,” (Isa 20:4) implying that the pre-Flood earth was free of rugged terrain, too. It is well known that high mountain ranges cause bad weather. They form barriers to the moisture-laden breezes from the ocean, causing one side to be excessively rainy and the other to be dry. They can cause storms, due to temperature differentials between peaks and lowlands. Our earth now is nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ water, and 50% of the land is uninhabitable. But I estimate the pre-Flood paradise to have had at most 5% fresh water lakes, leaving 95% level, habitable land.

Many Christians believe that since God rested on the seventh day from all His (creative) works (Gen 1:1-3), His planting of the Garden of Eden, Adam naming the animals, Adam sleeping, and God’s creating Eve from his ‘rib’ must have happened on the sixth day, right after He created all the animals. I do not believe that. It is simply too much to put into one day. It is not reasonable, and I believe the Scriptures are entirely reasonable, once we get past our preconceptions. So let’s start from scratch and see what the text actually says.

First, God did not bring the animals to Adam to name as He created them (as could be inferred from Gen 2:19). Chapter 1 gives the actual sequence: God created all the animals, then created Adam last. (1:24-27) Second, it does not require Eve to be created on the sixth day. It only says that “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He [then] created them.” (1:27) I take that to mean what it says: that God created Adam and Eve in one person, in the ‘image of God’ who is one. The first man was a complete, whole person like the angels. So when God separated Eve from Adam, it was not a new creative work (all of which God completed in six days), but rather a modification to provide human companionship for Adam. That’s hard for us, but Scripture often uses male pronouns when referring to both genders.

Eve was not created from dust; she was grown from the female organs removed from Adam. The Hebrew word translated 'rib' is 'tsal'aw', meaning "a curved part of the body, a chamber or cavity," an obvious reference to the womb. Even today some animals and many plants can start from a small portion of the 'parent' and develop into a complete, separate organism. In the perfect realm of Eden, why could not God surgically remove organs from Adam and cause them to grow rapidly into an entirely new person, without violating any natural law or expending any further creative power?

Does it startle you to think of Adam as created male and female in one person? God refers to Himself in the plural (Elohim) throughout Genesis 1 and much of the Old Testament. Yet we know that God is one. "Hear of Israel! YHWH is our God. YHWH is one!" (Deut 6:4) The obvious conclusion is that Adam, in God's own image, was also plural, yet one being. Look closely at the nature of God: His dominant nature is always male; master, law-giver, provider, initiator, protector... it is blasphemy to call God a 'she' as radical feminists do. Yet consider the incarnate God, Jesus Christ. His dominant nature is still clearly male; He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, as well as King of kings, Lord of lords, and the righteous Judge of all. But He Himself said, "I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak those things as the Father taught Me." (Jn 8:28) This is the female nature: supportive, motivated primarily by love and compassion, obedient, quiet, listening to and learning respectfully from His Father in prayer (Lk 5:16; 6:12; Eph 5:22-24; 1 Cor 14:34-35), and therefore acting in the full authority of the Father. (Matt 8:7-9; 28:18)

I submit to you that God is the perfect balance between the dominant male nature and that sub-dominant female nature which is willing to serve and live under authority. Adam, in the image of God, was created likewise, perfect and complete in himself. When Adam was separated into Adam and Eve, he was therefore incomplete, half a person, except in union with his wife. God calls the married pair 'one flesh'. (Gen 2:24) This union illustrates the spiritual completeness and perfection of the Bride of Christ in unity with her head, Jesus. (Eph 5:22-32) I believe that one day God will restore mankind to the perfection of Adam at Creation, to become again a trinity in the image of God, in the perfect harmony of combined male / female natures. We will be like the angels in heaven, who "neither marry [male], nor are given in marriage [female]." (Matt 22:30)

As to the timing – I believe this perfect sinless realm lasted for years, during which Adam tilled the ground and the plants sprouted and matured. "No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field was yet sprouted, for YHWH Elohim had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to till the ground." (Gen 2:5) God did not create the plants full grown. He created seeds, which He planted (Gen 2:8-9) and allowed to grow with watering, cultivating, sunshine, and time.

They grew very fast, due to the nutrient-rich soil and high atmospheric pressure, so that within a week or two the animals and Adam had plenty to eat. But even in that perfect climate I think it would take years for trees to get large enough to bear fruit.

Notice that in Chapter 1 Adam was given "every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed: it shall be food for you." (v 29) But in Chapter 2, presumably after the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was mature enough to start bearing fruit, God prohibited it. (v 16-17) The obvious reason it was not prohibited in Chapter 1 is that it had not yet matured. This implies time, lots of it, for Adam as well as for the trees to mature.

I can imagine Adam delighting over each new type of plant as it grew big enough to harvest. He was like a child. A good Father would not give him everything at once; it would have overwhelmed him. Similarly with the animals. God brought them to Adam one pair at a time, and Adam enjoyed getting to know each one. I believe this process took a long time, possibly many years. And though Adam certainly befriended the animals, he grew lonelier day by day as he found none capable of the intimate fellowship that a higher life-form requires.

I acknowledge that God's creative power could have created all the plants instantly full-grown. With Adam's superior knowledge and strength he could have tilled the garden, heard God's prohibition, named all the animals, and dropped off to sleep (exhausted), and God could have made Eve, all before sundown on the sixth day. But that doesn't seem to fit the picture I see in Chapter 2.

I see God as a Father, and Adam as His child, perfect, yet immature (though possibly full-grown physically), needing to develop in wisdom and knowledge. That takes time. I believe that God provided plenty of it. Adam could not have become lonely on the sixth day; there was too much new to see and do. He no doubt expected to find his life-companion among the higher animals. I don't think God provided Eve until Adam recognized his need of her. So that is how I write my narrative in *God's Plan of the Ages*. I see this perfect realm as one of the greatest love stories in the universe, lasting for a long time, probably many years, to the delight of 'the God of time' and His angels.

Speaking of time, two Hebrew calendars are now used. The **secular calendar** begins on the first of Tishri (roughly our mid-September). I believe that began at the Fall and expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. Man didn't really need a calendar before then, as he was in perfect communication with God, who kept track of time for him. And the other calendar? It is six months off, starting on the first of Nisan (roughly our mid-March). God instituted it in Exodus 12:2. He actually intervened and changed our calendar. He must have had an important reason. It is now called the **sacred calendar**. What's so sacred about it?

I believe that the sacred calendar points back to the perfect realm, back to Creation itself, back before the Fall when there was no sin and everything God made was 'very good', back to the perfect harmony of the universe, when Adam daily walked and talked with God in the Garden of Eden in the 'ruach' (breeze, breath, spirit) of the day.

And that, my friend, is the purpose of the Feasts of Israel, *to tell the story of redemption and to point us back to the sacred, the perfect, 'The Holy' – to remind us from whence we came and to reassure us that all will one day be restored.* At the resurrection we will receive redeemed bodies (Rom 8:23), which will be like the angels in heaven. (Matt 22:30) No more battle of the sexes! We will be restored to the perfection in which Adam was created on the sixth day, except now in maturity, full of the wisdom and knowledge that the first Adam lacked. He fell to Satan's temptation in ignorance and naïveté. *The last Adam, in full maturity, shall never fall into sin again!*

When I tell my story of the Creation, I give Adam a half a year just to name the animals and realize that he has no helper suitable to be his mate. That gives him time to get lonely. I then tell the delightful tale of the first romance, when Adam first wakes up from sleep, sees Eve, and exclaims, "At last! Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" I then give them 66 years of honeymoon before the first sin. That's time to mature in their love for each other, as well as time for them to grow lax in their keeping of the one command given them – to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, He drove them out of the Garden by means of His angel with "a flaming sword which turned every way." (3:24) Now notice all the other changes. Man began to die. The ground no longer bore of its strength. Man lived by the sweat of his brow. Procreation became painful. Animals grew antagonistic to man. Thorns, thistles, slugs, and bugs began taking over.

What happened here? As I said in the previous section on miracles, God did miraculously change the earth, but I believe He used means. The first sin did not catch Him by surprise. The Genesis account just presents the briefest summary, the outline, of the story. I have taken that summary and read between the lines. This is a guess; a flight into fantasy, if you will; one possible way that God *could have done it* without violating natural law.

We have many hints from history, from pre-history (legend), and from the natural realm, and I have tried to fit my story to them. Some of this story will seem strange, even far-fetched. It will sound preposterous to those who have been steeped in uniformitarianism all their lives. Again I ask, please, give me time to make my case before you throw it all out. Though admittedly we don't know what happened at Creation, we do know this for sure: the uniformitarian premise of the evolutionist is certainly flat wrong for all times prior to 689 BC.

So let us throw away our presuppositions and take Genesis 1 literally. God made two 'luminaries' (light givers, suns), the greater to rule the day and the lesser to rule the night. (v 16) There is no mention of planets other than Earth, and months or moons are not mentioned until the story of Noah. The greater luminary is obviously Sol; the lesser I named Nyx, the primordial goddess of the night. According to my hypothesis, Nyx was 2.4% the mass of Sol. This was heavy enough to sustain a controlled fusion reaction within its core, giving considerable light and heat as a tiny sun. It was on the opposite side of Earth, 1.2 billion miles away. It appeared much smaller than our moon, yet brighter than a full moon. It was always 'full'.

Earth was gravitationally, electrostatically, and geomagnetically centered between the two suns, rotating on a 90° axis so the day side faced Sol and the night side faced Nyx. (For those who wish to pursue this subject deeper, I include a discussion on this relationship in the appendix.) Man lived at a slower pace back then, with his 32 hour day and 350 day year. The system was stable, and could have lasted for millions of years. Other than the solar wind from both suns, there was nothing to disrupt the system; no planets, moons, comets, asteroids, or space plasma. The effects of the solar winds canceled, leaving no drag at all to slow the system down. God Himself called it "very good!"

God made Adam and Eve very much like Himself. They walked and talked with Him freely before the Fall. That means their spirits were alive toward God; their eyes were open in the spirit realms; they could see and relate to God and His angels. They lived with God in the heavenlies even as their physical bodies lived on the earth.

This is heaven, the way God intended for us all to live, and the way the saints will live in the age to come when the Kingdom of God is restored on the earth.

In many ways they were like the angels; able to freely transit between the physical and the spirit realms; able to fly from one place to another at the blink of an eye; able to rule the universe as God's ambassadors. I believe they could also communicate with higher animals, probably through mental telepathy. As I said, their strength and mental abilities were much greater than ours. They were able, yes – but immature and only beginning to realize their capabilities. The way I read the Genesis story, they had probably not actually ventured beyond the Garden of Eden before they fell into sin. In the Fall, they lost their ability to freely visit those wondrous heavenly realms.

At the Fall, Adam and Eve died to that spirit realm the very day they sinned. They lost their glory covering so that their nakedness was exposed. They lost the heavenlies and became earthbound. God (the pre-incarnate Jesus, who is the Creator) could still come to them, *but they could no longer go to Him.* And they could no longer see the angels except on rare occasions. In truth, they died, they were dying, and they would die, exactly as God had said.

I am sure that the solar system reflected their Fall. I hypothesize that Nyx became unstable and went nova. Though only about one fortieth the mass of Sol, it still had a very significant influence in the stability of the system. Due to its immense positive electrical charge, it kept the Earth suspended between it and the negatively charged Sol. But when Nyx went nova, it grew very bright and intensely hot, and began outgassing colossal amounts of space plasma (which is slightly conductive). When this plasma reached Earth, a powerful electric arc formed between Nyx and Earth, impaling the earth at the Garden of Eden. This was the “flaming sword which turned every direction” of Genesis 3:24. As the plasma reached Sol, the arc moved from Earth to Sol, where it remained while the immense charges between the two suns equalized.

The electrostatic discharge between Nyx and Earth had neutralized its attraction to Nyx, and released it to send it spinning around Sol on its own, now 112 million miles from Sol with a 301 day year. It changed Earth’s spin axis and many other things. Most significantly, it charged Earth with high levels of static, which weakened Adam and made it more difficult to till the garden. It also affected the animals, causing them to no longer be as friendly – all part of the curse of Genesis 3. This was the first major catastrophe of ancient legends. No longer locked to Earth, Nyx now threatened Earth, both with its brightness and heat (it may have become twice the brightness of Sol), and by lightning bolts when Earth came between it and Sol.

We don’t know how long this lasted, maybe just 2 years (my personal guess) up to several hundred years, to Seth’s son Enosh, when Jewish legend speaks of a great catastrophe. Then flaming Nyx imploded and split up, extinguishing itself; none of its many pieces had enough mass to maintain a fusion reaction. Heavier pieces formed the inner planets Mercury, Mars, Venus, and the asteroids; lighter pieces formed the four gas giants: Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. There was also a huge amount of space debris flying around: meteoroids, asteroids, comets, ice moons, and miscellaneous junk. At first, nearly all of them had long vapor tails. The major planets collected the debris to gain rings, multiple moons, and craters. Nyx probably split up in phases, which is the way I tell the story, with a humongous planet I call Titan later colliding with Uranus and breaking up into the four gas giants.

I know there is a lot of guesswork here, but we do know for sure that the resulting planets were all on catastrophic orbits at some time. Every one of them (including Pluto) is known to have threatened Earth, or at least passed close enough to Earth to figure extensively into ancient legends. Either that or the ancients had mighty powerful telescopes and vivid imaginations! Every ancient culture has legends of terrifying heavenly battles between the ‘gods’ (planets). This study could easily become a large book all by itself. Here I will tell you just enough to convince you that the ancients had good reason to fear and worship the planets.

You may complain: “That’s impossible. The orbits of the planets are too perfect now to have resulted from the breakup of a small sun.” But do you know about orbital resonance? Many factors affect orbital stability (gravity, mass, orbital speed, etc.). The least-understood of these is the principle of orbital resonance. This gets a bit technical, so I’ve moved most of this discussion into the appendix. Suffice it to say here that powerful gravitation, magnetic, and electrostatic forces between the planets can do many things you would not have thought possible. It can not only put the planets into proper orbits where they interfere with each other the least, but it can also bind planets into catastrophic orbits where interference is fearfully high.

That latter occurs during a ‘flyby’, when a rogue planet on a highly elliptical orbit periodically crosses another planet’s orbit close enough to charge up their magnetic and static fields. Instead of allowing the rogue planet to settle in to a more-circular orbit (as it wants to do), this flyby ‘kicks’ the rogue planet back into its tight elliptical orbit, thus preserving the catastrophic flyby relationship.

For example, from at least 1451 BC (at the Exodus) to 701 BC (the time of Hezekiah), Mars, Venus, and Mercury were coupled in resonance with Earth on cataclysmic orbits of which we have much legendary evidence. Only after that periodic coupling was broken were they able to settle into the nearly circular orbits we see today.

My pet scenario, which is shared in part by Don Patten, involves rogue Mars as the first primary threat to Earth after the breakup of Nyx. Mars settled into a semi-stable resonant orbit crossing Earth’s orbit twice every three years. Every ancient culture feared Mars. They called it the god of war, or the god of disease, destruction, and fire, or a fierce king of the dead, or a “dragon who flung himself in rage against the heavenly mountain, turning the skies inside out and tilting and flooding the world.”

Originally Mars had a long tail of gas and debris left over from the breakup of Nyx. Each close pass of Mars showered Earth with meteorites and caused some earthquakes, though I believe that the really close passes which could raise a whole mountain range did not occur until Noah’s time. Legends report that prior to the great Flood were several warning floods; at least one was responsible for the destruction and sinking of the mighty civilization of Atlantis (which is another whole book in itself). But the great Flood was an order of magnitude worse. The nature of resonant orbits prevents collisions, but the Flood was caused by a near collision. What happened?

My guess is that when Nyx first broke up in 5039 BC, Titan went inward, while Uranus went out into the cold emptiness of deep space for 1227 years. Each gathered space debris, which collected into comets, moons and planetoids. Uranus acquired Pluto, Charis, Glacis, Aster, and many others. By the time they returned, they were frozen and very brittle. Glacis was nearly pure, hard ice.

Other planetoids also cluttered the solar system. Among them was **Venus / Mercury / Phaeton**, orbiting each other as a distant trinary, at up to a half billion miles from Sol in an eccentric decaying orbit. (It would not threaten Earth until much later.) In 3812 BC Uranus returned, colliding with Titan. They exploded, to form **Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune**, and a new, smaller **Uranus**. Its moons continued past the collision at very high speed, to slingshot around Sol. One of them, Aster, headed toward Mars. Repentance due to Noah's preaching would have allowed God to use Aster to push Mars into a safer orbit, but there was no repentance. Earth was doomed.

Aster was a big frozen rock. On August 1st, 3810 BC, it came too close to Mars (within 1500 miles, Roche's limit for Mars), and fragmented. Some 20% of Aster impacted Mars nearly head on at a combined speed of 200,000 mph, including some very large chunks. One of them formed the 990 mile diameter Hellas Crater and actually punched through, causing the continent-sized Tharsis Bulge on the opposite side, nearly 25,000 feet above mean ground level. In one hemisphere over 3000 fragments impacted, leaving craters 20 miles or larger in diameter (91% of the craters on Mars are in this hemisphere.) Mars was 180 million miles from the sun, in the zodiacal zone we know as Libra when the collision occurred. Millions of fragments from Aster, mostly small ones, missed impacting Mars. They flew well beyond Mars' orbit, and fell into orbit around the sun in a ring of irregular chunks of frozen rock at between 220 to 300 million miles from the sun, which we now know as the **asteroid belt**. (Their orbit is stable, but many of them have not yet fully settled into it, implying a recent catastrophe.) Many of Aster's fragments were captured by Mars, forming rings around Mars and giving it numerous moons.

One of the large chunks of Aster just grazed the edge of Mars. Instead of forming an impact crater, it cut a gash in the crust of Mars, breaking through to its red, molten lava core at its closest approach. The gravitational attraction of Mars slowed it and bent its orbit around Mars. It left a 2600 mile complex of scars called Valles Marineris. Ancient Egyptians called it the Eye of Ra. The largest canyon in the center is 2200 miles long, 300 miles wide, and over 5 miles deep. The mountain ranges along each side are another 300 miles wide and over 15 miles high at their peaks.

The evidence indicates that the chunk from Aster, though not stopped, was slowed enough in the collision so that it could not escape Mars. I believe that it broke into multiple irregular chunks which became moons of Mars. The three largest were known from ancient times as **Deimos, Phobos, and Eris** (Fear or Panic, Terror, and Strife) for obvious reasons. Eris (so named in Homer's *The Illiad*) was later destroyed in collision at Italy in 750 BC, ending the Etruscan civilization to open the way for the founding of Rome in 747 BC. The Romans portrayed Deimos and Phobos as two fiery steeds pulling the chariot of Mars, their god of war.

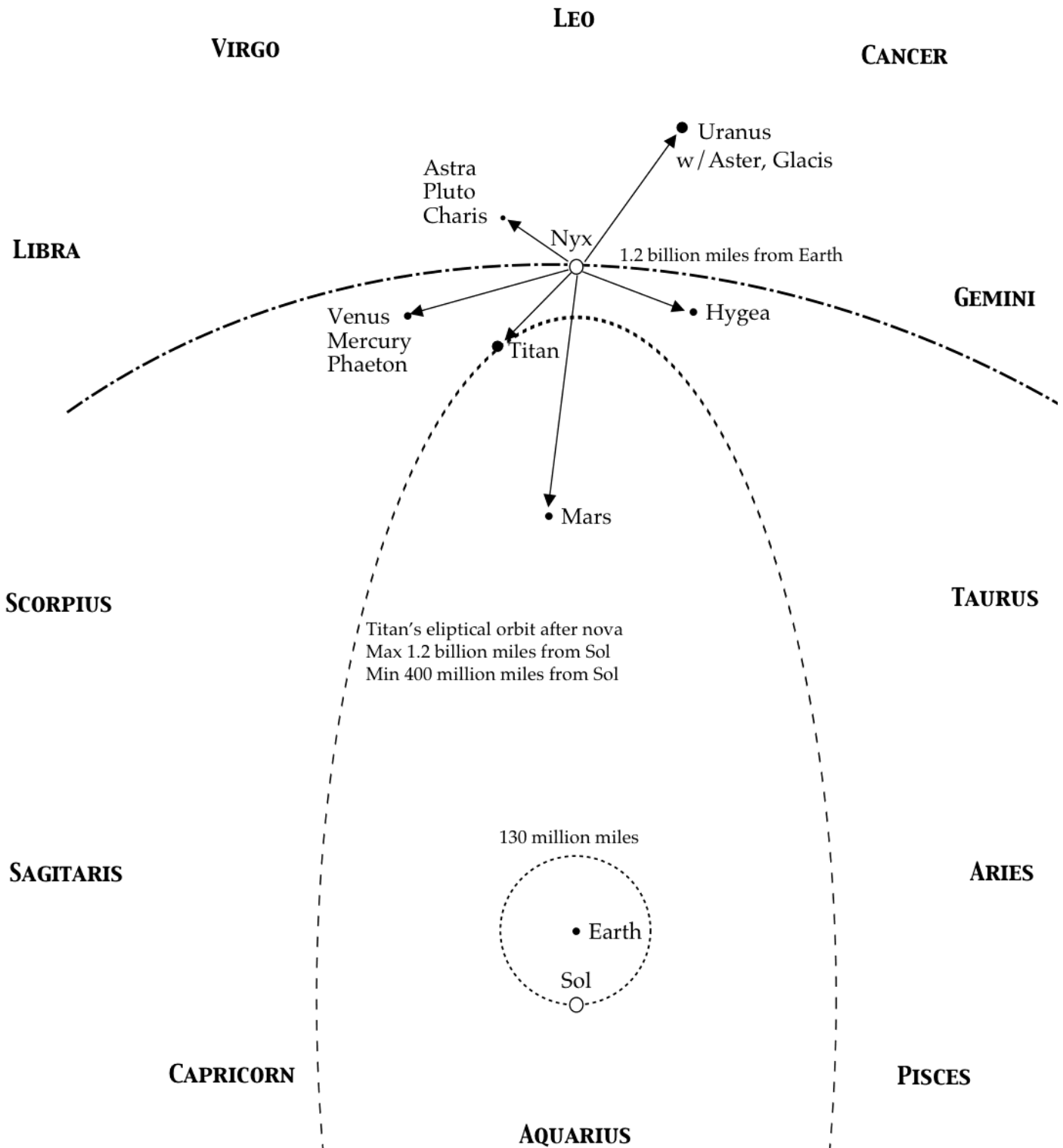
In 1726 Jonathan Swift wrote *Gulliver's Travels*. It was a brilliant satire on English society. In it, he tells of the Laputan astronomers, who were so much better than the English astronomers, they could see the moons of Mars! Swift described Deimos and Phobos in detail (though not using those names), including their size, distance from Mars, and orbital periods. 150 years later, when American astronomer Asaph Hall discovered the moons of Mars with the powerful Naval Observatory, astronomers were astounded to discover that Swift was nearly correct. Isaac Asimov downplayed it, "the luckiest guess in the history of science." But there was no luck involved. Swift simply had access to literature from before 701 BC. To protect their uniformitarian theories, modern 'scientists' can't accept the ancient's common knowledge of the planets during the Catastrophic Era, though plenty of evidence is available.

At the impact, Mars gained mass from Aster, but lost momentum and orbital speed. Its orbital ellipse tightened to a perihelion (closest approach to the sun) of 75 million miles and aphelion (farthest from the sun) of 218 million miles, an eccentricity of 0.48. Mars' spin rate decreased by as much as 50%. Its spin axis shifted about 30°, such that the impact point of Aster now appears to have occurred within 40° of the south pole. This new orbit still crossed Earth's orbit twice, initially about every 2 1/3 years, with Mars later (before the Flood) settling into the precise 1:2 orbital resonance with Earth for which it is famous. The result was that during the rest of the Catastrophic Era, Mars flew near Earth over the Middle East every even year on October 24 about noon, they both reached perihelion the next January 7, 15 to 25 million miles apart, and again came close together on the following March 20/21 about midnight Israel time, with Mars on the opposite (day) side of Earth (over the Americas and out over the Pacific).

To understand this, you also need to know a bit about the electrical effects of a close encounter between planets. Coils of charged particles (static electricity, similar to our Northern Lights and visible only in the night sky) stream out in all directions from an approaching planet, due to interaction between the two magnetic fields. With the face-like features of Mars (the giant craters Hellas, Isidis, and Argyre form eyes and a lopsided mouth) it looked just like the descriptions in Greek legend of the Gorgons or Medusa, with hideous and terrifying hair-like snakes waving out in all directions around the 'face' of Mars, causing the viewers to "turn to stone" out of fear.

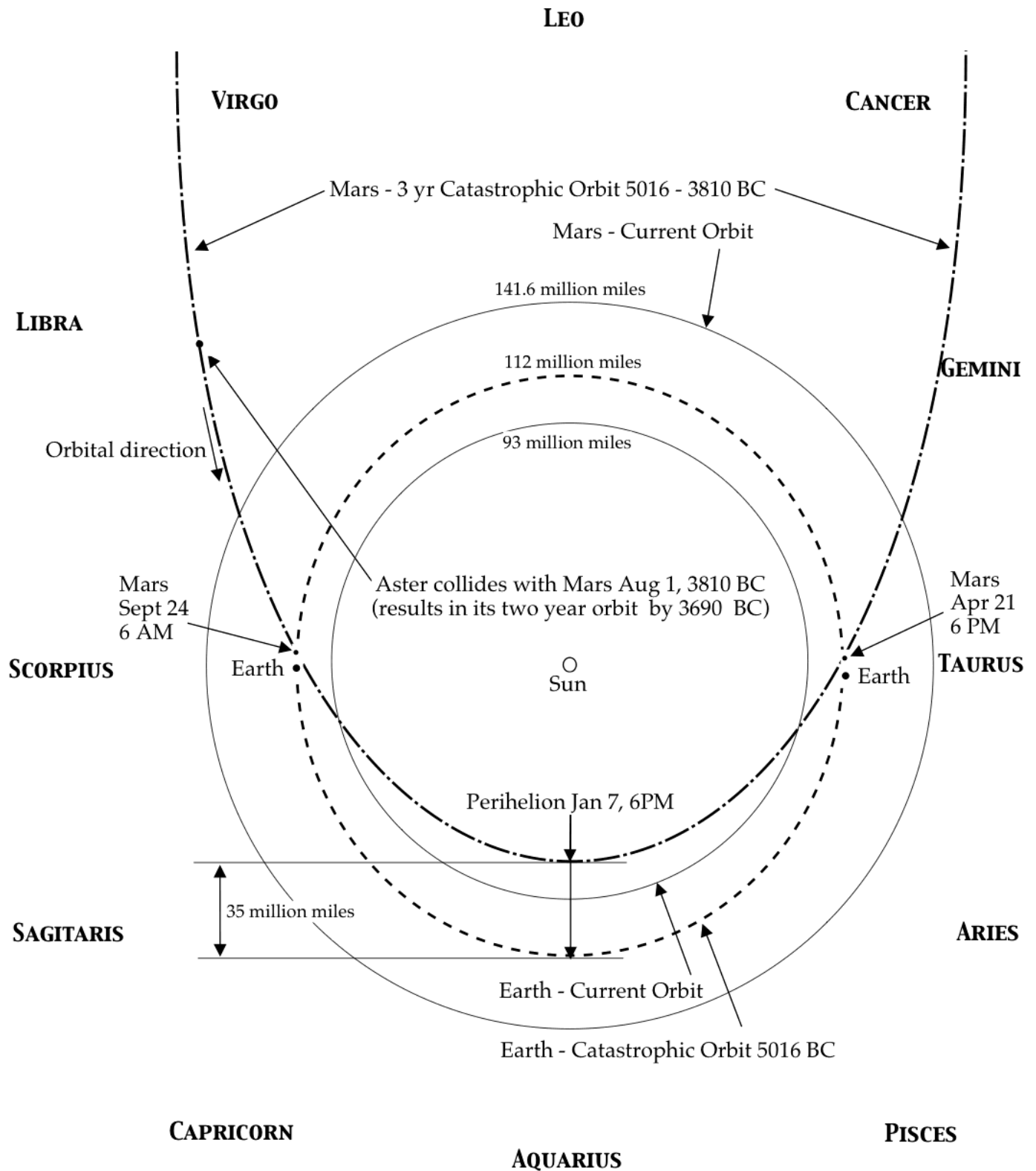
But there is more. Whenever Mars approached within 125,000 miles, its interaction with Earth's strong magnetic field became a huge generator, forming a circular flux tube of high-energy ions and charged particles between the two planets. This electric arc swept across the surface of the earth at roughly 2700 miles per hour, touching down like powerful lightning on hills, towers, and places of high ferro-magnetic concentration. Ancient Greeks called this the silver bowstring of Apollo Shootafar.

Sol / Nyx Binary System at the Fall – 5040 BC



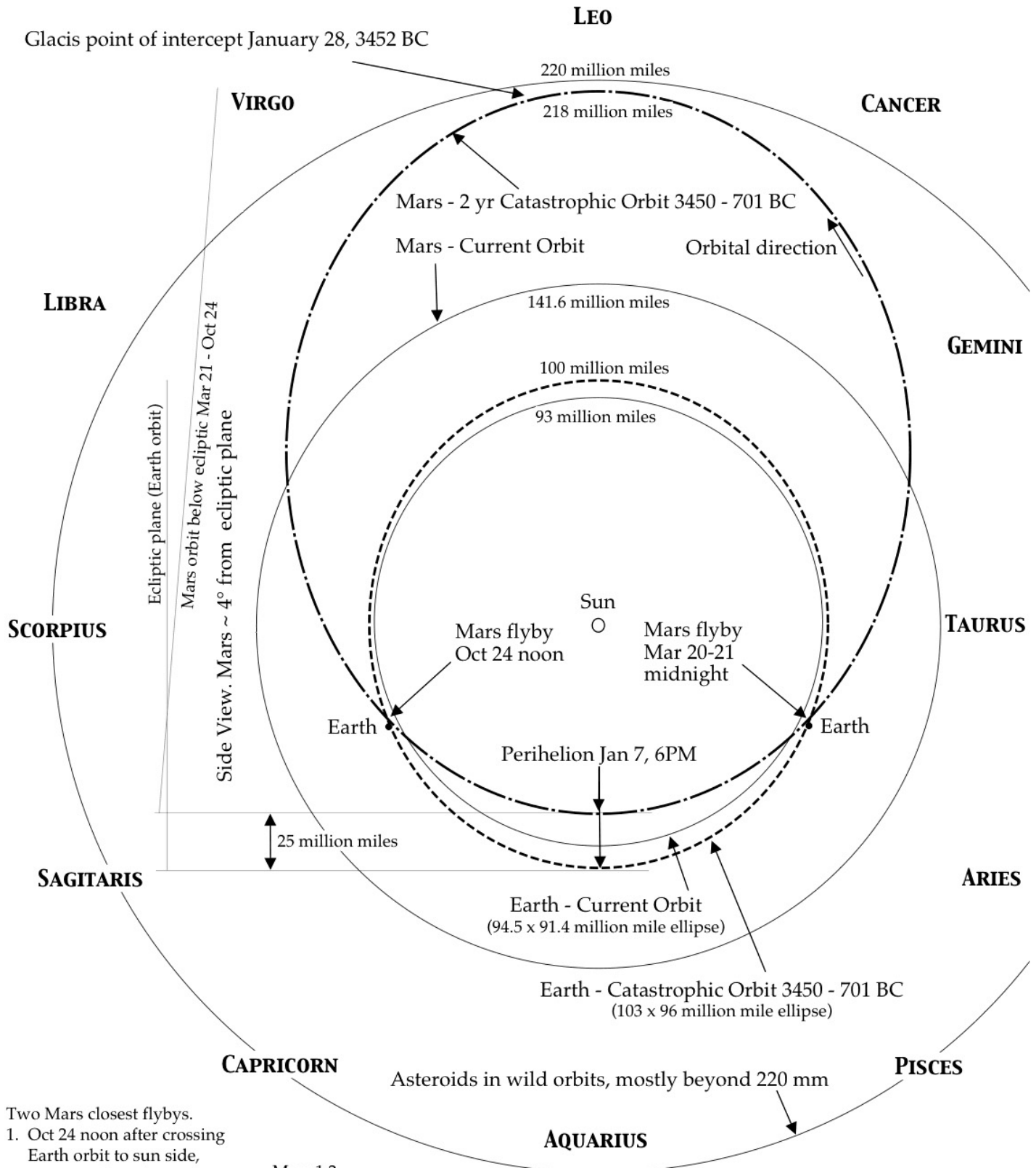
At Creation, an Earth-centered System. Sol and Nyx rotating around Earth on opposite sides of Earth. Earth suspended electrostatically and gravitationally between two suns. Sol larger, brighter, hotter, yellower, at 130 million miles from Earth - rules the day. Nyx about 2% the size of Sol, cooler, silver/white light, at 1.2 billion miles from Earth - rules the night. Explosion of Nyx at the Fall in 5040 BC produced Titan, Mars, Hygea, the Venus/Mercury/Phaeton trinary, the Astra/Pluto/Charis trinary, and Uranus with moons Aster & Glacis, plus many other moons, comets, & debris. In 5020 BC Mars slingshots around Sol to develop a 3 year catastrophic orbit crossing Earth's orbit.

Mars Catastrophic Orbit after the Fall – 5016 -3810 BC



Mars settles into a three year stable resonant catastrophic orbit in 5016 BC, crossing Earth's orbit Sept. 24 and Apr. 21. Venus / Mercury / Phaeton trinary on a decaying orbit averaging 500 million miles from Sol. Uranus - (w/Pluto, Charis, Aster, & Glacis) in deep space 1227 years; returns in 3812 BC and collides with Titan about one billion miles from Sol. This causes Titan (w/ many moons - 120 year orbit) to break up, forming Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, and a new smaller Uranus, all on non-resonant, decaying catastrophic orbits. Solar System becomes exceedingly complex. Orbits from 3810 to 3450 BC involve too many planetary interactions to draw.

Mars Catastrophic Orbit after the Flood – 3450 - 1450 BC

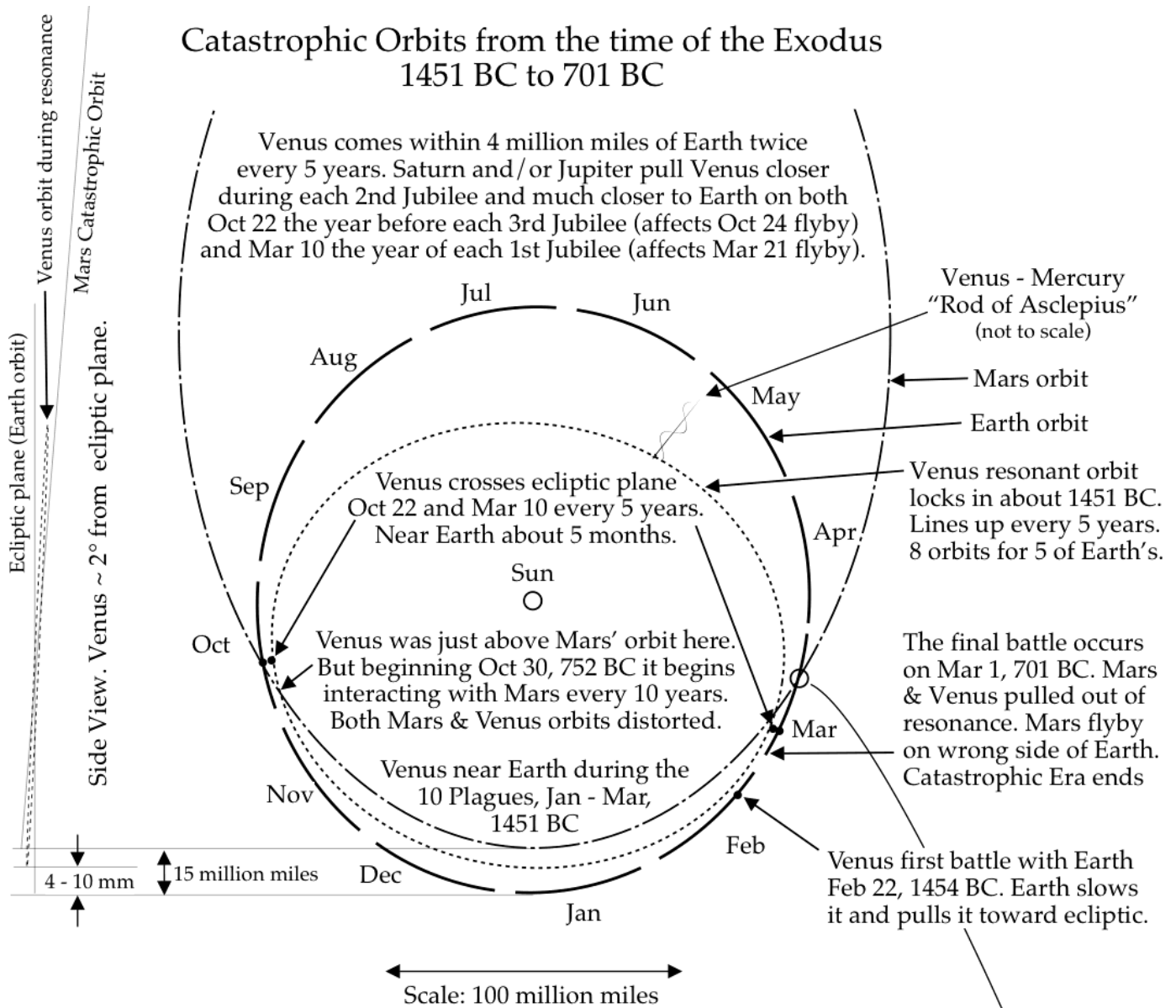


- Two Mars closest flybys.
1. Oct 24 noon after crossing Earth orbit to sun side, even-numbered years.
 2. Mar 20-21 midnight before crossing Earth orbit again, odd numbered years.
- All times are Israel time.

- Mars 1:2
 Jupiter - 1:12
 Saturn - 1:30
 Uranus 1:84
 Neptune 1:168

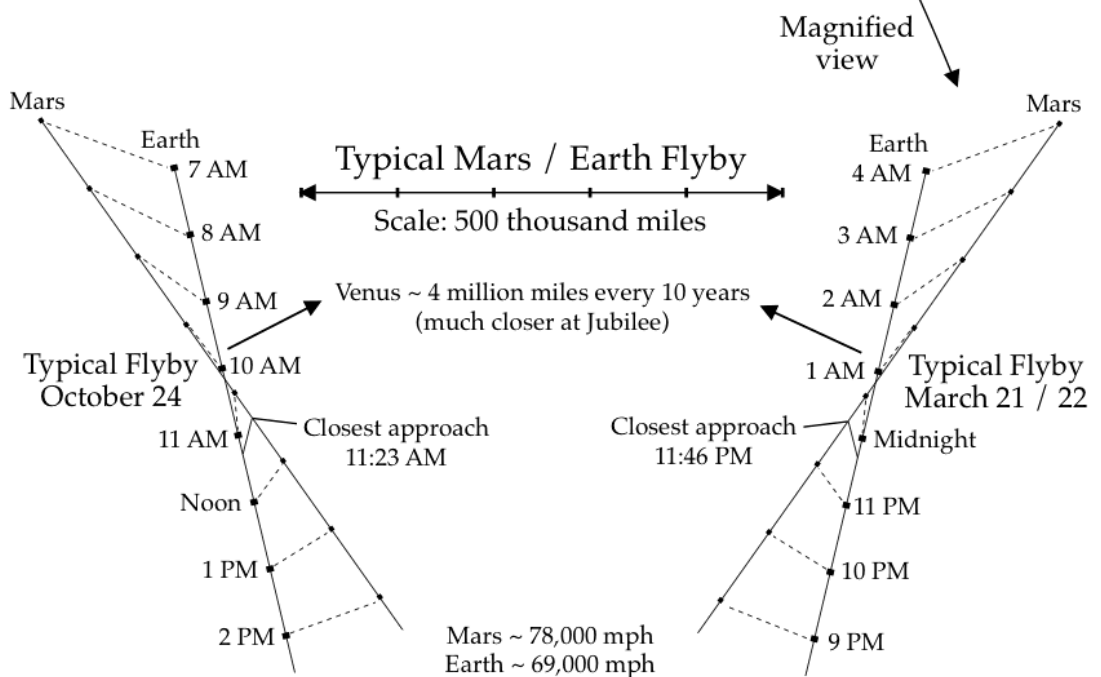
All planets (except Earth) on highly elliptical orbits.
 Venus / Mercury / Phaeton trinary still on eccentric decaying orbit at about 400 million miles

Catastrophic Orbits from the time of the Exodus 1451 BC to 701 BC



Jubilee Years

1451 BC	1st Jubilee
1401 BC	2nd Jubilee
1351 BC	3rd Jubilee
1301 BC	1st Jubilee
1251 BC	2nd Jubilee
1201 BC	3rd Jubilee
1151 BC	1st Jubilee
1101 BC	2nd Jubilee
1051 BC	3rd Jubilee
1001 BC	1st Jubilee
951 BC	2nd Jubilee
901 BC	3rd Jubilee
851 BC	1st Jubilee
801 BC	2nd Jubilee
751 BC	3rd Jubilee
701 BC	1st Jubilee



Date BC	Summary of my Proposed Dates of Historical Cataclysms
5106	Creation. Two suns, Sol and Nyx. 32 hour day and 350 day (50 week) year. No moon, planets, comets, etc. Nyx is 2.4% the size of Sol, 1,330 million miles (mm) away. Earth is 130 mm from Sol, 1,200 mm from Nyx.
5040	The Fall. Nyx goes Nova, breaks up. Earth is released from Nyx to orbit Sol @ 112 mm. 301 day 43 wk yr. Titan 120 yr orbit. Uranus w/Pluto, Charis, Aster, Glacis and many comets go out into deep space to cool. Venus / Mercury / Phaeton trinary (not visible, way out), Mars and Hygeia blown into eccentric orbits.
5019	1st pass of Mars in 3 yr (903 day) catastrophic orbit; but not too close until the next pass, 3 years later.
5016	Mars locks into resonance with Earth, crossing Earth's orbit on Sept 24 and Apr 21 every 3rd year.
4980	1st close pass of Mars. Great earthquakes, local floods. Lakes slosh out of basins. Cain murders Abel. Mars begins 60 year cycle of major catastrophes, whenever Titan is in Leo or Aquarius on its 120 year orbit.
4800	4th close pass of Mars. Enoch's revival. Avoids great damage from Mars pass. <i>Men first call on YHWH's name.</i>
3812	Uranus returns; loses its moons. Its collision w/Titan forms gas giants Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune. All are on catastrophic orbits, especially Saturn (30 yr orbit) and Jupiter (12 yr orbit).
3810	Aster collides head-on w/Mars Aug 1. Mars slowed, knocked out of resonance with Earth; 2.3 year orbit Mars captures Deimos, Phobos, Eris; Valles Marineris formed. Pieces of Aster become the asteroids. Mars closest pass yet, on Oct 24th. Earth's crust begins to crack. Mediterranean areas begin to sink.
3795	Saturn first close pass. Showers Earth with huge amount of rain, hail, snow, etc. Much coastal flooding. We now have our first sea, called the Tethyan Sea. Saturn is called Chronos the Timekeeper. 30 yr orbit.
3750	Mediterranean area sinks into Tethyan Sea (fresh water ocean). Wicked culture there is destroyed.
3705	4th close pass of Saturn; showers Earth with ice and snow. Terrifying catastrophe.
3691	Noah's first warning trip. Some repentance. Saturn collides with Hygeia, no longer threatens Earth.
3690	Mars locks into resonance again, now on a precise orbit passing Earth Oct 24 and Mar 20/21 every two years.
3660	Atlantis culture very wicked and violent. Their navy has conquered every other culture except Athens.
3630	Island of Atlantis shaken severely. Most cities flattened. God's final warning. Athens overcomes Atlantis.
3540	Atlantis sinks; entire culture wiped out. Great earthquakes. Worst two Mars passes in history. Many die.
3480	Worst pass; worse than 3540. Great earthquakes and local flooding. Earth's crust now fatally compromised.
3452	Mars captures Glacis. The two worst 'off year' passes in history. Noah's last warnings before Flood.
3450	The Deluge. South American Andes Mts. raised. Earth's crust splits wide open; subterranean oceans released. Glacis shatters, seeding Earth's vapor barrier, which collapses. Mountains of super-cold ice fall at poles.
3449	March: Himalayan Mts. raised from China to Turkey. Mars steals a third of earth's water & air. Ice Age! Earth gains energy and mass from Mars; now on 58 week, 406 day year, 22 hour day. 100 mm from Sol.
3300	Venus/Mercury/Phaeton trinary in near collision with Jupiter. Takes noxious atmosphere; long bright tails. Now visible from Earth. Caduceus is formed from its tails. Now 13 degrees to the ecliptic; orbit is decaying.
3180	Tower of Babel destroyed. Families scattered, to begin civilizations in Egypt, Africa, Asia, and the Americas.
2730	Jupiter and Saturn near collision. Jupiter's orbit circularized. Saturn's orbit tightened to threaten Earth.
2715	Saturn takes 3/4 of Earth's crust to form our Moon. Saturn's orbit circularized. 90% of mankind die. Saturn leaves only 'Pangea' behind. Takes nearly all our liquid water, but warms Earth, ending Ice Age. Showers Earth with ice; melts, adding water and air. 25 hour day, 360 day year. Earth now 97.5 mm from Sol.
2700	Continents pushed apart by glacier melt waters into the basin left by Saturn's last pass. Great calamities.
2610	" Earth Divided " between Africa and Asia at Great Rift Valley over next 4 years. Peleg born in 2606.
2430	Great catastrophe. In Egypt, Early Kingdom wiped out. Old Kingdom begins – Great Pyramids begun.
2220	Major famine during reign of Pharaoh Unas in Egypt.
2010	Old Kingdom ends – worldwide catastrophe. Early Bronze Age ends. Begin turbulent 1st Intermediate period.
1860	Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Jordan valley splits open and the Dead Sea is formed.
1857	Middle Kingdom begins in Egypt, 39th yr of Mentuhotep II. Recovery from great cosmological disaster.
1670	Joseph 1st year of famine. Rainfall in N. Africa excessive; flooding washes away topsoil, prevents planting.
1581	Venus in its decaying orbit now feared; watched closely. Was goddess of love; now becomes goddess of war.
1454	Venus passes near Earth w/loss of Phaeton, which hits Earth in 1452. Arabian and Sahara deserts burned up.
1451	Exodus. Worldwide disaster. Mars flyby, too. Venus locks into resonance. Venus now has 1 moon (Mercury).
1410	" Long Day " of Joshua ; great hailstones mixed with fire from heaven. Obviously a Mars flyby.
1260	Sisera and huge Canaanite army defeated by Deborah and Barak. "The stars fought from heaven..."
1217	Gideon defeats the Midianites and Amalekites. "The sword of YHWH"
1079	March close pass of Mars. Philistines defeated at Mizpah. "YHWH thundered with a great voice."
990	King David's census. The plague in October. The sword of YHWH kills 70,000. David picks temple site.
870	Elijah's barbecue with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. October flyby; arc from Mars often strikes Carmel.
869	March flyby fails to break the walls of Troy. 10 year siege of Troy ends in 859. Greeks resort to Trojan Horse.
852	Elijah taken to heaven in a whirlwind. Kaaba meteorite fell from heaven at Mecca in Arabia about 870 - 840
780	Jonah preaches at Nineveh. It is spared. Great flood of Egypt, clear up to Thebes "In 3rd yr of Osorkon II."
752	Venus battles Mars, causing 'The Earthquake' (Amos 1:1) in 750. Etruscans wiped out; Romans take over 747.
701	Venus battles Mars again, bends orbit of Mars so it passes on wrong side of Earth. Resonant system unravels. Mycenaean in Greece nearly wiped out. Sennacherib's army hit. 10 degree change on Hezekiah's sundial.
689	All rogue planets formed more-circular orbits. Earth settles into a peaceful 24 hr day and 365 day year.

Apollodorus named it Typhon, the Grim Reaper, and described it as advancing over land and sea from east to west from Phoenicia, past Rhodes, and on past Crete to Sicily where Mt. Etna began violently erupting; a distance of 1200 miles in less than 45 minutes. The Bible calls it “the sword of YHWH” (Jud 7:18; 1 Chron 21:12; Isa 34:5 ff) or “the sword of the angel of YHWH” (1 Chron 21:16), or “the flaming sword which turned every direction.” (Gen 3:24) An example of this sword actually exists today as first discovered by the Voyager probe when it flew past Jupiter in 1979. Jupiter is so massive and its innermost moon, Io, is so large (21% larger than our moon) and so close (261,000 miles), that it continually generates such an electric flux tube. It is quite visible (roughly 40 to 60 times brighter than our Northern Lights). Don Patten presents a rather spectacular photograph of it on page 102 of his book *Catastrophism and the Old Testament*.

Although Patten focuses on Mars, which was the first planet to make a close pass by Earth, the solar system was far more complex than just Mars. The three chunks of Nyx which were later known as Venus, Mercury, and Phaeton didn't threaten Earth at first. In fact, back then they weren't even visible from Earth, so we'll talk about them later. But four other major pieces of Nyx – Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune – were very visible, and were feared by the ancients. We do not know if Uranus or Neptune ever came close to Earth, but they were seen and feared. Both Saturn and Jupiter did threaten Earth. Saturn, with a 30 year orbit, was feared for its ice rings, which deluged Earth with ice, snow, and hailstones when we passed through them. The hailstones were mixed with 'fire'. Bright static discharges (lightning) always accompanied close passes between planets. Jupiter, on a 12 year orbit, was known for its huge lightning bolts and thunder, and was greatly feared by the ancients.

All the larger planets affected the orbit of Mars, causing a regular tightening of its orbit (which forced it closer to Earth) whenever their combined gravitational effects focused on the perihelion or aphelion of Mars. The result, in my estimate, was that every 6 years they would force Mars close enough to cause storms and earthquakes, while every 30 years Mars would come much closer, to cause major damage, crustal cracking, and mountain building (where Mars pulled two crustal plates into collision).

God always gives plenty of warning before a major judgment, and Noah's Flood was no exception. In my scenario, the time between the collision of Aster with Mars in 3810 BC and the Flood in 3450 BC was a period of great catastrophes. At least twice Earth passed through the ice rings of Saturn, which is known in legend for its 'weapons of snow and ice'. (Job 38:22-33) In 3540 BC (90 years before the Flood) the great island civilization of Atlantis was wiped out, first by an incredible earthquake as the crust underneath it cracked clear through. Then Atlantis slowly sank beneath the fresh-water Tethyan Sea.

This era of world history is confusing, controversial, and almost unknown except through ancient legends, for good reason. These were brilliant long-lived people using 100% of their brain rather than the 10 - 20% we use now. They had grand cities, books, tools, works of art, musical instruments, means of transportation, and many luxuries. But all they had developed over the previous 1656 years – everything but what Noah and his family brought with them in the ark – was completely destroyed and/or buried beneath many layers of sedimentation by the violence of the cataclysms. The land was totally wiped clean.

Though we have a few clues from Scripture, far more is left out than is recorded. It is risky to try to establish truth from myth. It is common for legends to be retold with each generation modifying them based on their own understanding, preconceptions, or hyperbole. However, when legends from many ancient cultures are similar, we must assume that there was some basis in fact, no matter how wildly facts may have been exaggerated. A good example is Noah's Flood. There are hundreds of Flood legends, many quite similar to the Bible story. The Bible also backs up many legends of planets being feared and worshiped as gods, as we shall see. Even using the Bible, sorting through the details to learn the actual facts can be difficult. Such outrageous legends as the sinking of Atlantis, lightning bolts from Jupiter, and Saturn's near collision with Earth and its formation of our moon, though also described in numerous ancient legends, have little biblical basis, so interpreting them is mostly guesswork. As such, my guess is as good as yours. So I've tried to put everything together into one coherent story. At least it makes a great yarn.

I've moved this story to Volume Two. To summarize, the antediluvian (pre-Flood) world matured into two opposing cultures, the 'sons of God' descended from Seth, and the 'daughters of men' descended from Cain. (The later are also called 'nephilim', a Hebrew word meaning 'those who fall upon others, thugs, brigands, tyrants', wrongly translated 'giants' in some versions. Gen 6:4) These cultures remained separate for many years, at the command of YHWH. Cain and his descendants settled “east of Eden” in the land of Nod. This area is known to us as the Middle East, then a lush fertile paradise. Scripture merely hints at their advanced culture: from the time of Lamech, they kept livestock, forged bronze and iron tools, and used musical instruments. (Gen 4:20 ff)

Archaeologists like Sir Leonard Woolley, digging below his flood layer at Ur, found some crude handmade pottery and flint knives. His digs 'proved' that the biblical Flood was only a local inundation around Mesopotamia. Other archaeologists found evidences of several flood layers (at different dates). They are all wet. The biblical Flood was far worse than we can imagine, scouring the earth down to the bare rock. The stone-age artifacts that Woolley found should be dated to the desperate struggle of mankind to survive in the 750 years after the Flood.

However, I'm not saying that no one has excavated below the true Flood layer. Most deposits of coal probably date from the Flood. But they don't form a neat layer, just a jumble of veins scattered helter-skelter, telling the tale of an incredible worldwide cataclysm. Modern 'scientists' cannot accept that. So they smugly proclaim that thin layer of water-deposited clay at Ur covering that 'stone-age civilization' as the basis of the 'Genesis Flood Myth'.

It is a shame that modern 'scientists' are so closed-minded, biased, and arrogant. The pre-Flood evidence is quite conclusive. Modern human skeletons, tools, dishes, jewelry, human footprints, including ones in sandals or moccasins, have been found buried beneath many feet of solid rock, granite, limestone, or sandstone, or encased in solid veins of coal dated by these godless 'scholars' at 100 to 300 million years old. Evolutionists desperately try to ignore the findings, or call them a hoax or an 'anomaly', but it doesn't wash. Even if they could, who is going to bury modern quarryman's tools 40 to 50 feet deep beneath 11 layers of solid limestone, as were found in Aix-en-Provence, France in 1788? Periodically, someone finds yet another 'anomaly' – a *still-living* animal solidly encased in coal or stone supposedly many millions of years old. Live frogs, toads, salamanders, newts, even a living pterodactyl which stumbled out of a great boulder of Jurassic limestone near Gray, France in 1856 while they were digging a railway tunnel. So – it was still alive after hibernating for roughly 100 million years? Yeah, right...

Putting all this together, here is what I believe. The antediluvians were advanced in mathematics and the sciences. They had sewer systems with flush toilets and baked-clay pipes similar to our french drains. They had water distribution systems, using aqueducts to bring fresh running water directly to their homes. They had batteries and used electricity. They understood aerodynamics enough to build toy gliders which flew very well. They built mighty cities, with great towers as astronomical observatories. They had concrete, asphalt, and a flexible, bitumen-based, quake-proof mortar. They had good roads and wheeled vehicles. They could quarry and move huge stones that we cannot move today. They not only could smelt iron and form it into tools, they also understood the alloying process and could make tempered steel. Jim Wyatt discovered that Noah even used exotic metals such as titanium and aluminum in the rivets for his Ark.

Their astronomical knowledge was higher than ours; they understood the movements of the planets and their electrostatic and harmonic interrelationships better than we do today. They multiplied rapidly in their antediluvian paradise. Human artifacts have been found with dinosaur and other extinct animal remains, presumably from before the time of the Flood, all over North and South America, all over Europe, east as far as Siberia, China, and India, and south as far as Australia. This implies that they had both advanced transportation and communication.

One thing we do not find encased in coal or rock is any evidence of false gods. The layers above the coal contain idols by the ton. But in the coal or below, nothing at all is found that can be construed as religious in nature. The antediluvians knew the true God from Adam or his direct descendants, but didn't care. They became their own gods. I believe that idolatry came later, with Nimrod and Ishtar.

Today's 'scientist' carefully ignores all such findings that disagree with his preconceptions. All evidence of a young earth and of a worldwide Flood burying a mighty civilization is carefully hushed up and kept out of school textbooks. That is not science; it is blatant fraud.

A modern 'scientist' will never even consider legends or 'myths'. He deals only in 'facts'. To protect his godless evolutionary dogma, he must deny the 'creation myths' in ancient literature and oral traditions of all ancient peoples just as he must deny the physical evidence. In all creation myths, the first man was **created** by a divinity, usually from mud or clay. No known ancient myth claims that man **evolved** from lower animals. This is a problem to the evolutionist, since if legends were just made up stories (as they claim) an evolution story would be an easier origins story to make up for a so-called 'primitive' early human, who lived with animals and sometimes even idolized them. Thus in their arrogance, modern 'scientists' despise the only historical records we have from people who lived far closer to the beginning of time than we.

Before Noah, Earth's crust was a continuous flexible shell. Though there were no oceans, a close pass of Saturn showered Earth with ice and snow, which melted to form a shallow, fresh water sea over low-lying areas. Legends call it the Tethyan Sea. Atlantis become a squarish island twice the size of the Iberian Peninsula, located just west of North Africa. The sons of God had settled west of Eden, filling Europe, Africa, Atlantis and the Americas. They at first were a gentle and good people. As taught by Adam, they followed YHWH's commands and received His blessings. To quote from the great Latin poet Ovid (who wrote his *Metamorphosis* shortly after Caesar Augustus):

"Then sprang up the golden age, which of itself maintained the truth and right of everything, unforced and unconstrained.

"There was no fear of punishment, there was no threatening law in brazen tables nailed up, to keep the folks in awe.

"There was no town enclosed yet with walls and ditches deep.

"No horn or trumpet was in use; no sword or helmet worn. The world was such that soldiers' help might easily be forborne.

"The fertile earth as yet was free, untouched by spade or plough, and yet it yielded of itself of everything enough.

"And men themselves contented well with plain and simple food that on the earth by nature's gift without their travail stood.

“*The springtime lasted all the year, and Zephyr with his mild and gentle blast did cherish things that grew of their own accord. The ground, untilled, all kind of fruits did plenteously afford.*”

“No muck or tillage was bestowed on lean and barren land to make the corn of better head and ranker for to stand.

“Then streams ran milk, then streams ran wine, and yellow honey flowed from each green tree whereupon the rays of fiery Phoebus glowed.”

The sons of God grew exceedingly wealthy. In their self-sufficiency they began to commerce and intermarry with the nephilim east of Eden, in direct violation of God’s command. (Gen 6:1-4) Soon the wickedness of Nod had infected mighty Atlantis, which quickly became more wicked and violent than any previous people. Legends say that they became increasingly militaristic, conquering “Libya [North Africa] as far as to Egypt, and Europe to the border of Tyrrhenia” (Tuscany in Italy). There the courage of the Athenian militia blocked their advance, pushed back, and at last freed the sons of God from their tyranny. God sent several warning disasters, but the Atlanteans did not heed. So in 3540 BC when Mars returned, the earth’s crust cracked and broke apart, causing their immense city to be flattened by a monster earthquake as the entire island sank down into the fresh, hot subterranean waters. It became a shallow, muddy sea – a hazard to navigation. Mighty Atlantis, quite possibly the greatest civilization mankind has ever known even to this day, vanished so completely that nothing but tantalizing legends remain.

Noah had been warned by God in 3570 BC and was preparing to build the ark when Atlantis sank. Now the structure of the earth’s crust was compromised. The next close pass of Mars could be fatal. Mankind had received many warnings. They should have all been streaming to Noah in repentance. But they did not. Remember that super-cold (-250° F) ice moon from deep space, Glacis? It was captured by Mars on January 28, 3452 BC, about 218 million miles from Sol. Mars now had four major moons. This added mass resulted in another close encounter with Earth, the closest yet, on October 24, 3450 BC (AM 1656).

Now, everything that had been happening with each close pass of Mars, happened again, only 10 times worse. Mars raked across the surface of the earth at about 15,000 miles core to core, just beyond the Roche limit of 12,000 miles. If Mars had come much closer it could not have survived as a planet. Glacis, the new fourth moon of Mars, did come too close and shattered, spraying Earth with 1.3 billion cubic miles of ice crystals. Some of these crystals seeded our vapor canopy, bringing it all down in 40 days as 80 million cubic miles of rain. Earth’s molten core bulged, fracturing the sub-crust mantle and over-heating the subterranean waters. The surrounding crust then broke apart into huge sections (continental plates), which sank in numerous places and partially grounded on the mantle.

280 million cubic miles of fresh, hot subterranean waters came gushing up to become oceans. Earthquakes strong enough to throw things into the air shook the entire globe. Providentially for Noah, Mars passed by on the far side of the earth. In six hours the gravitational / electrostatic attraction of Mars thrust up the Andes beginning at Terra del Fuego and straight up the border between Argentina and Chile, to its closest approach over Bolivia. There the earth’s entire crust broke free of the fractured mantle and skated violently sideways, triggering colossal damage. Mars began drawing away above Peru, and finally broke its grip on Earth just beyond Columbia above Africa.

This resulted in a 95 degree shift of Earth’s crustal spin axis, from India to northern Alaska. It also charged Earth’s magnetosphere 100 times higher than normal (to 50,000 gauss) and moved the magnetic north pole to north of Canada, within a thousand miles of its present location.

Most of the shattered ice crystals from Glacis, which had been electrically charged by the static streaming from Mars, fell on the new magnetic poles, forming two super-cold channels clear down to Earth. This created six-mile high mountains of ice at minus 250° F to began the Ice Age. That lasted nearly 750 years. Glaciers eventually reached over North America and Europe. Millions of big mammals were quick-frozen with tropical flowers still in their mouths. A little of that polar ice from Glacis remains at Antarctica even today, though it is no longer super-cold.

Crustal tides as high as 10,000 feet followed Mars. Flood waters circled the globe, increasing in the first 140 days to cover the tops of the mountains as the vapor barrier emptied upon the earth and as the hot oceans spurting from under the sinking continental plates melted the ice from space. The sea then receded as the new oceans cooled and the moisture-laden breezes began collecting into glaciers on the mountains of super-cold ice at the poles.

This catastrophe is well beyond our understanding. It involved 300 foot waves, 350 mph winds, 300 mph ocean currents, and 25,000 foot tides. (Tides would have been much higher, except at the time Mars passed, the oceans were still spurting up from below and still raining down from above.) Earth’s surface was swept clean down to the bedrock by the violence of the cataclysm. Finally even the highest peaks in the Andes (recently raised by Mars) were covered, and the broken shards of Earth’s crust lay under miles of ocean, salty for the first time.

The turbulent waters were filled with sediments. It buried plants and animals alike in huge graveyards, hydrologically sorted by size, shape, density, agility, etc. (yet not perfectly sorted due to the violent waters) thus creating the layers known as the ‘evolutionary geologic column’ during this one Flood. When the floodwaters ran off the newly laid, soft sediments, entire canyons like Arizona’s Grand Canyon were carved in a year or two. *Words are utterly inadequate to describe such a cataclysm.*

The artist's painting in your Bible showing a cute little ark afloat on a calm sea never happened. This catastrophe was orders of magnitude worse than our uniformitarian-trained minds can imagine. Before the storms abated, Mars returned for its March pass, thrusting up the Himalayan Mountains from Tibet to Burma and shifting the spin axis 2,000 miles to Canada's Northwest Territories. The ark survived only because at that time it was being carried over South America. The oceanic tide due to Mars exceeded the gravitational capacity of the Earth, flinging a half-billion cubic miles of ocean out into space and dropping the sea level by 7,000 feet. Mars actually captured a small amount of Earth's ocean during this pass, causing flash floods and creating its famous erosion patterns ('canals') in one day. The rest was blown away by the solar wind.

Mars also stole a third of Earth's air, increased Earth's spin rate, and even put a small wobble into Earth's core spin axis. Vast areas of soft sediments laid down in the Flood were bent, folded, and twisted, fossils and all; later they solidified into solid rock. The God-hating 'scientist' of today still cannot figure out how they were formed. All of geology shrieks to us of immense catastrophes, yet the evangelists and high priests of evolution cover their eyes and try to explain it all away using gradual processes over billions of years. (Although I must remind you that nearly all scientists of the 18th and 19th centuries did understand, since they accepted the Bible account of the Flood. See *The Deluge Story in Stone*, by Byron C. Nelson, 1931.)

Earth's day and year were dramatically changed. I believe we were created with a 50 week, 350 day year and no month (since there was no moon – Gen 1:14 mentions seasons [appointed times], days, and years, but not months). At the Fall this was changed to a 301 day year, when the electric arc from Nyx broke its hold on Earth. The catastrophes I've just mentioned: the flybys of Saturn, the floods creating the Mediterranean, the sinking of Atlantis, and the great Flood of Noah, changed the year to 406 days. We did not get a 360 day year until just before the time of Peleg, when we first gained a moon in 2715 BC. Months then were 30 days long, according to all ancient records. We did not get our current 365.25 day year until about 689 BC, after recovering from all the cataclysms. Months are first mentioned in Scripture in the story of Noah (Gen 7:11); but remember that Moses wrote out the story much later. He would naturally tell the tale in units familiar to him and his listeners. After losing the perfect 360 day year we had before 701 BC, Chinese historical records tell of a period of ten years of "confusion" before things settled down enough to re-calculate their calendar.

Obviously no land-based, air-breathing living creature could possibly have survived the Flood – except for the 8 souls in Noah's ark and the animals with them. The story of Noah's ark is a racy rabbit I'd like to chase for a bit. Controversy abounds, and again, whole books could be written, but I'll try to be brief.

The Bible describes the ark as 300 x 50 x 30 cubits – roughly 450 - 500 feet long, 75 - 83 feet wide, and 45 - 50 feet high. It had only one large door in the side, and one ventilation window a cubit (18 - 22 inches) from the roof. Some people think Noah built a 'moon pool' in the center of the ark. This is a cylinder with the bottom open to the ocean and the top open inside the ark. This would provide for greater stability in storms, allow access to drinking water from inside the ark, and provide forced ventilation as the waves moved the water in the pool up and down, drawing air in and out the single vent window. It sounds interesting, but I'm not sure it would be feasible.

Scoffers believe that no hand-hewn wooden structure that big would survive the waves, if it could be built at all. They are right, if you start with their 'cave men' using stone axes and wooden pegs! But I believe that Noah was both stronger and a whole lot smarter than today's so-called 'scientist'. Long life-spans and perfect memories enabled them to progress faster than we can even imagine. Noah lived in a technologically advanced society which had spent 1656 years developing their inventions. I'm quite sure they had capable saws and powerful electric motors. Big trees were plentiful. Besides, Scripture indicates that God Himself instructed Noah on how to build the ark.

Alleged sightings of a huge barge high in the ice on Mt. Ararat have excited a lot of people with the hope of actually finding the ark. That would be really cool, though it wouldn't prove anything to those who are determined to not believe. I am a believer, but I am still a bit skeptical of finding the ark on top of Mt. Ararat, for several reasons. 1) It is a volcanic mountain which has been active at least once and probably many times in the last 5450 years since the flood. 2) Ice flows in glaciers; if the ark was buried in the ice it most likely would not have stayed on top of the mountain. 3) Ararat is currently a 17,000 ft. mountain. It is a very difficult climb, even for skilled mountaineers. Assuming it has not grown to that height since the flood (volcanic growth probably would have destroyed the ark), it would have been very dangerous for Noah's family and all the animals to get down the mountain safely. 4) Ancient legends tell of people for thousands of years visiting the ark, having picnics there, and using lumber and other materials from the ark. As late as Josephus (1st century AD) they were finding remnants of the ark's bitumen ('pitch') for lucky charms to 'ward off evil spirits', though by then there was no wood left; it had all been scavenged for use in other building projects. If the ark was on top of Mt. Ararat, all that would have been impossible.

But the Bible story doesn't require the ark to be on top of Mt. Ararat. It says, "The ark rested upon the mountains of Urartu." (Gen 8:4) We call them the Zagros Mountains of Turkey. Ancient legend says that Noah and his family lived around the ark for many years, in the district still called Meshah. (Gen 10:30) It seems likely to me that the ark came to rest in the foothills surrounding Mt. Ararat.

An objection to that is that the tops of the mountains were not visible for 2 ½ months after the ark came to rest. (v 5) This implies the ark must be at the top of the highest mountain around, which is Mt. Ararat. But if the actual ark resting spot was far enough away, the curvature of the earth could have hid Mt. Ararat until the waters decreased. Besides, Ararat is an active volcano. It is likely that it was not as high then as it is now. And, the ark “resting upon the mountains of Urartu” does not require that it be grounded upon a mountain peak, anyway. I believe that Noah was smarter than that. I believe he did what I would have done: put out drogue anchors from his bow on long ropes, so that the ark would be kept facing the wind and waves during the storm, and so that it would be halted in the shallows before hitting the beach. If it had run aground during the storm it might have broken to pieces. If it had grounded on a steep slope, it might have rolled down the mountain as the waters receded. But with drogue anchors on long ropes, it is more likely that the ark would gently drag to a halt over land that is more level. Noah was not stupid. Besides, he had divine guidance.

So now we get to the fun (and controversial) part. An actual site has been found which fits both the Bible story and the ancient stories and legends. I'll tell this story in Volume 2 as I believe it unfolded (my personal guess based on all that I have heard and read). On the internet, see nwcreation.net/noahwyatt.html, noahsark-naxuan.com, and biblediscoveries.com/arkvisit.html for more details, some pictures, and the pro's and con's of the intriguing and delightful controversy.

I believe that Noah and his family lived right near the original Eden, and that is where they built the ark. But the world was very different then. My guess is that Eden was precisely above where the temple of Jerusalem is now. The storms and floodwaters carried them over what is now the Himalayan Mountains, though there were no mountains there at the time. They then drifted slowly over what is now the Pacific Ocean, and across South America over Venezuela (also on the equator at the time).

Then “At the end of 150 days the water decreased.” (Gen 8:3) Mars returned, raising the Himalayas, taking a half billion cubic miles of ocean, and lowering the mean sea level by 7000 feet. The resulting winds and currents pulled the ark from Venezuela across Africa (there was no Atlantic Ocean), across what is now the Mediterranean, and to what is now Turkey (a then distance of about 4500 miles) in half a day, at speeds over 300 MPH, before Mars lost its grip on Earth. The first stone anchor actually touched ground during this time, at low tide over Ankara, Turkey, but the ark was moving too fast and the anchor rope snapped. (That famous anchor can still be seen in Ankara, which was named after the event.) By the time the ark slowed, it was over the village of Arzap (‘cling to the earth’ in Turkish, ‘eretz zab’ in Hebrew), which is now called Kazan.

Several stone anchors hit bottom at this point, bringing the ark to a stop. “The ark rested upon the mountains of Urartu.” (v 4) It was the 151st day (17th day of the 7th month). The storms abated, and the ark lay at anchor, but as yet no mountaintops were visible. The huge mountains of super-cold ice at the poles prevailed over the warm oceans, dropping the sea level as they formed the glaciers which began the Ice Age. On day 223 the mountaintops became visible as the ark still remained at anchor over Arzap, 15 miles southwest of Mt Ararat. The anchor lines were differing lengths; thus the anchors have been found in different locations around the area. On day 263 Noah sent out a raven and a dove. The strong raven made it to the mountain peaks (which were many miles away, not where the ark was anchored), but the weaker dove returned.

One by one, each of the anchor lines broke. With all the long anchor lines broken, the ark drifted southeast, past Mt. Ararat (the currents would naturally flow around the mountain, not into it) and over what is now Dogubayazit, coming to a halt again as its final two anchors grounded on the sides of Mount Mesha (also known as Cordu, meaning Mountain of the Kurds, or Cudi Dag in Turkish) which is 17 miles south of Mt. Ararat and 14 miles from Arzap.

Again the ark rested at anchor, and again (day 270) Noah sent out the dove, which returned with the olive leaf. The dove had made it to the nearby Mesha Escarpment, a double peaked ridge whose shape has been made famous in some old paintings and is known as ‘the Wall of Heaven’ and ‘the Mountains of Mashu’ in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. On day 277 Noah sent out the dove again, and this time it did not return. The ark continued to rest at anchor until day 312, when it finally grounded near the Mesha Escarpment at what is now the 7400 foot level. The wind and waves pushed it sideways to the slope, so that it remained level. Yet Noah had to remain in the ark until day 370 when the ground upon which the ark rested was dry, though barely above the slowly dropping sea level.

So there is where Noah's descendants founded the first city after the flood, the legendary Naxuan. This town of about 1000 stone foundations has been found at the site of the original depression in the mud where the ark rested, probably for at least 100 years. This is known by the locals as ‘the Place of First Descent’. After a century or two the sea level had dropped and there was a big mud-slide. It carried the ark down about a mile to what is now the 6200 foot level. There a rock outcropping impaled it and brought it to a halt. A new town grew up just west of there, originally called Seron (ancient Babylonian Nisir), and now called Nasar by the Turks. There, I believe, the Ark's depression in the mud remains, though not much else. In the 5500 years since then most of the original has been lost by the scavenging of its materials, rotting, and volcanic activity. All that is visible is a huge boat-shaped trough/mound in the earth. A few artifacts such as rivets and fossilized wood were found, but no formal excavations have been done.

This is all rather controversial for numerous reasons. 1) Everyone expected to find an ark, complete with roof, empty rooms, and gopher wood, but all that remains at Mesha/Seron is a depression in the earth with a pile of mud in the center which the Turks won't let anybody dig up for fear they'll destroy the evidence. 2) Everyone expected it to be at the top of Mt. Ararat while the actual site is 17 miles away. 3) Several eyewitnesses who claimed to see the ark encased in ice on top of Mt. Ararat have gotten people all excited over the wrong place. 4) We expected the ark to be a crude barge built by Stone Age technology and cannot comprehend a streamlined vessel 500 feet long designed to handle 300 MPH currents, 350 MPH winds, and 300 foot waves. 5) the dimensions of the depression in the mud seem wrong: the Bible implies 450 x 75 feet, yet the water-line dimensions at Seron are 515 x 138 feet. But if you use the royal Egyptian Cubit of 20.6 inches (which Moses used) and if the Bible gives the average rather than the maximum beam width, that is exactly correct.

I am not going to solve the controversy here. So I'll just tell what I believe. I am convinced that old man Noah was incredibly brilliant, and that the technology he used was in some ways beyond ours. As opposed to the barge-like monstrosities you see in today's artwork (which could not have survived the cataclysm), Noah's ark was a beautiful, 500 foot long streamlined ocean-going vessel, designed to survive immense winds and waves during the Flood. Noah manufactured massive beams using a sophisticated glue-lamination process. The Hebrew word translated 'gopher' wood (Strong's 1613) comes from a root word meaning to bend together or entwine. It is not the name of a tree, it is the name of a process, and should be translated 'laminated' wood. (Some scholars think it was mis-transcribed and should read 'Kopher' (Strong's 3724), which describes the bitumen pitch covering over the wood. But I disagree.) Noah built the ark with keel, ribs, crossribs, and roll fins, connected together with notches and huge rivets just like any good shipbuilder of the 20th century. His rivets used a titanium aluminum alloyed steel, superior to anything we can make today. His double hull was over 10 inches thick, with pitch between the two layers. The ark's dimensions and layout were perfect for surviving an ocean gale. His many drogue anchors kept the prow facing the wind.

Having been trained in uniformitarianism, we think of Noah as trying to build his ark using flint knives, stone axes and hammers, wooden pegs, and a lot of hired labor. In fact he lived at the peak of the antediluvian civilization and almost certainly had power tools to assist him. We think we are so smart because we have believed the lie of evolution (though we won't admit it), but we've actually been devolving. I firmly believe that Noah was smarter and more capable than anyone alive today. He survived a cataclysm that would certainly have wiped us out!

I have fun telling the story in *God's Plan of the Ages*, giving Noah the credit I think he deserves.

Looking for evidences of the close pass of Mars which caused the Flood, Patten quotes from ancient authors such as Hesiod (8th century BC) and Homer in the Illiad. Here is one from Ovid, of the 2nd century BC. "He [Typhon, a Greek name for Mars] has a hundred snaky heads [the static], his eyes flash fire, and he emits strange noises... all kinds of voices, bellowings, yelpings, and hissings. Earth, sea, and sky resound with the din of battle. There is thunder, lightning, fire, and burning hurricane; the whole earth seethes, and the sky and sea likewise. Great waves rage along the shore, and there is endless quaking, so that even Hades and the Titans under Tartarus are reduced to trembling..." Patten then tells about one of his research team members, Leonard Schroedter, who was at Fairbanks, Alaska during the severe winter of 1949-50. There were huge magnetic storms, vast displays of the Northern Lights, and extreme cold, accompanied by intense screechy, witchy noises that nothing could block. They seemed to come from within the head; plugging the ears didn't make any difference.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is an Assyrian flood story found on clay tablets in Assurbanipal's library. Though colored by their idolatrous culture, it has some aspects that fit a Mars flyby scenario. "Whatever I [Noah] had put aboard it [the ark]. Whatever silver I had put aboard it. Whatever gold I had put aboard it. Whatever living creatures I had put aboard it. I made all my family and relatives [Noah's sons and their wives] board the ship. The domestic [clean] animals and the wild [unclean]. The fixed time arrived... [the ancients with their knowledge of astronomy could predict to the hour when it was coming]. With the first glow of dawn, a black cloud rose up from the horizon. Inside it the storm-god thunders... [the noise]. The god of the underworld tears out the posts of the dam [opening the fountains of the great deep]. The warrior-god leads the waters on [the floodgates of the sky]. The gods raise the torches, setting the land on fire with their blaze [the flux tube of electricity, plus widespread lightning strikes]. The fearful silence of the storm-god reached the heavens [the witchy screeching noises inside the head] and turned everything bright to darkness. ... of the land shattered like a pot [crustal tides and cracks]. For one day the tempest... [the flyby only takes one day]. It blew hard... Like a battle the divine might overtook the people [none of the people survived except those in the ark]."

At its closest approach Mars was on the far side of the earth, and therefore not visible – it is thus not described except as "the warrior-god." The fixed time for its arrival, however, was well known to the people of that culture.

One modern-day evidence of this 'fixed time' is our Halloween – the end of October. It is an ancient time of bewitching, devils, ghouls, and spirits of the dead. For thousands of years it was celebrated as a black Mass. It originated as the memorial for the dead during the week following the October 24th pass of Mars.

Between the Flood and 701 BC, Mars came within 250,000 to 400,000 miles of Earth twice every two years (inbound in October of even years, and outbound the next March). This is close enough to cause up to 10 foot crustal tides, together with oceanic tides up to 80 feet. The sea level was much lower than it is today, since the mountains of super-cold ice at the poles caused much of the oceans to freeze into the great glaciers that covered a third of the earth. But still, nobody built towns near the ocean back then. Twice every two years the oceanic tides would flood all the lowlands. They only built on high ground. This is the period termed by modern 'scientists' as the Ice and Stone Ages, the era of the 'cave men'. Between Noah and the division of the earth at the time of Peleg, mankind almost didn't survive. Many animals from the ark became extinct, including most of the dinosaurs and the flying reptiles. They couldn't take the cold or the thinner air; their metabolism and breathing efficiency were too low.

Flying, fire-breathing dragons survived, barely. They are a part of the early history or legends of at least 10 ancient cultures. Dragons had a complex language. They were known to be very cunning. They were evil and cruel, and hated humans. They loved to steal and hoard art, gold, and jewels. The last known fire-breathing dragons were killed by the knights of England somewhere between 700 and 1100 AD. By then dragons were smaller and could no longer actually fly. Their 'fire' was mostly smoke; the air was just too thin. But they were real.

After the Flood, the October flyby was usually across Israel just before noon. The Hebrew word Heshvan (their second month, corresponding to our October) is short for Marsheshvan, the month of Mars. The March flyby was across the Americas shortly before midnight Israel time. The Latin word for March comes from Mars. March 21st corresponds to the Roman Tubulustrium, when Mars and its steeds Deimos and Phobos were watched, worshiped, and feared. "Beware the Ides [middle] of March!" At that time the equator went through the Himalayas and across Israel toward Ecuador – tipped 30° from today's equator. The relationship between Earth and Mars was resonant; at each flyby the interaction of gravitational, electrostatic, and magnetic fields acted to preserve the interrelationship of the planets to keep the timing precise and predictable.

These flybys always caused problems; there were always earthquakes and coastal flooding. But every six years when Jupiter passed through Leo or Aquarius, its pull would tighten up Mars' orbit and cause additional distress on Earth. Then every 30 years both Jupiter and Saturn would line up, sometimes with other planets as well, pulling Mars within about 50,000 miles or worse. That would often cause major damage: monstrous quakes, floods, storms, volcanoes, and other disasters. Alternately in the best case, when Jupiter and Saturn were in Scorpius or Taurus, Mars passed by as much as 400,000 miles away. That was still exciting, but caused little damage.

The location of the closest approach of Mars was not as predictable. Although Mars usually passed near the earth's equator, that kept changing, since even after the Flood the earth's crust could still slide sideways a few degrees with each close flyby. The crust, though cracked and sunken to the sub-crust mantle, was still separate from it by pockets of water or steam, and was mostly intact. The Himalayas, European Alps, and Rockies show evidence of repeated passes of Mars. Each flyby pulled the crust together toward Mars, thrusting up a ridge of mountains, rearranging the landscape, and causing terrible earthquakes.

This is why Nimrod built his "tower that reached unto the heavens." He designed it to be a stable astronomical observatory to calculate just how far the crust had slid, so he could tell the people just when and where Mars would return and how close it would be. (I'll tell his story after just a little more background.) Records have survived from about 2700 BC indicating that the ancient Sumerians not only knew the orbits of the planets well enough to predict eclipses, earthquakes, etc, but they even correctly calculated the earth's spin axis wobble at 25,920 years, a feat that has not been duplicated until this century. These were not ignorant, superstitious cave men!

From after the Flood until the time of Hezekiah, the ancient world feared and worshiped not only Mars, but also Venus and other planets. At one period they feared Venus, the goddess of love, more than Mars, the god of war! Many cultures have two very different characters for Venus: a fertility / mother goddess on one hand, but a fierce goddess of war and destruction on the other. The Ba'als were the planets. Ancient myths that later devolved into the Greek and Roman legends of conflicts between the gods had their basis in these planetary interactions. Jupiter (Jove, Zeus), Saturn (Chronos), and Mercury (Hermes) also joined in the struggle, battling over the Earth in both legend and actual fact. Why Venus was first the goddess of love and fertility, and then became a goddess of war and destruction, once again is anybody's guess. But as before, my guess is as good as yours so here goes.

Among many other planets, planetoids, moons, and space debris resulting from the breakup of Nyx in 5040 BC, there was a special trinary (three body) system now known as Venus/Mercury/Phaeton. They had been flung into a wild, unstable, decaying elliptical orbit well out of the plane of the ecliptic, initially reaching past the orbit of Saturn. Think of it as Venus with two huge moons rotating opposite each other above Venus' ring of day/night. I am guessing that Venus happened to pass too close to Jupiter in 3300 BC. Jupiter is now covered with about 1800 miles of thick atmosphere and oceans – it had even more back then. When Venus and its 'moons' passed by, they raised colossal tides on Jupiter, drawing off a little of Jupiter's noxious atmosphere for themselves. This gave them a high degree of reflectivity, as well as long vapor tails, which made them spectacularly visible from Earth.

Thus Venus was worshiped as Ishtar, goddess of love. Her moons became her jealous twin sisters, Ereshkigal (Mercury) and Allatu (Phaeton). From the perspective of the ancients, Venus was 'birthed' by Jupiter. This close pass dramatically altered their orbit, bringing the trinary in to 13° from the ecliptic plane at 0.94 eccentricity. Her moons' orbits around Venus were perpendicular to the ecliptic and equidistant from the sun, such that as the three tails streamed away from the sun, they actually formed the 'caduceus' in the sky. (Two serpents entwined around a winged staff, carried by Hermes or Mercury in Greek legend. See Vol. Two for picture.) The tail of Venus formed the staff. The tails of the two moons formed twisted 'serpents' around the staff as they orbited Venus.

These lovely 'feathered snakes' were first adored and worshiped, then later greatly feared all over the globe. Even the Central American Aztecs, Toltecs, Mayans, and Olmec peoples have legends of them, called Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli, going clear back to 3113 BC (67 years after the Tower of Babel incident). Other examples are the venerated uraeus serpent of Egypt, and the bronze serpent Moses put on a pole. In Babylon Venus was called Astarte; in Egypt she was Isis or Iset; in Assyria she was Assur, etc.

The trinary's orbit out past Jupiter was unstable; it was not resonant with any stable planet. Just the opposite; the powerful attractions of other planets (primarily huge magnetic and electrostatic forces) caused a drag which made its orbit decay rapidly. (These interactions heated the irregular chunks of Nyx, which became molten and formed spheres.) Its sharply elliptical orbit just reached Earth's orbit, though being so far off the ecliptic plane would make collision unlikely. But that nearly happened in 1454 BC, three years before the Exodus. Earth slowed Venus and its twin moons, pulling off Phaeton and setting Venus and Mercury into a new orbit inside Earth's. Its new orbit was an improvement, with an eccentricity of about 0.51 and an inclination of 2° or less to the ecliptic. Venus flew near and locked into resonance with Earth about the time of the Exodus. According to the ancient historians Varro, Castor, and Eratosthenes, the catastrophes at the Exodus were caused by Venus, not Mars. Phaeton collided with Earth at Bermuda shortly before the Exodus. With Phaeton gone, Venus had but a single 'snake' around the staff. This came to be the symbol of the Exodus. It became a problem when Israelites began to idolize it. It is now the 'Rod of Asclepius', the symbol of the medical profession. I'll discuss these again in my story of the Exodus.

Besides the evidence from legends and myths, some evidence comes from a study of the planets. None of the planets have fully settled into the plane of the ecliptic, and a few are way off. This implies a recent catastrophic past. For the billions of years of planetary stability required by the evolutionist, such facts must be carefully ignored. Also some, like Mercury and Venus, are still excessively hot, which again implies a recent catastrophic history.

Most scientists agree that Venus in its present orbit is too hot (800° F at the surface) to be explained by solar heat. But it can be explained by the huge stresses of recent close interactions with other planets. Venus has a thick, noxious, corrosive atmosphere, like Jupiter (and 90 times thicker than Earth). Even more impressive, Venus still has a slow retrograde spin equal to about $\frac{2}{3}$ of our year, too close to its orbital year to be a mere coincidence. Venus always presents the same face toward Earth when it is near. Tidal bulges in the crust of Venus due to Earth's pull gave Venus that retrograde spin during those periodic 5-month close flybys in the Catastrophic Era, and it hasn't lost it, even though it no longer comes so close.

So now we have Mars, Saturn, Venus, Phaeton, and Mercury affecting our planet. A bit later I'll talk about how Saturn nearly impacted Earth. You would think there ought to be some significant references to the planets in the Scriptures and other ancient literature. There are! It is just that we, having been trained with a uniformitarian world view, have been unable to read this literature and interpret it for what it actually says. It has been 2700 years since the last close planetary flyby, so such things 'just don't happen.' Thus we thoughtlessly reinterpret such literature according to our own experience.

Many primitive cultures were (and are) terrified of passing comets and eclipses. Even some modern scientists recognize a correlation between comets and earthquakes. Most of you have never heard of the ancient Roman art of meteoromancy, defined as divination by observation of meteors. If you had, you would guess it involved fearsome portents in the sky imagined by superstitious and ignorant astrologers of long long ago. But you would be wrong, since you would be interpreting the past according to your uniformitarian views of the present. Noah Webster, in his famous 1828 dictionary, states that meteor divination was accomplished "chiefly by thunder and lightning." They were not so afraid of distant comets or streaks across the night sky as they were terrified of planets passing close to Earth, causing immense electric arcs, incredible thunder, earthquakes, and tidal floods along the coastlines, and of meteors or even small moons colliding with the earth to wipe out whole civilizations.

For example, the Etruscans perished in 750 BC when Eris, a moon of Mars, struck Italy. But Phaeton is the worst example. It came blazing across the sky just prior to the Exodus in 1451 BC. The intense heat caused the Sahara and Arabian deserts. It plowed the Atlantic Ocean over sunken Atlantis and impacted North America at what is now Bermuda. This was possibly the worst meteor strike in our history, devastating or annihilating such divergent cultures as the Harappan of India to the Olmec of SE Mexico. Most of North Africa was wiped out. The mighty Amalekites of Saudi Arabia were driven from their lands. The Nubians survived, but barely, and they have not recovered their powerful civilization to this day.

Ancient literature includes drawings of massive earthquakes, showing cracked and collapsing walls and towers and people both praying and prone, while the sky is filled with long-tailed meteors or comets blazing overhead. The example below shows ancient Byzantium. Even our word 'disaster' is translated from Greek and Latin as 'bad star' and refers to 'the evil influences of a star or planet'.

The ancients were more advanced in astronomy than we can comprehend. For example, a Sumerian tablet from about 2500 BC shows their god Enlil granting a farming tool to the human race; the background is a representation of the sun with 11 planets circling it in correct order by size (assuming the one with the moon is Earth), except there is a large planet the size of Saturn between Jupiter and Mars (where the asteroids are now), and another large planet out between Neptune and Pluto (which we have not yet discovered). In ancient Sumerian literature, all the planets are named (the one where the asteroids are was called Nibiru), and visually described (Uranus, for example, is correctly described with a greenish blue hue).

With Mars and the Venus trinary/binary spectacularly visible every few years, and with the recent memories of devastating cataclysms from Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, it is really no wonder that the Israelites were so tempted to turn away from YHWH to the worship of Ba'al, known as the lord of the heavens and controller of the planets.

The title Ba'al, meaning lord, was given at various times to many gods. But though the names were different, they originated with the same things in every culture: the rogue planets that so terribly controlled their lives.

The ancients knew that the true Creator God, known as Elohim (plural), was Spirit. But they also knew that they, in God's image, were body, soul, and spirit. I believe it was Nimrod who, in 3324 BC, first capitalized on that. He claimed that El (singular), which he called Bel, was the Spirit part of Elohim, that Nergal (Mars, the god of war) was Bel's physical representation in the heavenlies, *and that he himself was the human part of Elohim* – thus his divine right to rule. When Venus was 'birthed' by Enlil (Jupiter) in 3300 BC, he named it Astarte, claiming that it represented the female 'fertility' side of Elohim. His wife Ishtar was the corresponding human part, the goddess of love and fertility. Later, Ishtar and her bastard son Damu (Dumuzi) became the original Madonna and Child cult.

Thus Nimrod and his wife Ishtar set themselves up as gods, tricking the human race into the first idolatry, by capitalizing on their fear of the planets and the plurality of God's name, Elohim. Most idolatrous religions since then have evolved from this Madonna and Child cult, which we know in Scripture as Ba'al, Ashtoreth (plural: Ashteroth), and Tammuz. An exception is Hinduism, which began as the worship of Vishnu (Old Man Noah).



“... The earth shook and quaked, the foundations of heaven were trembling and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up out of His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub [destroying angel] and flew. And He appeared on the wings of the wind. And He made darkness canopies around Him, a mass of waters, thick clouds of the sky. From the brightness before Him coals of fire were kindled. YHWH thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. And He sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea appeared [tidal waves?]. The foundations of the earth were laid bare by the rebuke of YHWH and the blast of the breath of His nostrils.” (2 Sam 22:8-16; Ps 18:7-15) Patten quotes this to show how we of the uniformitarian age tend to dismiss it as hyperbole. However, it may have some basis in fact during a close flyby of one of the planets.

Another scriptural hint of a Mars flyby after the Noahic flood is found in Genesis 11. The **Tower of Bab-ilu** (Babel) was in the land of Sumer (Shinar) about 7 miles north of Eridu (not at Babylon, which was not founded at the time). Bab-ilu means ‘gate of god’. As with all idolatrous names, Hebrew scribes never used it without combining it with another word, ‘balal’, which means ‘to confuse’. It was more than a tower. It was a religious temple.

Nimrod’s religion was based on astronomy, and the purpose of his tower was to observe and gain precise knowledge about the planets and stars, thus glorifying the astrologers and giving them power over the people. His plan was to have the tower ready by the October 3180 BC flyby, which was predicted to be a close one, since Jupiter and Saturn would both be in Aquarius. Nimrod used a lot of forced labor to get his tower finished in time; he almost succeeded. He could not complete the temple on top, as he had trouble getting enough gold and jewels from Aratta.

The Tower of Bab-ilu was a circular tower built in steps or terraces. It rose a total of 288 feet above the flat Tigris-Euphrates plain. It was also 288 feet wide at the base, designed to withstand huge earthquakes. He used fire-hardened brick set in flexible, bitumen-based mortar which could absorb ground shocks. The mortar was watertight, so if there was another flood the people could come inside and be protected. The first terrace was 105.6 feet, the second 57.6 feet, the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth, 19.2 feet each, and the temple of Marduk (Lord Mars) on top was 48 feet high. These dimensions are in obvious reference to the orbits of the planets. The first and second stages are in 1:2 ratio, like the orbits of Mars and Earth. The total height and 7th stage were in 6:1 ratio, like the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. The 7th stage was in 5:2 ratio with each of the 3rd - 6th stages, like the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn. The total height was in 15:1 ratio with each of the 3rd - 6th stages, like the orbits of Mars and Saturn.

The Scripture is translated, “... Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” (Gen 11:4) The phrase “will reach into heaven” is literally “with the heavens.” This could also be translated, “whose top reveals or shows the heavens,” indicating the observatory on top. Since the planets were so fearful and so greatly affected their lives, proud Nimrod wanted everyone to look to him for the latest information on their orbits. Thus he planned to establish himself and his wife Ishtar as the god-king/queen of the earth, and to make his city into the world’s center of religion and knowledge.

Well, God was displeased with Nimrod. As Mars swept past, the combination of the earthquakes and the huge flux tube of electricity destroyed the tower. He should have known that lightning would strike the highest point. With Mars at about 40,000 miles, both crustal and oceanic tides were huge. Foolish Nimrod, in his temple at the top of his nearly completed tower, was killed. Ancient rabbinical Jewish legend states: “As for the unfinished tower, a part sank into the earth, and another part was consumed by fire; only one-third of it remained standing.”

An interesting thought here: nearly all people in the world were centered in the area of that electrical discharge. Our brains work by electricity. It is possible that God allowed the lightning strike to fry our neurological impulses, resulting in the confusion of our language.

The scriptural account is too brief. I will try to fill in the story, based on ancient legends, myths, extra-biblical sources, and my own guess-work. Legends abound, so the story could become a book in itself. I’ll consolidate these legends here briefly, and tell the story in more detail in *God’s Plan of the Ages*, fitting it to the biblical account.

It all started in 3391 BC with the birth of an ambitious and powerful man named Enmar, or Enmar-kar (Enmar the hunter), a younger son of Cush, son of Ham. He was a rebel “against the face of YHWH,” (Gen 10:9) making himself out to be god, so Hebrews (who refused to speak or write the names of false gods) combined his name Enmar (NMR) with their word ‘merad’ (rebellion), to get Nimrod.

By the time of our story, his older brothers and uncles had already founded many cities and towns in the land of Sumer (Shinar), including Uruk (Erech), Accad, Calneh, and Bactra. Enmar brazenly started the first false religion. He claimed that Bel (Belos) was the spirit of Elohim, the creator, life-giver, supreme god, god of justice, the one who holds society together, and controller of the elements (especially fire). The planets were physical manifestations of Bel. He himself was the son of Bel and Ninhursag (the earth goddess); thus he was given the divine right to rule. He gathered an army and within 20 years he had forced the cities and peoples of Sumer to accept him as their emperor. He was the world’s first potentate/dictator by conquest.

As he was consolidating his power, he noticed a very beautiful woman in Bactra named Semiramis. She was married to one of his former officers, a deserter named Onnes, who had become the keeper of an inn / brothel. Enmar had Onnes killed and took Semiramis to be his queen, claiming that she was a virgin who sprung up from the river at his landing at Bactra. Enmar changed the name of Bactra to Eridu (paradise). He built a temple there to An (god of heaven) and called it E-Anna (house of heaven). It was built on the 'holy' district of Eridu, named Nun-ki (mighty place). He renamed Semiramis Ishtar (brightest star, or evening star), and gave her the honorary title Inanna (**queen of heaven**, or great lady of the sky god An). Enmar appointed Ishtar to be in charge of his new religion, while he embarked on a massive building program.

At this time the Shemites lived in Aratta (where Noah's ark still lay in the Ararat foothills). Nearly on the equator at the time, their land was warm and fertile, and they were happy and prosperous. Enmar asked them to donate vast quantities of lumber, jewels, precious stones, gold, and silver to Bab-ilu and to his capital city Uruk. They refused, so they were conquered and forced to 'donate' tribute. Some became embittered, left Aratta, and fled west into what is now Europe. In my story the Shemites from Aratta are the only ones who retained the original language from before the Flood, which I believe was ancient Hebrew. (Parts of this legend are told in the famous Sumerian epic *Enmar-kar and the Lord of Aratta*.)

Enmar built many other splendid capitol buildings, temples, and towers in his conquered cities, but none to equal E-Anna, the fabulous golden temple to his queen Ishtar at Eridu. She transformed the simple lamb sacrifice that God had instituted at Eden into a New Year Festival celebrated among her priesthood with an orgy of food, sex, and hallucinogenic drugs. They would take a one-year-old ram and tear him limb from limb while still alive, then eat him raw with the blood still flowing. (Ishtar loved to drink the blood. This is the origin of red lipstick.) A newborn lamb would then be chosen to represent the new year.

Enmar and Ishtar had at least four sons: Ninyas, Agade (named after the jewelled 'crown of fire' Enmar made for Ishtar), Kalakh, and Lugalbanda, Enmar's favorite, who helped him subdue Aratta. Enmar intended Lugalbanda to be his successor in Uruk. However, his strategy contained a fatal flaw. As god of war, he was focused on power and control. He had given most of the responsibility for their new religion to Ishtar. Lugalbanda left Enmar to join Ishtar at Eridu. He became Saturn, the god of the harvest. Ishtar claimed to be Venus, goddess of fertility, love (sex), and motherhood. She enjoyed her role, consorting with any young man who took her fancy, then killing him and aborting any of their progeny so as to retain her image as a goddess. She developed a loyal priesthood of sex perverts, who were given free food, drink, drugs, and worshipers to satisfy their vile lusts upon.

Her lewd behavior disgusted Enmar, beginning a rift between them. He left Ishtar and returned to Uruk to plan construction of a huge temple / tower to Mars. It was to be an astronomical laboratory to chart the movements of the planets, so he could gain more prestige and control of the people by forecasting Mars flybys. He picked a site 7 miles north of Eridu. He called it Bab-ilu (gate of god).

Retaliating against Enmar for leaving her, Ishtar refused to abort her next bastard son, whom she called **Damu** or **Dumuzi** (from the Sumerian 'dam', meaning blood). Ishtar claimed that Damu was 'divinely conceived' (which no one could disprove since the father was slain). Ishtar decided to make Damu the next 'divine' king instead of Lugalbanda, who had become arrogant and unruly. Enmar was furious, and threatened to dethrone Ishtar and expose her ignoble origin. But Ishtar had the power of the priesthood behind her. While Enmar was desperately trying to finish his tower at Bab-ilu before the next close pass of Mars, Ishtar pulled a fast one. She substituted Lugalbanda for the ram to be sacrificed in the New Year Festival at the next winter solstice, on our December 21, 3195 BC. The drunk, drug-crazed priests didn't know the difference. They ate Lugalbanda and drank his blood. Damu was born four days later, December 25th. Ishtar claimed her newborn was the reincarnation of Lugalbanda (who she claimed had bodily ascended into Saturn). Thus Damu became the new human form of Saturn.

At this point Ishtar grew very bold. She swore hers was an 'immaculate conception' and a 'virgin birth'. She insisted that her infant Damu must be worshiped, or else there would be no spring. She claimed that Utu (Shamash) had impregnated her through the rays of the sun, *and that her baby was thus the very son of god*. (Damu's Greek name is Mithra, meaning sunlight.) She therefore claimed to be the '**mother of god**'. His birthday, on December 25, was in the middle of winter; the fear of having no spring was a powerful incentive to worship him. So Damu became the '**savior of the world**' each winter. He was called the god of spring greenery, god of the harvest, and the god of hunters, shepherds, and fishermen. I'm sure you recognize by now the source of the ancient '**Madonna and Child**' cult.

Ishtar changed the New Year Festival at the winter solstice into a birthday celebration for Damu. It became 'Saturnalia', a time of lewd orgies, centered around a large green fir tree decorated with silver and gold and pointing straight up, to encourage the sun to return to its summer position high in the sky. (Jer 10:4-6) This was the first symbol of fertility, now known as a phallic symbol (with depraved connotations), from which is derived obelisks such as the one in the entry to St. Peter's Catholic Basilica in the Vatican. Other fertility symbols, such as the Ishtar egg (laid by the Ishtar bunny?) and the Ishtar lily were similarly derived, intentionally erotic and suggestive of both male and female reproductive organs. The many fertility cults existing today all had their start with Ishtar.

Ishtar eggs were always dyed red, to symbolize the bloodiness of a newborn. The original dye used for the eggs was a sacrificed human baby's blood. (Ishtar had this thing about blood.) Other symbols such as the Yule Log, holly and mistletoe, the evergreen wreath, fertility colors of red and green, the pentagram, giving of gifts, and of course Santa Claus, the 'Old Man of the North' and his reindeer, all have pagan origins. Legendary Damu evolved into a powerful man with the head of a reindeer or elk called the **Pangenitor**, who has now become that ancient furry man in blood red who is borne aloft by a team of horned bucks and who 'delivers the goods' to the entire planet in one magical night.

As in modern America, abortions were very common, especially following Saturnalia (December 17 - 25). Our Christmas on December 25 actually celebrates the birth of Damu (Tammuz in Scripture), and not Jesus. (Jesus was probably born on September 25, 3 BC, when there were still "shepherds out in the fields by night.") Thus these pagan traditions originated thousands of years before the Catholic church Christianized them, first by Constantine about 312 AD, aided by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD and officially settled in 350 AD by Pope Julius I.

Continuing our story, some say that Nimrod did not die in his tower; that Ishtar had him put to death in the same way she killed Lugalbanda. But I tend to believe the ancient rabbinical legend that he had left Ishtar and was hurrying to finish his astronomical observatory at the top of his tower before the October 24, 3180 BC pass of Mars.

Nimrod had already conquered all of Aratta, Sumer, and Assyria, including the cities of Calneh (founded by one of his own older brothers), Assur (founded by a son of Shem), and Accad (now ruled by his second son Agade, who founded the Accadians). At Eridu (Bactra) on Nun-ki he had completed his magnificent, world-famous golden temple E-Anna for Ishtar the Inanna (Queen of Heaven). He had also founded the cities of Nineveh (ruled by Ninyas his firstborn), and Calah (ancient Nimrud, ruled by his third son Kalakh, from whom came the Chaldeans). He had expanded his capital city Uruk (Erech) and built it into a great treasure city. Now all his building projects were nearly finished and his world domination was nearly total. Of course he was enraged to hear that Ishtar had slain his favorite son, Lugalbanda, and elevated her bastard son Damu to take his place as the god Saturn, but he simply did not have time to deal with it until after the Mars flyby.

So at the age of 211, Nimrod focused all his efforts on finishing Bab-ilu. He had nearly finished it, his colossal, impregnable tower that (in his own boastful mind) even YHWH could never destroy, impervious to both flood and earthquake. The entire civilization now worshiped him, looking to him as their lord and king. Nimrod was at the peak of his power; absolute dictator of the world, the "mighty hunter against YHWH." (Gen 10:9)

God was not at all pleased at this challenge to His authority. He allowed Mars to come directly over the tower. Crustal tides were huge, and earthquakes shook the foundations so hard that the ground liquefied. The bottom third of the tower sank deep into the earth. All of Enmar's lightning rods and grounding systems proved woefully inadequate. An incredibly powerful bolt of lightning from Mars struck the top of the tower, vaporizing the entire top third and killing Enmar. The static electricity frazzled the brains of the survivors, confusing their speech and driving them away from foolish Enmar's once fabulous empire.

At that time, all the peoples of the earth were grouped by families around the land of Shinar, which we now call Persia in the country of Iraq. The sole exception is the Hebrew-speaking Shemites who had been living at Aratta in the mountains of Ararat near the ark, which was 250 miles and seven mountain passes to the north. I believe they were protected from the confusion of languages.

The weather was warm and dry that October as Mars passed by. The static electricity built to unbearable levels throughout the land. Many people died, and those who survived were shocked senseless. Their fine mud-brick homes were flattened into rubble. But worse, as they searched for survivors among their kin, they discovered that they could not talk! The electricity had fried the speech centers of their brains. With no communication possible and no homes to return to, all they could do is find their surviving kin and set out to find a place to rebuild.

In general, the families of **Japheth** went north or west, merging with the Shemites in Aratta, and moving on to Turkey, Russia, the Balkan Peninsula, and Europe to Italy, Sardinia, Corsica, France, and Spain, as far as England. Some of the families of **Shem** remained in Aratta, Assyria, and Shinar; but the rest went east or south, into the Sinai Peninsula, Arabia, India, Indochina and the Orient. The families of **Ham** traveled southwest or southeast, settling in Canaan, Egypt, North Africa, and Ethiopia, as far south as the Congo Basin and the southern coast of Arabia. Note that these were not poor choices back then, since the Arabian and Sahara Deserts had not yet burned up and those areas were lush green, well-watered, and fertile.

From the table of the nations in Genesis 10, ancient rabbinical tradition estimates that there were seventy (extended) families that went out from the tower of Babel. This may be accurate, as a study of language origins reveals that there are roughly that many non-derivative (original) languages. Many scientists accept the possibility that all humankind came from one original pair, but nobody believes that Hebrew, Chinese, and German, for example, originated from a single parent language. My theory is that everyone at the tower of Babel totally lost their ability to communicate and had to start from scratch and invent their own speech and script. Thus each separate family group would develop their own distinct language.

In contrast, to try to explain non-derivative language origins under the evolutionary hypothesis requires either multiple parallel lines of human evolution, or no speech at all until late in the evolutionary chain (both ridiculous).

Noah and his children carried genes for a great variety of body characteristics / pigments. But after the Tower of Babel there was little intermarriage between family groups for 1200 years. During that time, any genetic differences between family groups became inbred, thus solidifying into permanent racial traits to begin today's races.

Some of these cultures fought and conquered each other, or intermarried and lost their separate identity, such as the families of Japheth who settled around Aratta, Turkey, and Russia, learned Hebrew, and intermarried with the Shemites there. But many ancient civilizations survived as unique races scattered abroad. From Genesis 10, here are my own estimates of this mass migration.

The sons of **Japheth** went north and west into Russia, Turkey, and Europe, and also east to Medo/Persia. Gomer began the Cimmerians. Magog, Ashkenaz, and Togarmah became the Barbarians of the northern Steppes, known as Scythians or later as the forces of Gog and Magog. Madai began the Medes in Persia. Javan began the Ionian Greeks. Tubal and Meshech founded the Russian groups called Tabali and Mushki. Tiras was the ancestor of the Aegean Tirsenois. Riphath began the Paphlagonians in Russia's Rhiphaean Mountains. Elishah and Kittim went to Cyprus. Tarshish went to Tartessus, Spain, the Balearic Islands, and the Isle of Sardinia. Dodanim became the Dardanians of Asia Minor, at and around the Aegean Isle of Rhodes.

The sons of **Ham** traveled all over the world except Europe, though some stayed in the areas of Sumer and Canaan. Cush migrated to west Sudan (Kush = Nubia) and Mizraim to upper Egypt, which at the time were fertile highlands. (Lower Egypt, the Nile delta, was still forming and too close to sea level for permanent habitation.) Put (Phut) is Cyrenaica in North Africa (now NE Libya). Cush's descendants also populated Arabia: Seba in the south, Havilah in the central, Dedan in the north, Sabtah at Shabwat, and Raamah and Sabteca scattered as nomads. (Arabia was then a lush grassland.) Nimrod's descendants include the Sumerians and Babylonians. He also ruled the Japhethic Accadians and Shemite Chaldeans. Other sons of Mizraim include Ludim (Libyans), Caphtor (Crete), and Casluhim (Philistines). Canaan's many sons include Sidon (the Phoenicians) who later intermarried to become predominantly Semitic, Heth (the Hittites of Asia Minor), Jebus (the Jebusites in Jerusalem), Amurri (Amorites in the hill country of Canaan just west of the Dead Sea), and Seni (the Sinites in Asia and the Far East). Eventually Canaanites even reached the Americas. One race of people often attributed to Ham, the Amalekites of central Arabia, actually came from Shem – Amalek was a half-brother to Tammuz, by Ishtar and Cainan son of Arphaxad.

The sons of **Shem** (Semites) formed the central nations, mixed with Japheth in the north or with Ham's descendants in Canaan, Sumer, and Arabia. Of course the Hebrews (Israelites), the sons of Eber, came from Shem through Shelah, Cainan, and Arphaxad, as did all the Ishmaelites, Midianites, and Edomites. Elam began Susiana, (capital Susa) in ancient Persia. Assur began Assyria, which Nimrod conquered. After Nimrod died, Arphaxad's descendants founded Ur, at Bab-ilu. Joktan was the father of the 13 Arabian tribes of Genesis 10:26-29. Lud formed the kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor. Aram begot the Aramaeans, an important people in Haran which grew to cover most of modern-day Syria.

All these ancient civilizations, with their cities, complex languages, writing, culture, tools, jewelry, and pottery, started after the Tower of Babel catastrophe in 3180 BC.

Modern 'scientists' say no – many ancient cultures, (Sumerian, Chaldean, Egyptian, Minoan, Chinese, etc) must go back well before 5000 BC, since we have records that their civilizations were quite advanced as early as 3000 BC and 'It must have taken thousands of years to become so advanced.' But having a little biblical background you will not be fooled. These were not evolving Neolithic cavemen 'becoming civilized' over thousands of years. They lived 400 to 600 years, were well-educated and highly intelligent, and still understood the advanced antediluvian culture. Though they faced horrible conditions (thin air, the post Flood Ice Age, and regular close flybys of Mars) and had to start from scratch with no farms, homes, tools, language, or script, yet they were able to recover their advanced cultures within a generation.

Modern archeologists digging in the ruins of ancient cities cannot explain why so many cities have layers of rubble, with succeeding generations building a new city on top of the rubble. They form mounds up to 100 ft. deep, called 'tells'. But why? Cities nowadays, even ones lasting for thousands of years, do not form mounds. There is no build-up of material from past generations. But when the *entire city* is knocked down by a great earthquake every 30 or 60 or 90 years, you can't just sweep away the rubble – the entire city is rubble! You flatten it a bit and rebuild on top of the rubble. Thus these pottery 'experts' who date a civilization by its 'thousands of years' between the layers of pottery styles, miss it by several orders of magnitude.

Back to our story – with Enmar-kar dead, Ishtar took control. Her 'Madonna and Child' fertility cult sold well, thank you. The confusion of languages did not stop it – only spread it. Though the names were changed with the different languages, nearly every ancient false religion has its basis in Ishtar's fertility cult. Some examples are the Osiris, Isis, Horus cult of Egypt, Cybele and Attis of Phrygia, Aphrodite, Demeter, and Persephone of Greece, Maia, Saturn, and Rhea of Rome, Anat and Adonis of Syria, and Shiva, Kali, and Kevan of India.

Well, Damu/Dumuzi grew up. He became everything Ishtar had ever wanted in a man. She had claimed that her dead husband Enmar (now called Ninus) had not actually died, but had ascended into Bel, as physically represented by Mars (now called Marduk or Nergal). Ishtar promoted Damu as the reincarnation of Ninus. As Saturn, he became the god of fertility, both Ishtar's son and now her consort. The infant son of the mother goddess becomes her consort in all the ancient fertility cults. Damu is combined with the Hebrew 'taznuth' (fornication) to get Tammuz.

One legend claims that Damu wanted to rule, so she simply arranged for his death as with Lugalbanda, but I don't think so. He really loved her, and supported her religion and all her immoral activities wholeheartedly. For the first time, Ishtar had a man who would give her all the sex she wanted without trying to run things. The legend I believe is that on February 14, 3105 BC, almost 2 months before the spring equinox, Damu was tragically killed while hunting wild pig (a boar gored him). This devastated Ishtar. Damu was the only one she had ever really loved. She proclaimed 40 days of weeping and fasting for his death (later called Lent), followed by the Feast of Ishtar (Easter) to celebrate his resurrection. She claimed that Damu was the Pangenitor who impregnated the world at every winter solstice, and who was then reborn into the spring greenery when they arose at sunrise to greet him at the Feast of Ishtar (Easter Sunrise Service). In revenge they killed a boar and ate it for lunch on Ishtar Sun-god Day (our traditional Easter Sunday pork roast). Now you know way more than you ever wanted to know about the pagan origins for many of our revered customs and traditions.

A brief parenthesis here just in case you are wondering what I expect you to actually do with this information. Am I trying to destroy your Valentine's Day, Lent, Easter, Christmas, and Halloween and try to talk you into going back to the Old Testament Feasts of Israel instead? Let me be very blunt about this. I am not trying to get you to do anything at all. That is not my job. You and I, dear Reader, are totally free in Christ to walk by His Holy Spirit. Far be it for me to try to manipulate you into doing something.

On the contrary, you and I have spent most of our lives being manipulated by the ancient traditions we received from our forefathers, and as a result of those traditions, not being free to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. What I am trying to do is expose those traditions by telling the truth about them, to set you free from them so you can follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that the truth sets us free. (Jn 8:32) I do not (necessarily) want you to give up celebrating Christmas and Easter. I do not want you to start celebrating the Feasts of Israel instead. I really do not want you to do anything at all, except learn about old legends, traditions, and lies so we will no longer be bound by them, and thus be free in Christ to seek for the daily leading of the Holy Spirit as to where He wants us and what He wants us to be doing right now.

Patten lists 12 more scriptural incidents which could in part be explained by a close planetary flyby. The timing for each of these demonstrates the 30 year cycle of major calamities. Some of these involve battles. Wicked nations, who all worshiped Mars as the god of war, would pray to Marduk for success in battle. They tried to time their offensive during a Mars flyby, trusting that Mars would answer their prayers and direct its terrible destruction upon their enemies. But their enemies were praying the same thing, so in their minds the battle was won by the most fervent prayers or sacrifices and the strongest faith. By not understanding this regular catastrophic sequence, much of our ancient historical literature, including the Old Testament, cannot be properly understood.

270 years (9 x 30) had passed between the Flood (on Oct. 3450 BC) and the Tower of Babel catastrophe, when mankind was divided into ethnic groups (Oct. 3180 BC). Patten and other scholars believe this division occurred at the time of the birth of Peleg (whose Hebrew name means division), from Genesis 10:25: "Unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided..." I used to believe that too, but I had to give it up. Peleg was too long after the Flood and too close to the time of Abraham, when the powerful Egyptian civilization was already well over 1200 years old!

This was actually a major shift in my thinking, as I desperately wanted to believe the King James version of Genesis 11, where the generations of Shem are listed with 30 to 35 years between each from Arphaxad all the way to Terah, the father of Abraham, giving only 121 years from Peleg to Terah. But I could not get it to fit with Egyptian history. I cannot concede that the great pyramids, the ancient Egyptian language, the hieroglyphs, and their vast tapestry of gods and goddesses all began before the Flood, because the Bible is clear that at the tower of Babel they were "all one people, and they all have the same language." (11:6) But putting them after the Tower of Babel means adding about 1200 years to the Genesis 11 account, as we know of at least ten dynasties of rich Egyptian history, including king lists and lengths of reigns, before Abraham went down to Egypt at the time of Mentuhotep II.

So I finally concluded that the generations of Shem in Genesis 11 must be fragmentary (some missing). I figure this adds 1192 years total to the chronology. At least I am in good company. The Septuagint also adds 750 years here. We know that at least one generation is missing: Arphaxad was not the father of Shelah. (11:13) In Luke 3, he was the father of Cainan who was the father of Shelah. So I include 442 years for Cainan and three of his missing descendants. Now I can begin with one people and one language at the Tower of Babel, and still fit in the ancient recorded histories of Egypt, China, Phoenicia, Canaan, Minoa, Attica, Arcadia, Sparta, Chaldea, Mitanni, Hatti, and many others, who according to the biblical account all began after the Tower of Babel. (See endnote.)

We know that the families of two of the sons of Ham, Mizraim and Cush, settled in Upper Egypt and the Sudan respectively, about 3170 BC. Lower Egypt was not settled for another two hundred years, after the Flood waters finally dried from the Delta region as Earth's oceans were freezing out at the poles. Ham's families prospered in the well-watered fertile soils of Africa. By 3010 BC the first Egyptian king, Narmer, ruled upper Egypt. By 2931 BC many families had migrated onto the Nile River Delta, so Narmer's successor, Menes, annexed lower Egypt. Unified Egypt became a growing and prosperous civilization.

Now I have come to a very controversial subject. Remember my saying that the original creation may not have included a moon for the earth, but rather two 'light givers' (suns) Sol and Nyx? Several ancient legends speak of a "time before there was a moon."

The Creation story in Genesis does not mention a moon. The greater and lesser lights (v16) are both light givers, 'luminaries'. We know from Egyptian history that at the beginning of Semerkhet's reign (2715 BC) there was an incredible catastrophe that nearly wiped out the world, followed by numerous other catastrophes during his reign and the century following, including a huge earthquake in 2646 BC which totally destroyed Bubastis in the Nile Delta. My calculations put the birth of Peleg, in whose "days the earth was divided," only 40 years later (2606). By 2715 BC, 465 years after the Tower of Babel, mankind had spread over much of Europe, Africa, the Americas, the Orient, Asia, and Australia, often taking Ishtar's Madonna and Child cult with them in their own languages. Putting many things together, I propose the following scenario.

Ancient Akkadians named the Moon-god Sin, and claimed that he was born of their gods Enlil and Ninlil (Jupiter and Saturn). My guess is that Jupiter and Saturn were still on catastrophic orbits at the time, and that in 2730 BC they interacted, resulting in Saturn passing too close to Earth in 2715 BC. Earth's crust had already been badly cracked by the numerous close passes of Mars. But Saturn is 1000 times more massive than Mars, capable of much greater damage. Flying west from what is now the Americas toward China, Saturn peeled off two-thirds of Earth's crust and sub-crust mantle from Antarctica to Alaska clear down to the molten core. That's what formed the Pacific Ocean Basin. Saturn also took most of our salty oceans and a lot of our air. If Earth had not been so hot and flexible back then, it would have shattered like Aster. And if so much of our oceans had not been tied up in glaciers by the super-cold ice at the poles, our precious water might have all sprayed out into space. The horrific earthquakes wiped out the majority of mankind, and prompted some cultures to start building 'earthquake-proof' pyramids.

But Saturn, passing by at over 20,000 miles per hour, did not actually succeed in capturing that slice of Earth's crust; it wrapped itself into a hot ball to become our moon.

I know, that is difficult to swallow. But examine the evidence. The Pacific Basin has a thin floor, mostly of hardened lava, with numerous fractures and seamounts where the core stuck like taffy to the mantle as it pulled away. Plus if you look at a world map showing the ocean floors, you can clearly see how the Americas have slid west and Eurasia /Africa east, leaving long stretch marks and a central lava ridge down the Atlantic basin. It seems clear to me that the remaining continents were once on one side of the globe, grouped together with the Americas fitting into Africa and Europe, and with Australia and Antarctica tucking in beside India and Madagascar. All the ocean basins together are roughly the volume of the moon. *Two-thirds of the earth's crust is just missing!* If Saturn removed it and flung it into the sky to make the moon, and then over the next hundred years the remaining crust (today called Pangea) broke up into plates which slid partway over the abyss, the ocean floor would look about like it does.

Antarctica went way south. Australia broke off with the Indonesian Islands and slid northeast. The Americas broke off and slid west. Eurasia and Africa slid east. They were pushed by melting glacier waters and helped by the regular Mars flybys. This took place over a hundred years. It was accompanied by great earthquakes, such as the one in Bubastis. In my scenario it concluded as Africa pulled away from the Sinai Peninsula in 2610, which brought the Red Sea between Africa and the Middle East, put a huge rift down the continent of Africa, and divided Israel at the Jordan River Valley. That was aided by centrifugal force expanding Earth's circumference around the new equator, which had tilted some 20° since the Flood. It is now called the Great Rift Valley. It runs 3300 miles from Syria down the Jordan Valley, the Red Sea, Africa, and into the Madagascar Basin. Eber called his son (born in 2606 BC) Peleg, 'division', to commemorate that last great cleavage.

Saturn warmed the earth, ending the Ice Age. Steam blanketed the earth from glacier-melt hitting the hot lava after flowing across Panama and into the newly formed Pacific Basin. American Indian legends tell of the ancients standing on the west edge of the world, looking straight down for miles into a bed of steam and fire. Theopompus of Chios, a Greek historian and contemporary of Plato born about 378 BC, wrote that at the far edge of the great continent now called the Americas there was "a place named the 'Point of No Return', which looks like a chasm and is filled neither by light nor darkness, but is overlaid by a haze of a murky red color." And you have all heard of (and laughed at) the superstition of ancient mariners who were afraid if they sailed too far west they would sail off the edge of the world. Well, guess what? *The ancients were not as stupid as we want to believe.* There may well have been several hundred years in which it was possible to do just that, as the newly created Pacific Basin slowly filled up from the waters of the melting glaciers still plugging up the slowly widening north and south Atlantic.

Records are few and skimpy during this time period. The biblical record is limited to the single line at the time of Peleg “in whose days the earth was divided.” In Egypt, too, records are limited, but I found a few. Piecing them together the best I can, it seems that a 1st dynasty Pharaoh known as Anendjib (or Mebidos, from Manetho) was slain by this catastrophe, during his 14th regnal year. A usurper, Semempse or Semerkhet, then stole the throne, taking advantage of the turmoil. He erased Anendjib’s names from all his monuments and replaced them with his own. Some records admit that at the beginning of his reign (2715 BC) there was a very great worldwide disaster, with additional disasters throughout his miserable 9 year reign. The legitimate ruling family of Egypt managed to recover the throne in 2706 BC. They installed Qa’a-hedjet, or Qaa, as the Pharaoh for the next 34 years. Of course he erased Semerkhet’s names from the old monuments and replaced them with his own family names.

Saturn never again threatened Earth directly, so the encounter which formed our moon must have improved its orbit. But it was still called Chronos, the Timekeeper. Its precise 30 year period still timed the regular periodic catastrophes from Mars. I believe that subsequent flybys of Mars caused the end of the **Early Kingdom** in Egypt in 2430 BC, caused a big famine during the reign of Egyptian Pharaoh Unas in 2220 BC, and totally wiped out several civilizations in 2010 BC, such as the one in Ugarit, Syria. That terminated the **Early Bronze Age** and ended Egypt’s **Old Kingdom**, starting their **First Intermediate Period**.

I cannot find any biblical references to these terrible calamities, though recent archaeology has shown them to be widespread. Entire cities were flattened, with some not rebuilt for generations if at all. Melting glacier water was bottled up in the Atlantic by the mountains of polar ice. It flooded the temperate zones, spilling over at Panama. It also applied pressure on the Americans to slide west and Eurasia to slide east to fill in the new Pacific Basin. Enough material had been removed by Saturn so the melting glaciers could not again flood the earth, and thankfully they sweetened the overly salty floodwaters. This was the time of Reu, Serug, Nahor, and Terah, born in 2035 BC.

About 90 percent of the human race perished during this 700 year period. Those who survived learned to build important buildings in pyramid shape, the most earthquake-proof type of structure. Besides Egypt, pyramids have been found in Peru, Mexico, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Italy, the Middle East, India, Thailand, and the Pacific Islands. Though cut off from the rest of the world, they developed similar structures because they had the same problem, periodic earthquakes that flattened their cities. These continued through the time of King Solomon, who developed more-sophisticated earthquake-proof building techniques. He laid long cedar beams as shock cushioning between huge courses of ashlar stone in the foundations of all his major buildings.

On October 21, 1860 BC (with Jupiter and Saturn in Aquarius) **Sodom and Gomorrah** were destroyed. They had been founded two years after the Tower of Babel discharge, at the south end of what is now the Dead Sea. Patten surmises that this flyby caused the Jordan Valley to widen a bit more, resulting in the earth opening up with a huge blast and incinerating all the cities of the valley. One scriptural hint is that the angels escorting Lot out of Sodom seemed to have a fixed time schedule; they had to rush to get Lot out in time. The valley’s devastation was so complete that Lot’s daughters thought they were the sole survivors. They committed incest, in fear that the human race would go extinct. Ammon and Moab were the result.

I find it fascinating that every ancient culture without exception (there are on the order of 500 such cultures) declares that their survival was only through horrendous worldwide cataclysms. Every scholar up to recent times, biblical or otherwise, understood and believed that.

But then history took a sharp left turn. Along came the ‘Age of Reason’, or the ‘Enlightenment’, which begun the ‘Scientific Age’ starting in the mid 1600s. Philosophers like René Descartes, Voltaire, and John Locke began teaching that the ignorance, superstition, and myths of the Dark Ages should be replaced by the scientific method; that man’s reason could discover all there is to know about human nature and the physical realm; and that the world, though vast and complex, is well-ordered and well-behaved, so that by education and study of the world as it is now, we can rise to perfection. God was reduced to a clockmaker who wound up the universe and walked away. Deism flourished. Then at the height of this Age of Reason there was a brief fling called the Romantic Age (beginning in the late 1700s), which reacted against the cold, hard logic of Rationalism. Jean Jacques Rousseau and other romance philosophers taught that man is basically good, noble, and well-intentioned, but he has been corrupted by modern civilization. He needs to get in touch with his inner self and his feelings, passions, and inspirations.

This all set the stage in the mid 1800s for humanism, socialism, communism, and the entire ‘evolution of the species’ lie, as people like Charles Lyell, Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, and Karl Marx threw out God and His Creation and attempted to explain everything according to gradual evolution using the same natural processes we see today. Early man thus became ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, ‘cave-man’, or ‘ape-man’, and of course his beliefs, legends, and accomplishments were all trivialized, especially his religion. All those myths of ‘divine encounters’ must be replaced by ‘true science’, since it was the Roman Catholic church with its religious dogmas, abuses of power, and persecution which had kept people in ignorance. Once again, I am a Protestant, and I protest! The ancients were more capable and smarter than we. Their myths are at least as valid as the myths in today’s science textbooks. I doubt we could even have survived the Catastrophic Era.

One of the terrible but little known catastrophes set the stage for the **Exodus**. A massive comet fell, passing over Arabia and North Africa before striking America's eastern seaboard at the Bermuda seamount, just beyond sunken Atlantis. As I said, I believe this comet had been a moon of Venus, twin to Mercury, which together had formed the caduceus. It left a crater half the size of the United States, which can be seen on a world map showing sea elevations. This probably occurred just before the Exodus, while Moses was pasturing Jethro's flocks in the wilderness.

This comet is known in Greek legend as Phaeton, son of Helios. He drove the sun chariot too close to the earth and burned up most of Africa, turning the Ethiopian's skin to black. Zeus had to intervene with a lightning bolt to save the earth. Phaeton was a blazing comet with a long fiery tail. At the time of the Exodus, North Africa was a fertile paradise, as was Arabia. The Amalekite culture in Arabia was the most powerful culture on the face of the earth. (The Bible calls Amalek "first [foremost] of the nations," in Num 24:20.) The Nubians and Egyptians bickered for only second place. Evidently, as Phaeton blazed through our atmosphere, it burned up large parts of Arabia and North Africa, causing the deserts that are still there today. The Amalekites and Nubians never recovered. If you burn up all the vegetation over a wide area, a permanent desert will result. The water cycle in an area is dependent upon vegetation there. If there is none, no rain will fall, no plants will grow to hold the soil, the soil will dry up and blow away, and there will be nothing left but the desert sand.

I believe that there were no deserts on the earth before this time. The word often translated desert, (such as in Gen 16:7 & 21:14 telling the story of Hagar and Ishmael, and in Exodus 3:1 telling about Moses pasturing Jethro's flocks in Midian) just means wilderness. Those were not then real deserts, because in every case, people were able to live and pasture their flocks there. It may have been hot and dry in summer, but vegetation, rainfall, pastureland, rivers, and lakes were spread throughout what is now the Sahara Desert and the Arabian Peninsula.

Many legends speak of this catastrophe, as far away as China, where Phaeton was a great dragon in the sky who swooped down to drink up the river. The Bible uses similar terminology: "... was it not Thou [YHWH] who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon [Phaeton]? Was it not Thou who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a pathway for the redeemed to cross over?" (Isa 51:9-10) Several advanced civilizations in what has become the Sahara Desert were completely lost to history. Nubia, Arabia, and India were also devastated. China (in the Xia dynasty) suffered a drought, but was mostly spared; they still celebrate the passing of the great dragon. The Olmec civilization in SE Mexico was decimated by it. It is possible that some of the plagues of the Exodus were caused by the aftermath of Phaeton's collision with Earth.

Patten goes to great lengths to show how a Mars flyby could cause the **ten plagues on Egypt** in early 1451 BC just before the Exodus. I do agree that the ten plagues could have resulted from the earthquakes, storms, volcanoes, and static electricity of a close flyby. For example, the 7th plague had "fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail." (Ex 9:24) Hail, lightning and static discharges, and big storms were common during planetary encounters. The Passover itself, in which the death angel went through the land killing the firstborn, could have been 'Typhon', the Grim Reaper. The Red Sea escape could be explained by the high winds and tides that always accompanied a close flyby. My problem here is that I picture the entire Mars flyby sequence happening in one day. The Exodus plagues took at least two months, so they could not have all been caused by Mars. Venus must have been involved, too. I also don't buy Patten's suggestion that the pillar of fire God used to lead Israel might have been the flux tube of electricity from Mars. That struck only twice, as Mars approached and again after it left. In contrast, the Israelites followed the pillar of fire for years. (Num 14:14) I believe that it was God Himself, as it later became the Shekina Glory over the tabernacle. (Ex 33:9)

We do know that the Exodus happened near the time of the March 20/21 flyby: Nisan 14 falls in the middle of March. However, it was not on the regular 30 year cycle. Jupiter had just left Aquarius and Saturn was in Libra rather than Leo, so Mars was close but not dangerously so. It is obvious to me that a lot more went on here than just a Mars flyby. My personal guess is that Mars helped generate the winds and ultra-low tides at the Red Sea crossing, but it didn't have much to do with the plagues.

Remember that the Venus trinary had flown by Earth in 1454 BC. Being more massive than Venus, Earth slowed Venus down, pulled it toward Earth's orbit, and drew it within 2° of the ecliptic plane. Then on its next pass Earth pulled Venus completely inside our orbit, into a lopsided ellipse that came close to Earth. On its first time around in its new orbit, Venus was catching up with Earth in early 1451 BC. Traveling the same direction as Earth but a bit faster, it was near Earth (within a million miles) for two or three months just before the Exodus. That's what caused the ten plagues. Its nearness spawned epic storms. Earth passed progressively through each of its two tails as they streamed out for millions of miles, away from the sun.

In addition, for a period of nine days, Venus came between Earth and Sol, resulting in a total eclipse. For three of those days even our moon was in its shadow. The combination of its shadow and our being directly in its tail made a "thick darkness that could be felt" so that "for three days no one rose from his place." But God's hand protected the Israelites. The thick, noxious gases from Venus which extinguished the fires of the Egyptians partly bypassed the land of Goshen, so that "the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings." (Gen 10:21-23)

Ancient historians agree that Venus was the primary culprit, but not the only actor. This was a battle between the planets! Mars came moderately close (on its six year cycle), and Greek legend claims that even Jupiter (Zeus) got near enough to fling his thunderbolts to discipline wayward Mars (Typhon). Only Saturn was not involved, being in Virgo at the time. This was the first time any major catastrophe did not involve Saturn. Greek legends call it Chronos, the timekeeper. It was so predictable on its 30 year orbit that everyone used it to time the catastrophes.

But it missed this one. At the Exodus, Pharaoh clearly was not expecting such a major catastrophe; it was 11 years too early. Like I said, the encounters between Mars and Earth with the Venus/Mercury/Phaeton trinary in its decaying orbit was a 'coincidence' which had never happened before. The reason the Pharaoh kept hardening his heart was, though he was familiar with the one-day destruction which a Mars flyby would cause, he didn't know that Venus and her moons would remain so close for so long, continuing to cause plague after plague.

Christians don't realize that the plagues of the Exodus were worldwide. Many cultures describe them, and in the same order, though not all of them at all locations. The darkness is reported by many cultures, for up to 9 days. The subsequent fall of manna is also known from other cultures; it was reported in Greece, India, Scandinavia, and Mexico. Sure, God miraculously controlled it for His people, but again, I believe He used means.

This is a long (and fun) story. I tell it in detail in *God's Plan of the Ages*. While it may all seem like speculation to you, we do have a lot of evidence to put the story together. We know that at one time the comet Venus had two tails. In Egypt it was called Hathor, the sacred bull. Its two horns (tails) were up to 180° apart, driven off by the solar wind. They were made of different materials, one primarily ions, the other mostly dust, debris and sparks from the fiery head of Venus (with noxious volatiles and hydrocarbons picked up at its close pass with Jupiter). Both tails curved along magnetic lines of force. But only the dust tail was affected by gravity, thus pointing toward a passing planet.

Also, we know that Venus at first had two moons. They also had tails spiraling around to form the caduceus (two snakes twisted around a winged staff). These two tails would also split up, so they looked like 'feathered snakes', as commonly described in ancient legends from long before the Exodus. Then after the Exodus, everybody saw only a single 'snake around the staff'. What happened?

Knowing that one of those two moons of Venus was Phaeton, which impacted Earth right before the Exodus as I described earlier, the whole story begins to fit together. Moses' reminder of the Exodus was a single snake around a staff – the bronze serpent called Nehushtan. As I said, that became the 'Rod of Asclepius', the symbol of healing still used by the medical profession.

Legends all around the world chronicle these terrible battles. They are the wars between Marduk and the dragon Tiamat, between Isis and Seth, between Krishna and the serpent, between Ormuzd (Mazda) and Ahriman of Persia, between YHWH and Rahab the dragon, and, the most widely known of all, between Zeus and Typhon of Greece. They are described in hundreds of legends, and though there are conflicting details and rather wild assumptions, the overall picture given is that of an exceedingly complex series of terrifyingly close planetary encounters.

The ocean tides due to Mars (whose mass is 8.7 times our Moon's) at 240,000 miles away (near the orbit of our Moon), must have been ferocious. Venus was still close enough to make those tides even worse. That, coupled with the frightful winds that accompanied a close flyby, could have allowed the Israelites to walk across the Red Sea on dry land (though I admit this sounds preposterous unless you know that God was helping). This Mars flyby was on March 21, 1451 BC, six days after the Exodus. The Israelites had already crossed the Sinai Peninsula and were resting on the beach at Nuweiba beside the Gulf of Aqaba. Though Mars passed on the far side of Earth, God timed its flyby so the extra-low tide and high winds kept the ground dry until it was time for the Egyptian army to cross.

Egypt was utterly ruined by the plagues, and was defenseless after losing her entire army in the Red Sea. Cush (Nubia), a mighty civilization larger than Egypt, was even worse off, having been nearly wiped out by fires that literally cremated North Africa. They have not recovered to this day. Arabia, however, had a much different story.

The Amalekites living there had developed the greatest civilization on earth at that time. Many of them survived the searing fires that swept over the Arabian Peninsula, creating a desolate desert in just a few days. Their cities and grazing lands were wiped out, but their military, more than a million of their people, and multitudes of their flocks and herds had fled north and escaped.

Leaving Mecca in central Arabia (which before the fire had been a fertile paradise), they traveled northwest. They drove their herds and flocks ahead of them, followed by their army, with their women and children following up in the rear. They were strong and ruthless. They were also technologically advanced, with iron armor, weapons, and chariots. They were seeking a new homeland when they met the Israelites at Rephidim. Instead of sympathizing with their fellow refugees, they would have destroyed them had YHWH not intervened through Joshua, Moses, Hur, and Aaron at the split rock. After their defeat, the Amalekites moved into the now-defenseless Egypt.

God never forgave them for trying to destroy His people; He swore, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." (Ex 17:14) This was King Saul's mission, but he failed, so it was finally completed under King Hezekiah by the Simeonites. (1 Chron 4:43)

Few people know this story, because traditional dates for the Egyptian Pharaohs are all wrong. To get a better understanding of the dates, read David Rohl's *Pharaohs and Kings, a Biblical Quest, or From Eden to Exile, the Epic History of the People of the Bible*. David is Britain's best Egyptologist. I am in his debt. Though he doesn't know the Creation story or understand the catastrophic flybys of the planets, at least he gets the dates of the Pharaohs right.

If traditional dates were true, the 'higher' critics of the Bible would be correct; there would be no Israelites in Egypt, no famine at the time of Joseph, no devastation of Egypt at the Exodus, no Israelite invasion of Canaan under Joshua, no walls of Jericho tumblin' down, and no mighty kingdom of David and Solomon. But when you get the dates right, it all falls together very well, with much archaeological evidence supporting the truth of Scripture.

The Pharaoh in Joseph's time was Amenemhat III Nimaatre (1679 to 1620 BC) in the middle of Egypt's XII Dynasty. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream in 1677 BC, and abundant rainfall assured seven years of plenty until 1670. Then the rainfall in the lush rainforests of Nubia became excessive, causing the traditional flooding of the Nile to extend past planting season, preventing spring planting and resulting in a famine. Joseph built great waterwheels at the Faium and diverted flood waters from the Nile River into Lake Moeris by means of Bahr Yussef (Waterway of Joseph), a long canal near the Nile. He designed a canal system which drained marshes to reclaim 153,000 acres of fertile land, with another canal to release the waters of Lake Moeris back into the Nile when the year's flood was past. He built the famous 'labyrinth' at Hawara, to store grain during the famine, with 12 main courts corresponding to the 12 Nomes in the region. He prevented migration of starving Nubians into upper Egypt by sending them bread and beer. He set up 4 divisions, the 'Department of the South' (at Hawara) the 'Northern Department' (at Avaris), the 'Department of the People's Giving', and the 'Department of the Treasury'. Several grand statues of Joseph were found in Egypt, one at his mastaba burial site in Avaris – which of course was opened and the bones removed when the Israelites fled Egypt. See David Rohl's book *Pharaohs and Kings* for lovely pictures of Joseph's statue and drawings of his royal residence.

Joseph died in 1597 BC and all Egypt mourned. The Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph" (Ex 1:8) was Neferhotep I Kha'sekhemre in 1543 BC (mid XIII dynasty). He set up cruel taskmasters in Avaris to rule the Israelites, of which the first was Nehesy Aasehre 'the Nubian', beginning the XIV dynasty (concurrent with XIII). Both dynasties came to an abrupt end in 1451 BC with the deaths of the Nubian Pharaoh Ankhkare, Sobekhotep VII (Pul), and his co-regent brother Dudimose – whose firstborn son Ini II had no doubt been killed in the tenth plague. Dudimose (known as Tutimaeus or Thutmose by Manetho) was killed at the Red Sea while chasing the fleeing Israelites.

Ptolemaic era Egyptian historian Manetho wrote:

"Tutimaeus: In his reign, for what cause I know not, a blast of God smote us. And unexpectedly from the regions of the east [Arabia and the Negev], invaders of an obscure race [the Amalekites, known in Egypt as 'Aamu'] marched in confidence of victory against our land. By main force they easily seized it without striking a blow, and having overpowered the rulers of the land, they ruthlessly burned our cities, razed to the ground the temples of the gods, and treated all the natives with a cruel hostility..."

After the Amalekites lost to Israel, they went to Egypt, becoming the eleventh plague. Because all the Egyptian rulers and their armies had died, the Amalekites, led by Salitis, were able to take lower Egypt without a struggle. They settled in the land of Goshen, so recently vacated by the Israelites, conquering Memphis (the capital of lower Egypt) in 1451 BC, as well as Avaris and Tanis (Zoan). They also seized parts of Canaan and Syria. They are called Hyksos, 'foreign princes', but that is misleading, since the XIV dynasty Nubians were also called 'foreign princes'. The Amalekite invaders were the hated and feared Aamu of Egyptian history, now known as the XV Dynasty. They collected tribute from the XVII dynasty in upper Egypt at Thebes and from the XVI dynasty in the Sinai at Pelusium.

They continued to rule Egypt until Aamu Pharaoh Apepi II Khamudi was finally driven out by Pharaoh Ahmose in 1225 BC. From Egypt they fled to Canaan, there joining the Midianites to harass the Israelites for 7 years until conquered by Gideon in 1217 BC. (Jud 6 & 7)

So... moving on. The **Long Day of Joshua** (Joshua 11), on Oct. 24, 1410 BC, was on the 30 year cycle with Saturn in Aquarius and Jupiter in Leo. That a Mars flyby occurred this day is hinted by the scriptural account of the battle. Joshua didn't have to do much fighting. YHWH killed most of the Canaanites by great hailstones from heaven. Compare this to the seventh Exodus plague's hailstones mixed with fire, as was common in a close planetary flyby. Also, the Canaanites had all the iron armor, which would attract any electrical discharges from Mars. But the long day requires a different explanation. Patten suggests that the huge crustal tides during the Mars flyby loosened up the earth's crust (which had grounded at the Flood after it had cracked and allowed the subterranean waters to spurt out) so that the forces of gyroscopic precession between the two planets put it into a sideways skid westward for 4 to 6 hours. Patten (see page 132 ff) goes into detail with a scholarly analysis explaining how this could happen, which I won't repeat. You must agree that it is more logical than suggesting that the entire earth stopped spinning!

Exactly 150 years later (Oct. 24, 1260 BC), with Jupiter and Saturn both in Aquarius, Sisera and his big Canaanite army with 900 iron chariots came against **Deborah, Barak**, and the nearly defenseless Israelites. "Not a shield or a spear was seen among 40,000 in Israel." (Jud 5:8)

A simple uniformitarian view of this battle was that a tremendous storm caused the iron chariots to bog down in the valley, where they were attacked by the Israelites with swords. Where did the Israelites get swords? Maybe the electrical discharges forced the Canaanites to drop them. The Canaanite army fled by the ford of the Kishon river and were swept away in a flash flood. Sisera escaped to the hills, where Jael (wife of Heber the Kenite) killed him by pounding a tent peg through his temples. So, what do you think caused that huge storm? Some clues are recorded in the victory song of Deborah. "... the earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, even the clouds dripped water. The mountains flowed at YHWH's presence... *The stars [the planets] fought from heaven [space]; from their courses [orbits] they fought against Sisera.* The torrent of the Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul march on with strength. The horses' [Deimos and Phobos] hooves beat from the dashing [prancing, the literal meaning is swooping in flight], the dashing of his mighty ones." (Jud 5:4-5; 20-22)

Why did Sisera pick this day to go to battle? As with most people of his day he knew the timing of the Mars flyby and had prayed to his gods that the earthquakes and storms would work to his favor. He was wrong. This was clearly a planetary cataclysm. Those with a uniformitarian mindset cannot properly understand the passage.

42 1/2 years after Sisera, on March 20, 1217 BC, came the remarkable victory of Gideon and his tiny band of 300 over the vast hoards of "the Midianites, Amalekites, and all the sons of the east, [who] were lying in the valley as numerous as the locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore." (Jud 7:12) This battle occurred with Jupiter in Leo and Saturn in Cancer. Though not on the 30 year cycle, this was still on Jupiter's six year cycle, with the closest approach of Mars at midnight over the Americas. The Midianites knew about Mars; they knew the timing of the Mars flybys and the earthquakes, storms, and electrical discharges that accompanied them. They had gathered to take advantage of the situation, which they were sure would strike terror into the hearts of those defenseless, fearful Israelites.

But when Gideon and his little band of 300 came in the middle of the night, smashed their pitchers and sounded their trumpets (sounding like distant thunder), raised their torches high (like flashes of distant lightning) and shouted out, "The sword of YHWH and of Gideon!" the Midianites awoke terrified. They knew Gideon had an army, though they expected 32,000, not 300. They knew what YHWH had done for Israel before, such as against Sisera and the Canaanites. And they knew that their armor was a prime target for a lightning strike from Mars. So when they heard Gideon's courageous band shouting, "The sword of YHWH!" (which they understood to be Typhon, the Grim Reaper from Mars) they panicked and fled, slashing at anything and anyone in their way.

March 21, 1079 BC is back on the 30 year cycle. We read of a strange battle between **Israel and the Philistines**. Scripture is rather terse. "Now Samuel was offering up the burnt [Passover] offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But YHWH thundered with a great voice on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel." (1 Sam 7:10) Josephus gives it more detail. "But things fell out, that they would hardly have been credited, though they had been foretold by anybody, for in the first place, God disturbed their enemies with an earthquake, and moved the ground under them to such a degree that He caused it to tremble, and made them to shake, insomuch that by its trembling He made them unable to keep their feet, and made them fall down, and by opening its chasms He caused that others should be hurried down into them; after which He caused such noise of thunder to come upon them, that it was ready to burn their faces, and He suddenly shook their weapons out of their hands..." (Antiquities, book V, chapter 1)

Ginzberg describes it similarly, "God terrified the [Philistine] enemy first by an earthquake, and then by thunder and lightning. Many were scattered to wander about aimlessly [disoriented]; many were precipitated into the rents torn in the earth, and the rest had their faces scorched, and in their terror and pain their weapons dropped from their hands." Again, all of this clearly fits the pattern of a Mars flyby.

90 years later, in October, 990 BC, there was another flyby event recorded in Scripture. The story is told in both 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. Allow me to reinterpret this story according to Patten's hypothesis. **King David** knows Mars is coming, and, as Jupiter is in Leo and Saturn in Aquarius, he is afraid that this will be 'the big one'. Instead of trusting YHWH, he acts on his fears and takes a census of Israel and Judah (in direct disobedience to God's command), so he can calculate how many people will be killed by the flyby. God is displeased. He gives David three choices: 3 years of famine, 3 months of military defeats, or 3 days of "the sword of YHWH, even pestilence in the land, and the angel of YHWH destroying throughout all the territory of Israel." (1 Chron 21:12) David chooses the latter, so "YHWH sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time; and 70,000 men of... [Israel] from Dan to Beersheba died." (2 Sam 24:15)

The Hebrew word translated 'pestilence' can mean a plague of disease, but it can also mean subduing, calamity, or physical destruction of any kind. Many Scriptures tell of pestilence or plague – we may assume a disease epidemic where a more likely interpretation could be widespread mass destruction of a celestial origin. This pestilence is described in detail as: "the angel of YHWH standing between earth and heaven with his drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem." (21:16) This was no six foot angel! He was so large that his hand appeared to David to be stretched out over the whole city.

I believe that this was a flux tube of electricity from Mars. Electrical discharges from the magneto-head of Mars had already swept the land of Canaan from Dan to Beersheba, but now the discharge from the magneto-tail of Mars had reached the highest point in Jerusalem, the threshing floor of Ornan (Araunah) the Jebusite. There it paused; there was no higher point for the arc to jump to, and Mars was rapidly getting farther away. David quickly purchased the entire plot of land for the princely sum of 600 shekels of gold, plus Ornan's oxen for another 50 shekels of silver, and sacrificed them to YHWH there on what is now the temple mount. Then YHWH "relented from the calamity, and said to the angel who destroyed the people, 'It is enough. Withdraw now your hand.'" (24:16)

Then and there David decided to build the first temple, with the words, "This is the house of YHWH Elohim, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel." King David began to prepare immediately for building the temple, though it was another 19 years before his son Solomon actually laid its foundations. (971 BC)

A few side notes on Solomon's glorious temple. It took seven years to complete. It was dedicated in Solomon's 11th year as king, 964 BC. It lasted until the Babylonians sacked and burned Jerusalem in 586 BC. As far as we know, its foundations were aligned exactly to the prime points of the compass; yet archaeologist Asher Kaufman's research shows them to now be 6° off. A uniformitarian has trouble with that, since Earth's core spin axis doesn't change and Earth's crust is now pretty well grounded and spinning with the core. But in the Catastrophic Era each close flyby of Mars shifted Earth's crust over the molten core by at least a degree or two. The flyby in the time of Hezekiah shifted it about 10°. Each Mars flyby also flipped and shifted the magnetic poles by as much as 1000 miles. Though this shift zigzagged back and forth, a net shift of 6° from all the Mars flybys after Solomon is quite reasonable.

Charles McDowell, geographer and historian, thinks that Solomon's temple was so constructed that certain fixed stars showed through apertures and onto the water of the huge bronze laver (the molten sea). A trained priest could thus precisely calculate any shift in either longitude / latitude or compass point which might occur during a flyby. McDowell feels that the bronze oxen (2 Chron 4:4) represented twelve months rather than the twelve tribes, and that the mystifying two rows of 'gourds' (1 Kin 7:24) were arranged to create a compass rose with 360 divisions, one for each day of the year. This is just a guess, as no one alive has seen Solomon's arrangement. Yet it is a reasonable guess, as we now know that there were precisely twelve 30 day months in their 360 day year. He also notes that the Ugaritic and other alphabets of that day contained 30 letters, in harmony with the above. Only the foundation of King Solomon's temple remains, so this is speculation (which is getting to be a favorite pastime of mine). I'll talk much more about the temple later.

Again on the 30 year cycle, October 24, 870 BC was the barbecue between **Elijah** and Jezebel's 450 prophets of Ba'al (Mars) on Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 18) Elijah and King Ahab agreed for everyone to meet on the mountain early on the day of the Mars flyby, so that the contest between YHWH and Ba'al would be decided by whose altar the fire struck. The fire from the magneto-head of Mars usually hit Mt. Carmel in the morning, so the prophets of Ba'al chose from early morning until noon, dancing about their altar and calling on their god Mars. They all knew the timing of the Mars flybys. They fully expected at least one bolt from Mars to hit the mountain that day.

Noon passed and they got frantic. It was Elijah's turn. But he taunted them, staring up at the huge red planet passing overhead, appearing roughly 11 times larger than the moon: "Maybe he's asleep? Maybe he's busy?" "Maybe he's using the restroom?" As Mars receded, "Maybe he's on a long journey?" Finally, as Mars was getting smaller in the distance and the earthquakes and stormy winds were past, Elijah rebuilt the ancient altar of YHWH, using 12 stones representing all 12 tribes of Israel (a direct affront to Ahab, who represented the northern kingdom of 10 tribes). He laid 12 pieces of wet driftwood from the beach, and put on the ox. Then he made a trench in the dirt around the altar, and had the people dump 12 pitchers of salt water on top, filling the trench. (He would not have wasted fresh water during the drought. Mt. Carmel rises directly above the Haifa beach. With the exceedingly high tide pulled up by Mars, they would not have far to go for sea water.) He then knelt nearby and prayed to YHWH. Lightning from the magneto-tail of Mars (extending many thousands of miles behind Mars itself) hit the mountain at, of course, its most conductive point – Elijah's altar saturated with salty sea water. It vaporized the beef, the wood, the water, the altar stones, and even the dust on which it was built.

Note that Mount Carmel had been struck so many times before that it was considered 'Baal's Mountain'. The people knew how to get out of the way before the lightning struck. Still, the shock was so great that (with the people's help, I'm sure) Elijah was able to overcome and slay the 450 prophets of Baal. He then prophesied the end of the drought and outran Ahab's chariot back to Jezreel during the 'heavy shower', so he could slay the 400 prophets of Ashteroth as well. Isn't it ironic that Baal was (among other things) the Phoenician god of weather and storms!

March 869 BC began the siege of Troy, as described in Homer's *The Iliad*. This was just five months after Elijah's barbecue, on the return pass of Mars. This battle cannot be understood as history under a uniformitarian worldview. Patten relates this in great detail, and I won't repeat it here, except to say that as usual, the Greeks prayed that Phoebus Apollo (their name for Mars) would strike Troy, but they, with all their iron armor, got hit instead. Thus in 859 BC, after ten years of failing at everything else, they had to resort to the legendary **Trojan horse** to overcome the city.

Also about this time a meteorite made a terrible impact at Mecca in Arabia, killing the remnants of the Amalekites still there. 1500 years later (about 600 AD) Mohammed found a piece of it and kissed it, though for the life of me I cannot understand why he would worship a meteorite which fell and killed those cursed by God. To this day, foolish Muslims worship this black stone and its shrine, the Kaaba.

I believe God took **Elijah** in the whirlwind and chariot of fire in 852 BC, on Mars' six year cycle of close passes but not the 30 year cycle of disasters.

Jonah, after some persuasion, had preached to the Assyrians at their capital city, Nineveh. I always wondered why the Assyrians, the most cruel, hated, and feared nation on earth, were so quick to repent at the preaching of one recalcitrant prophet from Israel. I've heard it is because he told his miraculous fish story, and his bleached skin and hair proved it. But Patten presents another possible reason. *The Assyrians knew the timing of those Mars flybys.* It was October, 780 BC, and they could see Saturn and Jupiter in Aquarius. They had all heard about 'the sword of YHWH' at the times of David and Elijah. They knew it had helped Israel in their battles against the Canaanites, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the Philistines. They also knew that they had earned the wrath of YHWH as much or more than any other nation before them. They feared no Israeli army and they certainly didn't fear the Israeli God, YHWH. But they feared that sword! They had seen its destructive power! When Jonah said, "Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed," they heard, "When Mars flies by in 40 days, the sword of YHWH is going to vaporize your city!" So they repented, in sackcloth and ashes. I can imagine Jonah sitting on his hill east of the city to watch Mars pass on by, miffed at God that the prophesied 'sword of YHWH' had missed, destroying his credibility. I have a lot of fun with Jonah in *God's Plan of the Ages*.

However, allow me to tell the rest of the story. **King Shalmaneser IV** repented at the preaching of Jonah. But after eight years he was assassinated. Knowing that such a close flyby wouldn't recur for many years, the Assyrians quickly resumed their butchery and raiding. History records that they assaulted 100 cities throughout the Middle East during the next 80 years, under subsequent kings Assur-Dan III, Tiglath Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennacherib. Finally "... in the 14th year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them." (Isa 36:1) He deliberately timed his attack on Jerusalem for March first, 701 BC, because of his astrologer's advice that Mars would help him. He taunted the Israelis, claiming (Isa 37:10) that YHWH was on his side against Israel and had given him permission to destroy Jerusalem. King Hezekiah's response, to go to YHWH in prayer, moved God to promise to save the city and to send Sennacherib back the way he had come.

The biblical account of the battle is very brief: "Then the angel of YHWH went out, and struck 185,000 of the Assyrians. When men arose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead bodies. So **Sennacherib, king of Assyria**, departed and returned home, to live at Nineveh." (Isa 37:36) The Talmud adds a little color to it: "With his vast army Sennacherib hastened onward, in accordance with the disclosures of his astrologers, who warned him that he would fail in his object of capturing Jerusalem if he arrived there later than the day set by them. [March first] ... The death of the Assyrians happened when the angel permitted them to hear the 'song of the celestials'. Their souls were burnt, though their garments remained intact."

That description is consistent with burns and electric shocks from a massive arc from Mars. Sennacherib was later killed by his own sons as he worshiped in the house of Nisroch his god. Military defeat and political turmoil then racked the proud kingdom. Assyria was finished as a world power. So, was Jonah's prophecy wrong? Do you label Jonah a false prophet for declaring the destruction of the Assyrians by a bolt from Mars in 780 BC? Well, it didn't happen when Jonah had hoped. (Nineveh was not actually destroyed until about 612 BC when the great Babylonian King Nabopolassar conquered the Assyrian Empire and divided it up with the Medes and the Scythians.) *But what might have happened to Jerusalem if King Sennacherib had stayed home?* What if Nineveh had been destroyed at the time of Jonah's prophecy? Would the electrical discharges from Mars in 701 BC have destroyed Jerusalem instead? Lightning will strike the point of greatest conductivity. Sennacherib's military encampment, with their huge amount of iron armor spread out close to Jerusalem, was that point. Perhaps YHWH fulfilled Jonah's prophecy at a later time and at a different place, not only to demonstrate His mercy and response to repentance, but also to protect His own people Israel and His holy city Jerusalem.

That **March 701 BC flyby** was not on the regular 30 year cycle of close passes of Mars. Saturn was in Libra and Jupiter in Virgo; they would not directly line up for 11 years. Normally this would mean that Mars would not do any damage. But this time there was another factor which few understand. After the Exodus, Venus had locked into resonance inside Earth's orbit. Its new orbit was broadly elliptical, extending out toward Earth every 5 years and coming closer to Earth for over two months every 50 years.

God commanded this 50th year to be a year of **Jubilee**, to proclaim a release to the indentured servants of Israel. (Lev 25:10) When this 50 year Jubilee cycle coincided with the 30 year cycle of Mars, Venus could often pull Mars further from Earth to prevent major catastrophes, adding to the celebration. This Jubilee cycle began at the Exodus in March 1451 BC. *701 BC is on the year of Jubilee.* Venus was near Earth as well as Mars. In fact, understanding the complex series of flybys from 780 to 701 BC is impossible without understanding this 50 year Jubilee cycle.

Remember when **King Hezekiah** had a ‘sickness unto death’, and the shadow on the ‘stair’ (sundial) went back ten steps (degrees) as the sign from YHWH that he would recover? The way this story is told (2 Kin 20; Isa 38) makes it seem unrelated to the Assyrian invasion, but it was not. Sennacherib’s army was camped all around Jerusalem, awaiting the earthquakes and lightning bolt from Mars to break down the walls. But YHWH had promised Hezekiah that He would save the city. They saw Mars approaching, nearly filling the sky. Hezekiah couldn’t take the tension and suffered a massive heart attack. (The Hebrew word is usually translated ‘boil’, but you don’t die of a boil, and this was fatal. The word can be translated to everything from boil to burn, ulcer, or infection; why not heart attack?) Isaiah confirmed it was fatal and told Hezekiah to wrap up his earthly affairs. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and cried for God to spare his life. YHWH told Isaiah to reverse his prognosis. Isaiah had a poultice of figs applied over Hezekiah’s heart. (Figs are high in potassium, which absorbs through the skin and can restore normal heart function.) Hezekiah was granted 15 more years. That afternoon at its closest approach (about 30,000 miles) Mars caused a crustal skid and spin-axis shift, *this time in the reverse direction from prior March flybys*, causing the sundial to shift. The flux tube from the long magneto-tail of Mars struck down the Assyrian army that night.

The two Mars flybys just discussed, 780 BC (Jonah), and 701 BC (Hezekiah), plus one between, in 750 BC, are the last 3 celestial catastrophes recorded. (There was none in 720 BC.) They are described in a lot of ancient literature. The period from 752 to 690 BC is infamous as the Era of Nabonassar in Babylon, the ‘Times of Confusion’ in China, and the ‘Time of Reordering’ in Egypt. The pulls of Earth and Mars on Venus were fierce, and the Magi were unable to calculate their effects on the trinary. Venus rose and set at irregular times, and that terrified them. Astronomers began recording Venus risings and settings on clay tablets. Archaeologists have found thousands of these tablets in **King Assurbanipal’s** library at Nineveh.

Unaware of what you now know, astronomers today ridicule the records as faulty data by amateur astronomers. They don’t comprehend the terror of a Venus flyby. For example, the fear of Venus is recorded as a primary factor causing the chaos of the 2nd Intermediate Period in Egypt.

The **Etruscan Empire** in central Italy was wiped out due to the impact of a 3-4 mile diameter meteorite at what is now Lake Bolsena, a crater 60 miles north of Rome. This happened during the Oct. 750 BC Mars flyby. It prepared the way for the Latins Romulus and Remus to found the city of Rome 3 years later. (Their patron deity was the planet Mars.) It also weakened the Etruscans to the point where the Gauls were able to ravage the survivors in the north. This meteorite could well have been the third moon of Mars, Eris, called ‘Strife’ in *The Iliad*, which is how I tell the story in *God’s Plan of the Ages*.

The book of **Amos** contains fascinating hints of that 750 BC Mars flyby. Amos prophesied “*two years before the earthquake.*” (1:1) The word here translated ‘earthquake’ is the Hebrew ‘ra’ash’ which can also mean a commotion, uproar, fierceness, quaking, rushing, or rattling. It comes from a root verb which also implies trembling with fear. This earthquake was so bad that 200 years later it was likened ominously to Judgment Day. (Zech 14:5)

Two years before this ‘earthquake’ was October 752 BC, when Mars was passing by on its normal two year orbit, coming within about 400,000 miles of Earth. Though non-catastrophic at that distance, it was close enough to punctuate Amos’ warnings. In two years Jupiter and Saturn would be in Leo and Aquarius on the 30 year cycle of catastrophes. They hoped for the 751 BC Jubilee to save them. But Amos prophesied against Gaza of Philistia, Tyre of Phoenicia, Teman of Edom, Rabbah of Ammon, Kirioth of Ammon, Samaria of Israel, Jerusalem of Judah, and Damascus of Syria. In every case he prophesied that YHWH would rain down fire upon them to destroy their walls, towers and citadels. What kind of fire does it take to destroy stone walls? Well, a massive electrical discharge from Mars might do it! Right after Amos prophesied, Mars battled Venus (Oct. 30, 752 BC) in a famous flyby that set the stage for the Earthquake two years later.

Why do you think the Israelites had such a temptation to worship all the ‘hosts of heaven’ (the planets)? In Scripture, Mars was the ‘Lord’ (Ba’al). Since they knew that the other planets, especially Jupiter and Saturn, controlled the orbit of Mars, they also called these planets the ‘Ba’alim’ (Baals). “And they forsook all the commandments of YHWH their God and... worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.” (2 Kings 17:16) “Manasseh... did evil in the sight of YHWH... for he rebuilt the high places [the planetary observatories where they practiced astrology to predict when Mars would next threaten Earth] ... He erected altars for Baal [Mars], and made an Asherah [image of the planetary god Venus / Ishtar carved in lewd female form] ... and worshiped all the host of heaven [the planets] and served them. And he built altars [to the host of heaven] in the two courts of the house of YHWH [Solomon’s temple]. He also made his sons to pass through the fire, [infant sacrifices to Chemosh] practiced witchcraft, used divination [astrology], and employed mediums and spiritists.” (2 Kings 21:1-9) “... he also erected altars for the Baals... and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.” (2 Chron 33:3; see Acts 7:42.)

Manasseh, having seen what Mars did to the army of Sennacherib when he was seven years old (The sword of the angel of YHWH struck 185,000 of the Assyrian army – 2 Kings 19:35), feared Mars more than he feared YHWH. Manasseh co-ruled with his father Hezekiah from the age of 12 until Hezekiah’s death when he was 22. He was raised by godly parents and he knew the full story from his dad. He had no excuse.

It is impossible to understand why Manasseh didn't continue Hezekiah's righteous rule, until you realize the fear that a close pass of Mars or Venus caused!

After Manasseh died, good king Josiah "... did away with the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the surrounding area of Jerusalem, also those who burned incense to Baal [Mars], to the sun and to the moon, and to the constellations [Mazzaloth, the Zodiac], and to all the host of heaven [the planets]. And he brought out the Asherah [the lewd carved female statue of Venus] from the house of YHWH... burned it at the brook Kidron, ground it to dust, and threw its dust on the graves of the common people..." (2 Kings 23:5 ff)

So, what caused good king Josiah's reforms? In the 18th year of his reign the high priest discovered a scroll of Deuteronomy in the temple. When Josiah heard the scroll, he humbled himself and tore his clothes, saying, "... great is the wrath of YHWH that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written..." (2 Kings 22:13)

What did Josiah read to cause such consternation? "Beware, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun, moon, and stars, and all the host of heaven [planets], and be drawn away to worship and serve them, those which YHWH has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven." (All other nations worshiped the host of heaven. Deut 4:19) And "If there is found in your midst... a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of YHWH your God, by transgressing the covenant, and has gone and served other gods, and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host [the planets], which I have not commanded... you shall stone them to death... so shall you purge the evil from your midst." (Deut 17:2-7) Wow. Pretty stern, huh!

Jeremiah prophesied, "At that time, declares YHWH, they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its princes, the bones of its priests, the bones of its prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. They will spread them out to the sun, moon, and all the host of heaven [the planets], which they have loved, which they have served, which they have gone after, which they have sought for, and which they have worshiped. They will not be gathered or buried; they will be dung on the face of the ground." (Jer 8:1-3)

Can we finally understand why their fear of the 'host of heaven' was such a powerful temptation to turn away from trusting in YHWH? An exceedingly serious punishment was needed to dissuade the Israelites from falling to that temptation. That is hard for us now, because none of us in this benign solar system is tempted to worship or fear the planets in the slightest. We've had no cosmic cataclysms for 2700 years, such that even the memory of them is now all but forgotten except in the superstitions of astrology.

I have good reason to be spending so much time on this subject. *One day that temptation will return.* "And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became like blood, and the stars [planets? comets?] of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, the great men of the earth, the commanders, the rich, the strong, and every slave and every free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains..." (Rev 6:12-15. See also 8:10 & 16:17-21.)

God will do it again someday, possibly very soon. Will we recognize it as the hand of God and "look up, for your redemption draws near?" or will we become paralyzed with fear and try to hide? "And there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars [planets], and upon the earth dismay among the nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and the expectation of the things which are coming in the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, [don't succumb to fear! Instead,] straighten up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:25-28)

So, did good king Josiah's reforms last? Did they change the hearts of the people? Nope. The last 4 kings of Judah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah "did evil in the sight of YHWH, according to all that his fathers had done." (2 Kings 23:31, 37; 24:9, 19) When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, some Israelites fled to Egypt with Jeremiah, refusing to listen to his warnings. *They claimed the reason for the catastrophe that had befallen them was Josiah's reforms!* He had forced them to stop "burning sacrifices to the Queen of Heaven [Venus]." They claimed that ever since they had stopped, "We have lacked everything and have met our ends by the sword and by famine." (Jer 44:18 ff) They never did understand.

What about us? Do we understand their concerns? Or do we just despise them for being so silly? We cannot understand the Old Testament from our uniformitarian frame of reference. We need to know a bit about the terrors they went through in their Catastrophic Era to correctly understand their literature. YHWH says, "Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens [the visually terrifying and destructive passes of planets and comets], *although the nations are terrified of them.*" (Jer 10:2) He is warning them of a continuing problem which we cannot comprehend today because it is a problem we do not have. And that is the reason I'm writing this study. I am convinced that we cannot really understand the New Testament if we misunderstand the Old Testament. If you care at all about God, you will learn to love His holy Word enough to try to understand it.

So, what destroyed the resonant system and ended the Catastrophic Era? Let's review that flyby of 701 BC. Besides Isaiah, Joel, and Amos, Patten quotes Hesiod's *Theogony*, which reports a Greek perspective of the flyby. It describes Mars as a circle or a disc, a shield coated with glowing electrum or gold, and intensely bright. This is the only account of any close flyby which implies a 'full' Mars. Also, in case you didn't notice, this was a March flyby, yet the sword of YHWH struck the army of Sennacherib, and the closest approach was during the day over Israel! *What happened?* March flybys always went over the Americas, just before midnight Israel time. Only on October flybys did the lightning strike Israel. And from October through March on every previous flyby, Mars was a dark silhouette between Earth and Sol. Earth pulled its elliptical orbit even tighter, thus perpetuating the resonance of their orbits. As it approached in October and after it left in March, Mars always appeared as a crescent 'moon', so its 'Medusa hair' of static could be seen at night. However, that all changed during the Mars flyby of March, 701 BC. Mars was 'full'. *For the first time Mars passed on the wrong side of Earth.*

This acted to unravel the resonant system, pulling Earth's orbit outward and pulling Mars' elliptical orbit inward toward a circle. Mars effectively stole about 4.5% of Earth's kinetic energy, slowing the Earth in its orbit, and speeding up Mars. Therefore, the next flyby (in two years) pulled Mars even farther from Earth. Succeeding flybys continued the effect until by 689 BC Mars' orbit was nearly circular (as it is today). Mars' year dropped from 720 days to its current 687 days, and Earth's year increased from a perfect 360 days to near its present 365 $\frac{1}{4}$.

I know some of you are asking, "What caused the orbit of Mars to deform so much that Mars passed by Earth on the wrong side?" This was a tightly resonant system. In such a system, all the effects of the other planets could not even force Mars to collide with Earth, much less pass by on the wrong side. Only something outside the system could affect the orbit of Mars that much. Patten misses it here, because his book is focused solely on Mars and neglects the catastrophic orbit of Venus, which neared Earth on the year of Jubilee. The ancient literature agrees that Venus was the primary culprit. (See Immanuel Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision*, pages 153 - 203, for some examples.)

At the time of the collision of Aster with Mars, the Venus trinary was a comet in an unstable, decaying orbit, spending much of its time beyond Jupiter's orbit and in no way endangering the Earth. At its 'birth' by Jupiter (about 3300 BC) it became spectacularly visible, and thus was worshiped as the goddess of love, the 'Queen of Heaven'. The ancients always referred to it as a comet, not a planet. Its orbit was sharply elliptical. In my fiction scenario, it neared Earth's orbit and intersected the ecliptic plane just as Earth was passing, in early 1454 BC. Earth's heavier mass pulled it around, slowed it, and eventually set it on a new, less-elliptical orbit totally inside Earth's orbit.

As I said, that set the stage for the Exodus by pulling off Phaeton, which impacted the earth on October 31, 1452 BC. In 1451, Venus locked in to a semi-stable resonance with Earth. Its new orbit had a 225 day year, $\frac{8}{5}$ faster than Earth's 360 day year. This new orbit was an ellipse (with an eccentricity of about 0.51) so it spent most of its time far from Earth. But every 5 years (beginning in 1451 BC) it would come closer. Since Mars was also coming close to Earth, battles between Venus and Mars became inevitable, especially as Venus was pulled closer and closer to the plane of the ecliptic where all the other planets reside.

On Oct 30, 752 BC Venus crossed the orbit of Mars for the first time, resulting in that famous battle which pulled Eris away from Mars. Eris collided into Italy and wiped out the Etruscans. From then on, Venus battled Mars every 10 years until their frightful climax in 701 BC. Those were the years called the Era of Nabonassar. Venus would fight to either pull Mars away or send it closer (as it did during the Earthquake prophesied by Amos). The result was totally unpredictable, and even the world's wisest astrologers were terrified. The goddess of love became known as the goddess of war. People feared Venus even more than Mars, as it is so much larger. I call it a semi-stable orbit, because of its complex interactions with Earth and Mars.

I believe we had a tightly resonant system until 780 BC. At that time all the planets except Neptune or Pluto were in elliptical orbits, locked in resonance with Earth's 360 day orbit. Their periods were: Venus/Mercury 225 days (8:5); Mars 720 days (1:2); Jupiter 4320 days (1:12); Saturn 10,800 days (1:30); and Uranus 30,240 days (1:84). This made the close passes and resulting catastrophes of the planets quite predictable, to within a few minutes. As I said, Mars came by every even year on October 24 just before noon over Israel, and again the next March 20 just before midnight (Israel time) over the Americas. Venus came near every fifth year. It affected Earth and Mars, but rarely got close enough to Earth to be dangerous. The 12 year orbit of Jupiter and the 30 year orbit of Saturn greatly affected Mars and Venus, bringing Mars closer to Earth every 6 years and much closer every 30 years, and bringing Venus closer every 50 years on the year of Jubilee. 50 is not divisible by 30 or 6, so this system was stable for many years, with virtually no orbital decay – until 780 BC.

Now we can see how the resonant system ended. At the repentance of Nineveh in 780 BC, God's angels moved Mars forward and south, making it 10 minutes early and stretching the resonant system to its limit. 751 and 701 BC were Jubilee years. (See appendix.) Venus was near Earth and would normally pull Mars away. Instead, Mars was an hour early in October, 750 BC, causing 'the Earthquake'. That did it. The resonant system was doomed. In 720 BC (normally a deadly year), Mars was nowhere near Earth. By 702 BC Mars was 3 weeks early, passing far from Earth. It flew inside the orbit of Earth for 5 months, to return the first of March, 701 BC over Israel during the daytime.

But Venus and Mercury were also inside Earth's orbit. To observe this, astrologers used darkened sun-mirrors to look toward the sun. Babylonian Magi actually saw (and wrote about) that famous battle between Mars and Venus. Venus was then close enough to the ecliptic plane so it pulled Mars around and aimed it right toward Earth. Then tiny Mercury pulled Mars even further (the Greeks wrote about that) such that it crossed Earth's orbit on the wrong side, after Earth had passed. Its closest approach at 6:00 PM slid Earth's crust sideways, setting King Hezekiah's sundial back 10 degrees. An arc from the magneto-tail of Mars hit Jerusalem later that night, wiping out most of Sennacherib's army and saving Hezekiah's hide. Mercury was yanked away to find its own orbit around the sun. Mars and Venus sped up and also found new orbits. Earth slowed down. The resonant system, which for so long had locked the planets in their catastrophic elliptical orbits, totally unraveled. The planets gradually settled into more-circular orbits, never to seriously threaten Earth again.

This was the stuff that engendered the legends of the battles between the gods, which have become enshrined in the histories of many ancient peoples. For a long time, Jupiter was in control of the system, causing Mars to come catastrophically close whenever he was in Aquarius or Leo. When Saturn (his son, or father in some cultures) aligned with Jupiter, the catastrophes were worse. Mars, the death angel, the grim reaper, was only doing their bidding. Venus, the beautiful goddess of love, was birthed by Jupiter and grew up to become his mistress. In time, Jupiter sent her to war against Mars, who had now become too dangerous for mankind. Jupiter was nearby, in Pisces; he flung bolts of lightning at Mars to aid his mistress. Though losing both of her lovely sisters (moons), Venus ultimately won the war, with the aid of Mercury.

And this was just a Greek version of these great battles fought in the heavenlies. They were immortalized in Egypt as the war between Isis (Venus) and Seth (Mars). Many other cultures have similar legends. Now you can see how those fanciful legends had their basis in actual fact.

Saturn is also mentioned in many of the legends. Its 30 year elliptical orbit brought it near Earth, but only when it was in Leo. That was right in the middle of the 30 year cycle of disasters (when Jupiter was in Scorpius or Taurus) so it did not add to them. Saturn is very massive, but it was usually too far away to do much damage, except 4 times from 3795 - 3705 BC and once in 2715 BC, when it stole $\frac{2}{3}$ of Earth's crust to make the moon. That encounter must have circularized its orbit. As Chronos, it still 'kept time' by its effect on Mars, but never again neared Earth itself. Then in 701 BC when the resonant system unraveled, Saturn ceased to be the Timekeeper. It was in Libra and wasn't involved in the battle. Its current orbit is 29.46 years, equal to 29.89 360 day years. Only resonant orbits remain precise. All orbits are now decaying due to drag from space plasma, solar wind, and Sol's magnetosphere.

Was that famous 701 BC deviant (outside) flyby a good thing? It finally brought peace to our solar system, as the 'war between the worlds' had finally ceased. But so did the regular reversing and recharging of our geomagnetic field, which has now dwindled down to the point that it no longer protects us from cosmic radiation. The planetary 'gods' which had caused so much destruction and taken so many lives have been reduced to myths and legends, which in our 'scientific' era have been all but forgotten. But has this peace caused us to draw closer to the true God of the cosmos, YHWH, to fear and trust Him more? Or have we forgotten Him along with all those ancient tales, and placed our trust in our own resources and in the stability of a benign solar system?

One day, and from the weakness of our magnetic field it had better be soon, Jesus Christ will return. He will recharge Earth's magnetic field, cleanse the earth with fire, restore her vapor canopy, level every mountain, fill up every valley, get rid of the oceans, melt Earth's crust and reform it to one continuous unbroken shell as before the Flood, prepare lush gardens like Eden all over the earth, and give His people 1000 year lifespans to tend and rule it under His command. This 'day of the Lord' will be like 'the Earthquake' in 750 BC at the time of King Uzziah. (Zech 14:5) It is prophesied in Joel to be a day of darkness and gloom, a day of destruction from the Almighty, a day in which fire burns up the trees and pastures, the ground quakes, and the heavens tremble, a day in which YHWH displays wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke, a day in which the sun is turned to darkness and the moon to blood. He could do all that with just the Word of His Power, but from the way God has usually done things in the past, I think not. I think He will use means. When we see the coming cataclysm will we understand what He is doing and lift up our hearts to Him rejoicing, or will we succumb to fear and flee in terror?

The reason I spent so much time on the Catastrophic Era was to give you a feel for the times in which the Feasts of Israel were instituted and celebrated, times in which Israel was slow to trust YHWH and quick to be drawn back into the idolatrous astrological worship of the neighboring nations. In his Talmudic commentary, Ginzberg writes that in the days of the judges, even many of the Hebrews themselves were so addicted to the worship of Ba'al that they carried around small images (talismans) of Mars with them, occasionally kissing the talisman with great fervor. This is seen as mere superstitious nonsense by all of us from the Uniformitarian Era.

But now that we have caught this glimpse of the fearful Catastrophic Era, we can begin to understand why God gave them the Feasts, starting with Passover in March just as Mars was **passing overhead**. He wanted to redirect their attention away from the rogue planets which seemed to so terribly control their lives, to Himself, the Creator of the planets and Director of the heavenly symphony.

This does have comforting implications to those who have been swept up in the 'Global Warming' hysteria of the 'Chicken Littles' of our day. Of course the earth has been warming. The six-mile thick mountains of super-cold deep space ice which caused the Ice Age are now gone from the poles. But far from threatening the earth, the return to normal warmth would replenish the earth's vapor barrier with little change in sea levels. The resulting greenhouse effect would stabilize temperatures and rainfall around the globe, holding much-needed warmth in the winter and shielding us from harsh solar radiation. God knows what He is doing! We just need to trust Him.

Allow me to close this section with a few quotes from Isaiah. Hezekiah's battle with Sennacherib of Assyria is tied to the final restoration of Israel at the end of the age. "O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer! He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. Although YHWH has given you the bread of privation and the water of oppression, He, your Teacher, will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. And your ears will hear a word behind you, '*This is the way, walk in it,*' whenever you turn to the right or to the left. You will defile your graven images... and say to them, 'Be gone!' Then He will give you rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground, and bread from the yield of the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous. On that day your livestock will graze in a roomy pasture... And on every lofty mountain, and on every high hill there will be streams running with water *on the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.* And the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days, on that day that YHWH binds up the fracture of His people and heals the bruise He has inflicted.

"Behold, the name of YHWH comes from a great distance. Burning is His anger, and dense is His smoke. His lips are filled with indignation, and His tongue is like a consuming fire. His breath is like an overflowing torrent, which reaches to the neck, to shake the nations back and forth in a sieve and to put in the jaws of the peoples the bridle leading to ruin. You will have the song in the night, *when you keep the Festival*; and gladness of heart like one marching to the music of the flute, to go to the mountain of YHWH, to the Rock of Israel. YHWH will cause the majesty of His voice to be heard, and the descending of His arm to be seen, and the flame of a consuming fire, in cloud-burst, in downpour and hailstones. For at the voice of YHWH, Assyria will be terrified, when He strikes with the rod. Every blow of the rod of punishment which YHWH will lay on him will be with the music of tambourines and lyres. In battles, brandishing weapons, He will fight them. For Topheth (the Valley of Hinnom, where they offered child sacrifices to Molech) has long been ready... He made it deep and large, a fiery pyre with plenty of wood; the breath of YHWH, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire...

"For thus says YHWH to me, 'As the lion or young lion growls over his prey, against which a band of shepherds is called out, will not be terrified at their voice or disturbed at their noise, so will YHWH of Hosts come down to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill.' Like flying birds so YHWH of Hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it; He will **Pass** over it and rescue it. Return to Him from whom you have deeply defected, O sons of Israel. For in that day every man will cast away his silver idols and his gold idols, which your hands have made as a sin [the images of Mars they used to carry and kiss whenever Mars came near]. And the Assyrian will fall by a sword not of man, and a sword not of man will devour him [the sword of YHWH, Typhon, the Grim Reaper from Mars]. So he will not escape the sword, and his young men will become forced laborers, and his rock [his stability, possibly his leaders or even his god Nisroch, representing Mars the god of war] will pass away because of panic, and his princes will be terrified at the standard [Yashua's sign in the heavens – Matt 12:30], declares YHWH, whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem." (Isa 30:19-31:9)

Much of Isaiah continues like this. Indeed it is difficult to maintain a uniformitarian world view reading Isaiah. He speaks so freely of cataclysms – "... the windows above are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken asunder; the earth is split through; the earth is shaken violently. It reels to and fro like a drunkard, and it totters like a shack..." (24:18-20) "All the hosts of heaven will be dissolved, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the fig tree." (34:4) "For YHWH will execute judgment by fire, and by His sword on all flesh, and those slain by YHWH will be many." (66:16) It just goes on and on. But finally, "Woe to you, O destroyer, ... as soon as you finish destroying, you shall be destroyed..." (33:1) Hallelujah!

The celebrated flyby of 701 BC was not the last great cataclysm. Though Mars is defeated, we now await the awesome day of YHWH, which I have no doubt will be even worse. Of that day Isaiah says the light of the sun is 7 times brighter; Joel says the sun is turned to darkness; Peter says the atmosphere is destroyed by burning and the elements melt with fervent heat; Matthew says the stars fall from the sky and the powers of the heavens are shaken. Contradictory? Not when you realize that God still uses means. It sounds like amid all the other catastrophes of the end times, the sun will become a supernova, bursting into intense flame for a time (which will melt the earth's crust and burn up its atmosphere), and then go dark. And then, "I saw a [renewed] heavens and a [renewed] earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea... and the city has no need of the sun or the moon, for the glory of YHWH has illumined it... and there shall no longer be any night. They shall have no need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for YHWH shall illumine them..." (Rev 21-22; also see Isaiah 60:19)

THE ASHES OF THE RED HEIFER

I must cover one other subject before getting into the seven Feasts of Israel. As with the Sabbath, the story of the ashes of the red heifer is not one of the seven Feasts of Israel. Yet, like the Sabbath, it is very significant and will help us understand them. This also is a huge story, which could be an entire book.

Summarizing Numbers 19, an unblemished red heifer (female cow) was taken outside the camp (they used to do it on the Mount of Olives, from which they could easily see the whole temple area) and slaughtered in the presence of the high priest, Eleazar. He took some of the blood and sprinkled it toward the altar of burnt offering. Then the entire heifer was burned into a pile of ashes. As it was burning, the priests threw cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet cloth or thread into the fire. They gathered up the ashes and stored them in a clean place outside the camp, to be used by anyone who needed them. When needed, they mixed these holy ashes with running water, which was then stored in a bottle and called the 'water of purification' or 'water for impurity'. This water was used to sprinkle persons or things that have touched a dead body.

When the supply of ashes got low, they would offer another red heifer, mixing the remains of the first heifer's ashes in with the new ashes, in order to ensure continued ceremonial purity. Over the 1500 years from Mt. Sinai to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, there were seven red heifers sacrificed. The ashes of the seventh heifer, guarded by the Essenes in a special urn called a Kalal, were hidden prior to the Roman conquest of their community. The hiding place is recorded on a special copper scroll, found in 1952 among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Many in the Near East fervently believe (as stated in the Koran) that whoever possesses that Kalal, has the right to rule the world. It is possible (but not likely) that when the Jews recover the Kalal of ashes, the Muslims will finally acknowledge their right to rule the land of Israel. At any rate, the Orthodox Jews recognize that they cannot re-establish their system of temple sacrifices without first attaining ceremonial purity, which they cannot do until they have that original Kalal of ashes. Even if (when) they sacrifice a new red heifer, its ashes must be mixed with those of the last one to be ceremonially pure.

God understood about germs long before people did, and He gave the Israelites specific instructions to protect themselves against infection. One reason for the many required washings, quarantines, sprinklings, laws about clean and unclean animals, and so on was to protect the Israelites from disease. "And He [God] said, 'If you will give earnest heed to the voice of YHWH your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to [hear and heed] His commandments, and keep all His statutes, *I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians;* for I, YHWH, am your Healer.'" (Ex 15:26)

God gave them detailed laws far in advance of their scientific knowledge; anyone who kept those laws was protected from disease whether he understood why or not. For example, the 'water of purification' was a powerful antiseptic. There are lots of germs on dead bodies, and you need an antiseptic (as well as strict quarantine laws) to keep them from becoming an epidemic.

At the time of the terrible bubonic plague and other plagues that ravaged Europe, as much as a third of the population died, except in Jewish communities, where almost no one died. Nobody understood why (even the Jews), and at times the Jews were accused of starting the plague to wipe out the Gentiles. But now we understand. The Jews, mostly by tradition, were more faithful to God's laws. And to the degree that they were faithful, they were protected from disease.

The Bible says, "The life of the flesh is in the blood." (Lev 17:11) Yet bloodletting was widespread throughout the 19th Century. During our Civil War, more soldiers died from blood-letting than bullets. Medicinal leeches are still used today. As late as 1865 'scientific' doctors in 'modern' hospitals would routinely go from an autopsy to a surgery or to a birthing without washing their hands. Mortality rates for hospital births was 25 - 30% – ten times higher than that for home births. Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis correctly deduced that disease was spread from cadavers to birthing mothers. He required all doctors and students in his hospital in Vienna to wash their hands before examining patients. The mortality rates in his ward dropped to about 1%. His superiors fired him and dropped his handwashing procedures. The mortality rates soared again. He went elsewhere, again requiring handwashing, with the same results. The 'scientific' community attacked him with ridicule and scorn. His 'newfangled' procedures, which God gave Israel in Numbers 19, were not accepted into widespread practice until after his death in 1865.

You laugh and proudly state that modern science has now surpassed the Scriptures? I beg to differ. As late as 1975 most doctors swore that diet had nothing whatever to do with cancer. But the Bible gives lists of clean and unclean foods in Leviticus 11, and finally some doctors are beginning to wake up to the fact that people who follow God's ways don't get most types of cancer. I believe that most cancers (as well as many other diseases) would be avoided if we would follow God's list of clean foods, eat whole foods instead of refined (white) flour, sugar, and rice, drink pure water instead of coffee, tea, or soda pop, get a good weekly Sabbath Rest (as well as a good nightly sleep), and avoid all drugs, radiation, and toxic chemicals. A good general rule of health (or anything else, for that matter) is: just do things God's way instead of the world's way. But modern 'scientific' doctors don't understand God's ways. They still try to cure cancer by using poison, radiation, or surgical removal of a diseased organ. 'Science' has caused much suffering by hating God and His ways.

Bunny trail... Back to the ashes of the red heifer. The physical ramifications, though very significant, are only the beginning. The spiritual parallels are immense. The red heifer was a female cow, in the prime of her life, young, full of life, able to give life, unblemished, pure, a virgin, who had never worn a yoke. This was not a sin offering! Sin offerings were always male: whether lamb, goat, or bull. It is not a sin to touch a dead body, and the cleansing is not a punishment. The purpose of the cleansing is simply to offer life to one who for any reason encounters a realm of death. Death is 'catching'. It spreads easily and can quickly become an epidemic. But through the 'living' waters of purification, the death around us is held at bay.

The female gender of the cow, a heifer, is a key to the interpretation of the sacrifice. We know that Jesus died in our place. But it was not only the man Christ Jesus who died on the cross; His Bride also dies in Him. (Rom 6:1-11) The heifer was a virgin; symbolizing the sinless purity of the Bride. This is not an offering for sin! It is hard for us to get around that, but please consider that Christ's death on the cross accomplished at least two different things. First, Jesus did die as an offering for sin – that is symbolized in the Passover sacrifice; He was the Passover Lamb, who is always male. I do not minimize that at all.

But the symbolism of the red heifer is quite different. I believe it is an even greater accomplishment than the sin offering. It speaks to those of us who are already saved. Our sins are washed away by the blood of the Passover Lamb. We are now the pure (female) Bride of Christ. We are justified before God; yet we must still, "take up our cross [die] daily and follow Him." That is sanctification. It takes a second kind of offering – the ashes of the red heifer.

The heifer was slain outside the camp. Yashua died outside the walls of Jerusalem. Jerusalem symbolizes heaven – outside its walls represents the world. The Bride of Christ, washed pure and clean by the precious blood of the Passover Lamb, is sent outside the city gates. We have to go back out into the world, to live in the realm of disease and death, surrounded by millions dying in their sins – and maybe even hang between two thieves. How can we survive? By fighting for our rights? By defending ourself? "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth..." to defend Himself. (Isa 53:7) No, in the Kingdom the earthly rules invert. It is only through our daily crucifixion and death to the self-nature that we can live and be fruitful in the Kingdom of God.

Red symbolizes blood, which in turn symbolizes life or death. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls..." (Lev 17:11) The heifer had to be red. Perfect red heifers are rare; it has taken modern Jews 50 years to find one. Even so, the precious blood of Jesus which makes eternal atonement for our souls, is rare. His death only occurs once in the history of the universe.

The heifer, though innocent and without blemish, had to die to give life. The perfected Bride of Christ still must die (to self) with Christ to give life. A scarlet thread or piece of material had to be thrown into the fire. The King of the universe had to give up His scarlet robes of royalty and humble Himself as a man to woo the Bride to Himself. This scarlet thread is woven throughout the tapestry of history, always available to give Life to those who seek Him by faith, humble themselves, and submit to His Lordship.

Hyssop was also thrown into the fire. It is a small leafy bush of the mint family, probably marjoram, which is common in Palestine. It grows in rocky or dry ground, or even in a rock wall. Its leaves are hairy and easily able to hold water when bunched together. It was used both as an active ingredient in the 'water of purification' and as the means used to sprinkle it on the one needing cleansing. Hyssop always relates to cleansing and purification. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Ps 51:7)

Both the scarlet thread and the hyssop also relate to humility. "Have this attitude in yourselves which also was in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form [nature] of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [clung to], but emptied [humbled] Himself, taking the form [nature] of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man [with a fully human nature], He humbled Himself [even further] by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross..." (Phil 2:5-8) Jesus' precious blood is sprinkled only with humility. The proud cannot receive it. Jesus had to humble Himself in order to give it, and we must likewise humble ourselves to receive it.

Cedar wood was also thrown into the fire. Cedar wood symbolizes fragrance, endurance, and fervency. It is sweet-smelling in life or in death. Other fragrances lose their sweetness in time, but not cedar. Cedar wood fills the room with a pleasant fragrance which never fades. Cedar boards never rot, and they keep their strength and their beautiful reddish grain. Cedar burns 'fervently', hot and fast. Even its smoke is fragrant, symbolizing the fervent fragrance of everlasting Life, and the sweetness, power, and beauty of the presence of Emmanuel, God with us.

"... when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the [most] holy place once for all, having *obtained eternal redemption*. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a [red] heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, *how much more* will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, *cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" (Heb 9:11-14)

This is an incredible passage, which I think most of us have never stopped to analyze. It talks about the cleansing of the flesh, using both sin offerings (the blood of goats and bulls) and the ashes of the red heifer (which is not a sin offering). It compares these to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, in a form of hyperbole. In essence, the author is saying two things. First, “*The sacrifice of Jesus is so much better than the old sin offerings, that He obtained eternal redemption.*” Then in the second sentence he claims, “*the blood of Jesus is so much better than the ashes of the red heifer, why, it can even cleanse our consciences!*”

Those two things are very different. Sin offerings were related to the seven Feasts, which portray God’s plan of redemption from sin. The sacrifice of Christ is certainly better than those old sin offerings, for “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10:4), but the blood of Jesus is actually able to take away the sins! “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. The Holy Spirit also bears witness to us... ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says YHWH; I will put My laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them, and their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is forgiveness [removal] of those things, there is no longer any [need for an] offering for sin.” (10:14-18)

But the ashes of the red heifer are not a sin offering. Hebrews 9:14 is talking about something greater than a sin offering. It is talking about *cleansing our consciences from dead works*.

Think about that. Does it sound strange? It is a crucial concept which few understand. All I can do in this book is present a brief summary of a deep spiritual truth which as I said could be the subject of an entire book. Please pray for Holy Spirit discernment of what I am about to say.

Cleansing our conscience has no more to do with sin than does touching a dead body, but it is just as important for spiritual life as washing one’s hands after handling a dead body is to physical life.

What is conscience? Is it just that little voice inside our heads that makes us feel guilty whenever we mess up? And if it is, just where does that little voice come from, anyway? The Greek word here is *suneidesis*. It comes from the root *suneido*, which means “to see completely, to understand or be aware, to be conscious of or (secretly) informed of, to consider, know, be privy, or be ware of.” Therefore the conscience involves knowing something with the mind. Now, the mind learns from many sources, the five senses, experience, books, logical reasoning, and so on, but this knowledge is different. The source is the spirit realm. The conscience is that part of our soul which was created by God to hear from the spirit realm and translate it into words that the mind can understand. The conscience then is the ‘heart’ of the soul, the bridge of communication between Spirit and body. That is an important concept.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, their conscience was pure and perfect. They could communicate with God the Spirit as clearly as you talk with your spouse. They joyfully and easily learned from Him. All they had to do, all day every day, was look to YHWH and follow Him. They had no concept of good or evil; they couldn’t know they were naked; they had no lust or greed or any of the ‘self sins, as they had no concept of ‘self’ apart from God. If you want to think of it this way, God was their only ‘conscience’. Like children, they were totally dependent upon His guidance.

Adam and Eve were perfectly innocent, but immature. Like newborn babies, they were naked and unashamed. Though they had a free will, in their dependence they had no way to exercise it. They needed to have their conscience developed, so they could hear what God said, appreciate the goodness of it, and make the choice to obey because they wanted to. But giving someone a choice also gives them the possibility of choosing wrongly. So along with the gift of choice, they needed to be able to discern good from evil, or else they always would have been robots, able only to obey, unable to choose anything for themselves.

God wanted sons in His image, who love righteousness and hate evil like He does. But how could they hate evil never having seen it or heard of it? God created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden for a purpose, and He gave Adam and Eve ‘the rule’ knowing full well that they would break it and fall into sin. In a very real sense, God engineered the whole thing, even using Satan in His plan to mature Adam.

Light must be contrasted with darkness before it can be appreciated. Beauty is truly admired only after one has seen some ugliness. God wanted to give Adam a glimpse of the darkness so he would be able to love the light. God knew Adam could never fully appreciate the tremendous blessings of walking in righteousness until he had seen the awful curse of touching the wickedness.

Whether or not Adam actually had to fall into sin to have his conscience awakened to the sinfulness of it is questionable. I personally don’t believe he did. I think that if he had recoiled in horror at the thought of disobeying God, God might have come to him and said, “Very good, Adam. You learned your first lesson about wickedness, and you passed the test. The serpent was wicked, and I will show you how severely he must be punished. But you chose to obey Me! You shall see the blessings of obedience. Come with Me now. We have some more testing to do.”

Some babies learn easily, by viewing the discipline of others. A compliant child rarely needs discipline himself. There are plenty of strong willed children around for him to learn from. However, doesn’t it seem like a strong willed child always needs to disobey and get punished before he is able to learn wisdom? Thus we see the ‘high road’ of obedience as well as the ‘low road’ of consequences, and God can take His children by either road.

What is the first thing you do when you want to develop the conscience in your baby? Give him a rule – just one will do – and discipline him when he breaks it. The rule doesn't have to involve anything wicked; it may be as simple as "Tommy, don't touch the stereo." The sin is then not in the rule itself – he will be permitted to touch the stereo when he is older – but in willful disobedience to the command. If the lesson is learned, then Tommy has developed his conscience in one small area.

So, he heard the command, but Momma went outside. What is the first thing little Tommy does? Right, he looks longingly up at the stereo. Then he sneaks up and touches it (breaking the knob in the process, of course). Tommy immediately feels guilty. His conscience is awakened. What happens next?

First he tries to justify his actions in his own mind: "Mommy touches it. Jimmy touches it. Why can't I touch it? I'm a big boy now!" Second, he tries to hide from his parents the fact that he disobeyed. He tries desperately to 'fix it' but the more he works on it the worse it gets. And third, his love / trust relationship with his parents is broken until the disobedience is resolved.

Not having been born yesterday, his mom will come in, take one look at the guilt-ridden horror on her child's face, glance over at the broken stereo knob, put two and two together, and confront him. "Tommy, did you touch the stereo?" Tommy will look frantically around for an alibi. "Uh, Jimmy did it!" "Yeah, sure. Jimmy has been hanging up the laundry with me." "Oops. Uh, the cat did it!"

Hopefully momma will not fall to the temptation to get angry over the broken stereo. She has taken on the task of first awakening, and then developing and cleansing her son's conscience. This process has eternal significance. The stereo's value is insignificant in comparison. Every child must learn that obedience, whether he understands it or not, is a matter of life or death. While disobedience in the area of touching the stereo only results in a spanking, disobedience in other areas, things that he can't possibly understand at this age, could result in death or permanent injury. His only hope for a long and happy life is to learn obedience and submission to godly authority, now. And the sooner he learns it, the better off he'll be.

It is a foolish parent who tries to protect his child by refusing to discipline. He is only guaranteeing that his child will be disciplined much harder, later, by a higher authority (such as the state), and by then it may be too late to help him. But, being a wise mother, Momma gives Tommy a spanking just hard enough so that he will remember it whenever he looks at the stereo. She then reassures him of her love and of her desire for him to mature into a godly man, and explains how important obedience is for his well-being. And finally she tapes the knob back on the stereo, and promises Tommy that, "Daddy will fix it all better when he comes home."

So God gave His first babies a law. Only one, and it was such a simple little thing. "You can eat of any tree in the garden, but just don't eat from that one." Can you imagine Adam and Eve looking longingly at the beautiful fruit on that one tree when God's back was turned? Can you just hear them saying to each other, "I wonder why this one is so special?" And when Eve fell to the tempter's suggestions and ate of the fruit, Adam was right beside her to have some too; don't think Eve was the only one at fault here!

Then their consciences were awakened and they knew they were naked. Of course they tried to 'fix' it, by sewing fig leaves. They were afraid of God in the garden. Their relationship to Him was broken, so they hid themselves. When God came back and found them, He confronted them with the real problem, disobedience. "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen 3:11) Of course their first response was just like little Tommy, trying to justify themselves and redirect the blame. God, like any wise, loving parent, then did three things. He gave Adam and Eve a discipline severe enough that they would never forget it; He gave them the promise of a Redeemer who would permanently fix the problem of disobedience and rebellion one day; and He provided a temporary 'fix' until the Redeemer would come.

The discipline was the curse on the ground and the pain of bearing and raising children, causing unceasing toil, suffering, and ultimately death for us all. Certainly a severe enough punishment. We should have no trouble remembering it whenever we consider that stereo!

The promise of the Redeemer was that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. The serpent was illustrative of the 'problem'; the bruise in its head was illustrative of the permanent 'fix'. There will be no more temptation, sin, or death one day.

The garment of skin He made for them illustrates the temporary 'fix' until the Redeemer would come. This was the first death in God's perfect universe. An animal, most likely a ram (male lamb), gave its life to clothe Adam and Eve. The implication from Abel's acceptable offering in Genesis 4:4 is that God instituted the sacrificial system, whereby the substitutionary death of an animal was required to atone for their sin and free them from its guilt.

So, we now have an awakened conscience, and a very powerful tool it can be in God's hands to mature us in the faith. But there is a problem. *An awakened conscience is not a cleansed conscience.* Naturally speaking, the awakened conscience does not lead us to God. Just the opposite. Adam and Eve ran and tried to hide from God. They made fig leaves to try to cover their nakedness. They desperately tried to justify themselves and redirect the blame. We are no better! We get really religious, and try to do all sorts of things to justify ourselves and make us feel less guilty. We work to earn God's approval. We make resolutions, give to charity, help out at church, and discipline ourselves.

These are called, in Scripture, “dead works.” Anything we do to attempt to fix the problem is no better than little Tommy trying to put the broken knob back on the stereo. When will we foolish children realize that we cannot fix it, no matter how hard we try. All we can do is make it worse. Only Daddy can fix it when He gets home.

Those who make their living from religion really have a field day with this awakened conscience. Most sermons, even some very good sermons, have a least an element of manipulation involved, trying to get people to feel guilty about doing something the preacher doesn’t want you to do, or to have that warm, fuzzy feeling about doing what he wants you to do. That is what passing the offering plate is all about, for example. They push a plate in front of you right in full view of the rest of the congregation (in direct contradiction of Jesus, who said to do your alms in secret—Matt 6:1-4) and try to pressure you to feel guilty if you don’t ‘dig deep’ and ‘give till it hurts’. Each church group has its own customs and traditions, and whatever they are, you are made to feel guilty as sin if you don’t ‘go along with the program’ and are promised a life full of happiness, peace, and prosperity if you do.

You see, this whole awakened conscience is a ‘law’ thing. In breaking the commandment, we put ourselves under the law, and through the deeds of the law no flesh is justified in His sight. (Rom 3:20) It is the strangest thing. Even knowing full well that our eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the disobedience in the first place, we still seem to think that eating more fruit from the tree will help. If only we can learn more about evil, so we can avoid it. If only we can learn how to ‘be good’, to live just right, worship just right, love and care for each other, not tell lies, give our money to the poor, and on and on, then we’ll be all right. And after a whole lifetime of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, do you think we are any more acceptable to a holy God?

It is the law that teaches us about good and evil, but “... we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” (Rom 3:28) Does that conflict with “... not the hearers of the law are just before God, but doers of the law will be justified.” (2:13)? Not at all. As long as you always keep the law perfectly, you will be justified by it. But the very first time you disobey and break that stereo knob you are toast. You cannot fix it! All your trying to keep the law from then on is only ‘dead works’.

Conscience is an interesting thing. Once awakened for the first time, it kinda takes on a life all its own. If you happen to be raised in a cannibal culture, you may think nothing of killing and eating your enemies and drinking their blood, but your conscience may bother you horribly if you forget to bow down and sprinkle a few drops of their blood on the tribal idol first. A Roman Catholic may think nothing of bowing down to the idols as long as they’re named after the ‘saints’, but his conscience bothers him if

he is late for Sunday Mass or forgets to bring an offering. A Hindu may think nothing of being late to worship or not having an offering, but his conscience will smite him down if he kills a ‘sacred’ cow. A Muslim will have no trouble killing the cow, or even a human if he is an ‘infidel’, but his conscience will bring pangs of guilt if he faces away from Mecca in his daily prayers. A Jew will never pray toward Mecca and may gladly eat the beef, but might be devastated if he eats pork or has to work on the Sabbath. The typical modern Christian has no trouble with the pork or with working on the Sabbath, but may have pangs of conscience over watching a football game instead of attending church on Sunday. J. Preston Eby tells of one Pentecostal church in south Alabama where there were hundreds of rules and traditions against anything that seemed worldly: make-up or jewelry of any kind, a wedding band, bright-colored clothes, even bobbed or curled hair for women. Pastor Eby confesses that he grew up in that church as a pastor’s son with a ‘Pentecostal conscience’. When he bought a simple gold plated tie pin to hold his tie in place, his conscience smote him so horribly that he immediately took it off.

So, as you can quickly see, the natural man’s awakened (but untrained) conscience is of very little help toward godliness. In fact it can very quickly become a tremendous bondage in the many rules and regulations according to the traditions of men.

That is the purpose of the awakened conscience. It binds you down to the horns of the altar from which there is no escape in this life. The law is a bondage. It can never set you free, all it can do is condemn you to death. You can keep all the laws you want and make a zillion more to go along with them, and it is only ‘dead works’. They get you nowhere except bound more tightly to the altar. To live by the awakened but uncleansed conscience is to live by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and in God’s own words that always results in death.

Did I just say that the law is bad? Not at all. God made it, back at Creation. “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Gen 1:31) He made it for a purpose, just like He made the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for a purpose. “... is the law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the law...” (Rom 7:7) Just as you saw with little Tommy, the law first awakens our conscience, then challenges us to try and keep it, and finally demonstrates to us that we cannot keep it. We cannot make ourselves acceptable to God through our own efforts. All our good deeds are only ‘dead works’ before Him.

Once I have eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then even if I could always choose the good and avoid the evil, it is still I making the choice. That is iniquity. That is ‘self’ on the throne of my life, instead of Jesus as Lord over my life. Having once eaten of that tree, I have no hope unless I can make it to the Tree of Life.

“Judge not, lest you be judged yourselves.” (Matt 7:1) We all know that verse, but how many of us realize it comes immediately after the paragraph on “Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness?” (6:33) You see, Jesus is contrasting two opposing ways of living here. Seeking first the Kingdom of God is eating from the Tree of Life. It is seeking first the Kingship of Jesus as the Lord over my Life. The alternative, the only alternative, is judging. That is eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is setting yourself up as lord to judge everyone based on whether you consider their deeds to be good or evil. So on Judgment Day, “... in the way you judge, you will be judged” (7:2), according to your own deeds. (Rev 21:13)

The Tree of Life represents Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The new Life He gives is Himself, a whole new eternity-based life-form. He is not interested in improving the quality of your old life. He is not interested in teaching you how to do better; how to try harder, how to keep the law, how to do more good deeds, or how to be more religious to make yourself more acceptable to a holy God. He is not interested in teaching the old nature all about good and evil. Not at all. He wants to see that old nature dead and buried with Him at Golgotha, so He can give us a new, transformed nature, the divine nature.

Every being lives according to its nature. You can do all you want to the old human nature, clean it, dress it up, teach it, discipline it, and it will still be unacceptable to God. It can get very religious, and outwardly very pretty, but it can never become godly. Why? Because godly means in submission to God, ruled by His Spirit, and this is the one thing that a fallen human nature cannot possibly do. “Those who are according to the flesh [the human nature] set their minds on the things of the flesh... the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom 8:5-8)

The total focus and motivation of our old nature is self – protecting, pleasing, pampering, and providing for self. That has got to die, and die it shall, through the process of redemption and transformation. Only in its death can we ‘metamorphosis’ into the new nature of Christ.

So what is the nature of Christ? Jesus also has two natures, the human and the divine. But His human nature never fell into sin. It didn’t need cleansing. All His life it was tuned to the Father’s will, led by the Holy Spirit. He did nothing on his own initiative (for ‘self’) but only what the Father showed Him. (Jn 5:19 & 30) That is “eating of the Tree of Life” and “seeking first the Kingdom.”

He showed us how to live. Now He wants to cleanse our conscience so we can live that way, too – free from the bondage of ‘dead works’, and seeking only one thing: Life from above. Jesus is the Life from above! Our cleansed conscience is like a stereo that receives only one station: Jesus, doing the Father’s will like He always did.

Oh, the devil will still come to you and try to change the station, saying, “You gotta do this! You gotta do that!” to put you right back under bondage. “Lookit! You broke the stereo. So now you gotta fix it!” But the new cleansed conscience doesn’t hear; it is tuned to a different station. It only looks to Jesus in love and adoration and says, “Here I am, Lord. What would You like me to do?” That is living with Jesus on the throne of my life. That is eating of the Tree of Life. This is the way we were created to live.

The old nature was tuned to many stations. The flesh nature pulls at us in many directions. There may be a fun and games pull, a sensual pull, a riches pull, a fame and glory pull, a beauty, peace, and grace pull, a religious pull, and many others. The devil doesn’t really care which of these you emphasize; any of them can destroy you. A well rounded person in the eyes of the world is one who has these various desires all balanced in his life. Even if the ‘Jesus’ station gets tuned in there somehow, Satan doesn’t mind too much, as long as all the other stations are still coming in loud and clear.

We tend to think of the Christian as one who just has the ‘Jesus’ station turned up louder than the others, and that is the way it often is with baby Christians. But that is not God’s design. He wants to go through our entire stereo and ‘fix it’. *He wants to cleanse our consciences from dead works.* He wants to clean out the tuner, so that all those other stations are gone, and all we hear in every area of our lives is only what He would have us hear. The pull of the world has a plague of death on it, and listening to any of their stations is polluting.

Note that only ‘living water’, water from a flowing stream, could be used to apply the ashes of the red heifer. Jesus is the Living Water. When He applies the ashes of His death to our conscience, the plague of death is halted and Life takes over. This is not a sacrifice for sin! This is just a cleansing from the defilement of death. Touching the dead body, living in a world full of death, or dwelling with worldliness all around us, is contaminating, even if we don’t participate in their sin, even if we always choose the good and avoid the evil. The plague of death is upon them, and it would kill us too, if we do not have that little bottle of Living Water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer.

But praise God! It is available to anyone, right here outside the camp. You don’t have to be a priest. Liberally sprinkle it over yourself, your family, all your possessions. It is a powerful antiseptic, and it might sting a bit, but that is OK, Tommy. You’re a big boy now.

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [His works, not ours], knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor 15:58) Victory? Over what, sin? Death? The law? Yes! All of the above!

By His redemption, Christ delivers us from sin and death, and by cleansing our conscience, He delivers us from the law, so that we can walk in the newness of His Life. (Rom 6:4) It all works together. That is why “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom 8:1-2)

When Jesus gets finished cleaning our stereo (which admittedly may take a good deal of time), we can tune it to any place on the dial – riches, fame, glory, fun, beauty, physical pleasures, religious activities, and so on – and we will see them from His perspective, participate in them with His nature and character and only as He directs, receive His wisdom in them, and humbly give Him thanks.

This is a transformed nature, which truly wants what God wants rather than only what pleases self. This is the cleansed conscience. Instead of knowing good and evil, we know Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the (Tree of) Life in intimate relationship. Now we can see with His eyes, discern with His Holy Spirit, and think and make decisions with His mind in us. (1 Cor 2:16) This is liberty (2 Cor 3:17) and freedom in Christ. (Gal 5:1) This is the abundant life (Jn 10:10) of true ‘faith works’ (Jam 2:18 ff) rather than ‘dead works’. This is dwelling in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6), as Adam and Eve before the Fall. This is the sons of God being led by the Spirit of God. (Rom 8:14)

If you have followed me so far, dear Reader, you have all you need mentally and spiritually to understand the Feasts of Israel. Let’s conclude this lengthy introduction with a few exhortations from the apostle Paul.

Paul warns the Galatians, “... by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified... Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now perfected by the flesh? ... the law has become our tutor [guardian] to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor... Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days, months, seasons [Feasts], and years! I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain... It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery... You were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into opportunity for the flesh... Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh... if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” (Gal 2:16–5:18 excerpts)

Pretty straightforward, eh? But Paul’s exhortation to the Colossians is even stronger. See if you can discern from it how the blood of Jesus Christ is so much better than the blood of bulls and goats or the ashes of the red heifer that it actually cleanses us not only from sin and guilt, but also even from the dead works of the guilt-ridden conscience.

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him, and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men, rather than according to Christ.* For in Him all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete [perfect], and He is the head, over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands... having been buried with Him in baptism, you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead... He made you alive together with Him...

“*Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or the Sabbath* – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the body of Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause in his fleshly mind... If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘*Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!*’ (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using) in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your affections on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our Life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to [all the deeds of the flesh nature] ... since you laid aside the old self with its deeds, and have put on the new self, who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him, in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and freeman, *but Christ is all and in all.* And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience... put on love... let the peace of Christ rule... be thankful... let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you... And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (Col 2:6–3:17 excerpts)

So my daily prayer becomes, not only “Lord Jesus, cleanse me from sin and be Lord of my life,” but now, “Lord Jesus, please cleanse my conscience from dead works so that all I do this day is only Your Life being lived by faith in and through me.” (Gal 2:20)

THE SPRING FEASTS OF ISRAEL

In general, each of the seven Feasts of Israel (as well as the Sabbath) is a shadow picture of three different things. In our discussion of the Sabbath, we saw that these things are past, present, and future: the seventh day of creation on which God rested from all His works, our present need for rest, communion, and sanctification, and our future millennial Sabbath Rest. With the Fall Feasts, the three things are also past, present, and future, as we shall get into later. However, the Spring Feasts are a little different; at least for us Christians, they are past, past, and past.

This does not mean that they have no value for us. It is always wise to look to the past and learn from it. It is a tremendous faith-builder to see how beautifully the Spring Feasts were fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

The first 'past' is the celebration of the Feast in Egypt at the tenth plague, when the death angel was blocked by the Spirit of God passing over each house that had the lamb's blood on the doorposts. The second 'past' is the Passover ceremonies and sacrifices which God required of the Jews until the time of Christ, to temporarily cover their sins, to remind them of their deliverance from Egypt into the Promised Land, to prepare them for Messiah's return, and to point to His perfect sacrifice. The third 'past' is the final fulfillment, the once-for-all-time sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, whose blood on the doorposts of our heart redeems us and brings us out of the Egypt of our flesh nature into the Promised Land of sweet fellowship with a holy God. It is all a 'done deal'. Nothing can be added or taken away. All that remains is for each of us individually to accept His free gift of salvation, bow the knee to His Lordship in our lives, and seek His face to learn by His Holy Spirit how to know and love Him. This in a nutshell is what the Spring Feasts portray.

If you have not done that, dear Reader, the last 'past' is still in the future for you. The mere fact of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection 2000 years ago can mean nothing to you until you by faith give Him your sinfulness, accept His righteousness, and invite Him into your heart as Lord and Master of your life. I urge you, do not delay any longer. You cannot really live without Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life living in your heart by His Spirit.

The eternal God wants to give you His eternal Life – right now. If you will accept Him by faith, receive the cleansing blood of Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for your own personal sins, and entrust Him with your own past and future, then He will give you the mind of Christ to receive His Lordship over the present and to know what the will of God is now for your own life. Then you can understand both past and future fulfillments of these Feasts in such a way that they become in the present tense what the eternal Father intended all along: a means by which He escorts us into a closer, deeper, more personal and intimate love relationship with Him.

PASSOVER, FIRST OF THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL

Passover is foundational. At least the first four and in a sense all of the other six Feasts are built upon it. In fact the entire Jewish culture revolves around it nearly as much as it does around the Sabbath. Jewish people have celebrated it ever since the time of Moses and the Exodus, whether they were in Jerusalem, or scattered across the face of the earth, calling out to one another with a fervency non-Jews cannot possibly understand, "*Next year in Jerusalem!*"

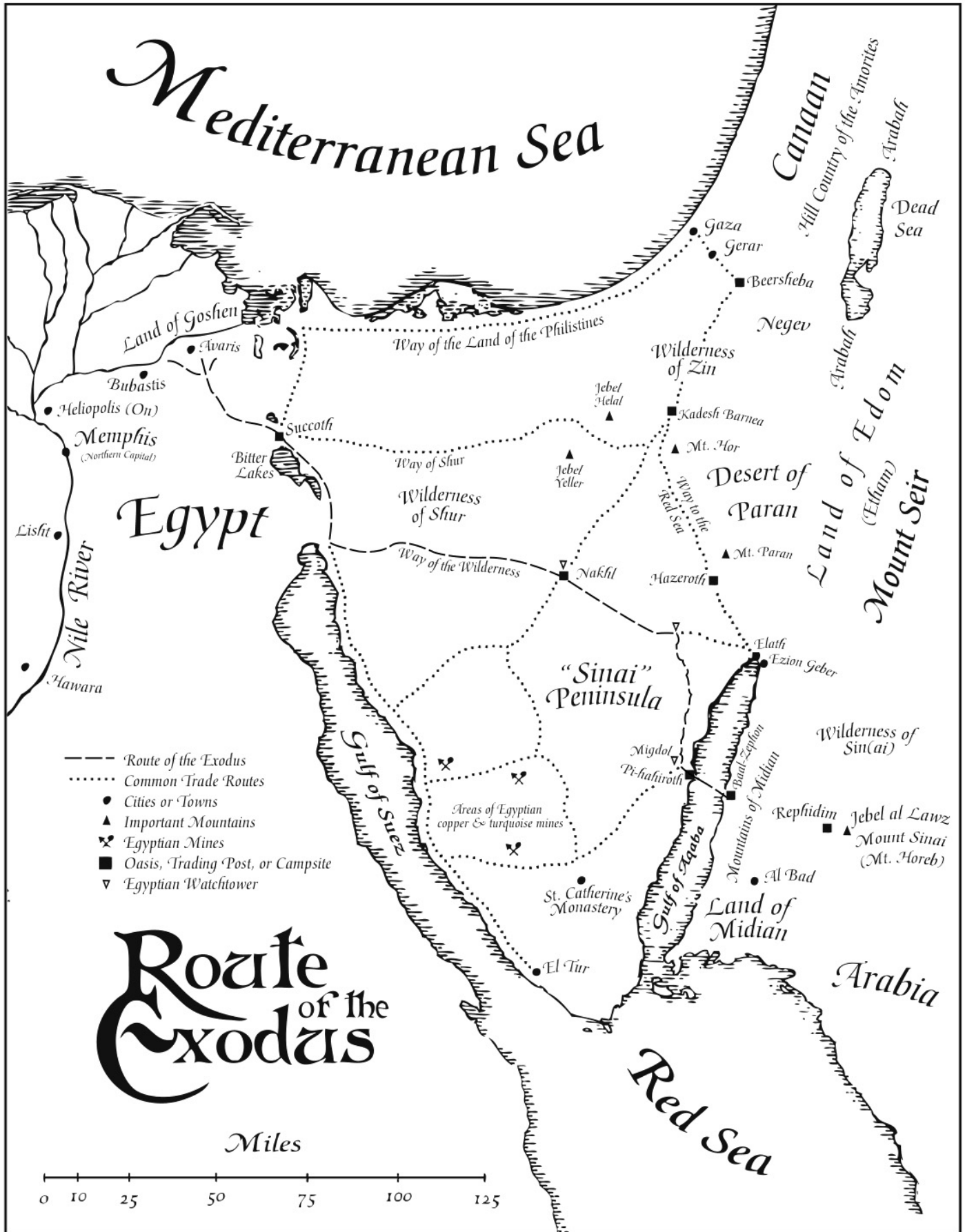
The Hebrew word for Passover, **Pesach**, traditionally carries with it the entirety of the Spring Feasts, including the Days of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Firstfruits. Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks, Pentecost) is also tied tightly to Passover by virtue of the count of seven weeks from the Feast of Firstfruits.

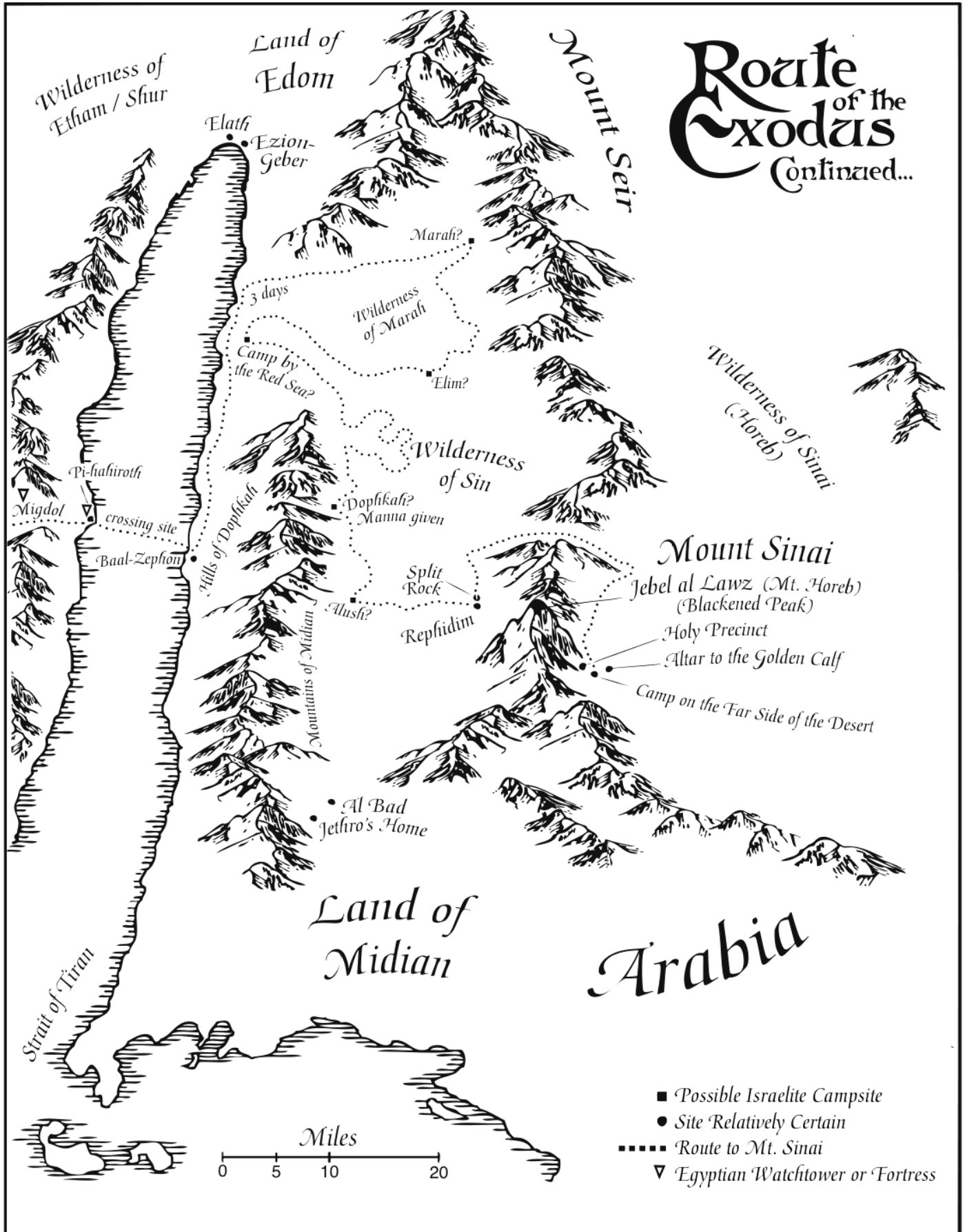
God even changed the Jewish calendar so the Passover month (Nisan) became the first month of the year instead of the seventh. (Ex 20:2) Now the Jews have two New Years each year: the civil / agricultural new year in Tishri, and the religious new year in Nisan. Since these months are six months apart, each new year falls in the seventh month of the other. God placed such high importance on Passover for a reason. The symbolism of Passover, our deliverance from Egypt (the world) and our redemption back to God, must come first before we can partake of His blessings. In fact, Passover is the only Feast which was intended to be first celebrated in Egypt; all the other Feasts, though given at Mt. Sinai in the desert, could not properly be celebrated until the Israelites were bringing forth the harvests of the Promised Land.

But Passover is not celebrated at the first of the month. No, the moon is dark then, symbolizing the darkness of the world. Passover is celebrated beginning the 14th of the month, when the moon is at its fullest, symbolizing the brightness of the gospel light – the good news of salvation – and the marvelous joy of receiving God's deliverance and full redemption from the darkness of the world.

THE 'TELLING' OF THE EXODUS STORY

You all know the story of the first Passover. But please bear with me. I'd like to tell it as an Israeli father might tell his family during the celebration, using both Torah and ancient Hebrew traditions, except he would substitute 'The Name' ('Ha Shem') for 'YHWH' in the narrative, out of reverence for His most holy name. I'll skip the battles of the planets for now. The Israelites were barely aware of them. Their total focus was on what YHWH said through Moses, not on the 'Ba'als' in the heavenlies which the pagans so feared and worshiped. I'll call the patriarch of the house John Cohen, and his firstborn son will be little Johnny. This is the traditional '**Haggadah**' ('the Telling'). It has been retold every year, and even delightfully embellished, in every good Jewish home for about 3500 years.





We were slaves in Egypt. Pharaoh was a harsh taskmaster. We were cruelly oppressed. Pharaoh's armies were the mightiest in the world and we had no hope of revolt or escape. Pharaoh enslaved all our strong young men to build his treasure cities. He gave us no rest from our labors, eventually even taking our Sabbath from us. He tried to force us to drown our own baby boys in the Nile River. Finally we cried out for deliverance to (Ha Shem) YHWH, Blessed be His most holy name forever and ever.

YHWH raised up a deliverer for us, Moses, the son of Amram of the tribe of Levi. Moses was saved from the drowning because his mother Yochebed made an ark for him before putting him into the river. Bathiah, daughter of the Pharaoh, drew him out of the water and called him Moses, meaning drawn out. Bathiah loved him, and raised him as her own son, educating him in all the wisdom of Egypt. She intended for him to be the next Pharaoh!

But when he grew up, Moses chose to identify with his own people in their labors and suffering, rather than with the luxury and wealth of Egypt. After he killed an Egyptian who was oppressing one of his own brethren, the Pharaoh sought to kill him. He fled from Egypt.

God called Moses out of Egypt into the land of Midian, and spoke to him from a burning bush in the desert on Mount Sinai. Moses wondered that the bush kept burning, yet was not consumed. Why was the bush not consumed? It represents us Jews; always hated, cheated, persecuted, tortured, harassed, and sorely abused, yet not consumed.

God says to Moses. "I have heard the cries and seen the afflictions of My people Israel. So go down to Pharaoh already, and bring them out of Egypt."

Moses says, "Who am I, that I should go before the Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"

God responds, "Surely I am with you. This shall be the sign that I have sent you: after you have brought My people out of Egypt, you shall come here and worship Me on this very mountain."

"But who shall I say has sent me? What is Your Name?"

"I AM who I AM! Tell them that I AM has sent you. Tell them YHWH, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has sent you. YHWH [a name derived from *hayah*, the Hebrew verb for 'I AM'] is My memorial name forever, to all generations. But Pharaoh will not let you go, until I break his pride with many mighty miracles. Then I will grant you favor in the sight of the Egyptians, and you will go out freely and with great plunder."

So Moses goes down to Egypt and tells Pharaoh, "YHWH, the God of Israel, says, 'Let My people go!'"

Pharaoh responds, "Who is YHWH, that I would listen to Him? You are just lazy! So get back to work already!" And he made our labors even harsher than before.

Then God through Moses and Aaron sent plague after plague on Pharaoh, and on all Egypt, and on all the gods of Egypt, for they are not gods at all, but only created things. The first plague was on the Nile River, which God turned to blood. Then came the plague of frogs, followed by the plagues of fleas, biting flies, sickness upon the livestock, and boils on all the people. Then God sent a heavy hail mixed with celestial fire, destroying every green plant and tree, followed by a plague of locusts, eating up everything that was still green in the land of Egypt. Finally God sent a choking, thick darkness, obscuring the sun, the moon, and even the Egyptian's torches and candles, though the fires still burned in our dwellings in the land of Goshen. After each plague Pharaoh still hardened his heart and would not let us go, even though the very planets in their courses came down to torment him.

Johnny, the Egyptians worshiped the Nile, the frog, the insects, Neith the cow, the green tree, Ptah the fire, Ra the sun, all the planets, and even people (especially the Pharaoh and his sons). YHWH's glory was displayed as His mighty power mocked the gods of the Egyptians, who are not gods at all. In fact, YHWH helped to harden Pharaoh's stubborn heart, so He could finish demonstrating to the world that the gods of Egypt are ridiculous and powerless. They became odious in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Then YHWH through Moses and Aaron prepared us for the final plague. You see, though YHWH protected us from the earlier plagues, He would not have protected us from the final plague unless we believed and obeyed Him and got ourselves ready.

Each of our families had to find a perfect male lamb, without a single spot or blemish. We brought him into the house on the tenth of this month, Nisan, joyfully shouting, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of YHWH!" We treated this lamb as a pet, no, as a member of the family, loving him, grooming him, caring for him, and inspecting him daily for any blemish, for four days.

At sunset beginning the fourteenth of Nisan, I, as the head of our home, shout, "I find no fault in him!" Then I kill him while the family watches, tearfully aware that he has to die for us to be saved from the plague. That is the hardest part, killing our pet lamb while his trusting eyes gaze up at us! I quickly drain his blood into a bowl, dip in a hyssop branch, and daub his blood on the lintel and both side posts of the front entry of our house.

We put the lamb on a spit of pomegranate wood, being careful that not a single bone is broken and that nothing touches it to contaminate it. We then roast it with fire, symbolizing the fire of God's judgment upon the lamb, which would have been on us if we had not obeyed.

Finally we eat the Passover together, inside the house, eagerly and in haste, with our clothes and coats wrapped about us, our shoes on our feet, and my staff in my hand.

Outside, the death angel is traveling throughout the land. He is killing the firstborn son of every family who did not believe and obey the word of YHWH through Moses and Aaron, to place the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of his house. Even the firstborn of the Pharaoh is slain.

Look at me, Johnny. You are my firstborn son! Do you know what that means? If we had been there then, and had not put the blood on our door, you would have been killed by the destroying angel! But no; I put the blood on the door, and the Spirit of YHWH ‘passed over’ our house, hovering over us and protecting us until the death angel was gone, so that your life was saved. Never forget it!

About midnight, we hear the anguished wails and screams of all the Egyptians who had despised the word of YHWH. Even as we finish our Passover celebration they’re banging on our door. “Go! Please go! Go quickly, or we all be dead men!” they howl.

“So why should we go now at midnight, when you wouldn’t let us go in the daytime after each of the other plagues?” we ask.

“We didn’t know your God was so powerful! Hurry, before He slays us all! Here, take my jewelry, take my gold, take everything, anything you want, but only go already!”

So we went. We grabbed our possessions, woke our cattle, and about dawn on the fourteenth we started out, 600,000 men plus our wives and little ones, driving our livestock before us. The Egyptians urged us frantically on, so we didn’t even have time to bake bread for the journey. Therefore we took unleavened dough to bake flatcakes along the way.

We fled from the land of Rameses (Goshen) on the Nile River Delta, toward Succoth (tent). Succoth is not a city. It is a big, flat plain the Egyptians use for pitching their tents when mobilizing for war. There Moses formed us into groups by tribes. On the fifteenth we marched out into the desert, the ‘Wilderness of Shur’ (Sinai Peninsula). He led us by the southern route to avoid the Philistines who guarded the northern route on the coast.

As we fled, YHWH went before us in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, so that we could travel rapidly, both day and night. We went seven days and nights on the strength of that lamb and the daily flatcakes of unleavened bread. Thus we celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.

When we got across the desert, we camped in the land of Etham. (130 miles from Succoth; now called Edom.) There God told Moses to lead us south toward the Red Sea, instead of north toward the Promised Land. We actually went right down past the Egyptian watch tower on Migdol, and camped on the beach near the Egyptian fortress of Pihahiroth. Of course as soon as they saw us, the Egyptian sentinels notified the Pharaoh by heliograph.

When the Pharaoh heard we had turned south, he thought we were lost, wandering in the Sinai Peninsula. He could turn that peninsula into a trap! So he hardened his heart and changed his mind once more. He quickly assembled his 200,000 infantry, 50,000 cavalry, and 600 iron chariots, his priests with their gold-plated chariots, and all his Nubian taskmasters. They marched after us, double time. While we were camped on the beach, resting from our long march, his army caught up to us. We were trapped! In front of us was Pharaoh’s army. They filled our only escape route – the path down between the steep cliffs. Behind us was the Red Sea, 9 miles wide and 900 feet deep!

We were terrified! We had no weapons! We cried out in anguish to YHWH. So He moved His pillar of cloud and fire back, between us and the Egyptians, to block them from our sight. When Moses stretched out his arm over the sea, YHWH told a strong east wind to blow across the Gulf of Aqaba. It was a strange wind; it blew down from the hills of Midian onto the channel, first pushing the tidewaters out of the Gulf and drying the channel, and then pushing the tide back like walls beside us when it tried to return. We hurried across, praising YHWH as we went. There were so many of us that it took the entire night to cross. It would have been too dark to see, except YHWH made His pillar of fire burn brightly on our side, lighting our way. But it was a pillar of cloud and darkness to the Egyptian army, so they didn’t even know what we were doing.

The next morning, when YHWH lifted the pillar of cloud, Pharaoh Dudimose saw us getting away. He was furious. He immediately ordered his army in hot pursuit. But YHWH fought for us. He caused their chariot wheels to swerve and fall off. He caused the horses’ hooves to get stuck in the sand. He fed them with terror and confusion until the entire army was in the middle of the channel.

We had just finished crossing to the other side, so YHWH told Moses to stretch out his hand again over the Red Sea, to make it return to its place. The east wind stopped, and the tidewaters returned with a great crash, sweeping Pharaoh and his army into the deep water to the north. Not a single one remained. And yet we had all come up out of the water dry-shod, we, our wives, our little ones, and our animals; not a hoof was left behind. What a party we had then! This is why we joyfully celebrate the Feast of Firstfruits as a part of the days of Unleavened Bread; we were baptized in the waters of the Red Sea, and raised up as firstfruits to YHWH as a chosen and special nation above all the nations of the earth.

We had escaped Egypt. We were free! YHWH took us by stages into the land of Midian, to the wilderness where Moses had tended the flocks of Jethro his father-in-law. There we saw the mountain of the burning bush, Mount Sinai. It quaked continually, all in fire and smoke. We fell down and worshiped YHWH in awe and wonder there at the mountain, exactly as YHWH had promised Moses.

On the third day, which was the fiftieth day from the day we had crossed the Red Sea and escaped the Pharaoh's armies, an incredibly loud trumpet sounded from the mountain. It was so loud that all the peoples of the earth certainly heard it, for it was almighty God (blessed be His holy name forever) speaking in all 70 languages of the world, giving His law for any who were willing to receive it. Then YHWH called Moses up to the top of the mountain and gave him the Ten Commandments, engraved on stone tablets by the finger of God.

Thus on the fiftieth day from the Feast of Firstfruits we celebrate Hag haShavuot [the Feast of Weeks, Pentecost]. We offer unto the Creator of the universe the firstfruits of our wheat harvest baked into two loaves of bread as a symbol of His giving us of His law, which is our bread of life. The loaves are two because the law applies alike to both Jew and Gentile. The loaves are leavened because the law applies alike to both righteous and unrighteous. The loaves are not burned on the altar, because no leaven must ever touch the altar, but rather they are eaten by the priests during the feast, to show that eating the law brings life.

Shavuot, "the Season of the Giving of the Law," is thus the birthday of Judaism, because Judaism is founded upon the giving of the law.

So you see, Johnny, that we cannot celebrate only the Passover. The Passover points us to the Unleavened Bread, the Unleavened Bread points to the Firstfruits, the Firstfruits points to Shavuot, and it all points to the giving of the Law, the holy Torah, the very Words of YHWH, *blessed be His holy name forever and ever*.

Here John Cohen, the patriarch of the house, holds a scroll of the Torah higher than everyone's head to indicate its authority over everyone there. Then he slowly brings it back down again and reverently kisses it to show his own love and submission to the Torah.

Little Johnny thrills with the sudden awareness that the same familiar story, the story that he has heard every year of his life, the story that has been told by Jewish families every year for 3500 years, must one day be told by him to his children. He goes over the details in his mind, determined not to forget anything, determined to one day make his children proud of him, just as his own heart is bursting with pride in his dad.

SOME BACKGROUND FOR THE EXODUS STORY

We've recently confirmed the who, where, and when of the Exodus. The 'when' was 1451 BC. The plagues occurred from early January to March 14 evening (Nisan 14 that year, Passover). The Exodus began on March 15, early the next morning (still Nisan 14). The (Firstfruits) Red Sea crossing was the night of March 21 / 22 as Mars crossed South America and the South Pacific.

Festivals of many other cultures were also linked to the fearful flybys of Mars. Romans celebrated two feasts to Mars, in which they offered 2 horses (Deimos and Phobos) on the altar. On October 22nd was the Armilustrium (Day of Alarm), as Mars crossed to the sunward side of Earth's orbit. On March 23rd they celebrated the Tubilustrium (Day of Trumpets), a boisterous, joyful feast just after the evil 'days of tumult, toil, and trouble' when Mars crossed back, since it would not trouble them again for two years. Similarly, the Phrygians fasted in fear, repentance, and purification on March 15-21, and celebrated their 'Hilaria' (Festival of Joy) on the 23-25th. Orientals celebrated the Buddhist 'Higan' (Festival of the Dead) March 17-23. The Egyptians celebrated their death/resurrection myth on March 20-25. In it, Osiris, Pharaoh of Egypt, is killed by wicked Seth (Mars). Osiris' widow Isis (Venus) collects his body parts and is impregnated by him through magic. Osiris is then reborn as Horus (Saturn). He grows up to be his mother's consort and the new Pharaoh of Egypt. Nearly all ancient cultures had similar legends related to Mars, such as the Greek feast of Athena (March 19-23) and the legends of the Etruscans, Germans, Druids, and Norse.

The 'who' of the Exodus has recently been confirmed through the efforts of David Rohl. After Joseph's death, the Pharaohs were weak, due in part to their practice of inbreeding within the royal line. But over the next 50 years the Israelites grew mighty and numerous. The Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph" and feared the Israelites was Neferhotep I Kha'sekhemre in 1543 BC (of the mid XIII dynasty). His sons Wahneferhotep and Sihathor were incapable of reigning due to inbreeding and were both killed. But his son-in-law Sobekhotep IV Kha'neferre did reign after him for at least 28 years. He was the Pharaoh whose queen (Bathiah, daughter of Neferhotep I) raised Moses (born 1531 BC). Her own children were too inbred to rule (although one, Sobekhotep V, did survive a 4 year co-regency), so she groomed Moses to become the next Pharaoh. He fled Egypt in 1491 BC during the reign of Ay, the last great Pharaoh. With no (inbred) royal blood, Ay was brilliant and ruthless. In 1476 BC Ini (the grandson of Bathiah) staged a coup against Ay to restore the royal line as Sobekhotep VI Sekhemre Sankhtawy (also known as Neferhotep II). His incompetent sons Sewadju, Ined, and Hori ruled under him until 1463 BC. Then his fourth son Pul took over as Sobekhotep VII Merkaure. Pul was strong and shrewd. His youngest brother Dudimose became the Pharaoh in 1455 BC; his firstborn, Ini II, died at the tenth plague. Dudimose was the stubborn Pharaoh who chased the Israelites at the Exodus. He drowned in the Red Sea with his army and all his taskmasters, ending the dynasty.

We also now know 'where' this took place. The Red Sea (Ex 13:18) where they crossed is the middle of the Gulf of Aqaba. It was called the Sea of Edom, because most of the area around and north of the Gulf of Aqaba was controlled by the Edomites. (Edom means red.)

At least two Scriptures (Num 21:4 and Jer 49:20-21) specifically call the Gulf of Aqaba (identified by proximity to the land of Edom) the 'Red Sea'. Solomon's shipyards and his metal ore smelting plant at Ezion-Geber have been found there. (1 Kings 9:26) He caught the constant gulf winds in big air funnels to fan his smelting furnaces.

About the middle of the gulf, the actual crossing site has now been found. Solomon marked it with a tall stone column on each side of the Gulf, engraven in ancient Hebrew letters. The column on the west side is at the present-day Nuweiba, which is at the south end of a huge beach with a wadi as the only entrance. Its Arabic name is Nuwayba al Muzayyina, or 'Waters that Moses Opened'. The beach could easily hold all the Israelites with miles to spare, but they would be trapped when Pharaoh's army started down the wadi. At the north end of the beach is the Egyptian fortress called Pi-hahiroth. The sea floor gets pretty deep now, over 850 feet, though it was more like 300 feet deep 3500 years ago. The sandy bottom is firm enough for easy walking. It slopes up gently, ending in huge beaches on each side, 9 miles apart. It is shaped like a saddle, with very deep water and thick mud to the north and the south. Ron Wyatt and others have been diving in this area, and have found numerous remnants of chariot parts on the sea bottom at both sides of the crossing.

Other possible crossing sites on either arm of the Red Sea are more difficult. Many have steep cliffs either coming down to the water or under the water, which would have been impossible to pass. For others the water is much deeper. And for most the bottom is 30 to 60 feet of mud, while Scripture assures us that the Israelites crossed on "dry land." Larry Williams feels that the crossing site must have been at the south end of the Gulf of Aqaba, at the Straits of Tiran. He has a good point; the water there is quite shallow, with a natural land bridge just under the water extending nearly across the straits. It all could have blown dry by a strong east wind. But the bottom is rugged and there are deep drainage channels which would be almost impossible to climb, especially for the animals.

I believe Ron Wyatt. He has the chariot parts and stone columns to prove it. He has good possibilities for Migdol, Pi-hahiroth, and Baal-zephon. But most importantly, it fits the biblical story, while coming north from the Straits of Tiran would allow the Israelites to get to Jethro's home even before they reached Elam, which makes a mess of the sequence in Numbers 33. The deep water is not a problem to God – the Mars flyby caused huge winds and tides.

Migdol (Ex 14:2) has not been identified. Ron Wyatt thinks it may be the name of the mountains west of the beach, or the name of a watch-tower on the top of these mountains. I agree with the latter. Egyptian Pharaohs maintained communications through the Sinai Peninsula by means of watch-towers on mountaintops, using signal fires at night and reflected sunlight (heliographs) by day.

"Between Migdol and the sea" would put them anywhere on the beach. "Before Pi-hahiroth" would put them anywhere south of the Egyptian fortress. But it is a very big beach. By specifying "... in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea" God told them exactly where He intended to part the waters. On the east side of the crossing site there is also a large beach along the coast. Opposite and a tad south of the Nuweiba beach there is also an ancient structure, probably a Midianite or (more likely) Amalekite fortress dedicated to Baal, which Ron believes is Baal-zephon. Ron Wyatt found a matching stone marker column nearby. Obviously God put them on the south end of the beach at Nuweiba, and they crossed toward the ancient fortress.

From Baal-zephon I believe they traveled north about 20 miles, collecting weapons from the dead Egyptians washed up on the beach, then headed east up a natural wadi. This way, they would have avoided contact with both the Edomites to the north and the Midianites to the south. It would also take them into the middle of that waterless wasteland for the miracle at Marah.

Marah has not been positively identified, though there are several places with bitter alkaline waters that could qualify. Most of the area, from Edom in the north to the land of Midian in the south, is desert, with virtually no good water. (Ex 15:22-23) This same area is called the Wilderness of Shur in 15:22, but the Wilderness of Etham in Numbers 33:8. The whole area from Egypt to the land of Midian is mostly wilderness, if not desert. This huge area was known by different names by the locals. It was called the Wilderness of Shur by the Egyptians, the Wilderness of Etham by the Edomites, and the Wilderness of Sin or Sinai by the Midianites. (See endnote, Volume Two, pg 315)

Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and 70 date palms, has also not been positively identified. Both Ron Wyatt and Larry Williams feel it is now the town of Al Bad, a beautiful oasis with numerous palms and abundant water. Nearby is a number of major archeological ruins, including what local tradition claims is the settlement of Jethro the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in law. (Ex 18) They are currently guarded by the Saudi Arabian military.

I personally disagree that this is Elim, because of the biblical sequence; After they left Elim they camped by the Red Sea, then in the Wilderness of Sin, then at Dophkah and Alush, and finally at Rephidim, where they had no water. But it wasn't until Rephidim that Jethro came into the picture, and the story in Exodus 18 clearly implies that it is the first time Jethro (and Moses' wife and sons) had seen Moses since the Exodus from Egypt. Jethro lived within two miles of Al Bad, where there was plenty of water. The story just doesn't make sense unless Elim and Jethro's home are separated by a waterless desert. Therefore I would place Marah and Elim north of the Wilderness of Sin, so the Israelites are coming from the north when they reach Rephidim and run out of water.

Jethro would then come from the south to meet them for the first time while they are camped at Rephidim, after the rock has been split to give them abundant water, and after the famous battle with the Amalekites there.

About 20 plus miles northeast of Al Bad are several immense, level plains in between rugged mountains, large enough for the Amalekite battle at Rephidim. Perched on a 200 ft hill overlooking one of these plains is a 5 or 6 story granite rock, where Moses sat with Aaron and Hur holding up his arms during the battle. The rock is split in two, and there is a pattern of water erosion coming from it in both directions, in harmony with Exodus 17:6. The local name for this split rock is 'Hurab'. About 200 yards from the rock is an ancient altar. (17:15) This split rock could also be the rock where God appeared to Moses in the "cleft of the rock." (Ex 33:22 ff)

The actual Mount Sinai (Mt. Horeb) is located just east and within sight of Rephidim, about 30 miles inland from the Gulf. (Ex 19:2) It is now known as Jebel al Lawz (Mountain of the Law), in Saudi Arabia. Local residents call it Jebel Musa (Mountain of Moses). The upper fifth of one peak is still black from the fire of God. (Ex 19:18) To the west and to the east are immense level plains for the Israelite camps. The entire area surrounding it is rugged mountains and desert. Northwest of the mountain is the desert facing the Red Sea. It was called the Wilderness of Sin by the Edomites, the Midianites, and in the Scriptures. (Ex 16:1; 17:1) But the final camp of the Israelites was on the far side of the rather large mountain range, "on the backside of the desert." (Ex 3:1) Scripture calls this area the Wilderness of Sinai. (Ex 19:1)

Within sight of the blackened peak, numerous traces of the Israelite encampment remain to this day, including the altar of uncut stone (Ex 20:25), the twelve stone pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex 24:4), and the stone boundary markers around the mountain to prevent the Israelites from touching it. (Ex 19:12) About a mile away from the boundary markers is another ancient altar with Egyptian-style carved inscriptions of Apis bulls and Hathor cows. It is almost certainly the altar where they worshiped the golden calf. (Ex 32) High on the mountain is a cave, probably the cave of Elijah. (1 Kin 19:9)

In contrast, none of these evidences has ever been found in the area surrounding St. Catherine's monastery, the traditional (Catholic/Orthodox) Mt. Sinai on the Sinai Peninsula. It has no artifacts, no monuments or altars, no large level plain or campsites, no caves or split rock, no Rephidim or Elim or Marah or Etham, and no Midianite settlements nearby – nothing to indicate it was the correct mountain. Though it makes a lovely tourist attraction, its peak (which is snow-covered in winter) is a rugged 3000 foot climb to an elevation of 8600 feet above sea level. It is tough for young climbers and well-nigh impossible for the typical out-of-shape tourist.

The real Mt. Sinai in Midian is much easier to climb. Remember that at 80 years of age Moses had to make several trips up and down wearing sandals, once carrying two heavy tablets of stone. (Ex 34:1) Its only problem is that the real Mt. Sinai fails as a tourist attraction. Saudi Arabia is closed to tourists.

Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, built St. Catherine's monastery about the third century after Christ. She 'confirmed' it as Mt. Sinai with the help of a Greek mystic. It was officially recognized in 527 AD by Justinian, a Byzantine ruler who was working to expand the Eastern Orthodox religion. It is not far from the famed Egyptian turquoise and copper mines. Egypt maintained a strong military presence in the area during the Middle Kingdom and probably on into the XIII dynasty. Thus it can hardly be classified as "out of Egypt." (Ex 3:10) In fact, it is only 175 miles from Succoth. That seems inconsistent with Exodus 16:1 & 19:1, which say that it took a month (Nisan 14 through Iyar 15) to reach the Wilderness of Sin and another 15 days to get to Mount Sinai.

The traditional route has Israel crossing the 'Sea of Reeds' on the third day, but that is less than 50 miles. They were not strolling, they were fleeing for their lives, day and night. (Ex 13:21) They could have covered 50 miles in the first 24 hours. Don't judge them according to your own (lack of) abilities. There was not a feeble one among them. (Ps 105:37) They had just finished a first-rate exercise program: building Pharaoh's treasure cities. You and I could not, but they could walk the 260 miles from Goshen to the Gulf of Aqaba in 6 days. The Talmud agrees with me that Israel crossed the Red Sea not on the third, but "on the seventh day of Passover." And they crossed on dry land, not in mud. (Ex 14:22) How ridiculous to claim that the Egyptian army all drowned in the "depths" of the "mighty waters" (Ex 15:5-10) of the shallow, muddy Sea of Reeds! The traditional site clearly exists to fool naïve tourists, since the actual site is guarded by Saudi Arabia's military.

Personally, I wonder how modern Christians could be so snookered. The Bible clearly says that "Mount Sinai is in Arabia." (Gal 4:25) Even a casual reading of Exodus 3 tells us that the Mountain of God is on the backside of the Midian desert at Horeb. Check your Bible maps; we all know that the land of Midian is in Saudi Arabia. But no, ignorant tourists and godless Bible 'scholars' will continue to flock to the Sinai Peninsula because they insist on following the traditions of men rather than the clear Word of God. We have been lied to. One of the main purposes of this study is to toss out all those lies.

Obviously some details still need to be worked out, (such as Elam and the camp back at the Red Sea between Elam and the Wilderness of Sin – Num 33:10) but I am convinced by the vast preponderance of evidence that the actual crossing site at the Gulf of Aqaba and the actual Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia have been rediscovered.

HEBREW PERSPECTIVE OF THE EXODUS STORY

Not being Hebrews ourselves, nor having 3500 years of Hebrew history, traditions, and culture under our belts, we Protestants have a rather tough time understanding the significance of the Exodus story. It is utterly pivotal in Israeli historical, secular, and religious life, far more than America's story of the Revolutionary War and our freedom from England is for us. Even many Jews today who don't believe in God or Torah or Jewish religious traditions, find that the Exodus flavors their thinking, their speech, and their ambitions, hopes, and dreams for the future.

There is a deep-rooted Jewish conviction that the final redemption of Israel will take place in the same fashion as their deliverance from Egypt. The prophet declares: "As in the days when you left Egypt, I [Messiah] will show you wonders [of ultimate deliverance]." (Micah 7:15) Everything that happened during the Exodus thus becomes prophetic of what will happen "when Messiah comes."

For example, at the Exodus Moses (symbolic of the Messiah) spoke to the people only about deliverance from their laborious physical bondage, but he spoke to Pharaoh only about deliverance from spiritual bondage. To the people he described the Promised Land as flowing with milk and honey; but to the Pharaoh he only asked for a three day trip into the desert to worship YHWH. Why? The people were so steeped in the idolatry of Egypt, they didn't even know they needed spiritual deliverance, but they sure wanted freedom from slavery! Pharaoh, on the other hand, considered himself god to his people. Moses came directly challenging all the gods of Egypt.

Similarly, when Messiah comes, nearly all Jews believe (whether they acknowledge it or not), that He will target His deliverance specifically to their own individual needs. Those seeking spiritual restoration will receive it; those seeking physical deliverance, peace, prosperity, or healing will receive that; those longing for political freedom will get that; those hoping for emotional vindication and the restoration of their national pride will get that; Zionists zealous for the entire Promised Land to finally be accepted as an Israeli nation will get that. Everyone will then be happy and blessed. This differs greatly from our western ideas of heaven. In Hebrew thought, heaven is simply escape from the slavery of Egypt (and from oppression by surrounding nations), victory in the hard-fought battle to obtain the Promised Land, and peace and prosperity in Israel, right here on earth.

Only Messiah can take all these different people, fulfill their widely differing needs and desires, and unite them as one. "He shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." (Mal 4:6) *Redemption shall come only when Israelites are restored to their homeland, to Torah, to a life of love, shalom (peace), and harmony, and to national unity under YHWH.* Only Messiah can do this – and He will! (Heb 8:8 ff)

The first of the seven Feasts of Israel is Passover, which celebrates the Exodus story. The Haggadah (the telling of the Exodus story) is at the very heart of Passover. Thus we Americans tritely conclude that the heart of Passover is freedom from slavery. That looks easy for us. After all, we are the 'Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave'. We freed our slaves long ago. We flout our independence and wealth, so we assume we know what freedom looks like.

No. We don't. The Hebrew perspective of freedom is very different. They were not set free from slavery in Egypt just to become independent and wealthy. They were freed from the Pharaoh so they could become bound to another Master, YHWH Himself. Their wealth went toward His tabernacle. Modern Jews do understand this, and it is reflected in their Passover Seder. We'll tell that story later. For now, we need to understand the Hebrew (and biblical) concept of freedom. What is it? Can you be truly free if you have a mortgage? Are you truly free if you have a wife and children? Or a mother-in-law? Can you be truly free if you have a job? Or if you have no job?

The biblical principle here is that unless you become as a child you can't even enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matt 18:3) Yes, Passover is the festival of freedom, but it is also the festival of the child. God commanded the Israelites to celebrate it with their children forever, and told them what to answer when their children asked them what it all means. (Ex 12:24-27) The Passover Seder is deliberately mystifying, designed to stimulate a child's curiosity. It is centered around 'the four questions', to be asked by the youngest child present. These questions were prefaced by, "Why is this night different from other nights?"

From the perspective of a Hebrew rabbi, the wealthiest person is the least free, since he is bound by the demands, worries, and burdens of all his possessions, and no amount of money can buy joy, or peace, or true love. On the other end of the spectrum, the most free person is the child of godly parents. She is utterly convinced that they love her and that they will protect her, provide for her, and take care of anything that may come up. In that knowledge she has no worries or burdens. Thus she is free to fully enjoy each minute of her young life.

So to discover the true message of the Exodus story we need to look at that child and let her teach us. She does not agonize over past faults or failures, nor does she fret about future troubles. She simply believes and obeys her parents, views everything as a fun game or a nifty toy, delights in each new discovery, and trusts her parents for the rest.

Just so, we are the children of God, the ultimate Father. He delivers us from slavery to false gods (including the love of money and bondage to possessions), and presents us with true freedom, eternally and unconditionally. The Passover teaches us how to receive that freedom, not as independent ego-centric selves, but in our childlike trust and dependence upon our loving heavenly Father.

THE SPRING FEASTS AS COMMANDED

“These are the appointed times of YHWH, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. In the first month [Nisan], on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is YHWH’s Passover. Then on the fifteenth day of the same month [15 Nisan] is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to YHWH; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation [high Sabbath]; in it you shall not do any laborious work. But for seven days you shall present a [daily] offering by fire to YHWH. Then on the seventh day [21 Nisan] is a holy convocation [another high Sabbath]; in it you shall not do any laborious work.” (Lev 23:4-8)

This correlates with the original command back in Exodus 12. Here are some highlights. “... on the 10th of the month [Nisan] ... take a lamb... keep it until the 14th... kill it at twilight... take some of the blood... put it on the doorposts... eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire... with unleavened bread... eat it in haste... it is YHWH’s Passover... against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments... when I see the blood I will pass over you and no plague will befall you... this day will be a memorial to you... a permanent ordinance... seven days shall you eat unleavened bread... on the 14th day of the month at evening you shall eat unleavened bread until the 21st day of the month at evening...” (from Ex 12:3-18)

Passover symbolizes redemption and deliverance from Egypt (a type of the world and its wickedness). The Feast of Unleavened Bread then symbolizes fleeing from the taint (leaven) of Egypt (the world). The Feast of Firstfruits symbolizes the new life we receive once we escape Egypt. The term ‘Passover’ may refer to all three feasts. These are the Spring Feasts (which may also include Pentecost).

The timing of the Passover seems straightforward enough from the Scriptures, but it is not. For one, the 7 day Feast of Unleavened Bread seems to be combined with the Feast of Passover in Exodus 12. Also, the timing specified (Ex 12:18), the 14th of Nisan through the 21st, is eight days, not seven, unless you read it as exclusive (the 14th up to but not including the 21st). At the Diaspora most Jews did celebrate for eight days, due to the uncertainty of lunar dates, since they were far from Jerusalem where dates were set by sightings of the moon. By the time of Christ, some Jews were still celebrating Passover over two days, the 14th and the 15th, but the majority had settled on this scheme: the Pascal lambs were killed and the peace offerings sacrificed on the 14th. The Passover offerings (‘hagigah’) were eaten that evening, the 15th. The Feast of Passover thus was combined with the start of the 7 day Feast of Unleavened Bread, going through the 21st.

This seemed to solve all the problems, and in fact this scheme had great significance in the prophetic fulfillment of the Feast, as I show when I tell the story in Volume 5. But still, it was wrong. (See the endnote in Volume 5.)

The proper interpretation is to read the Leviticus 23 dates as inclusive. (Remember that the Hebrew day always begins in the evening at sundown.) The Feast of Passover must begin at twilight (just after sundown) on the 14th, as the Scripture says. Though the majority of Jews at the time of Christ’s passion sacrificed their lambs on the 14th and ate their hagigah on the evening of the 15th, Jesus Himself knew better. He ate the Passover with His disciples the evening of the 14th, the correct time. He was captured that night at midnight in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was crucified the next day and died the afternoon of the 14th, about 3:00 PM, at precisely the same time as the last Pascal lamb (representing the nation of Israel) was slain by the high priest. The Jewish leaders were then able to wash their hands of the whole affair and eat their hagigah on the evening of the 15th, the first day of Unleavened Bread.

Correcting this error also becomes significant as I tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, which must begin the evening of the 14th (Ex 12:6). The Feast of Unleavened Bread could not begin then, as the Hebrews had no time to cleanse their houses of leaven. All during the next day (still the 14th) they gathered at Succoth. It was not until the morning of the 15th, as they fled from Egypt, that they had no more leavened bread.

Firstfruits symbolizes beginning a new life free from the wickedness of Egypt. “When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf [omer] of the first fruits of your [barley] harvest to the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf [omer] before YHWH for you to be accepted; *on the day after the Sabbath* the priest shall wave it. Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to YHWH. Its grain offering shall then be two tenths ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to YHWH for a soothing aroma, with its libation: a fourth hin of wine. Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. This is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.” (Lev 23:10-14)

The date of the celebration of Firstfruits is deliberately not given; only “the day after the Sabbath,” our Sunday. This is very significant. The Sadducees, and later the Karaite Jews, understood it correctly to be the day after the weekly Sabbath, whenever that day should fall within the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, the majority opinion of the Pharisees was that the day after the Sabbath must always be Nisan 16, the day after the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread. This made it easy to always know when Firstfruits and Shavuot (Pentecost – 7 weeks later; celebrated on Sivan 6) would come. Unfortunately, it lost the symbolism involved and led to the Catholic interpretation that there was only one full day between Christ’s death on Good Friday (Passover evening) and His alleged resurrection Sunday morning as the firstfruits.

How do we know the Sadducees were right and the Pharisees wrong? Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks, Pentecost) must occur on a Sunday according to Scripture. The priests were commanded to count fifty days (inclusive) from Firstfruits, “to the day after the seventh Sabbath” (Lev 23:15) after Firstfruits. “The day after the seventh Sabbath” can not possibly mean anything but Sunday, the day after the weekly Sabbath. But the way the Pharisees did it, Shavuot could come on any day of the week (or they would not have the correct 50 day count.)

I believe that during 31 AD the Passover fell on Wednesday, Nisan 14. Jesus died as the perfect Lamb of God Wednesday evening at twilight, just before the start of the high Sabbath of Unleavened bread on Nisan 15 (our Wednesday night / Thursday). On the 15th, the disciples rested according to the law while the majority of the Jews ate their Passover. Stores were closed on Thursday night, but Friday morning, as everyone was preparing for the weekly Sabbath, they were open. So the disciples bought spices and prepared them for embalming Jesus’ body. The Jewish leaders went to Pilate to get a Roman guard placed over the tomb. Again everyone (except the Roman guards) rested according to the law on the weekly Sabbath (Friday night / Saturday). I believe that Jesus arose at twilight on the Sabbath, exactly 3 days and 3 nights from the time He died. I believe He rose through His grave wrappings and the stone tomb, directly into the heavenlies. The Roman guards did not see Him. He did not allow anyone to see Him until the next morning, our Sunday. It was then that the disciples came to the tomb and the angel told them, “He is not here, for He has [already] risen, just as He said. Come see the place where He was lying.”

Scripture makes it clear that the first one to see Him after His resurrection was Mary Magdalene. (Mk 16:9) But there is an interesting twist to this meeting. He told her, “*Do not touch Me. For I have not yet ascended to the Father.* But go to My brethren, and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’” (Jn 20:17) Later that very evening (still our Sunday), He came to the disciples through locked doors and gladly allowed, even encouraged, them to touch him. (Jn 20:19-20; Matt 28:9) After eight days He came again through locked doors and told Thomas to touch His wounds. (Jn 20:24-29)

What changed? The Feast of Firstfruits! Jesus Himself is the firstfruits. (1 Cor 15:20-23; Rev 1:5) Jesus gave Mary the rare privilege of seeing Him before the sheaf (omer) of the firstfruits was waved to YHWH, but couldn’t let her touch Him. *According to the law, no one was permitted to touch the harvest until after the firstfruits were waved.* Then immediately after talking with Mary, Jesus ascended to the Father as the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits, I believe at the exact moment on Sunday morning that the high priest was supposed to be waving the omer of barley. When Jesus returned, the disciples were invited and even encouraged to touch Him.

THE TIMING OF THE RED SEA CROSSING

I believe that there is another reason why the date of the Feast of Firstfruits is undefined. That is a good way of giving a single symbol to be fulfilled multiple times, with a different time interval each time. The primary fulfillment was, as always with the Feasts, in Jesus Christ. As the true firstfruits, He fulfilled it exactly to the hour and minute, which in 31 BC was after 3 days and 3 nights in the grave.

But look at the initial pattern at the Exodus. There is simply no possibility that the Israelites could celebrate the first Passover on the evening of March 14, flee Egypt on the 15th, and cross the Red Sea by the 16th, as many people (even Bible scholars) seem to believe. Consider the time it must have taken the Pharaoh to gather and equip his army and catch up to the fleeing Israelites; and that’s after he learned they had been wandering aimlessly in the desert and God hardened the Pharaoh’s heart to decide to chase them. All that simply couldn’t happen in 1 ½ days. But if Firstfruits Sunday fell on the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that year, it all fits easily.

Scripture does not say how long it was from the first Passover to the crossing of the Red Sea. We do have some clues, but our best clue is found in the symbology of the Feasts. Passover itself symbolizes turning away from Egypt (the sinful world) to follow their new Master, YHWH. Leaven stands for Egypt’s wickedness. The seven days of Unleavened Bread symbolized their fleeing from it, implying that they fled from the Pharaoh for the entire seven days. Firstfruits symbolized starting a new life free from the wickedness and bondage of Egypt. That clearly implies the Red Sea crossing, after which they were truly free of their old slave master for the first time. To create that initial pattern, Firstfruits could not occur while the Israelites were still fleeing Egypt. But after crossing the Red Sea they were free to serve their new master and to become God’s chosen “holy nation.” (Ex 19:6)

So what actually happened during those eight days of the Feast? Here is my guess. It is only a guess, but it is reasonable, fits the facts as we know them, and fits one possible timing of the Feasts. Some of this comes from Numbers 33, which lists campsites along the way. Remember that in Hebrew time the day starts as evening begins. For reference, I will put our day of the week in parentheses. For example, they ate the Passover Nisan 14 evening (Saturday), and left for Succoth early on Nisan 14 morning (Sunday).

After they got the Pharaoh’s permission (command?) to go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, they left early on the morning of Nisan 14 (Sunday) from Rameses on the Nile Delta in the land of Goshen. (Num 33:3) They probably weren’t hurrying too much the first day; there was not yet the threat of pursuit, and the Egyptians were urging them to go and giving them free stuff. No doubt they were rather enjoying the ‘vacation’.

Bear in mind that they had been slaves; they were in great physical shape, but they hadn't had a vacation in years. So after the Passover dinner on Nisan 14 (Saturday) they went an average of 30 miles on Nisan 14 (Sunday) from their homes and gathered in Succoth, just north of the Bitter Lakes. Moses had received military training from the Egyptians. Whenever the Pharaoh wanted to send out an army, he would first have them all gather at Succoth at the edge of the desert and then go out together. So the Israelites camped at Succoth on their first night of freedom, Nisan 15 (Sunday). They no doubt celebrated with feasting, singing, dancing, and congratulating one another on their escape from Egypt. This day is called the first day of Unleavened Bread. They rested well that night.

Early Nisan 15 morning (Monday) the party's over. Moses knows they'll be chased, and he wants a head start. He quickly forms them into military style ranks (Ex 13:18) and they strike out across the Wilderness of Shur. (Gen 25:18) They did not try to blaze their own trail across the desert. It is most likely that they went south to pick up the well-worn 'Southern Route' known as Darb el-Hajj, the 'Way of the Wilderness', which heads toward Ezion Geber. It is the safest route, as there is considerably less desert to cross. It is also possible they went east on the 'Way of Shur' which goes to Kadesh Barnea, the 'Middle Route'. They did not use the northern route, the 'Way of the Land of the Philistines', according to Exodus 13:17.

They are committed now. They have got to get across the desert on the water and provisions they are carrying. Nothing is available in the wilderness. Even the grass is recently burned; there is nothing for their flocks and herds; not one shrub to tempt them to stop and graze. The seriousness of their desperate situation finally hits them; no more campsites! They make use of the "pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way [and for shade], and... the pillar of fire by night to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night." (Ex 13:21) They can't run; though they are physically able to run, their flocks and herds couldn't keep up. But they are at least able to average 2.7 miles per hour. So by continuing day and night they get 110 miles from the morning of Nisan 15 (Monday) to the evening of Nisan 17 (Tuesday), a period of 40 hours.

They have successfully crossed the desert. They are exhausted and must rest. They camp "in Etham on the edge of the wilderness." (Ex 13:20) Etham is the whole land of the Edomites around the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba, as you can see: "They journeyed from Succoth, and camped in Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness [of Shur]. And they journeyed from Etham, and turned back [south] to Pi-hahiroth, which faces [opposite] Baal-zephon; and camped before Migdol. And they journeyed from before Pi-hahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness [of Etham]. Then they went a three days' journey in the Wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah." (Num 33:6-8)

My story assumes they have taken the Southern Route, the 'Way of the Wilderness'. It crosses the desert at the middle of the Sinai Peninsula, to a place now called Nakhl. That is where they camp. It is on the southwest edge of the kingdom of Edom. They get a good night's sleep there, much-needed after crossing the desert. Early Wednesday morning they leave Nakhl, no doubt expecting to head north toward the Promised Land. But instead, God leads them southeast, toward Elath and Ezion Geber.

Travel up to that point has been easy; the road was broad and level. As they turn southeast on the morning of Nisan 17 (Wednesday), they enter a rugged mountainous region where travel is only possible through narrow wadis (dry watercourses). From then on, they are 'shut in' by the wilderness. This slows them considerably; now they can average less than 2 miles an hour, again traveling day and night. No matter where Pharaoh catches up with them, he will have them trapped by mountains on either side. We know that Pharaoh maintained watch towers throughout the peninsula and was able to get news from them through signal fires at night and flashing mirrors (heliographs) by day. He certainly had a watch tower at the intersection of these important trade routes. As the Israelites turn southeast instead of northeast toward Canaan, Pharaoh hears the report within the hour and decides to give chase. He quickly commands his army to assemble at Succoth.

Moses probably expects to continue the main road to Ezion Geber, then head south to Midian, for God had told him, "When you have brought the people out of Egypt you shall worship on this mountain." (Mt. Horeb – Ex 3:12) But God changes Moses' plans. "Tell the sons of Israel to turn back [south]; camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the [Red] Sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, '*They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.*' Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so he will chase after them..." (Ex 14:2-4) When they get to the cut-off for Pi-hahiroth, Moses leads them straight south, through even more-rugged territory. This is where they "... journeyed [away] from Etham, and turned back [south] to Pi-hahiroth..." (Num 33:7) In 60 hours of hiking they are only able to cover 100 miles. Their column, which had been about 8 miles long in the desert, now grows thinner to almost 50 miles long.

It is now the afternoon of Nisan 19 (Friday), and the Sabbath is about to begin. But they've finally reached their campsite: south of the Egyptian fortress of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, and opposite the Amalekite fortress of Baal-zephon. (They have no concern for the Egyptian Fortress. It contains only a hundred men at most, compared to their 600,000.) They are totally exhausted by now, and are looking forward to keeping their Sabbath and getting some sleep that night. In fact, after a joyous Sabbath evening meal, they lay out their bedrolls and fall fast asleep, all the way to Sabbath noon. (Nisan 20)

Pharaoh, meanwhile, has brought his chariot down to join his troops at Succoth. By noon on the 17th they set out. By marching quick-time 16 hours each day (with rest breaks) they can cover about 75 miles per day, so it only takes them 3 days to catch up. (230 miles) That brings them also to Sabbath noon on the 20th.

Can you imagine the terror of the Israelites when they wake up to the thunder of Egyptian chariots coming down the wadi? They are completely boxed in. The Egyptians in the Fortress of Pi-hahiroth are cheering and preparing to join the battle. Beyond them to their north, the mountains extend to the sea, as do the mountains to the south. Behind them is nine miles of deep blue water, and in front of them they see nothing but steep and rugged mountains, with the entire Egyptian army streaming down their only exit. Trapped! *Worse, they are unarmed!* The Israelites panic. YHWH plants His pillar of fire and cloud in front of the Egyptian army and tells Moses to stretch out his arm over the sea. Besides the ultra-low tide caused by Mars and Venus, a strong east wind blows down from the Mountains of Midian, pushing the Red Sea south out of the gulf and drying the sandy bottom. It continues blowing all night as the Israelites cross. The pillar of fire lights their way, though it covers the Egyptians with darkness.

By first light the Egyptians begin their pursuit. They are in the channel at sunrise, struggling with recalcitrant horses, tangled tack, and swerving chariots. It is **Sunday morning, Nisan 21**. God tells Moses to stretch out his arm over the sea, and the wind dies. The high tide rushes north in a wall of water up the gulf. It flows over the Egyptian army, pushing them off the sandy saddle into the depths. “They sank like lead in the mighty waters.” (Ex 15:10 – this was certainly not the shallow ‘Sea of Reeds’ as some claim.) The reason they sink so readily is that the Egyptian custom was to tie their weapons and shields to themselves, so they could not lose them during the battle. They are weighted down. But after a few days, their bloated bodies wash up on the beach (Ex 14:30) so the Israelites can arm themselves for the coming battle at Rephidim.

Notice the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits, on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, on the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They have eaten unleavened bread for seven days while they were fleeing, because they didn’t have time to wait for the dough to rise. (Ex 12:8-11, 15, 34) But now the Israelites can stop to feast. They have a new relationship with YHWH. They are not only out of Egypt, but their old slave-master is dead, and they can for the first time acknowledge YHWH as their rightful Master. *In a real sense, they, the Children of Israel, are the firstfruits to God.* YHWH is now their Father, their Provider, their Protector, and their Guide, as He has never been before. From then on, all through their travels in the wilderness, He proves Himself to them, even to providing them with water from the rocks and manna from heaven for forty years in the wilderness. (Ex 16:4, 35; 17:6)

At the end of the forty years wandering in the desert, the scene is repeated, except this time just before Passover. They cross the Jordan River on dry ground and come up out of the waters on the Nisan 10 (Josh 4:19), and celebrate the Passover on Nisan 14. (Josh 5:10) I don’t know what day of the week it fell on, but my guess is that Passover fell on a Sabbath day that year, because of what happened on the day after Passover: the manna ceased and they ate the produce of the land for the first time, as a ‘firstfruits’. (Josh 5:10-12) Others believe that Sunday fell on Nisan 10, the day they crossed the Jordan. Either way, the importance of having Firstfruits on “the day after the Sabbath” rather than on a specific day of the month now becomes evident.

This was harvest time according to Joshua 3:15. (It was the beginning of the barley harvest.) The harvest time comes when it comes, and when the harvest is ripe, you take the firstfruits and offer it to God so that you can receive the full blessings of the harvest. Every year at the beginning of the harvest season when Israel celebrated the Passover, they were to remember the great deliverance that YHWH had worked for them, and to acknowledge themselves as the ‘firstfruits’ unto Him.

Our **Sunday** therefore takes on a significant prophetic role in the Feasts of Israel. It is the first day of the week, the day of new beginnings and new relationships. Firstfruits is symbolized by baptism: the death of the old way of life, coming into a new way of life – out of Egypt, slavery, and bondage, and into the Promised Land, with YHWH as the only Lord and Master. Firstfruits thus speaks of salvation: the death and burial of the old nature and resurrection in newness of life. (Rom 6:4 ff) Scripture assures us that the Israelites passing through the Red Sea is a type of baptism. (1 Cor 10:1-11)

I believe it is all speaking prophetically of the Gentile church-age (which is indeed characterized by worship on Sunday) and the harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God (which burden has mostly been borne by the church, not the Jews). Which day is it proper to evangelize? Why, any day, of course. Behold now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Him in the wilderness. (Ref. Heb 3:7-4:11) And when is a good day for the saved to gather with the saints for worship and public confession of their faith through baptism? Well, again, we can meet any day of the week, any date of the month; we are under grace, not under the Old Covenant law.

But at the risk of pointing out the obvious, most evangelism, most worship services, and most baptisms for the past 1800 or more years have been done on Sunday, the “day after the Sabbath.”

Just a coincidence? Perhaps. Or perhaps God knew in advance about the church-age when He instituted the Feast of Firstfruits on “the day after the Sabbath.” Perhaps that was His sovereign will, part of His Plan of the Ages.

THE SPRING FEASTS – FINAL FULFILLMENT?

Though the first fulfillment of the Spring Feasts was the delivery of the Israelites from Egypt, Yashua is the greater fulfillment to which it all pointed. He fulfilled the Feasts perfectly, completely, to the day and hour. He was the Passover Lamb, sacrificed to make atonement for our sins. He was crucified just as the first of the Passover lambs was being slain, and died just as the last was slain. He was buried in the earth within moments of the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He is the Unleavened (sinless) Bread from heaven, which we must bury within us if we are to have life. After 3 full days in the grave, He arose. Then precisely as the priests waved the firstfruits to YHWH, He presented Himself to the Father as the firstfruits. Thus He is our guarantee of a good harvest. He came again in the person of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to reap His harvest for the Kingdom, a vast harvest, which is still being reaped.

The exact correlation of the timing of the Feasts with the timing of Yashua's death, burial, resurrection, and return as the Holy Spirit is far beyond coincidence.

When Yashua fulfilled the 3 Feasts of Passover and the Feast of Pentecost, He did away with the old, that He might establish the new. (Heb 10:9) In that sense, Yashua was the final fulfillment of these Feasts, *and they are never again to be celebrated as they were*. Indeed, ever since the veil in the temple was torn in two, and later the temple itself was destroyed, they cannot be celebrated as they were. I'll talk more about this in later chapters, and when I tell the story of Yashua's life on earth in Volume Five.

But in the spiritual sense, the true sense, we are the final fulfillment of Passover every time we eat the Lord's Supper; or at least we should be, if we rightly discern the Lord's body and do not eat and drink unworthily. (1 Cor 11:27 ff) Just before His death, Yashua taught His disciples how to celebrate the Feast of Passover correctly. If we are ignorant about Passover when we partake of the Lord's Supper (communion), we miss much of the impact that it should have on us. It is only out of the old that He establishes the new. The old is the foundation for a proper understanding and appreciation of the new. A communion service should be a lot more than just remembering the substitutionary death of Yashua for us, important as that is.

Some of the lessons of Passover are obvious; but let's briefly go over a few of them together anyway. (Many of these concepts came from Rick Joyner's wonderful little book *There Were Two Trees in the Garden*, by MorningStar Publications. I wish every Christian would read his book!)

Passover is a meal. A special, memorial meal, but a meal, just the same. Bread and wine were among the most common foods of the day. He takes the most common things as a daily encouragement for us to remember the sacred, the divine, throughout the daily routines of our often mundane lives.

The Israelites were in bondage. Sometimes in this free land of America we forget what that even means. But the shackles of sin are just as strong now as they were in old Pharaoh's day. Without the reality of Passover in our lives, we are just as much in bondage as a slave in the dungeon.

The gods of Egypt had been judged. The ten plagues were finished with the Passover. All the gods of Egypt, even to the Pharaoh and the firstborn prince of Egypt, had been mocked and exposed as powerless before YHWH.

Passover begins a journey. It is not just the journey of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land; it is also the journey each of us must take out of our self-nature into the divine nature. Passover (salvation) is but the beginning, the first step. This is the journey of a lifetime.

A lamb for each house. Passover is a family thing. The head of the house takes responsibility for all those under his roof, and they are saved through his obedience to the command. Even a rebellious and disobedient first-born son is saved through his father's obedience, as long as the son remains under his roof.

The lamb must be without blemish. "... you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a [sacrificial] lamb unblemished and spotless." (1 Pet 1:18-19) Yashua, the literal, physical Lamb of God of which the Passover was only a picture, took upon Himself human flesh. Because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit He did not inherit Adam's sin nature, but in every other way during His stay on earth He was just like weak, fallible Adam. "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through the things which He suffered." (Heb 5:8) Thus He "has been tempted in all things as we are, *yet without sin.*" (Heb 4:15)

The lamb must die. This is an offense to modernists, who consider Jesus only a good moral teacher. *But if you stumble on this, you cannot be saved from the wrath of God.* Yashua, the perfect God/man, did much more than show us the way to God. He died a horrible, painful death to pay the penalty of the law for our sins. "According to the law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Heb 9:22) He then descended into the pit of hell, where He received every torment we deserve. Thus He won back from Satan the keys of death and hell. He now sits at our heavenly Father's right hand of power, interceding for us.

The blood must be applied. Killing the lamb was not enough to protect the family. The head of the family has to take the blood and apply it to the doorposts and lintel of his house. If he does not obey, his firstborn son, no matter how young and innocent, must die. Yashua's decisive victory over death and hell has absolutely no benefit for me until I take His precious blood and apply it by faith to the doorposts of my heart.

The blood makes a stain on the doorposts. This stain is visible to both God and Satan. It marks those in this house as God's people. YHWH sees the stain, and 'passes over' the house, covering it so the death angel cannot enter. Does your heart have a permanent bloodstain, marking you as belonging to God? You may not see it there, but the angels and devils see whether it is there or not, and therein lies the battle over the human soul.

The lamb is roasted with fire. As we stare into the fire, we see ourselves, roasting in the fires of hell in payment for our sins. *Except the Lamb took it all upon Himself.* Every punishment the law demanded of me fell upon Him, and I, by faith, receive His righteousness into myself.

The lamb must be eaten. The Israelites needed energy for their flight from Egypt. They ate the lamb with their feet shod and their coats on, ready to flee at midnight when the anguished cry arose from the Egyptians. *That lamb literally became life for them, providing strength for their escape.* We also eat the Lamb of God continually, as we feed on the Living Word of God, and He becomes our life. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal Life, and I will raise Him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him... It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (Jn 6:54-56, 63)

It was to be eaten in haste. The Israelites were fleeing Egypt and all that held them in bondage. We also were in bondage to sin and our sin nature, and the Passover is our open door to freedom. But we don't just saunter casually through the door; if we recognize our sin for the bondage that it is, we hate it and flee from it.

One New Testament parallel is the "Living Water" Jesus gave the Samaritan Woman. (John 4:10 ff) Still water quickly stagnates, but Jesus promises to give us water like a fountain within us, springing up to eternal Life. They say a swift mountain stream cleanses itself every 100 feet. Jesus does the same for His Bride and for His church. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for her; *that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless.*" (Eph 5:25-27)

But we must keep moving. The Word of God is alive! He is ever growing within us. He is infinite; the treasures of His wisdom and the knowledge of Him yet to be found in His Living Word are inexhaustible. Just about the time we think we understand God, having fully explained Him in all our doctrines, we look in our little box and He is gone. Churchmen may think that they can prevent error or heresy in their church by carefully codifying the truth into a list of creeds. But truths will not keep us from error.

Only knowing and loving the Truth – who is Jesus Himself – will keep us from error. This is the important work that the Spirit is doing in us now – developing a love relationship with Him. He was sent to lead us to Jesus! Used as a rulebook, the Bible becomes the letter that kills, the tree of knowledge, even an idol. But used by the Spirit, it points us to Jesus and helps us to walk with Him, abide in Him, know Him, love Him, and become more like Him, rather than just know about Him.

The Pharisees confronted every problem with a new rule. They maintained order and protected the purity of their doctrines with a zillion petty laws. But the result was spiritual stagnation and death. You see a great deal of order (and zero chance for heresy) in a cemetery! The spiritually dead will have their orderly church, with no heresies or arguments (except maybe about the color of the carpet). You may think those in the cemetery are finally at peace and rest, but, "There is no rest for the wicked." (Rev 14:11) The strict letter of the law may bring an outward order, but it does not bring peace, it brings death! "... the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Cor 3:6)

Yashua came to give us life, and that more abundantly! Abundant life isn't always free from disorder, growing pains, arguments, misunderstandings, or even heresies that make us wrestle with God for answers. We still see through a glass darkly. (1 Cor 13:12) We cannot know anything fully until we know God fully. But we must keep moving that direction. "The unfolding of Thy Words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." (Ps 119:130) "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day." (Prov 4:18) The Spirit, by His very nature of moving from glory to glory into abundant life, is threatening to any who want outward peace and order. Having the Truth living and growing within is threatening to those whose security is in human traditions, creeds, and doctrines. Pharisees among us still elevate their orthodoxy and tradition to the level of biblical revelation. But the spiritually hungry eat the Lamb in haste and move on, before the leaven of the world has a chance to work its poison within.

The lamb must be finished – none could be left over for another day. If we are to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in His Passover, we must accept every part of Him. He does not give us the option to pick and choose which aspects of Him to accept. When we disciple the nations, we are to go, "... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." (Matt 28:20) As in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, we have to sell everything we have. (Matt 13:44-46) *In accepting Yashua as Lord of our lives, we must relinquish the right to make the final decision on where He will lead us.* That, after all, is what 'Lord' means. Only in total submission to His Lordship are we delivered from the self-centeredness that would kill us. When we come to Him with self-imposed conditions on what or how much we will accept, we make void His power in our lives.

In fact, it seems those very things about Him which intimidate or threaten us turn out to be the things we need the most. Instead of allowing Him to remake us in His image, we sometimes try to strip Him down to our image, to our own concept of what we want Him to be like.

This is nowhere more evident than in our choice of church fellowships. Instead of going where the Holy Spirit leads, I naturally gravitate where I feel comfortable and accepted, where everyone else believes the same as me and is pretty close to the same level of spiritual growth. In most congregations this results in a debilitating imbalance. Those with evangelistic fervor meet in one location; those with a pastoral burden in another; those with a zeal for the written Word in another; those who love the prophetic spoken Word in yet another. Of course those whose focus is joyous, emotion-filled worship and dancing in the Spirit could never get along with those who love the peace and reverence of cathedral music. One congregation is all 'feet', another is all 'hands', another is all 'ears', and another is all 'eyes'. No wonder there are over 5000 different sects and denominations! But Jesus prays that we all be one body, as He is one with the Father. (Jn 17:21 ff)

The apostle Paul dealt with this extensively. (1 Cor 12) Paul insists that *it is the Holy Spirit who distributes all the various gifts and ministries and sets them into the body just as He wills.* (v 11) My job is to be sensitive to His leading and be willing to receive and exercise His gifts at the time and place He directs, regardless of how much it moves me out of my comfort zone, and to love and accept the other members of the body, even though their gifts and level of spiritual maturity are often very different from mine. Then and only then can I begin to, "Grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." (Eph 4:15)

No bone of it could be broken. As with many of the prophecies in Scripture, this is a double prophecy of both the physical body of Yashua, and the spiritual many-membered body of Christ, the church. Physically, Yashua was slain for our sin yet not a bone of His body was broken. Spiritually, we die daily in Christ only to be raised into His abundant Life. *In a true sense, all of the above statements about the Lamb of God apply equally to the church.* "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been joined with Him in the likeness of His death, so also shall we be in the resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." (Rom 6:3-7) As we reckon ourselves crucified and buried in Him, we become like Him in His glorious Resurrection Life as well. We also become a lamb without blemish, a perfect and acceptable living sacrifice to the Father.

This we do daily, as we lay down our sin-bound lives upon Him, in order to walk each day in His perfect, sinless Resurrection Life. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Lk 9:23) "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." (Gal 2:20) No bone of Christ is broken. No part of His body is broken off or separated from Him who is the head.

None of it could be taken outside the house. (ref. Ex 12:46) The house here symbolizes the local church. Inside the house was the extended family, possibly together with neighbors if the family was too small for a whole lamb. In one house was every level of spiritual maturity from babes to elders. Even the Egyptians who believed and obeyed Moses were saved in their houses. But outside the house were the ungodly, disobedient Egyptians, symbolic of the world. Israel was prohibited from taking any of the lamb outside the house to give to their Egyptian friends; they would desecrate it. Even so, salvation is found only within the body of Christ, the church.

There are no 'Lone Ranger' Christians. Do not think you can be saved while living or associating only with the world. You will have no Lamb to feast on until you come into a local church body. A picture of this is the sacrament of communion; you do not take communion outside the house, but only among your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, the church. In a real sense, you are what you eat every day. If you get your continual nourishment only from the world, you will be worldly, but if your daily nourishment is the Lamb of God, you will become more and more Christ-like. "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4)

No stranger may eat of it. (ref. Ex 12:43) Idolatrous Egyptians were not to be invited into the house to eat of the lamb. The unsaved, rebellious, unrepentant, unbaptized children of the devil are not invited to eat of the sacrament of communion. The church does become less judgmental as we grow in grace and knowledge of our Savior, yet we never seek for the approval of men by watering down the power of the pure and uncompromising Truth of God. We must beware when all men think well of us. Yashua is the Door to the sheepfold. A door has two functions: to let people in, *and to keep others out.* When we allow those to join the church who have not come in through the Door, we place the entire church in jeopardy. Men by nature are social creatures, and the church is a great social gathering, designed to meet many social needs. But all our beautiful facilities, programs, projects, and social gatherings can be a distraction or even a hindrance to conversion if we allow membership and extend fellowship in the church without rebirth in Yashua.

Do we make it easy for people to be attached to the body without being rightly related to the head? Or do we instead boldly challenge one another with the power of the gospel? “But we preach Christ [in a many-membered body] being crucified [present continuous tense – daily!]; to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor 1:23, 24)

The people had to depart. This step is easy for us to forget. They did it! They fled Egypt and went through the Red Sea. They crossed the wilderness, and ultimately entered the Promised Land. We cannot expect to reach the Promised Land if we never take that first step out of Egypt. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” (1 Jn 2:15) Have we left Egypt? Are we on the road? Remember, you can’t steer a parked car.

They spoiled the Egyptians. After being poor slaves for 92 years, Israel partook of the Passover and became rich beyond their wildest dreams. When we partake of Christ the true Passover, we become sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ, to whom belongs the world and all it contains. But notice what they bought with all this wealth. They couldn’t spend it on their own personal pleasures at the nearest bazaar – they were wandering in the desert, where they couldn’t even buy the necessities of life. Instead, God allowed them to invest their wealth in something far more valuable than anything the world could sell them: the tabernacle, a habitation for God to dwell among them. We also are exhorted, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Instead, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matt 6:19-21)

I am not implying that Christians won’t have great wealth on this earth. Those who follow biblical principles of wisdom may well have earthly riches flowing through their hands accomplishing the will of God through their lives. Or they may not – depending on what God is doing in them. Earthly wealth is not a sign of God’s blessing, nor is poverty a sign of God’s displeasure. Wealth is a tool that can be used by God to accomplish His purposes – or that can be used by Satan for destructive ends. Tools are to use. They accomplish nothing sitting on a shelf or in the bank. The devil would like to get us to focus on the tool: the money, what it can buy, or the prestige of having lots of it. “A worldly man loves things and uses people; a godly man loves people and uses things.” God wants our focus on that which lasts for eternity: Himself and those He died to save. When we find the true riches of the glory of God in Christ Jesus, all the wealth of this world is by comparison no more than just a saw or a hammer to use in building the Kingdom of God.

Many examples in Scripture refer to spiritual wealth as a Christian’s riches. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph 1:3 – one example of many) But some also speak of earthly wealth: “Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and the gospel’s sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age... with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal Life.’” (Mk 10:30) I think this passage sums it up best: “Instruct those [Christians] who are rich in this present world [and there will be some] not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy – to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.” (1 Tim 6:17-19)

And then there are the great heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11. Many of them got quite wealthy – such as Abraham, Joseph, David, and Solomon. But what is the conclusion of the chapter? “... others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised... All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth... But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for He has prepared a [heavenly] city for them.” (Heb 11:35-39, 13-16)

They would not accept their release, that they might obtain a better resurrection. They did not live in palaces; they lived in holes in the ground. Did they miss God’s blessing? No, no more than Yashua Himself, who did not even have a place to lay His head. *When we begin to see our spiritual riches in Christ, it does not matter to us where we live.* If Jesus is in it, even a cave has more glory than the greatest mansion. If Jesus is not in it, the greatest mansion is a sad and lonely, tragic, empty shell.

Some think it is more spiritual to be blessed; others think it is more spiritual to be abased; *in fact it is neither.* Some of the most ungodly men live in monasteries keeping their vows of poverty and chastity. Others of the most ungodly men drive a Rolls Royce, live in a huge mansion, and run a ‘health and prosperity gospel’ ministry.

But those of us who seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness are strangers and exiles here. We have no lasting city here *and are not trying to build one*; rather we are seeking that holy city whose architect and builder is God. The truly spiritual one is the one whose heart has been so captured and enraptured by Christ and the things of the Spirit that he has no time or desire to focus on worldly wealth or pleasure. Some have tried to be spiritual by working to develop a distaste for the pleasures and comforts of life, but that leads to a sour, critical attitude. The mature saint receives all things from God's hand, whether pleasures or trials, with joy. Once my heart becomes filled with love for my Redeemer, once my eyes are open to the reality and beauty of the spirit realm, once I get a taste of the fabulous wealth that is my inheritance in Christ, everything else fades into its proper perspective.

They ate Unleavened Bread. They were fleeing. They did not have time to sit around waiting for their bread to rise. Leaven symbolizes the pervasive influence of sin. As long as a child of God eats only unleavened bread and presses on with God from glory to glory, feeding on the Bread that came down from heaven, as long as he is fleeing the corrupting influence of the world, his life is free from sin, *for sin has no time to work within him*. It is only when the child of God loses the vision of God's glory and lingers by the way, yearning for the 'good old days' of the leeks, garlicks, and fleshpots of Egypt, that he becomes filled with the leaven of malice and wickedness. So with assemblies as it is with individuals, when they settle back in smug self-complacency, satisfied with their condition and content with the thought that they 'have the truth', they leave plenty of time to leaven their dough, and the fiery cloud of God's Shekina Glory moves on and leaves them behind.

That is why Yashua warned us to, "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Mark 8:14) They, like today's denominations, thought they had it all together. They were the religious leaders of the day. Yet Yashua harshly condemned them. *Why?*

The **Sadducees** are easy. They denied the resurrection, angels, spirits, miracles, the supernatural – they had a form of godliness but denied the power thereof. They "*understood neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.*" (Matt 22:29) It is just so with the modern liberal churches who preach a warm fuzzy social gospel and the power of positive thinking, but deny the miracle virgin birth and the divinity of Jesus, reject His substitutionary sacrificial death and resurrection, and scorn the filling of the Holy Spirit in wisdom and power within each believer.

Yes, there are still plenty of Sadducees around. But the **Pharisees**? That strikes closer to home. These were good people. Yashua even tells us to "Do and observe all that they tell you..." (Matt 23:3) Their doctrines were right on. They know the Scriptures, but, "... they say, and do not do... they do all their [good] deeds to be noticed by men."

So it is with modern Pharisees. They accept the inerrancy of God's Word and have all the right doctrines. They do understand the Scriptures and the power of God! They believe in the power of Jesus' blood. They teach about the miracles of Christ and the early church. But "they say, and do not do." Worse yet, they condemn and denounce the one who wishes to plunge on in and explore the glories of Resurrection Life. Oh, it is all right to talk about such things (past or future), but when one suggests that this is the heritage of the saints here and now, and that the power of the Holy Spirit is just as available to today's believer as it was at Pentecost, you will hear loud protests from the Pharisees. They have made right doctrines their camp ground, the leaven has worked its subtle influence, and their theology has developed into a dead orthodoxy.

I weep as I write, *for I have just described myself*. Much of my life I have been nothing but a good Pharisee. Even in this very study on the Feasts of Israel, I have so many right doctrines and so little of the power of God's Holy Spirit in my life. I'm sorry. All I can do is urge myself, as I urge you, "... *count all things but loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but dung in order that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, *that I may know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings*, being conformed to His death, that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained, or have already been made perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:8-14)

God has a call upon my life. Whatever it is, I want to find it and **do it**. By the power of His Holy Spirit. *I'm tired of being just a good Pharisee!*

Well, don't sit there and stare at me like that! God has a call on your life, too. Have you found it? Are you doing it? Are you fleeing Egypt? Are you feeding on the Unleavened Bread that came down from heaven? Are you drinking deeply of the new wine of the Kingdom, the precious blood of Yashua? Is He your life? Do you know Him, and the power of His Resurrection Life within?

I challenge you, just as I challenge myself: I want that! I don't want to settle for a penny less than all He has for me in this life. I am not content to sit back just waiting for the rapture and 'heaven by and by' to get to know Yashua. I want to get to know Him right now, to allow Him to live His life through me, even work His miracles through me if He wants. He's my Lord. Whatever He wants, I'm His man.

The Unleavened Bread lasts through Firstfruits. This Feast within a Feast has an important significance. “Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.” (Jn 12:24) Yashua the Bread of Life, died and was buried. He rose again, and ascended to the Father on Sunday morning as the firstfruits of the harvest. Even so we who follow in His footsteps eat the unleavened bread of death to our self nature until we also have ascended to the Father and are joined in unity with Yashua at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Bride of Christ thus becomes an extension of His firstfruits offering. We are the firstfruits! (Rev 14:4)

But there are two firstfruits, one at Passover and the other at Pentecost. Just as the Bride becomes an extension of Christ’s firstfruits offering at Passover, the church, the many-membered body of Christ, becomes an extension of Christ’s firstfruits offering at Pentecost. Our entire lives become a sweet-smelling firstfruits offering to the Father! But remember, firstfruits always points to the full harvest. “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come! Let the one who is thirsty come! Let whoever wishes take the Water of Life without cost.’” All the nations will stream to Jerusalem to worship the King and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, for the Feasts of Passover and Pentecost will finally be fully fulfilled – *fulfilled in us*. As we saints tabernacle with our King and rule with Him in power and glory, the full harvest for His Kingdom will be awesome, for the Spirit and the Bride will evangelize with the fullness of the seven Spirits of God, rather than with the limited taste we have known.

Yes, I believe that we, the Bride of Christ and the church, are destined to become the final fulfillment of the Spring Feasts. Especially Pentecost! We tend to think of Pentecost as being all fulfilled in Acts 2. Many modern churches have a goal of getting back to the New Testament church pattern. Well, that is not a bad thing – the modern church seems pretty pathetic compared to the faith, zeal, courage, and power of New Testament believers. But I think God wants us to go forward, not back. God allowed the Dark Ages for a purpose, just like He allowed the Fall of Adam and Eve for a purpose. The church was just a baby in the New Testament era. There is nothing wrong with that – you become as a child to enter the Kingdom. But God still wants to mature us. He wants us to, “Grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ.” (Eph 4:15)

The church did a lot of maturing during the Dark Ages; *she finally began to realize the wickedness that lay within her own heart*. There is no evil upon the face of the earth that the Catholic church did not wholeheartedly pursue during the Dark Ages. That is why they were so dark. And just like the universal church, so it is with each of us. Until we each recognize and acknowledge our own capacity for evil, our inner potential to plumb the depths of depravity, we will not fully appreciate the great salvation that God is working within. Only then will God grant us salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

The end result will be a wondrous Pentecost in which, “I will put My Laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen or everyone his brother saying, ‘Know YHWH!’ for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. [Wow! What a promise!] For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” (Heb 8:10-12) That will be the great harvest for the Kingdom of God, making the ‘Firstfruits’ Pentecost described in the book of Acts look like the childish rehearsal that it was.

SHAVUOT (PENTECOST) AS COMMANDED

“You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete Sabbaths. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; [Note that Pentecost also had to be on **Sunday**, the day after a Sabbath, the fiftieth day (inclusive) from Firstfruits] then you shall present a new grain offering to YHWH. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths ephah of fine flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits [of the wheat harvest this time] to YHWH. Along with the bread, you shall present seven one-year-old lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd, and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to YHWH, with their grain offering and libations, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to YHWH. You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male one-year-old lambs for a sacrifice of peace offerings. The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits before YHWH; they are to be holy to YHWH for the priest. [God provides the best foods for His priests during the Feasts.] On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation [high Sabbath]. In it you shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout all your generations.” (Lev 23:15-21)

“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain [the barley harvest, which began on the day of the Feast of Firstfruits]. Then you shall celebrate the **Feast of Weeks** [Shavuot, or Pentecost as it came to be known because of the fifty days] to YHWH your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where YHWH your God chooses to establish His name. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt [thus be kind to the poor], and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.” (Deut 16:9-12)

As in all the Feasts, God insists we care about the poor, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. Even travelers from other nations were to be welcomed at the Feasts.

“In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on this day they came into the Wilderness of Sinai... and there Israel camped in front of the mountain... YHWH said to Moses, ‘Go to the people. Consecrate them today and tomorrow. Let them wash their garments and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day YHWH will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people...’ So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, there were thunder and flashes of lightning and a thick cloud covering the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because YHWH had descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. And when the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder. YHWH came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and YHWH called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up... Then God spoke all these words, saying ...” (Ex 19 and 20, where begins the giving of the Law of God on Mt. Sinai, including the Ten Commandments).

Now, what does the giving of the law on Mount Sinai have to do with the Feast of Pentecost? Everything! Note that they couldn’t really celebrate the Pentecost (Feast of Weeks, Shavuot, Firstfruits of the Wheat Harvest) until they reached the Promised Land and actually started to harvest wheat. But the first actual celebration of Pentecost was the giving of the law in the wilderness.

Notice the timing. If the Firstfruits Sunday came on Nisan 21 (as I believe), then Pentecost would come on the seventh Sunday, Sivan 10. Though the exact timing is not given, it is pretty easy to fit a hypothetical itinerary in between these two dates. I’m sure they had several days of partying there on the beach, plus it probably took several days to collect all the weapons from Pharaoh’s soldiers washing up on shore. Leaving the Red Sea crossing site on the 25th, they would come to Marah by the 27th, which is a Sabbath. (Ex 15:22) From there I assume they are only a day or two from Elim, where they would have camped for a week or so, probably from Iyar 1 through 8. Another few days travel gets them to the camp by the Red Sea by Iyar 11, the next Sabbath. From there they turn inland; a two-day march would reach the Wilderness of Sin by Thursday the 15th. (Ex 16:1)

This is where they grumbled for lack of food. It was a whole month since leaving their homes in Egypt, and they had run out of provisions. So God sent the manna. They probably camped at least through the Sabbath weekend of the 18th there, enjoying the manna. (Ex 16:30) The next two campsites, Dophkah and Alush (Num 33:12-14), are close (“journeyed by stages from the Wilderness of Sin” – Ex 17:1), so they could easily get to Rephidim by the 22nd.

Rephidim is still in the Wilderness of Sin but it is now “at the mountain of God.” (Ex 18:5) It is a huge plain a short distance from and within eyesight of the mountain, and is most likely where Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came to meet him and helped him to set up judges over the people. (Ex 18) They could have stayed there as much as two weeks, as that is also where they ran out of water and God told Moses to strike the rock (Ex 17:6), after which they had plenty of water. And that is where they had the famous battle with the Amalekites, when Moses held up his arms for a whole day (with Aaron and Hur’s help) until they defeated Amalek. (Ex 17:12 ff) That brings us to Sivan 7, which is “in the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt.” (Ex 19:1)

At God’s command they moved their camp around Mount Sinai to the clearing “on the backside of the desert.” (Ex 3:1) “On that very day they came into the Wilderness of Sinai... there Israel camped in front of the mountain,” Mt. Horeb, now Mt. Sinai. (Ex 19:1-2) So it is still Sivan 7. After setting up camp, Moses went up the Mountain to talk to God. God told Moses to set up boundaries so that no one would touch the mountain. (Ex 19:12) They then had two days of purification (Friday and Saturday) until God came down to the mountain (“on the third day” – v16) in fire, earthquake, thunder, lightning, and the loud trumpet, on **Sunday the 10th**, the day of Pentecost, 50 days (inclusive) from the Red Sea crossing. Yes, this is a lot of guesswork. But it fits, easily, without twisting any Scriptures.

The giving of the law on Pentecost also fits with ancient rabbinical tradition, which says that God spoke from the top of the mountain in all 70 languages of the world on the day of Pentecost. This should remind us of the New Testament story of the fulfillment of the day of Pentecost in Acts, when Jesus’ disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in ‘other tongues’ so that all the Jews who had come to Jerusalem from “every nation under heaven” to celebrate the Feast, could hear them in their native language. (Acts 2:1-10)

So how does the giving of the law from Mount Sinai relate to the Feast of Pentecost? How did the law come down the mountain? On two tablets of stone, represented in the Feast by two loaves of bread waved as the Firstfruits offering. (Num 28:26) God’s Law is the firstfruits of the wheat harvest! That reminds me of the temptation of Yashua after His baptism. The devil said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” He answered, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” (Matt 4:1-4) *So in one sense those two loaves of bread represent the Word of God as summarized by the two tablets of the law.* “Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O YHWH God of Hosts.” (Jer 15:16) “How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Ps 119:103)

Yashua fulfilled this at His incarnation: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, [greater glory than the law, which only pointed to Christ], glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Jn 1:14)

The two tablets of the law can represent the two phases of the Covenant – the Old and New Testaments. The first 4 Commandments are akin to the smaller New Testament, since they relate primarily to our spiritual duty; then the last 6 Commandments are parallel to the Old Testament, relating more to our duty to our fellow man. But it is really only one law, one covenant, which is renewed in the New, just as it is one God and one heavenly law reflecting God’s divine nature and character.

But as I said in the discussion on the nature of the Word, there is a very close parallel between the Lord Jesus Christ and the written Word; it is only the Spirit of Christ who makes the Word come alive in our hearts. Just as physical loaves of bread bring life to our physical body, so the Word of God brings life to our spirit, because it really is Jesus Christ Himself, revealing Himself to us through the Word and living out His life in us and through us by the power of His eternal Life. This becomes our only law: “the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 8:2)

Jesus made this very clear in John 6. “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. . . *I am the living bread that came down out of heaven*; if any one eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh. . . Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal Life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. . . It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” (Jn 6:35-65, excerpts)

Jesus is the living Word of God; I eat His flesh and drink His blood by faith as I devour His Word and let His Holy Spirit write His commandments on my heart.

This is not an impersonal list of do’s and don’ts. It is a living relationship, in which He “... will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right or to the left.” (Isa 30:20-21) for “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (Jn 10:27)

In a second sense, the two loaves represent God’s chosen people, both Jew and Gentile church, as became evident at the fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the 120 believers gathered in Jerusalem after Yashua ascended to the Father.

We’ll talk more about that later. For now, note that the loaves are both leavened; both the Jewish and the Gentile church are a mixture of believers and unbelievers. And the loaves are the firstfruits, offered in the anticipation of a great harvest to come. Not just among the Jews, but also within the Gentile church I believe there will come a great harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God.

Please note that whenever I speak of the Gentile church, I am not speaking of a church made of redeemed pagans separate from Israel. As I said in the discussion on the 10 lost tribes of Israel, the northern kingdom (the Kingdom of Israel, referred to in Scripture as ‘Ephraim’ after the largest of its 10 tribes, in contrast to the Kingdom of Judah in the south) is scattered among the nations. It is now so thoroughly mixed that *they think of themselves as Gentiles*. But this is not a church of redeemed pagans; it is made up of the 10 lost tribes of Israel and those adopted by faith into Israel from among the pagans. I, for example, am not a pagan! Pagans cannot be saved until they are adopted into God’s chosen family. If not physically descended from one of the 10 lost tribes of Israel, I am at least adopted into one, thus a true Israelite by adoption and by faith. Yet, like most of the others, I still think of myself not as a Jew or an Israeli, but as a member of the Gentile church.

God separated Israel from Judah. “I cut my second staff, Union, in pieces, to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.” (Zech 11:14) But at the end of the age He will restore their unity. “In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave to your fathers as an inheritance.” (Jeremiah 3:18) So those two loaves can also represent the northern and southern kingdoms: the house of Israel (Ephraim, or the Gentiles) and the house of Judah (the Jews).

In a third sense, the two loaves represent a growth process, which Jesus described as, “... the Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, until it was all leavened.” (Matt 13:33) Leaven is not always a bad thing. The Passover Feasts symbolized purging out the old “leaven of malice and wickedness.” (1 Cor 5:8) The 120 disciples waiting in the upper room then became “a new lump, just as you are unleavened. For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.” (5:7) Pentecost starts the leavening process again, this time with a different kind of leaven – the Holy Spirit.

This leavening process takes time. Nearly 2000 years have passed since those first 120 believers, and still the two loaves are not fully leavened and ready to bake. But we have His promise: “... Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (5:6) I believe the process is nearing completion, when all three measures of meal (spirit, soul, and body) of both lumps of dough (Jews and Gentiles) will be fully leavened (by the Holy Spirit) and ready to put into the oven (the fires of great tribulation).

I do not believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church; when the two loaves are risen they must be baked in the oven. I'll talk more about this later.

Let's close this section with a quote from Hebrews 12. It compares the giving of the law at Mount Sinai with both the speaking of God to our hearts by His Spirit, and the appearing of Yashua in power and glory to burn up all that is not of Him and establish His Kingdom. Notice especially the fulfillment of the wondrous prophecy that Yashua will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matt 3:11)

"For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched, and to a blazing fire, and to darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words [the giving of the law] which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.' So terrible was the sight that Moses said, 'I am full of fear and trembling.' But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the festal gathering [Feast] and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking [the Holy Spirit of Jesus]! For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them from earth [Moses], much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven [Jesus]. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven!' [Jesus' glorious return at the end of the age] and this expression, 'Yet once more...' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; *for our God is a consuming [baptizing] fire.*" (Heb 12:18-29)

THE SPRING FEASTS, INCLUDING PENTECOST, ARE ALL FULFILLED BY CHRIST

The Spring Feasts were all completely, precisely, and beautifully fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ at His first appearing. He is the **Passover Lamb** of God, whose shed blood was sprinkled on the altar for our sins. He is the **Unleavened Bread** which came down from heaven in untainted purity and perfection, and He is the 'New Wine' of the Kingdom, the freshly squeezed unfermented fruit of the vine symbolizing the New Covenant in His sinless blood. We must eat His body (the unleavened bread) and drink His blood (the fresh grape juice) to have (spiritual) life within ourselves. (Jn 6:53-58; Matt 26:26-29)

No one who is used to old fermented wine of the world likes the new wine, which is why it must be put into new (renewed) wineskins. (Lk 5:37-39) This symbolizes the transformation process we must undergo before we can (or want to) receive the Holy Spirit.

And finally, Jesus is the **Firstfruits**; our promise of Resurrection Life: "... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we only have hope in Christ in this life, we of all men are most miserable. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then the end, when He [Christ] delivers up the Kingdom..." (1 Cor 15:17-24)

But **Pentecost** is the best. We sometimes don't think of Pentecost as being fulfilled by Jesus Christ, since it was the Holy Spirit coming down as flaming tongues of fire upon the believers waiting in the temple at Jerusalem, resulting in the virtual explosion of the gospel to "turn the world upside down." (Actually right side up – Acts 2:1 ff; 17:6) But don't forget what Jesus told His disciples at His last Passover meal. "In My Father's temple are many dwelling places... I go to prepare a dwelling place for you... I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also... I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to [God] the Father but through Me... I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper [Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor, Tutor], that He may be with you forever, that is, the [Holy] Spirit of Truth... you know Him, because He dwells with you [Jesus the man], and will be in you [Jesus the Spirit]. I will not leave you as orphans; *I will come to you...* In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him. *We will come to him and make Our abode [dwelling place] with him.*" (Jn 14, excerpts)

This passage has been tortured by many who apply it only to the Second Coming, the rapture, and eternal mansions of glory in heaven. But I beg to differ. That is an old Roman Catholic fable which we Protestants never quite got around to protesting. Read the entire context, chapters 14-17. Jesus is not talking about coming again at the rapture; He is talking about coming again in the Person of the Holy Spirit and dwelling in the hearts of His saints. The 'mansion' Jesus is preparing for us is the temple of our own human hearts, where He wants to reign as Lord over our lives by His Holy Spirit. The word in verse 2 which is mistranslated 'mansions' in the KJV is the same word translated 'abode' in verse 23: "We will come to him and make our abode with him." Our hope for a lavish mansion in glory is not from God. His Plan of the Ages is for a many-membered temple where He can display His glory!

Jesus in the flesh was very limited. He had to leave physically (Jn 16:7) so He could return in the unlimited power of His Holy Spirit within the heart of each believer. He returned at Pentecost, not to rapture the saints to heaven, but to offer them His abundant heavenly Life (in the midst of tribulation and persecution) here on earth. "... I am come that they might have life, and that more abundantly. I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (Jn 10:10-11)

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' ... Abide in Me, and I in you... I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing ... If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask what you wish and it shall be done for you... when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth... These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. *In the world, you will have tribulation*, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (Jn 14:26 through 16:33, excerpts)

Did you notice the fulfillment of Pentecost here? *Pentecost is the giving of the law*. But the only law for the saint is the leading of the Holy Spirit within, for as long as we are being led by the Spirit we are not under the (old) law. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." (Rom 8:1-2) "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; *against such things there is no law*." (Gal 5:22)

Nowhere in Scripture, especially *John 14 – 17*, does God say the Holy Spirit was given to zap us into instant holiness and snatch us up to heaven to live in luxurious mansions of glory for all eternity. Just the opposite. Jesus' concluding prayer was, "... I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep [guard] them from the evil one... I do not ask in behalf of these [12 disciples] alone, but for [all] those also who believe in Me through their word [that's us]; that they also may be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be [dwell] in Us; *that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me*. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me... I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them." (17:15-26) That is Resurrection Life! He wants us to dwell in the heaven of His presence right now, continually, right here on earth, as His ambassadors!

Jesus prayed, "... *that the world may believe...*" (v 21) The world cannot see Jesus now, at least not in the body. But the world should see the Christ in us, and believe! "After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me..." (Jn 14:19) "As they observed the confidence of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling to recognize that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13)

Now we are beginning to get a true picture of Pentecost. It is much more than just the giving of the Law, and more even than the filling of the Holy Spirit. It is the coming of the Lord Jesus Himself to sit on the throne of our lives and rule there as King! In one very real sense, the fulfillment of Pentecost was the **Second Coming of Jesus**, to His own disciples, anyway. Perhaps His return in power and glory at the end of the age should be given a different name, such as His 'Second Appearing' (in the flesh).

Consider the evidence. Jesus promised, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom." (Matt 16:28) This promise is commonly understood to be fulfilled at the Transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John got to see Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in their glorified bodies. But how did that show Jesus in the glory of His Kingdom? His Kingdom will be one of great power and authority, with us bowing to His Lordship and doing His will, and with miracles and signs following. Seeing Jesus chatting with Moses and Elijah seems to me a rather lame fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. But look at the disciples at Pentecost. That's a far better fulfillment!

"Behold, days are coming, declares YHWH, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put My Law within them, and on their heart I will write it. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:10; Ezek 36:26-28) Just what is being written on our hearts? Jesus is the Logos, the Word of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jn 1: 1-4, 14) *So who is the Holy Spirit who came into the believers at Pentecost?*

Yes, He is Jesus, the Word of God, written on our hearts as the sign and seal of the New Covenant.

John the Baptist said, "... He who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to remove His sandals. He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matt 3:11) When was that prophecy fulfilled? Not during Jesus' earthly ministry. It was actually fulfilled at Pentecost, when Jesus baptized the gathering of about 120 believers with the Holy Spirit appearing on them as tongues of fire, with a noise like a violent windstorm. (Acts 1:14 ff; 2:1-21)

The disciples couldn't really follow the King very well while He was on earth. They tried, but for the most part failed Him miserably. But after His death and resurrection, Jesus taught them for forty days, "... speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God. And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised... 'For John baptized with water, *but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit* not many days from now.'" And when they asked Him if He would then restore the physical kingdom to Israel, Jesus responded, "... It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; *but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*; and you shall be My witnesses..." (Acts 1:3-8)

Jesus told His disciples, "... I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away [to the Father]; for if I do not go away, the Helper [the Holy Spirit] shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment... when He, the [Holy] Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all Truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears [from Me] He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me, for He shall take of Mine and shall disclose it to you." (Jn 16:7-14)

"Now the Lord [Jesus Christ – see v 14] is the [Holy] Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror [dimly] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the [Holy] Spirit." (2 Cor 3:17-18) Jesus said, "... 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 believed in Him were to receive; for the [Holy] Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (Jn 7:37-39) (Most translations add "given" to make it read "the Spirit was not yet given," but it is not in the original. *The Person and function of the Holy Spirit* "was not yet," and could not be until Jesus ascended to heaven and was glorified. Apart from Jesus He didn't even exist!) So who is that flow of 'rivers of living water' within us, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit? "... Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal Life." (Jn 4:14)

We are too quick to divide the Trinity up into separate persons. But God is one. I believe that Jesus is the fullest possible manifestation of the eternal Father into our realm of time and space, and that every mention of God working within time refers to Jesus. Yes, Father God created. Yes, it is the Kingdom of God. Yes, it is God's Holy Spirit. But always through Jesus, for there is no other way to the Father but through Jesus Christ.

Father God created the universe through Jesus. Father God rules the universe through King Jesus. Father God sent His Holy Spirit into the womb of the virgin Mariam (Mary) and Yashua haMashiach (Jesus the Christ, the Messiah) became flesh, with the Holy Spirit so woven into His human nature that He always did the will of His Father. (Jn 5:30; 14:10) Jesus was glorified and returned to the Father so He could send His Spirit to be likewise woven into our own human natures. Yes, that same Spirit that the Father placed in fullness upon Jesus, He places upon us.

There is only "one Spirit." (Eph 4:4) "The Lord is that Spirit." (2 Cor 3:17) "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God [the Father] dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [Jesus], he does not belong to Him." (Rom 8:9) "And because you are sons, God [the Father] has sent forth **the Spirit of His Son** into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4:6) Jesus fulfilled His promise "I will come to you." (Jn 14:18) and "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode [dwelling place] with him." (v 23) by sending us the Holy Spirit. (v 26)

Did you know that the 'Second Coming' of Jesus is called 'second' in only one Scripture? "Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes the judgment; so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation." (Heb 9:28) This passage is talking about what we commonly call the Second Coming of Jesus in great power and glory. This agrees with the Old Testament prophecies which reveal the coming Redeemer in two ways, as a suffering servant and as the King of kings. Hosea 6 even pinpoints the timing: first at the 'latter rain' of Passover, then second at the 'former rain' of Tabernacles. But notice the wording: it says He shall **appear** a second time (implying in physical, bodily form). The Greek root here is 'optomai' from which we get our word 'optical'. It means to see with the eye, gaze (as at something remarkable); physical appearing. Other examples are: "... keep the commandment without stain or reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Tim 6:14) "... Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead, according to His appearing..." (2 Tim 2:1) His Holy Spirit cannot be seen with the physical eyes.

When we take that word 'second' and try to create a doctrine of 'the Second Coming' of Christ, we have a bit of a scriptural conflict. Jesus sent His disciples out with, "Do not go off to the Gentiles... but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand!' ... It is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you... truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, *until the Son of Man comes*." (Matt 10:1-23) Sounds like Jesus told His disciples that He would return before they finished reaching the cities of Israel. *Did He?*

Yes. Jesus came in power and glory at Pentecost, when He baptized His disciples with the Holy Spirit and fire. Everyone saw the fire and heard the mighty rushing wind! That was certainly the ‘Second Coming’ for them! “You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you’ ... And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass, you may believe.” (Jn 14:28) Jesus was speaking of Pentecost. When it came to pass, they did indeed believe! *So is that the ‘Second Coming of Christ’?*

“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared [optomai – seen with your eyes, visibly, physically] to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17) It is the same Greek word used in Hebrews 9:28. *So maybe that was the ‘Second Coming of Christ’?*

Of course not. We obviously have a misunderstanding here. Jesus has appeared many times to many people throughout the ages, sometimes visibly, and He will continue to appear to all who diligently seek Him. That passage in Hebrews 9 is talking about something different; read the whole chapter. It is talking, not just about Jesus coming, but specifically His coming as our High Priest.

His priestly function is accomplished in two stages. First, He appeared as our sin offering, to pay the legal debt of our sin on the cross. After death He rose victorious over sin and death, making salvation from the guilt and power of sin available to everyone who believes. But that is not sufficient for salvation. We have it by faith, yet still our physical bodies wither under the power of sin and death. We are not yet “saved to the uttermost.” (Heb 7:24-8:2) *No one can be saved until He returns, physically, to swallow up death in victory by changing our mortal bodies to inherit immortality.* (1 Cor 15:49-57) That is all the ‘second’ in Hebrews 9 means. We cannot be saved by His first physical appearing; it takes two! At His second physical appearing we will receive in reality all that which we have received until then only by faith: “... our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” (Rom 8:23) That is still in the future. With that, the redemption story will be complete.

Yes, there is no doubt that the second time Jesus appears, physically, *in His priestly function*, will be at the end of the age when He comes to take His Bride. That’s what everyone labels the ‘Second Coming’. And now you see why I prefer to call it His ‘Second Appearing’.

But did you notice – the first of these is long past, and the second may be far in the future. I maintain that something as important as Jesus’ coming ought to be a bit more personal. Let’s look at it from the perspective of the three Feasts. Jesus’ First Coming for me is at Passover, as the Lamb of God who takes away my sin. Jesus’ Second Coming for me is at Pentecost, when He fills me with His Holy Spirit. Jesus’ Third Coming for me is at Tabernacles, when He comes to dwell in me as my God and King. Each of these ought to be in the present continuous tense.

Thus Jesus has come millions of times since Pentecost, in the Person of the Holy Spirit within everyone who believes and receives Him into their hearts at their own personal Pentecost. In fact, Jesus the ‘pre-incarnate Christ’ came many times before His ‘First Coming’ too. “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel [clearly speaking of Jesus’ coming]. *His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.*” (literally from everlasting or from the beginning of time – Micah 5:6) Jesus has been coming and going since time began!

Jesus appeared to Abram first in visions, then when he was 99 years old as El Shaddai, God Almighty, who makes and keeps covenants, and later as an angel from heaven. He appeared to Isaac as the God of Abraham at Beersheba. He appeared to Jacob as a wrestler, and to Joseph in his dreams. He appeared to Moses first in a burning bush, then later He talked with him face to face as a man talks with his friend, and even showed him His glory while hiding him in the cleft of the rock. (Ex 33) He appeared to Joshua as a military commander with drawn sword. He appeared to Israel as a cloud and pillar of fire, while Pharaoh and his army saw only thick darkness. He appeared to Gideon as an angel, to Isaiah as One high, exalted, sitting on a throne, and to Ezekiel as bright sparks of fire flitting amongst wheels within wheels.

So was Jesus’ ‘First Coming’ at the incarnation? No, obviously not, though it certainly was His first physical coming in His priestly function to offer and be our sacrifice for sin. His actual first coming was when God spoke the universe into existence at the beginning of time, shouting, “Let there be Light!” and stepped from eternity into our realm of time and space.

I got many of these insights from J. Preston Eby. I quote from his Kingdom Bible Study *Looking for His Appearing*. “Like a choir of many voices and as the sound of many waters, the testimony of the Word of God resounds with abundant, stunning, and inescapable evidence that the coming of Christ is not a single event, but includes many different manifestations. His coming to us is a many-sided experience. To multitudes He appears as Savior. They find Him at the crossroads of their lives. He becomes their salvation, but they never venture any deeper to know Him intimately. They have only a superficial knowledge of Him. To others He appears as chief Shepherd and Bridegroom. These hear His voice, are moved by His love, and follow on to know Him in deeper measures of intimacy and union. To others He appears as a thief. He comes into their world uninvited and unannounced; He overtakes them unexpectedly, breaks up their lifestyle and smashes their religious games. And unto others He appears as fire, consuming their hay, wood, and stubble, eliminating by the Spirit of Burning all that is of self and not of God. The coming of the Lord is as many-faceted as the most dazzling crystal or the most beautiful diamond known to man.”

Pastor Eby then goes on to tell of the ancient rabbis' confusion regarding prophecies of Messiah's coming, even to the point of thinking there might be two Messiahs, one the suffering Servant, the other the conquering King. He then asks us the question – Which of these is the true 'Second Coming' to which the saints look forward with eager expectation: When He comes as a thief or with a great shout and trumpet sound? When He comes as the former and later rains unto the earth or in flaming fire? When He comes to His holy temple or to the Mount of Olives? When He comes in the clouds, or in the air, or on a white horse, or as the Sun of Righteousness, or as the dawn, or as the Morning Star, or as the refiner's fire or the fuller's soap, or as the chief Shepherd, or for every eye to behold Him, or as the Bridegroom, or as the King, or as the righteous Judge of all the earth, or to His saints, or for His saints, or with His saints, or in His saints?

The answer is obvious: they are all scriptural, so they are all true. Further, they are not conflicting, for there can be no contradictions in God's perfect Word. But when taken all together, these promises ought to shake up our common doctrine that the Second Coming of Christ is just one single, future event. It seems clear that these are also speaking of the progressive revelation of the coming of Christ in as many manifestations as there are people, with each eye beholding Him in that unique way which he or she needs to confront and judge sins, break bonds, expose lies, reveal truth, heal wounds, meet needs, open eyes and ears and soften hearts – whatever each person needs to bring him or her to the point of accepting or rejecting the claim of God on his or her life.

So for us, the Second Coming of Christ must be when we meet Him at our own personal Pentecost, as we invite Him to begin preparing us for His physical return at the end of the age when He will complete His High Priestly work. Jesus Christ is the final fulfillment of all the Spring Feasts, including both Passover and Pentecost, right now. He fulfills them in us, even as He prepares us for that final Feast, Tabernacles, when He will return for us. The world will still call that His 'Second Coming', for that is all they know. But for the saints, that will be but the culmination of many comings as He draws us close to Himself.

I cannot deny that that future event will be the greater fulfillment, when Jesus shall come with power and glory at the end of the age to marry His purified Bride. But can we not also see that Jesus promised to return to His disciples, and fulfilled that promise (on a limited basis) to them at Pentecost? Only when we see that will we realize – He is still fulfilling that same promise to everyone who accepts it by faith, meets Him at Pentecost, and receives Him to dwell in the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit within, in response to His command: "Abide in Me, and I in you." (Jn 15:4) That is Pentecost! Christ was with His disciples, and now He abides within them – within us! "Christ in you, the hope of glory!" (Col 1:27)

Christ the almighty God deliberately limited Himself when He came to earth as the infant Jesus. "Who, although He existed in the form [nature] of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [held on to], but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant..." (Phil 2:6-7) He had all authority and power in the universe but He willingly gave it up to enter a very limited human body. In the weakness of His human flesh He defeated all the powers of sin and darkness by the power of the Holy Spirit within, paying the price for our redemption by His death. He rose again, showing the greatness of His victory.

Jesus could have stayed on earth, made Himself King, and ruled His enemies with a rod of iron. But no, He went away, back to His Father. *Why did He go away?* He warned His disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." (Jn 16:7-8) The apostle Paul gives us the reason, "He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens *that He might fill all things.*" (Eph 4:10)

The weak Jesus of the flesh, limited by time and space, went away. The disciples who once followed Him around said, "... though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has now committed to us the word of reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:16-19) Yes, *Christ Limited* went away, but He returned as *Christ Unlimited*, head of a many-membered body, to whom He has now entrusted His great ministry of reconciliation. He is no longer limited by time or space. He is the Holy Spirit, able, willing, and eager to fill all things at all times and places. "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!" (v 20)

Once again sleepy church-goers got snookered into putting everything into the past or future. They believe Jesus first came as a babe at Bethlehem, and His Second Coming will be at the end of the age. They know only the Jesus of history and His promises of future glory from the dusty pages of a storybook. They believe the words of the story, and hope that someday Jesus will come again, to restore, comfort, heal, cleanse, empower, and perfect them. So they miss His present-tense coming: "I will not leave you as orphans [comfortless]; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more, but you will behold Me! Because I live [present tense] you shall live also. In that day [Pentecost] you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." (Jn 14:20) Yes, dear Reader, this story of redemption is much bigger than we have been taught, and it is for right now!

Why is this significant? Am I making a big deal out of nothing? I don't think so. The most dangerous heresy takes enough truth to make it believable, and mixes it with just enough error to destroy our relationship with God. Consider the source of our traditional doctrine of the Second Coming. During the time of the Roman Catholic ascendancy to power in the governments of Europe, they needed doctrines to bind the people to the church, but still keep them from God. They used a combination of fear of judgment and hope of ultimate salvation, mixed with religious exercises and traditions designed to perpetuate these hopes and fears. But if you analyze their doctrines, you will find that it was all put into the past or the future; there was nothing at all for the present. They knew that they must keep the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the people at all costs, for if anyone were to be filled with and ruled by the Holy Spirit, that person might then be set free from the bondage of their religious system.

Their goal was power and control. If the Spirit of God were to come as He did at Pentecost and fill the common people, they would lose control. So they preached a First Coming (long past) and a Second Coming (far future), with nothing in between. They would not be filled with the Holy Spirit themselves, and they prevented 'their' people from even knowing that there is a Holy Spirit who wants to dwell in them, inspire them, and guide them into all truth. Normally we will not accept a major doctrine based on only one Scripture, but how many of us have never even stopped to question the long established doctrine of the 'Second Coming', based on the improper understanding of Hebrews 9:28?

Having said that, I now must backtrack a bit. There is another scriptural concept that seems on the surface to support the Roman Catholic view of the Second Coming. "He [Jesus], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet," (Heb 10:12-13. This theme, originally from Psalm 110:1, is repeated in Heb 1:3; 8:1; 12:2; Mk 16:19, etc). How do Roman Catholics handle that one? They want you to believe that Jesus is stuck up there in heaven until the Second Coming, pleading with an angry Father on our behalf. (They get that from, "... He ever lives to make intercession for them..." – Heb 7:25) This crude concept is so far beneath our loving, almighty, triune God it would be laughable if it wasn't so tragic. It reminds me of the book by J.B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small*.

Well, my God is omnipresent. He is big enough to be seated in power and glory at the right hand of the Father in heaven and at the same time come to dwell within every humble, contrite heart who will receive Him. And as to His intercession, God is one. He is not up there arguing with Himself over us! His intercession is directed at us, not at the Father. He covers us with His grace, bathes us in His prayers, and woos us to Himself with His infinite love.

According to Jesus the function of the Holy Spirit is, "... He shall bear witness of Me." (Jn 15:26) "... He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." (Jn 14:26) and "... He will guide you into all Truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears [from Me] He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me, for He shall take of Mine and disclose it to you." (Jn 16:13-14) God knows we earthbound 'human beans' have great difficulty relating to Him, because He is Spirit, so He sent us His Holy Spirit for the specific purpose of revealing Himself to our hearts as a person: Jesus!

We can relate to a person. God is a personal God. He wants to have a personal relationship with us. This will never happen until we begin to realize that we are indwelt, not just by 'a spirit', but by the very Person of Jesus Christ our Lord, communicated / revealed to us by His very own Spirit. This is easier to accept if you just become as a little child, ask Jesus to come and live in your heart, and then believe that He did. Sometimes adults work too hard at theologizing it away. We forget that unless we come as a child, we can't even enter God's Kingdom. (Matt 18:3-6)

At Pentecost the Old Covenant finally passed away. The New Covenant, the Holy Spirit writing God's Law on our hearts, came fully into effect, and is on-going in us today. There is a big difference between us and the Old Covenant believers. In a sense they could be filled with the Spirit of God, but only under very limited conditions; for example filled with the spirit of skill for a certain task (Ex 35:31 – Bezalel, skill for building the tabernacle) or power (Judges 14-16 – Samson); filled with the spirit of wisdom for leading (Deut 34:9 – Joshua) or for prophesying or writing Scripture. (Micah 3:8) However, under the Old Covenant, such filling of God's Spirit rarely worked much of a heart / life transformation. For example, the Scripture says that the Spirit of YHWH came upon Samson mightily (Judg 15:14), but Samson never received a new nature. Only seven verses later (16:1) he finds a harlot and goes in to her. Why? The Spirit of God moved him, but never transformed his heart.

But at Pentecost something changed. Believers are now more than filled, we are baptized (literally immersed) with the Holy Spirit and fire, to become our Life. It becomes a fire within us, burning up the flesh nature, ruling over our soul, and transforming us, step-by-step, into the very nature and glory of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within us that is writing the Law of God upon our hearts and giving us a new nature that loves to obey it. This is far more than being empowered for a task or inspired to write a book. This is lifting us up into a personal relationship with the God of love, changing us from glory to glory into His own image, teaching us His ways, and making us His ambassadors to work with Him in reconciling the world back to Himself. That is the Second Coming of Christ at Pentecost!

So thank God for Pentecost! The law which came at Mount Sinai, with fire, thunderings, earthquakes, and a mighty trumpet blast, was but a dim picture of the Law which comes by the baptism into the Holy Spirit and fire, writing His Word on our hearts, transforming us with infinite power from scared, foolish, failures into children of God, willing and able to do His will. "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ... written not with ink, but with the [Holy] Spirit of the Living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts. And such confidence we have... Not that we are adequate [able] in ourselves to consider anything [good] as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who made us adequate [competent, qualified] servants [ministers] of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives Life." (2 Cor 3:2-6)

Jesus, while on earth, could have sinned. He was fully human as well as fully divine. He was "... tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15) The devil came to Him at the beginning of His ministry with the full expectation of getting him to fall to temptation. (Lk 4:2 ff) Some people think that "of course He didn't sin. He is God, and God can't sin!" But it is not that simple. Yes, He is and always was God. But when He became man, He willingly laid aside His royal power and authority and humbled himself to become just like us, in all the weakness and frailty of human flesh. (Phil 2:7 ff) Why? Because He is much more than our sacrifice for sin.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one comes to the Father but through Him. (Jn 14:6) He not only described the way to the Father while He was on earth, He also lived it. He was constantly in prayer, in communication with the Father, and He often went alone by Himself to pray. "He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." (Lk 5:16) "... He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." (Luke 6:12; see also 9:18, 28; Matt 14:23) The result of all that prayer was that He did not live for Himself, He only did what He saw the Father doing. (Jn 5:17-30) From the time of His baptism, when the Spirit came upon Him like a dove (Matt 3:16), Jesus lived His earthly life totally led by the Holy Spirit. He had a human nature, but He never allowed it to rule Him. Every choice He made was to let the Holy Spirit rule over His human nature.

He did that to show us the way to the Father. Yes, our salvation is by faith in His perfect sacrifice, but salvation is and must be but the first step in getting to know Him personally as our Way, Truth, and Life. "My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father: Jesus Christ the Righteous. He Himself is the propitiation [atonement] for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.*"

"The one who says 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. *By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*" (1 Jn 2:1-6)

Faith and repentance, water baptism, and being filled with the Holy Spirit are just the first steps of salvation. *But learning to know Him intimately so that we keep His commandments and walk in the same manner as He walked is the goal of salvation.* While on earth, Jesus showed us how to do it and demonstrated that it can be done. Then He returned to the Father and sent His own Holy Spirit to live within us, to give us the power and the desire to walk in His footsteps. Now we can claim the promise of Jesus that "... he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me [an intimate love] you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is, the Spirit of Truth..." (Jn 14:12-17)

Please note that we are not exactly talking about keeping the law here, at least not the Old Covenant law. When I say, "keep His commandments," I am talking about the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1), the law of love (1 Jn 3:23), the law of simply walking as Jesus walked, led by the Spirit of God. "For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. These are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things you please. *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the [Old Covenant] law.*" (Gal 5:13-18) We are not saved by obeying the Holy Spirit, but those who are saved are being led (or at least are learning to be led) by the Holy Spirit. We may not always hear His gentle whisper, but when we do hear, we are learning to obey!

Did you know that a large part of the old law given by Moses on Mount Sinai was instructions on building the tabernacle in which God would dwell among them? Well, guess what? The Law written by the Holy Spirit on our hearts does the same thing, only this time it is a tabernacle not made with hands, but rather a temple of living stones of the many-membered body of Christ; "... you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 2:5)

So for all those who are eagerly looking forward to the glory of the 'Second Coming' of Christ, I urge you to turn your focus inward. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared *with the glory that is to be revealed in us*. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of [the Lord at His glorious 'Second Coming'? No, no!] *the sons of God*." (Rom 8:18-19) "All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." (v 14)

"Now the Lord [Jesus] is the [Holy] Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror [dimly] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the [Holy] Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18) Yes, He is indeed coming in great power and glory for His Bride, but that is not just a one time event at the end of the age. That is a continuous process as He unifies and purifies the many members of His Bride.

"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness!' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels [clay pots], that the surpassing greatness of this power may be of God and not from ourselves. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, *that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh*." (2 Cor 4:6-11) That's it! That is the entire Christian life in a nutshell.

"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." (Gal 2:20) We do not have to wait for the end of the age to see the glory of God revealed in Christ Jesus the Messiah. No, what we need to do right now is to allow the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ to shine in our own hearts, exposing the self-centered nature that lurks there and putting it to death on the very cross on which He died. As we die daily to that self-nature, He gives us grace to live daily in His divine nature. There is glory! There is power! There is love, peace, joy, and... every godly thing, because it is His own nature and character, His own life, being lived out through us. This is a life of repentance – repentance of operating in that human-nature with self as lord, and repentance of eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is a life of discipline, chastening, as we allow Him to correct us, teach us, develop our trust in Him, do whatever it takes to bring us totally under His sovereign Lordship. And it is a life of power and glory, as He restores to us the relationship He had with Adam before the Fall, and as He lives out His life in and through us.

It is hard for us to receive this message. First, it is hard because we see so few (if any) around us actually walking, breathing, living out the life of Christ in them. We are too quick to see the human flaws and so slow to see the Christ in one another! We know that "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." (1 Cor 15:50) So we tend to put it off for the future. "Just as we have borne the image of the earthly [now], we shall also [in the future] bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Cor 15:49, in the context of the changes that will only occur at the rapture.) And second, because there are too many who have boldly proclaimed the power and glory of the risen Christ in them *in their own arrogance and pride*, thereby becoming antichrist, deceiving many, and dragging them into a man-centered cult. It is difficult (humanly impossible) to reconcile the Christian character of meekness and humility with the awesome power and glory of the risen Christ.

But wait. Jesus Himself said: "Abide in Me, and I in you," "He who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do..." (Jn 15:4 & 14:12) "The glory which Thou hast given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me..." (Jn 17:22-23) This is not some future pie-in-the-sky kind of thing. From this and many other passages I get the distinct impression that Jesus wants to live His life through us right now, in power and glory, with greater works, bringing us into unity with Him and each other. Then the world will see Jesus in us, recognize that He is indeed the true Messiah sent from God, and be awed!

I wish I could set myself up as a good example of this, but alas, I don't seem to be walking in a whole lot of power and glory right now, either. Sorry. But I still insist, "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar." (Rom 3:4) Just because none of us have fully manifested the nature of Christ in us yet, doesn't mean it's impossible. It simply means that God is not finished with us yet.

But I am a Believer, with a capital B. God is not only fully able to do all that He has promised, but I believe that He is actually in the process of doing it in me. As I remain faithful to walk in the little that I have so far, to do what He has set before me to the best of my (so far rather limited) abilities, He will take what I have committed to Him and make it turn out for the glory of His Kingdom to His praise. This is, after all, a walk by faith. Regardless of what I see by my human (flawed, limited) vision, I still believe that He is bringing glory to Himself, even through me, by taking everything that I do, all that I have committed to Him, (yes, that includes my sitting down and writing this book), and working it all out in His infinite sovereign power to further His Kingdom and be a blessing to His people. If I may be a bit presumptuous here dear Reader, I believe He is doing the same through you or you would not have read this far.

Let's review our Lord's full name: the Lord Jesus Christ – Adonai Yashua haMashiach – Curio Yesu Christos – **the Lord**, the Master, Boss, King, Owner, Father, expressing nobility and authority, honor, dignity, majesty, and power; **Jesus**, YHWH Saves, Jehovah is our salvation, the Savior; **Christ**, the Messiah, God's Anointed One, Anointed to be our High Priest, the Promised One, He who is to come to anoint His saints to be kings and priests unto Him. Three names in one Person; each name has a distinct meaning and fulfillment shown in the Feasts.

Yashua came in **Passover** as **Savior**. Yashua comes in **Pentecost** as **Christ**, the **Anointed One**, baptizing with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and fire. Yashua will come at the end of the age in great power and glory in the Feast of **Tabernacles** as **Lord**, before whom every knee shall bow. Then we who have loved His appearing shall tabernacle forever with Him as our **King**.

Pentecost is controversial, especially when I talk about a 'Second Coming' of Christ at Pentecost. Pentecostals will jump up and down with glee at my obvious reference to the 'second work of grace' which they believe only follows salvation and is evidenced by speaking in tongues. Well, I've been there, too. I spent seven years in a Pentecostal church, and spent months praying earnestly for the gift of tongues. God met me, and blessed me, and I don't regret a minute of that. But I have come to see the shallowness and superficiality of most of the Pentecostal emphasis on tongues. Yes, a baby often speaks unintelligibly for a while, but eventually he'd better learn to talk. If tongues are not communicating, if they are just a noisy babble, they are probably not accomplishing a whole lot for the Kingdom. Yes, it may be an emotional high and a personal blessing to be speaking a 'heavenly language', and there is nothing wrong with expressing our emotions, but I remind you that the tongues spoken in Acts 2 were actual languages. The disciples boldly spoke the Word of God to foreigners who had gathered for the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, so they could understand God's plan of salvation. (v 6 ff) I therefore vigorously assert that tongues as used most often today are not a reliable indicator of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Nor for that matter are any of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit: even uncanny words of knowledge, amazing prophecies, and miracle healings can be and have been faked by the enemy and used in pride, hypocrisy, and deception to manipulate and wow the crowds.

What is a reliable indicator of being filled with the Holy Spirit? Only one thing: *The Word of God being written on our heart*. When we show evidence of the transformed nature – loving God and His Word, loving His people, His laws, His wisdom, and His ways, hating the "deeds of the flesh" but developing the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:19-26) in our lives, and using any of the gifts of the Spirit when and as He directs (1 Cor 12:11) yet in humility giving God the glory – then we have met Yashua at Pentecost – then He has filled us with His Spirit and fulfilled the Feast in us.

One thing tends to bother me when I hear the babel of tongues at an enthusiastic Pentecostal assembly – it seems to be going backwards. The tower of Babel, where speech was confused and people couldn't understand each other, was over 5000 years ago. I don't want to go back there!

The true Pentecost moves forward. In the book of Acts, the apostles spoke to the multitude of visitors from all around the world, and they understood, in the languages of their birth. That's not going back to Babel! That is a giant step forward toward that great Feast of Tabernacles when "I will give to the peoples purified lips [literally, "I will change to the peoples a clear lip," an obvious reference to clearly understood speech], that all of them may call on the name of YHWH [in one unified voice], to serve Him shoulder to shoulder..." (Zeph 3:9) When Yashua returns for His Bride He will remove the curse of Babel, so that all people, all over the earth, may call on the name of YHWH in the same pure language as Adam and Eve spoke before the fall, when God Himself called everything 'very good!'

We tend to forget the tremendous difficulty that the language barrier has caused the missionaries to foreign countries. Pentecost begins to remove that barrier. I believe that the filling of the Holy Spirit will do so more and more as we near that great day of the return of YHWH for His Bride. Missionaries, evangelists, listen up. Are you called to a foreign country? I urge you, don't waste your time struggling, agonizing over the language, until you have first wrestled with God for the filling of His Holy Spirit. I assure you, you cannot be effective in winning souls to Christ unless you are being led by the Spirit of God, *walking in the true Pentecost!*

And the 'seven Sabbaths'? Does it really take fifty days after salvation to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I believe no. Seven is God's perfect number. Seven Sabbaths simply means that 'God will do it in His perfect time'. From the Father's eternal perspective, everything is right now. Even at the first moment of salvation, those who open up their hearts to the Lord are filled with His Spirit, and He comes and tabernacles with them.

How much of the Law of God has been written on their hearts at that time? Probably very little.

But that is OK. Their hearts are transformed and the writing has begun, and the little that they have is very new and all-consuming to them. Some time later (hopefully soon) they meet the Lord again in a new and wonderful way, and He transforms them again, and writes some more of His Law on their hearts, and comes and dwells with them in an even closer way. They may be ecstatic, and even speak in tongues or evidence other supernatural gifts. So now have they arrived? Is that all there is? Heavens no! They are still just babies taking their first wobbly steps in the Kingdom! Not from their perspective, of course. They see how incredibly much they have received and think themselves stuffed full of God's Spirit, as at a great feast.

But others who have walked with God for many years look at them both with joy at their new, hot, fervent bridal love, and with sadness at how much still lies before them, how little they understand and appreciate the principles and ways of God, and how much of the law and nature of God remains to be written on their heart.

Salvation, being filled with the Spirit, and walking with God is really not a one-time thing, for it all comes from Him who dwells in eternity. The true Christian is constantly being saved from sin, constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit, and constantly dwelling and walking with God. And every time he grows a little, matures, and learns wisdom through the last meeting with God, his own capacity is expanded, so as God fills him afresh he has more of God than he ever had before.

But mine is not to criticize. If in the perfection of time ('seven Sabbaths') the Holy Spirit directs you to fellowship in a Pentecostal style assembly as He did me, then go for it. I know it helped deepen my walk with God. Like I said, I don't regret a minute of the seven years my family spent there. At the very least it strengthened my faith in the God who is able to do abundantly beyond all I could ask or think, the God who still does work miracles, even through His humble servants – and yes, even through me. But I'm also glad the Lord led us out and put us where we are now. And in the future, I hope to always find myself exactly where He has led me, for He is Lord.

So here's to all you dear folks who are looking for the 'Second Coming' of Christ in a rapture to snatch you up to the heavenlies before the tribulation. He has already come! He has already fulfilled the Feast! He has already "raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus." (Eph 2:6) The tribulation has been around for a long time and it will no doubt continue getting worse, but it cannot touch us who "dwell in the secret place of the Most High." (See all of Psalm 91.)

It is ironic. I preach so strongly against the secret pre-trib rapture heresy, yet I so fervently believe in a different 'secret pre-trib rapture' – Jesus secretly coming within each saint in the Person of the Holy Spirit, empowering us to live continually, abundantly, in the glorious heaven of His presence, thus enabling us to live triumphantly right here through whatever tribulations are headed our way.

And do I look down on the baby Christians who still spend much of their worship time babbling in ecstatic utterances? Actually, no. After sixty years of walking with God the best I knew how, I've begun to realize how far I have yet to grow, how much of God's infinite Word still needs to be written in my heart, *and what a baby Christian I still am myself*. But praise YHWH, He is able! He will complete and perfect that which He has begun. (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:15) One day Yashua will present me absolutely faultless, blameless, holy, before His heavenly throne with great joy. (Jude 24) He is faithful. *See you there!*

The way the Spring Feasts are kept today, especially Passover, is a delightful mixture of Scripture and tradition. The Passover Seder has been modified many times over thousands of years according to the faith of the celebrants. These traditions vary considerably, even among Jews, especially when Messianic Jews or Gentile Christians have gotten into the act. I will try to combine the best of all these influences into a single story of the Passover Celebration. Many of us have been to Christianized Passover Seders – it is a tremendous blessing and inspiration, isn't it. If you have not, I recommend you do. However, I will tend to lean more toward current traditional Orthodox Jewish celebrations, with comments to give us a clearer picture of the prophetic nature of the Feast. Though this story is obviously fiction, yet something very similar to this has been enacted in orthodox Jewish homes every year for thousands of years.

Seder is a Hebrew word meaning 'order'. The Passover Seder is the traditional order of the responsive readings, prayers, symbolic foods, actions, and songs which have been celebrated by Jews for 3500 years. Though Scripture commands the celebration, it did not dictate the order; thus numerous changes and embellishments have occurred over the centuries. Many of these changes occurred soon after Jesus' death, as the very nature of the sacrificial system was forever altered both by Jesus' death as the Passover Lamb of God, and by the destruction of the temple and all its blood sacrifices 40 years later. I'm sure some of these changes resulted from what Jesus taught His disciples on His last Passover Seder with them. Modern Orthodox Jews, although they may be unwilling to acknowledge Jesus in word, do acknowledge Him in their Passover Seder. We will try to review it just as they have been doing ever since the first century.

But first, a side note. Jewish tradition has a curious conceit regarding Passover: that all the most important events in Jewish history are connected with the Passover season. This includes God's covenant with Abraham and the revelation of the Hebrews' future (Gen 15:12-21); the 'almost' sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22); Lot's supper with the heavenly messengers just before the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19); the crossing of the Jordan and taking of Jericho (Josh 5-6); the loaf of barley bread speaking of the defeat of Midian by Gideon (Judg 7:13); God's destruction of the Assyrians in Hezekiah's day (2 Kin 19:35); the mysterious handwriting on the wall before king Belshazzar the night of the fall of Babylon (Dan 5:5); Queen Esther's fast before going to the king (Esther 4:16); and others. As you can see, Passover is a day of rejoicing for God's deliverance of His people and destruction of their enemies. Thus, it is at the Passover that the prophet Elijah is expected to come, just before the "great and terrible day of YHWH" as foretold in Malachi 4. Though fearful, all good Jews long for this day as the day Messiah will come and "set all things right."

Johnny was outside playing with his little brother, Tommy, when he heard Maria, his mother, call. “Johnny, come in now. It’s time to get the house ready for Passover tomorrow.”

“Awww... Now? Why so soon?”

“So you will have lots of time to ask questions.”

“But I don’t have any questions. I’ve already heard it all a thousand times.”

“Then I’ll give you some questions. Now get in here already. We’ve got a lot of cleaning to do. We have to get the entire house spotless before your father comes home.”

“The whole house?! Why???”

“Good question. I thought you said you didn’t have any questions. We have to make absolutely sure that there is no leaven, not even one speck, in the entire house.”

“OK, Mom, I’m coming. But it sure seems like a waste of time to me.”

And so little Johnny and his mother scrubbed the walls and floor, cleaned out the drawers and shelves, and even took their clothes and laundered them with the pockets turned inside out. As they worked, they talked. Little Johnny learned that the leaven symbolizes the sins of Egypt – their idolatry and worldliness. Getting rid of the leaven is fleeing from that wickedness and its bondage, so we can be free to celebrate the Passover Feast to YHWH.

“But Mom, I’m not a slave in Egypt! So why do I have to worry about their stupid wickedness?”

“For someone who didn’t have any questions, you ask some pretty good ones,” Maria said, kneeling down by Johnny. “According to the ancient rabbis, every good Jew in every generation must consider himself personally freed from Egypt. If you do not cleanse out all the old leaven and celebrate the Feast with unleavened bread, then you’re doomed to get enslaved back into Egypt again. Only by carefully following the traditions of our ancestors all the way back to the first Passover, are we protected from falling into the same sins our forefathers were punished for – and receiving all the same punishments! Now, do you want to just forget all this ‘cleaning out the leaven’ stuff and end up as a slave back in Egypt?”

“Oh, no! Mom, I understand. I’m helping. Let’s get back to work.”

When everything was spotless, Maria again sent Johnny into the back yard to play. He didn’t see his dad sneak in the front door and go throughout the house hiding little bits of bread. He didn’t even know that his dad was home until he was called to dinner. There was his dad, standing by the dinner table with a big grin on his face.

“Dad! Dad! Dad’s home!” shouted little Johnny, dashing up and sailing into his outstretched arms.

“Dad! Why you didn’t call me when you came home?”

“So you would ask questions.” His dad laughed.

Johnny looked up at his dad, then at his mom, and then back to his dad. “You two are in this plot together, aren’t you!” he accused, determined that he would ask no more questions, no matter what.

But after dinner, when it was quite dark outside, his mom lit a candle and turned off all the lights in the house. Johnny’s curiosity began to grow when his dad picked up a feather and a wooden spoon. He looked mysteriously at Johnny and Tommy. “Follow Me!” he said, holding the candle high. Johnny almost blurted out, “What in the world for?” but instead, he bit his tongue.

But his dad answered his unspoken question anyway. “**This is bedikat chametz, the search for the leaven!**” He made it sound like a treasure hunt or something. His little brother jumped up and down with glee, but Johnny scowled and said, “What for? You won’t find any. We just cleaned the whole house. It’s spotless!”

“No matter how carefully you clean, there’s always a few specks that you miss,” his dad responded, giving Johnny a small empty bag. He headed for the living room with Johnny and Tommy tramping along behind him. Maria brought up the rear, with baby Rebekah on her hip.

Sure enough, there was a small piece of bread, right under the corner of the couch. Dad swept it into the wooden spoon with his feather, then dumped it into Johnny’s bag. A short additional search and Dad found another piece in the corner by the door, and another on the hall shelf, and another on the floor under Tommy’s bed... a total of twelve pieces. Each piece was carefully swept into the spoon with the feather, and dumped into the bag. And with each piece, Johnny’s eyes grew bigger and he bit his tongue harder. Finally he could stand it no more. “Dad! Where are these coming from? I know we cleaned here. We got this whole place spotless! Just ask Mom.”

“Yes, my son, I know you did. I put these here just so you would ask questions.” Dad smiled.

“Well, I’m not asking any more questions!” Johnny felt a little bit abused. “But...” and then his curiosity finally got the better of him, “But, why?”

His dad knelt down and gave him a hug. “When you cleaned the house, you got all the leaven you could see, but could you have missed some that were too tiny to see?”

“Yeah, I suppose. But these are big!”

“Well, it is like the sins in our lives. Even when we get rid of all the big sins that everyone can see, there are still some tiny sins left that we can’t see. Later, while we’re not looking, those tiny sins can grow into big sins, maybe even big enough to destroy you. We’ve got to catch them first, and tie them up in your little bag.”

Maria came up with a small piece of cord, and helped Johnny tie the top of his paper bag. “There. Now they can’t get out. It’s time for bed. We’ll take care of it tomorrow.”

The next morning before going off to work, John Cohen explained how in the olden days before the temple was destroyed, the priests would put two large loaves of leavened bread (*chametz*) on top of the outside colonnade of the temple. As long as the loaves remained, the people could eat bread. When they took one loaf down, they must stop eating bread, and when they took the other loaf down it was time to burn all the remaining *chametz* with fire.

As he said that, he held the paper bag over the fireplace until it ignited, then dropped it in to let it burn. He made a big deal of it, enjoying his children’s wide-eyed interest.

He then lifted up his eyes toward the heavens and prayed. “Blessed are you, YHWH our God, King of the Universe, who hallows us with *mitzvot* [commandments and religious duties] and commands us to burn *chametz*. May our sins be purged from our hearts and forever destroyed, just like this leaven was purged from our house and destroyed, never to return. In the cleansing, may we never have to return to the bondage of Egypt, either personally or nationally. And may we all be prepared to celebrate Your Passover with pure hearts and a pure home, so that Your promised blessings of obedience will come upon all of us throughout this coming year. Blessed are you, YHWH King of justice in judgment. Judge us now, we pray, for you alone are able to purify our hearts and free us from our bondage to sin, so when the death angel comes, he will find nothing on us and have to pass over us.”

John said his good-byes and headed out the door. But little Johnny called after him. “Daddy?”

“Yes, son?” John came back in, closing the door.

“Do I have any sins that need to be cleaned out before the Passover?”

“Of course, Johnny. We all do.”

“How can I make sure they are gone? I don’t know how to catch them and put them in a bag.”

“Only YHWH can do that. I’m just the father of this physical house. He is the Father of our spiritual house, the house of our hearts. In the spiritual house, just like in the physical house, the mother can do all the cleaning, but only the Father can capture the last pieces of leaven in the bag and burn them. Do you want Him to?”

“Yeah, I sure do. Very much!”

“Then just tell Him that, and He will.” John started to leave again, then thought better of it, turned back, and gave little Johnny a big hug. “But there are some things you can do to make sure He is willing to listen to you.” The thought of YHWH Himself listening to little Johnny made his eyes grow very big and his heart race.

“First, tell Him what all those sins are, so that He will know that you understand the difference between sin and obedience. Second, tell Him that you are sorry for them, and that you will do your best to turn away from them and never do them again. And third, promise Him that, as best as you are able, you will always obey Him from now on. If you do that, YHWH will hear your prayer just like He hears mine, and will make you perfectly clean for Passover.”

The very thought of YHWH hearing his own prayer just like his dad’s was totally overwhelming to little Johnny. As his dad left for work, he threw himself into his mother’s arms and began to cry. “I can’t do it! I just can’t do it! I’m too little, and YHWH is too big!” he wailed.

“Of course you can do it,” Maria countered. “Your daddy told you to do it. Would your daddy ever tell you to do something that you couldn’t do? Come on; sit up here beside me, and I’ll help you through it.”

Later that day, as little Johnny was helping his mom with the chores, he paused, looking up at her. “Mom. I think He heard me.”

“Of course He did, Johnny. He always hears.”

“No, I mean, I think He did what we asked. He cleaned my house! I feel cleaner inside than I have ever felt before! I think I’m ready for Passover.”

Maria laughed, a beautiful, musical, sparkly laugh, that made everyone else in the house want to laugh with her. “That’s wonderful, Johnny! I’m so happy for you! And, you know – you can do this any time you feel dirty inside. You don’t have to wait for Passover. YHWH loves to hear and answer our prayers for cleaning all the sins out of our lives.”

So the rest of the day as they worked together there was a special closeness between little Johnny and his mother that made them both feel very loved.

They put a clean white lace cloth on the dinner table and then set out their finest dinnerware, including the heirloom crystal goblets and the pure silver candlestick holders. Johnny put new white candles in them, while Maria set out the special Passover plate. Johnny picked a bouquet of fresh flowers from the garden, and Maria arranged them in a vase, and set it in the center of the table. As they worked, Johnny was full of questions, which his mother patiently answered.

“What are these special cups for?”

“Those are goblets for the wine. Wine is red, like the blood of the Passover lamb. Everyone at the table must drink it, even you, because it symbolizes that the lamb had to die to give us life. With four cups of wine, everyone gets happy, so the wine also symbolizes the joyfulness of the celebration.”

“Why did you put this pillow by dad’s place?”

“When we were slaves in Egypt, we were never able to recline and eat a leisurely meal. The pillow symbolizes our freedom and our wealth. The pillow is placed by your dad because he is the head of the house, and if the master of the house is free and wealthy, then everyone in his house, everyone under his protection, is free and wealthy too.”

“What is this beautiful bag with the writing and pictures on it?”

“That’s the **matzo tash**. It is made of linen embroidered with gold threads. The writing says it is only for the three matzos [unleavened bread] we use for the Passover.”

“Why just three? Why not one for each person?”

“Nobody knows why just three. Maybe it has something to do with the middle one, which must be taken out, broken, and hidden. If there were two, or four, there couldn’t be a middle one.”

“What is this pretty plate with the writing on it?”

“That is the Passover Seder plate. The six sections are labeled to tell what goes in them. This one is for the shank-bone of the lamb which symbolically died to cover our sins. Since our temple was destroyed, we can’t sacrifice a real lamb anymore. This helps us to remember the lamb’s death for us. The next section is for **maror** [bitter herbs], which is to remind us of our bitter suffering when we were slaves in Egypt. If we forget how terrible it is to be a slave, we might get lazy and proud, and lose our freedom again.

“The third section holds the **karpas** [parsley]. It is to remind us of the hyssop we used to use to sprinkle the lamb’s blood on the doorposts. But now it means something else, too. I put salt water in this special little cup. Your dad will dip the karpas into the salt water, hold it up for everyone to see that it is still green, and then pass it around for us to eat. It symbolizes our going under the salt waters of the Red Sea, and coming up alive on the other side. The salt water also symbolizes the salty tears of our slavery in Egypt, and the green karpas shows that YHWH took us out of Egypt and grew us into a great nation.

“The fourth section is for **hazeret** [whole bitter herb, such as a horseradish, radish, or onion]. It symbolizes the bitterness of our wanderings in the desert after YHWH brought us out and made us a nation. Our fathers were stubborn and disobedient. They wouldn’t trust YHWH to take care of them, but murmured and complained. Their deaths in the desert remind us to be obedient and thankful.

“The fifth section is for the **kharioset** [chopped apple, dates, nuts, cinnamon, raisins, and wine]. The mixture is sweet, to symbolize the sweetness of our freedom from Egypt, but it’s supposed to look like the red-brown clay and mortar which we used in making bricks for Pharaoh’s treasure cities. It tells us that if we abuse our freedom by getting lazy, self-centered, and disobedient, we could end up again as slaves, making bricks back in Egypt.

“That last section contains a whole egg, roasted until it is hard. It first symbolizes Pharaoh’s heart, which got hard as he was roasted in the plagues. It also symbolizes the **hagigah**, the peace offering we sacrifice to God. After the priest takes his portion, he gives the rest back to us. We roast it in the fire, symbolizing our own hearts, which are just as hard as Pharaoh’s until they are roasted in the fire on YHWH’s altar. Then out of the fire of judgment the hagigah becomes life to us when we eat it, and that brings us peace with YHWH our God. Isn’t it all beautiful!”

“It sure is. But I’ll never remember all that!”

“That’s why we have this plate with the writing on it, to remind us. And that is why we do this every year. Don’t you remember when we did it last year, over at grandpa’s house? Your grandpa was the leader then and had been for many years, but now he wants your dad to lead, so you will ask him questions and be proud of him.”

Jumbled memories of last year at grandpa’s house came flooding back to little Johnny. “Wow! I remember! But Grandpa never explained it like this. And I don’t even remember this beautiful plate.”

“Yes, he explained it all to us, but you were too young to understand, so you only came out during the dinner part. Now you are old enough to sit through the whole thing, and your grandpa wants us to explain it to you. That is why we’re doing it at our house this year.”

And so the questions went on and on, and Maria was very glad that she had started preparing early.

Finally Johnny stood back, surveyed the beautiful table arrangements, shook his head, and commented.

“Mom, it’s very pretty, but it’s just not worth it. All this trouble for one dinner? It’s just not worth it.”

Maria again knelt down by Johnny and gave him a hug. “Tell me, Johnny, how many questions have you asked since we started cleaning yesterday?”

“Uh, maybe a hundred?”

“Maybe more. And that is what makes it worth it. The more special things we do, the more you ask questions. The more you ask questions, the more you learn. When you get married and have children, your dad will want you to lead, so you can teach this to your own children.”

Johnny was quiet for a time, overwhelmed by the thought of having his own children. So Maria went back to her cooking. Then she noticed him counting all the place settings at the table. “Mom, there are way too many plates. Who else is coming tonight?”

“Grandpa, your Uncle Dan and Aunt Helga, and your Aunt Naomi and her new husband Philip.”

Johnny counted again. “Who else, Mom? There is still one extra place here.”

Maria laughed, her bright sunshine laugh. “Yes, Johnny. That extra place is for Elijah the Prophet.”

Johnny’s eyes grew satisfyingly wide. “Is he coming?”

“That is a great question! How ’bout if you save that one for your dad to answer?”

“But I’ll forget.”

Maria laughed again and gave Johnny a big hug. “You won’t forget, but if you do, your dad will remind you. Now, it is time to learn your part in tonight’s celebration.”

“My part?” Johnny was still feeling overwhelmed.

“As the youngest one at the table tonight, you have the honor of asking the four questions, so your dad can answer them for the whole group. I’ll teach them to you.”

“I guess asking questions is one thing I must be good at.” Johnny mused as his mother showed him the place on the script that he would speak, and helped him read through them.

Finally all the guests had arrived. They all put their coats on the back of their chairs, to remind them of the hasty escape from Egypt, and stood waiting. The sky outside was still ablaze with the sunset. There was that empty place set for Elijah. It seemed to glare silently at him. His mom was right – it wouldn’t let him forget. He burned with curiosity. But Maria was lighting the candles.

“Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha’olam asher kidshanu bidevaro uvishmo anakhnu madlikim haneyrot shel yom tov,” she intoned reverently.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has set us apart by His Word, and in whose name we light the festival lights.

“Thank you, Maria, my beloved.” John smiled and bowed slightly to her. “You may all sit down. Remember that the Passover Seder is the **Festival of Redemption**. It is very fitting that our celebration should begin with a woman, since our Redeemer, the Messiah, must come through the seed of a woman. Now let us quote together YHWH’s four redemption promises from Exodus 6:6-7.”

“I am YHWH, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and will deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am YHWH your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for an everlasting possession; I am YHWH.”

“During Passover, we celebrate these four promises of redemption by drinking from the cup four times. With each cup, let us remember the relationship with Him that YHWH desires. He is our God, and we are His people.”

John stood to fill each glass with wine, saying, “This is the first cup, the **Cup of Sanctification**. As we pray over this cup, YHWH (bless His holy name forever and ever) sanctifies us – makes us holy – so we can eat the Passover.” Grandpa, sitting in the seat of honor to the left of John, nodded his approval of John and the way he was leading. Little Johnny, sitting just to his right, felt his heart swell with pride and love for his dad.

John lifted his cup high. “Everyone raise your glass and stand with me for the **kiddush** [prayer of sanctification].

“Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha’olam borey pri hagafen...”

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine. Blessed are You, YHWH our God, King of the Universe, who has chosen us from among all the peoples, and exalted us from among all languages, and sanctified us with Your commandments. And lovingly You’ve given us, O YHWH our God, the Sabbath for rest and all the festivals and appointed seasons for gladness, and now this Feast of Passover, the anniversary of our freedom as a holy congregation, commemorating our escape from Egypt. For You have chosen us and made us holier than other peoples, and caused us to inherit Your Sabbath and Your holy festivals with joy and gladness. So we bless You, O YHWH King of the Universe, who sanctifies all the people of Israel, the Sabbath, and Your appointed seasons. We bless you, O YHWH our King, who has preserved us alive and sustained us and brought us to this season.

Everyone lifted his cup high and then drained it. The wine was sweet, yet it had a strong bite that Johnny was not used to. He was glad that his cup was very small.

“You may sit down,” John said, as he picked up a bowl of water and a towel. “Next is the **urchatz**, washing of the hands, which is a symbolic act of purification.” He looked upward. “*Blessed are You, O YHWH our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and has instructed us concerning the washing of our hands.*” John humbly knelt and held out the bowl to each person, starting with grandpa and ending with little Johnny, while they washed their hands and dried them with the towel.

Johnny wondered that the leader should be the one to wash their hands. It seemed more like the job of a servant than a leader. He almost objected and offered to carry the washbowl and towel around himself. But his turn to speak was coming up, and he didn’t want to forget or mess it up.

John, back in his place at the head of the table, lifted up a big sprig of parsley in his right hand. “Passover comes in the springtime, when the earth is becoming green with life. This bright green vegetable, called **karpas**, represents life, created and sustained by the almighty power of YHWH. He is the God of Life, and He offers Life to us, abundant, joyous, and free.” Here he paused and picked up the cup of salt water in his left hand.

“But life in Egypt for the Children of Israel was a life of pain, suffering, and tears, represented by this salt water. Let each of us take some karpas and dip it into salt water, remembering that sometimes life is immersed in tears.” Then he dipped and ate a sprig of the parsley, and passed them to his left, saying, “Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha’olam borey pri ha’adamah.”

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

“As you eat the karpas dipped in salt water, remember also that our forefathers were camped by the Red Sea and about to be slain by the Egyptian army. But they cried out to YHWH, who opened up a pathway through the sea, so they crossed on dry land, while the Egyptians who were chasing them were all swallowed up in the salty waters. YHWH delivered us from certain death and gave us life! After passing through the sea, He made us a great nation.”

“Now Maria, it’s time for the **yachatz** ceremony. Please pass me the matzo tash.” John held it up and opened it in full view of everyone. Sure enough, three matzos were hidden inside. John carefully slid the middle one out, broke it in half, and put one half back in the middle. He wrapped the other half in a clean white napkin. “This is the **afikomen**. I’m going to hide it now, so everyone close your eyes. Tight, now, no peeking.” John quietly slipped it under the pillow that was by his left arm.

He then held up the rest of the three matzos still in their tash, reciting, “Lo! This is the bread of affliction, that humble and simple bread which our ancestors ate as they fled the land of Egypt. Let anyone who is hungry join us at this Seder, and let him partake of what we have to share.” The others joined in, “*With gratitude for the blessings which we have been given, we invite the less fortunate to share with us at this meal, and also at other times.*” John continued, “May the Jewish people who are still deprived of total freedom, wherever they are, enjoy liberty at this time next year.” The people responded again, “*May our brethren in Israel speedily attain freedom from fear and want, and may they also be privileged to build a symbol of peace for all nations.*”

Then without a word, Maria got up and cleared all the dishes from the table. The only dish she left behind was the full cup of wine at the empty place for Elijah. Forgetting his part, little Johnny blurted out, “Why did you take all the dishes away, Mom?”

His dad laughed a big hearty laugh and everyone else joined in. “So everyone can hear the **farakasha**, your four questions, without any distractions. But Johnny, that wasn’t one of the four questions.”

“Oh...” Johnny’s face turned a bright red, and he looked frantically down at his script to remind him. His mom pointed to his place, whispering in his ear, “It’s OK, Johnny. That was a great question!”

Johnny read his part slowly, for he was just learning to read. “How different this night from all other nights! On all other nights we eat bread or matzos. Why do we eat only matzos on this night? On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables. Why do we eat bitter herbs only on this night? On all other nights we do not dip our vegetables even once. Why do we dip them twice on this night? On all other nights we eat our meals sitting or reclining. Why do we eat only reclining on this night?”

“Well said! Those are the right questions! And you read them very well, my son. I’m proud of you!” Johnny beamed up at his dad, relishing in the praise. Maria too, smiled at him, as she got up and began replacing the dishes around the table. “Remember those four questions. They are the basic framework for everything else we do tonight. I will answer them, but first, I want to tell you a story. Would you like that, Johnny?”

“Well, sure, Dad. You know I love stories.”

“And during the **haggadah** [the telling], or anytime this evening, you may ask any questions you want, for this is the night to ask questions. You’re very good at that, Johnny. And thank you, Maria, for returning the dishes. I now pour the second cup, the **Cup of Instruction**, for this is our time of instruction.” Here John relaxed back in his chair and told the entire story of Moses and the Israelite’s escape from Egypt, including the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the journey to Mount Sinai. (I will not retell it here; it is on page 139 and following.)

During the story, several of the adults lifted their wine goblets to pour out a drop or two of wine on their plates as each of the plagues were described. Johnny raised his hand. “Dad, why are they dribbling wine on their plates?”

“Good question, Johnny. The Egyptians suffered a lot in those ten plagues, so much that they went from being the most powerful nation on the earth to being enslaved by the Amalekites. They have never fully recovered. Many died, including all their firstborn; most of their livestock died; most of their farms, gardens, and orchards were destroyed. They gave us most of their gold and silver when we left. They suffered more than any nation before them. So it would be wrong for us to fail to grieve for them. The drops of wine are expressions of sorrow for the Egyptians. We do rejoice that we were set free, but we never rejoice in another’s sufferings, lest YHWH forget about disciplining them and turn on us for our hardheartedness.” Little Johnny beamed with pride in his dad; *he is so spiritual, so wise, and he always knows the right answers!*

Following the haggadah, John smiled at his son. “Any other questions now before we go on?”

“I sure do. That matzo that you broke and hid; what is that funny name? What does it mean? And why did you hide it? And why are there only three matzos in the bag? And why did you break the middle one? And when you...”

“Wait! Not so fast! Those are tough questions! The broken matzo is the afikomen. It represents the sacrificial Pascal lamb. I don’t know why we... uh,” he paused. “Grandpa, why do we hide it?” Johnny was shocked. He thought his dad knew it all.

Grandpa chuckled. “I don’t know either. That’s just the way we do it. Afikomen is not a Hebrew word at all. It is a Koine Greek word meaning ‘I came’. I have no idea how it got into our Passover Seder. According to some old rabbis, the three matzos represent the Cohens [priests], Levites, and all Israel, or possibly Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But others think the outer two matzos represent the two goats, one for YHWH and one for Azazel, while the middle one represents the Passover lamb itself. That seems right to me, so that’s how I taught you. However, we eat all three, while the goat for Azazel was just sent away to a dry land, so that may not be it either. Nobody knows why only the middle matzo is broken and hidden. That’s what we do. When Messiah comes, He will explain it all.”

“When Messiah comes...?” Johnny puzzled. “So... why does afikomen mean ‘I came’ instead of ‘I will come’? Did Messiah already come once before?”

There was silence for a few moments. Finally Grandpa cleared his throat and began talking in a low voice. “Some say that Messiah did come, as a baby, 70 years before our temple was destroyed by the Romans. They say His name was Yashua, which means YHWH saves. When He was about 30 years old, He was crucified on a Roman cross at the time of the Passover. After that His followers claimed He rose from the dead. They caused a lot of commotion and convinced a lot of people that Yashua was Christ, the Messiah. His followers are still around; they’re now called Christians. They say that God is three in one – the three matzos in one matzo tash, and that Yashua is the middle one of the three. They claim that breaking the middle matzo and hiding it represents His death and burial. Later, when we all eat the broken matzo just before the third cup, the Cup of Redemption, they claim that we all must eat His body and drink His blood to have life eternal.

“Good Jews, of course, cannot believe any of this, for four reasons. First, our Prophets and Sacred Writings say that Messiah will never die, but will reign as head of our government forever. Second, Torah is very clear that YHWH is only one. Christians make Him out to be three, with Yashua as God’s Son. That’s totally preposterous, for God to have a Son! Third, Jews are absolutely forbidden in Torah to eat human flesh or drink human blood; the very thought is abhorrent to us. And fourth, we know from the writings of our rabbis who actually knew Him that this Yashua was really a very wicked man. He overthrew the temple customs; He broke the Sabbath laws; He ate and drank with publicans and prostitutes; and He defied our Jewish leaders and the Roman government, too. He was a real rabble-rouser! He led multitudes of people astray.

“His followers are still just as wicked as He was! They are our most cruel enemies. We were fortunate that our leaders were able to capture Him and condemn Him to death, before He turned our entire society upside down. Even as He was dying on the Roman cross, His followers were hoping He would save Himself like He saved others, defeat His enemies, and take over the government, thus proving that He was Messiah. But He didn’t. He just died, and then was buried, and that was the end of that.”

“If He was so bad why did He have so many followers?”

“Well, obviously, a lot of people didn’t think He was so bad. After all, He did a lot of good things. He healed people, helped the poor, fed whole multitudes at a time, calmed the stormy sea, even raised dead people back to life. Our leaders actually saw His miracles and they couldn’t deny it. And it was all recorded by eyewitnesses in what Christians call their ‘New Testament’. Even some of our leaders believed in Him, at least until He died.” Grandpa chuckled again. “It’s funny how many of our leaders still carry a piece of the afikomen if they go to sea, believing that if a storm comes up they can throw it into the water, and it will calm the storm. I wonder how they explain that!”

“If so many people believed in Him, could they be the ones who added the three matzos to our Passover Seder? Could they have named the middle one ‘I came’ just to represent Him? If He could heal people and raise people from the dead, I’d sure like to know more about Him.”

“Well, Johnny, those are really good questions, but you’ve got to understand that no good Jew can become a Christian. Everywhere we go, it is always the Christians who are persecuting the Jews. They hate us, torment us, steal things from us, throw us in prison, and even kill us. If Yashua was really the Jewish Messiah, they would never do things like that! No, Johnny, you had better forget about Him. Let’s go on with the Passover celebration.”

“Thank you, old father,” John said respectfully to Grandpa. “And thank you, Johnny, for your questions. We all learn from them! Now that we finished the haggadah, it is time for the *midrash* [recitation]. Follow along in your script. I’ll start and you read the italicized parts together.

“The Egyptians afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. We cried to YHWH, the God of our fathers. YHWH heard our voice and saw our affliction, toil, and oppression. Then He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. YHWH brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great awe, and with signs, and with wonders.

“YHWH brought us forth out of Egypt.”

“For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, man and beast; and against the Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I am YHWH.

“With a mighty hand means the ten plagues.

Behold, the hand of YHWH will come against your livestock which are in the field, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks.

“With an outstretched arm means His sword.

Arise, O YHWH, confront him! Bring him low. Deliver my soul from the wicked with Thy sword.

“With great awe means His divine Presence.

Has any other god ever tried to take for himself a nation from within a nation by trials, by great signs and wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, as YHWH your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

“With signs means the rod of Moses.

You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.

“With wonders means the blood.

And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke.

Oh give thanks to YHWH! Bless His holy name, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.

If He had rescued us from Egypt, but not punished the Egyptians...

“We should have been content. [Heb: Da-ye-nu.]

If He had punished the Egyptians, but not destroyed their gods...

“We should have been content.

If He had destroyed their gods, but not killed their firstborn...

“We should have been content.

If He had killed their firstborn, but not given us their riches...

“We should have been content.

If He had given us their riches, but not divided the Red Sea before us...

“We should have been content.

If He had divided the Red Sea before us, but not drowned our oppressors...

“We should have been content.

If He had drowned our oppressors, but not supplied us in the desert for forty years...

“We should have been content.

If He had supplied us in the desert for forty years, but not fed us with manna...

“We should have been content.

If He had fed us manna but not given us the Sabbath...

“We should have been content.

If He had given us the Sabbath, but not brought us to Mount Sinai...

“We should have been content.

If He had brought us to Mount Sinai, but not given us the Torah...

“We should have been content.

If He had given us the Torah, but not brought us to the Land of Promise...

“We should have been content.

If He had brought us to the Land of Promise, but not built us the temple...

“We should have been content.

If He had built us the temple, but not provided us with salvation from our sins...

“We should have been content.

If He had provided salvation from our sins, but not promised the coming Messiah...

“We should have been content.

But praise the holy name of YHWH forever and ever, He has provided all of this and more! Yet He has still promised to us the coming Messiah, saying:

“A rod will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of YHWH will rest on Him, the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Strength, the Spirit of Knowledge and the Fear of YHWH. And He will delight in the fear of YHWH, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make His decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth. And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

“Also, righteousness will be the belt around His loins, and faithfulness the belt around His waist. And the wolf will dwell peacefully with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. Then the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea. Then it will come about in that day that all the Gentiles will seek after the root of Jesse, who will rule as the Standard for all peoples; and His throne will be very glorious.” (adapted from Isa 11:1-10)

Little Johnny thrilled with the recitation as it echoed around the room. He saw tears in his grandpa's eyes, and his mother's; even his dad's! Wiping his own eyes, he found tears there, too, and wondered in awe. It was all too beautiful for words. But his dad had started talking again. "Rabban Gamaliel instructed us, 'He who does not speak forth these three essentials of the Passover Seder has not discharged his duty; namely, the Passover sacrifice, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs.'

"Take the shank bone of the lamb, and pass it around. It represents the Passover lamb who had to die for us. Each one of you hold it while you give thanks in your heart to YHWH. When we had the temple, we used to actually slay the Passover lamb, put its blood on our doorposts, and eat its flesh. We are no longer permitted to sacrifice the lamb, ever since the Romans destroyed our temple. But there can be no Passover without the lamb, for it is only the blood of the lamb that atones for our sin. Each one of us has sinned. It is the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doorposts of our hearts that atones for our sins so the destroying angel cannot touch us. This is the very heart of the Passover, for without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness from sin. [See Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22.] When we dipped the sprig of parsley in the salt water, we also symbolized the sprig of hyssop used to sprinkle the blood. We must accept by faith that the blood of the lamb is now sprinkled on the doorposts of our hearts. Thus we give thanks to YHWH for providing our atonement through the Passover sacrifice even though we have no temple."

John waited until the shank bone came back around, then took it from little Johnny and held it high. "We bless and thank you, O YHWH our God, King of the Universe, for granting atonement for our sins through Your Passover Lamb. We receive it into our hearts by faith."

"Take this matzo and pass it around. Each of you, hold it up and offer a silent prayer for forgiveness and cleansing from your sins. Later we will break it and eat it. This is the unleavened bread. Johnny asked why on other nights we eat bread with leaven, but on this night we eat only unleavened bread. When we escaped Egypt, we were fleeing for our lives. We had no time to wait for our bread dough to rise. So for seven days, until after we had passed through the Red Sea, we ate nothing but unleavened bread. YHWH intended this to symbolize that we are sanctified by the Passover sacrifice to be a pure priesthood and a holy nation unto Him. The leaven in bread symbolizes sin in our lives. The effort we take cleansing our house from leaven and eating only unleavened bread this Passover week assures YHWH that once He has cleansed us from sin by the Passover sacrifice, we will try to continue to walk free from sin throughout the 'seven days' (seven decades) of our lives. The fact that we must celebrate the Passover every year tells us that we do fail and need cleansing again. But it is our earnest desire to walk before Him in holiness. Are you willing to do that?" Everyone nodded solemnly.

The matzo had gone around the table. John took it from little Johnny, held it up, and recited,

"Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha'olam hamotzi lekhem min ha'aretz."

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

"Johnny's second question was, 'Why do we eat the maror [bitter herbs] only on this night?' Old father, take the maror and pass it around, each of you giving a prayer of thanks in your heart that you are no longer slaves in Egypt. The Egyptian taskmasters made our lives bitter with long hours of hard labor in their fields and in building their treasure cities. We must always remember the sorrow and bitterness of slavery or we are doomed to become slaves again. During the meal, we will eat enough of this to bring tears to our eyes, as old Rabbi Hillel taught. It will be a good reminder for us all year. Then can we personally identify with our forefathers in their bitter bondage in Egypt.

When the maror came around the table. John took it from Johnny, held it high, and recited,

"Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha'olam ashere kidshanu bidevaro vitzivanu al akhilat maror."

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has set us apart by His Word and commanded us to eat bitter herbs.

John next gave the hazeret (whole bitter herb) and kharoset (sweet brown apple mixture) to grandpa to pass around, saying,

"The third question Johnny asked was, 'Why do we dip our vegetables twice tonight, though on other nights we do not dip at all?' We have already dipped the parsley into the salt water, to remind us that no life is ever unmixed with tears. Later, during the meal, we will each dip the bitter herbs into the sweet kharoset, to remind us that even the most bitter of circumstances is sweetened by the hope we have in YHWH. The kharoset is mixed to look like the bricks and mortar of our slavery in Egypt, yet it is sweet. Everything YHWH permits, even our suffering, discipline, and labor, is sweet and good if we allow it to purify our lives and make us strong in faith, strong in character, and strong in endurance. When our fathers came out of Egypt, there was not a weak or sickly one in their midst! Notice the hazeret. We have a white onion here, but it can also be a whole horseradish. It looks sweet and good, but will taste bitter, while the kharoset, which looks like the bitter hard labor of bricks and mortar, will taste sweet. These are to symbolize that we cannot tell whether a thing will turn out bitter or sweet, but we must trust to our Creator, YHWH, blessed be His holy name forever and ever, to only give us that which He knows is for our good.

That is why the psalmist insists, "Oh, give thanks to YHWH, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever!"

“Now, one more question before we sing the first half of the Hallel. *Johnny asked us why do we eat reclining? Why do I have this pillow on my left? It is because once we were slaves, but tonight we are free! On the first Passover we ate standing, with staff in hand, sandals on our feet, and our coats wrapped about us. We ate as slaves, ready to flee. But this night we eat with our coats draped on the back of our chairs, relaxing, or even reclining on a pillow. We now have YHWH’s promise that we will never again be enslaved to anyone, never! as long as we keep His commandments, celebrate His Feasts in His appointed seasons, keep His Sabbaths, and love His Torah. That is reason indeed to sing the Hallel! All together now...*”

“Hallelujah! [Praise YHWH!] Praise, O servants of YHWH. Praise the name of YHWH. Blessed be the name of YHWH from this time forth and forever. From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of YHWH is to be praised. YHWH is high above all the nations; His glory is above the heavens. Who is like YHWH our God, who is enthroned on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of His people. He makes the barren woman abide in her own home as a joyful mother of children. Hallelujah! [Praise YHWH!].” (Ps 113)

“So now, with great joy and thankfulness, we drink the second cup, the **Cup of Instruction**, for we have now been instructed on how we can be set free from sin and bondage to love and serve YHWH.”

Once again Johnny was startled at the pungent bitter-sweetness of the wine, and again he stared with burning curiosity at the empty place and full glass of wine for Elijah. It stared right back at him from across the table. Nobody had come to sit there. Not yet. He would not forget to ask his questions about that!

Suddenly there was his dad, the leader, kneeling before each person with that bowl of water and towel as before. Johnny thought about asking if he could wash the people’s hands while his dad did more important things. It just didn’t seem right for the leader to be the servant. But something in the solemnity of his dad’s face bade him be silent.

John spoke softly as he served, “It is time for the meal, but this meal is not like other meals. In this meal everything has a symbolic meaning. I have explained some of the meanings to you; others we will discuss as we eat. Remember the four questions. And remember the four cups of wine, the cups of **Sanctification**, **Instruction**, **Redemption** (or Blessing), and **Praise** (or Acceptance), of which we have drunk just the first two so far. Everything we do tonight is for our sanctification, our instruction, our redemption (which is our blessing), and to fill us with praise and thanksgiving because we have been accepted at YHWH’s table. So any of you feel free to interrupt with questions at any time.”

Finally he came to little Johnny, the last in line. As he stooped before him, Johnny could stand it no longer. He blurted out, “No, Daddy! You’re the leader! You shouldn’t have to wash my hands. I can do it.”

“If I don’t wash your hands then you cannot be my son,” John said softly, waiting.

“Oh...!” gasped Johnny, his eyes growing as wide as saucers and his face turning white. “Then... wash my hands, and my face; wash me all over!”

His dad laughed as he took Johnny’s hands and dunked them in the bowl. “No, Johnny. This is only symbolic. None of us can wash ourselves free from sin. Only YHWH can sanctify us to eat the Passover. I represent YHWH here, and you, my son, represent all of YHWH’s children. It is He who says, ‘You cannot be My son unless you let Me wash you.’ When you allow me to wash your hands, you are symbolically saying, ‘Wash me, YHWH. Cleanse me from my sin and sanctify me for the Passover.’ It doesn’t matter if I wash one finger or your whole body, the real washing is done by faith in YHWH’s promise.”

“Blessed are You, O YHWH our God, who has sanctified us now with Your commandments, and has instructed us concerning the washing of our hands.”

John then took out the upper matzo and the middle half-matzo from the matzo tash, broke them into pieces, and passed them around, saying,

“Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us for the Passover and commanded us concerning the eating of unleavened bread.”

“Everyone break off a piece. Eat it plain and dry, for it symbolizes the plain, dry food for our flight from Egypt across the dry desert. Out of death comes life, for those who know and follow the Author of Life.

“Now, this third matzo...” John took it and carefully broke it into eight pieces, “will not be eaten dry. This one is special! Each of you must take a piece, break it in half to make a sandwich, and put some maror in between the two halves. Use enough to bring tears to your eyes, for each of us must be able to identify personally with the bitterness of our forefather’s slavery in Egypt. But then before you eat it, dip the sop into the sweet kharoset, for even in the bitterest circumstances there is sweetness for those who place their hope in YHWH for His redemption. We call this the ‘Hillel Sandwich’ in honor of our esteemed Rabbi Hillel II, who taught us how to understand the Passover Seder.”

Groans, gasps, and giggles ensued, as they followed John’s lead in eating their Hillel Sandwich. After Maria finished hers, she quietly got up and started bringing in dishes of delicious smelling, mouth-watering foods and setting them on the table. There was gefilte fish, matzo ball soup, glazed chicken with matzo nut stuffing, potato kugel, and honeyed carrots – truly a meal fit for a king.

After the food was set out, she brought a bowl of whole roasted eggs and gave them to her husband. He stood up and raised his hand for silence.

“The last item on the Seder platter is the whole egg, roasted hard over the flame. I have a bowl of them here. You may each take one, or two if you like. Dip it in the cup of salt water before you eat it. It symbolizes the heart of Pharaoh, hardened in the fires of God’s judgment. The salt water is the bitter tears of all the Egyptians, because hard hearts always result in bitter tears. But when we eat it in obedience to YHWH, we symbolize the **korban hagigah**, the Passover peace offering. It was to be roasted in fire on YHWH’s altar, and eaten by everyone. It symbolizes our own hearts, which are just as hard as Pharaoh’s until they are roasted over the fire of the altar, the fire of YHWH’s judgment. When we eat the hagigah, it becomes life to us and brings us peace with YHWH, just as surely as the fire of YHWH’s judgment brought death in Egypt.”

“Let’s now enjoy our meal together. Maria, please wake Tommy and Rebekah so they can enjoy it with us. This is a time for the whole family to rejoice!”

“Dad, you said everything has a meaning. What is the meaning of the gefilte fish? Is it the Egyptian army when they became fish food?”

“No,” John replied, as everyone laughed. “But I think you can figure out what it does mean. Look across the table; all the foods in abundance. They are made especially good with spices and honey. The whole table laden down with special foods means one thing; what might that be?”

“I know! The Promised Land! The Promised Land! Torah calls it a land flowing with milk and honey.”

“Very good, Johnny. I’m proud of you! Do you also remember what the Promised Land symbolizes for us – something for our future?”

“Uh, do you mean the coming Messiah, when He sets up His kingdom, rules over the Gentiles, and brings peace and prosperity to the whole earth?”

“Yes! Good, good! Don’t forget, Messiah will rule over us Jews too. But there is a big difference. We Jews want His rule, for He promises to rule through us and use us in His government. The Gentiles don’t want His rule, so they will be ruled with the iron rod of discipline until they submit.”

Thus with questions, instruction, jokes, and happy laughter, the evening was spent in feasting, fellowship, and such sharing of love and family ties that every heart overflowed with joy and gratitude.

When all were more than satisfied and the dishes were cleaned off the table, Johnny again looked across at the full glass of wine and the empty place for Elijah. The whole meal he had held back his curiosity, certain that his dad would explain it at the proper time. Did his dad forget?

John interrupted his thoughts. “Johnny, it is now time to find that which was lost. Get up and lead your little brother around the house in the search for the afikomen. Remember at the beginning of the meal when we hid it?”

“Sure, Dad, but I don’t need Tommy. It can’t be hard to find. You only took a second to hide it, and you didn’t even get up from your chair.”

“Oy-vay! You are too smart for me! OK, point it out to Tommy, so he can be the one to discover it.”

“Come here, Tommy. Look under Daddy’s chair. No? Look behind him... in his pockets? No? Ah! The pillow. It must be the pillow. Look under the pillow.”

“Found it! Found it! Found it!” Little Tommy bounced up and down with glee.

“Wonderful! You are fast! Now, give it to me, and you each get a special prize for finding it. Tommy, your mommy made this just for you; see, it fits on top of your head like this. It’s called a **kippa** [yarmulke in Yiddish]. It means you are growing up into a man. Next year you’ll be old enough to join us in all the Passover celebrations like your big brother did tonight. Johnny, here’s a new kippa your mom made for you. Yours has gold embroidery on it just like mine and your grandpa’s, showing that you have been through the Seder. When you wear it, it will remind you that as a man, you are responsible for learning all the laws, customs, and traditions of your forefathers, so that one day you can lead in the celebrations and pass them down to your children. As men, this is our most important responsibility, so we use this special cap to remind us.”

Johnny and Tommy swaggered back to their places with heads held high and faces beaming like the sun. Maria got up and met them with a double hug, saying, “I’m so proud of all my men!”

“Now, this middle matzo, which was broken off and hidden under the pillow, represents the sacrificial lamb, *the special Pascal lamb*, which was slain to atone for our sins. Rabbinical law states that everyone must eat of it; anyone who does not, will die in the coming year. It is the last food we will eat tonight, just like the lamb was the last food eaten at the first Passover. That is why some of our rabbis believe that afikomen might mean ‘dessert’.

“With the afikomen, we’ll drink the third cup of wine, the **Cup of Redemption**, also called the **Cup of Blessing**, since we hold it up as we say the blessing. Enjoy them together. By the sacrificial lamb we receive the atonement of our sins and are redeemed back to God, thus receiving His Blessing instead of His curse on our lives. This matzo and wine together are known as the **tzafune**, meaning *holy communion* or sweet fellowship. This is important! Only by our obedience in eating this matzo and drinking this cup of redemption may we have communion and sweet fellowship with YHWH in the coming year.”

“Now it’s time to say the blessing. Torah proclaims, ‘When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless YHWH your God for the good land which He has given you.’ [Deut 8:10] Let us all repeat the blessing together.” John held his goblet high, his piece of afikomen between his last two fingers, and lifted his eyes toward heaven.

“May the name of YHWH be blessed from now unto eternity. Blessed be He in whose good we have eaten and through whose goodness we live. Blessed are You, O YHWH our God, King of the Universe, who feeds the entire world with goodness, grace, lovingkindness, and compassion. You give bread and wine to all flesh. You give Messiah to all men, for Your mercy endures forever. We give thanks to You, YHWH our God, for the food with which You feed and sustain us continually, every day and at all times. Take pity, YHWH our God, on Israel, Your people, and on Jerusalem, Your city, and on Zion Your holy mountain, the habitation of Your glory, and on the kingdom of the house of David, Your Anointed. Our God and our Father, shepherd us, maintain us, feed us, sustain us, and ease us from all our troubles. Let us not be needing alms at the hands of flesh and blood, but only at Your hand, that is full and open, holy and broad.”

Everyone carefully ate his or her piece of the middle matzo, and drank the third cup. Johnny was once again startled at the pungent bittersweet taste, and reminded again of the glass of wine at the empty place. *Daddy was going to finally explain it, and He didn’t. I guess he must have forgotten. I’m going to have to ask after all,* he thought.

Johnny looked back up at his dad, who was already looking down at him. “Yes, Johnny, now is a great time to ask your question about Elijah’s cup.”

“Dad! How did you know what I was thinking?”

“We put it there so you would ask questions!” John leaned back and chuckled. “I’ve been watching your eyes go back to it all through the meal.”

Johnny didn’t smile. Eyes wide with anticipation, he stood and pointed. “Is Elijah, the real Elijah the Prophet, really gonna come and drink that wine?”

“Well said! Well said!” John laughed his big, booming laugh, and everyone else joined in. “You certainly do know how to ask the right questions, Johnny! That is precisely the question that every good Jew has been asking at every Passover ever since the prophet Malachi told us that Elijah would return before the coming of the great and terrible day of YHWH. Nobody has answered it yet, but we know that one of us will answer it, one of these days, maybe very soon. *Maybe it will be you!*”

“Me? How could I answer it?”

“*Go open the door!* See if Elijah is there. Invite him in. Tell him that we have the cup of wine for him to drink, and that we’re all here waiting eagerly for his announcement that Messiah is come.”

Johnny thought his dad was pulling his leg, but when he looked at his grandpa, there were tears and fire in his eyes. He nodded back to Johnny.

Every eye was on him as Johnny slowly got up and went to the door. Opening it a crack, he peeked out, then threw it wide open and walked out on the porch. No Elijah. Nobody at all. He just stood there, strangely disappointed. Then from down the street he heard a call. “Elijaaaah!”

“Elijaaaah!” he called back, and then another call sounded out from another house, and another. “Dad, he’s not here, but everyone is calling for him.”

“That’s right, son. Every good Jew for a thousand years has called out in his heart every Passover for Elijah to come to announce Messiah. *Put it in your heart, too!* Call out every year until Messiah comes! Until then, we shall set Elijah’s place at our table and pour a glass of wine for him every Passover. He will come! Messiah will come! And we must keep that hope burning in our hearts until He does. Maybe next year! Maybe next year in Jerusalem. Yes, O God!” John raised his glass. “*Next year in Jerusalem!*”

Little Johnny was startled with the sudden intensity and fervency of the chorus, as everyone lifted his glass high and cried out together, “*Next year! In Jerusalem!*”

In the brief pause that followed, as everyone wiped away the snuffles and tears, Johnny came to realize how incredibly deeply flowed this current of heartfelt longing for Messiah throughout his people. He didn’t know how it got there, but he suddenly became aware that it was in his own heart as well.

His dad was refilling the wine goblets, this time up to the brim and overflowing. “This last cup is known as the **Cup of Acceptance**. We have now fulfilled our obligations to keep the Passover in obedience to YHWH’s command in the Torah. Therefore we know that YHWH has accepted us, as He promised, saying, ‘*Listen to My voice, and do according to all I commanded you; so you shall be My people, and I will be your God.*’ [Jer 11:4; also see Lev 26:1-12]

“This fourth cup is also called the **Cup of Praise**, for over it we sing the last half of the **Hallel**. This cup is filled to overflowing, because, having kept the Passover, our joy is now full to overflowing. We have had a great feast: in our food, in our instruction and fellowship, and in our souls, so we’re overflowing with joy and thankfulness to YHWH. Everyone stand up and join in as we sing our praises to Him.” Most everyone knew it by heart so they sang lustily:

*“Give thanks to YHWH, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Oh, let Israel say,
His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Oh, let the house of Aaron say,
His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Oh, let all who fear YHWH say,
His lovingkindness is everlasting.”*

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From my distress I called upon YHWH;
 YHWH answered me and set me in a large place.
 YHWH is for me; I will not fear;
 What can man do to me?
 It is better to take refuge in YHWH
 Than to trust in man.
 It is better to take refuge in YHWH
 Than to trust in princes.
 YHWH is my strength and song,
 And He has become my salvation.
 The sound of joyful shouting is in the tents of the righteous.
 The right hand of YHWH does valiantly.
 The right hand of YHWH is exalted.
 The right hand of YHWH does valiantly.
 I shall not die, but live,
 And tell of the works of YHWH.
 YHWH has disciplined me severely,
 But He has not given me over to death.
 Open to me the gates of righteousness;
 I shall enter them and give thanks to YHWH.
 This is the gate of YHWH.
 The righteous will enter through it.
 I shall give thanks to You, for You answered me.
 And You have become my salvation.
The stone which the builders rejected
 Has become the chief cornerstone.
 This is YHWH's doing;
 It is marvelous in our eyes.
 "This is the day which YHWH has made.
 Let us rejoice and be glad in it!
 YHWH, save now [Yashua], we beseech Thee!
 YHWH, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity!
 Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH;
 We have blessed you from the house of YHWH.
 YHWH is light, and He has given us the Light.
 Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.
 Thou art my God, and I give thanks to Thee;
 Thou art my God, and I extol Thee.
 Oh! Give thanks to YHWH, for He is good;
 For His lovingkindness is everlasting."

(Ps 118)

Everyone drank the **Cup of Praise**, with truly full and thankful hearts. Then, one last time, John turned to his son. "We're finished, it's late, and I'm sure you're tired, but I want to give you one last chance to ask questions before we all head for bed. Your questions have been so good! You helped to make this a joyful and rewarding time for us all."

"Thank you, Dad." Johnny was so glad to be accepted among the adults, and he was almost bursting with pride in his dad and his leadership of the Seder. "I just thought of another question. What is that stone we just sang about, that was first rejected and then became the cornerstone?"

"Uh..." John wrinkled his brow and looked over at grandpa again. "I don't remember the rabbi ever talking about that verse. Do you, Dad?"

"No, but we can guess what it means by the context. We know this passage is talking about Messiah, because it says 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH.' and 'You have become my salvation.' So the stone probably also symbolizes Messiah. Maybe it means that at first He is rejected by our leaders until YHWH proves Him to us; then He becomes the chief cornerstone. After all, you can't just accept anyone who claims to be a Messiah; you have to wait until YHWH proves Him."

"Oh! Wow!" responded Johnny, thinking back to their discussion on the afikomen and Yashua. "Could this be talking about that guy our leaders said was so bad, even though He did a lot of good things?"

John and grandpa stared at each other. Finally, John cleared his throat. "Yes, Johnny, I suppose it could. Our leaders rejected Him all right. But as your grandpa said, we Jews cannot believe in Yashua; at least, not yet. Not unless or until He does what the Torah and the Prophets say that Messiah must do. If YHWH wants Yashua to be Messiah, there are a lot of things He will have to straighten out to prove Him. The song says 'This is YHWH's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.' That means only He can figure it all out and make it all happen. We will just look on with awe and wonder. All we can do right now is wait and trust that Messiah will explain it all when He comes."

"Thank you Daddy, and Grandpa. And I do trust that Messiah will explain it all," Johnny responded fervently, his heart strangely still drawn to Yashua, YHWH Saves. And not too surprisingly, John and his father also felt the pull toward Yashua, as if the entire Passover celebration was focused upon Him. Logically, rationally, according to all their traditions they could not accept Him, but deep within their hearts they could still hope that someday, somehow, YHWH would reveal the truth about Yashua, and set all things right. Well, maybe next year.

Next year, in Jerusalem! Next year, in Jerusalem!

SHAVUOT (PENTECOST): DAY OF FIRSTFRUITS

The first Pentecost was the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. However, the Israelites were unable to celebrate the Feast until after they had entered the Promised Land and began to harvest their fields. Like Firstfruits, Pentecost is also a harvest festival. They had no harvest wandering in the desert! At Passover the Feast of Firstfruits heralded the beginning of the barley harvest. The sheaf (omer) of barley was waved before YHWH before the harvest could begin. Right after the barley harvest, the wheat harvest began. The wheat was bound into sheaves, dried and hardened, and threshed into grain. By the **Feast of Weeks, Shavuot**, the wheat harvest was done. The first and best of the grain was then baked into two loaves of bread and offered as firstfruits to YHWH. Shavuot is therefore also known as Yom haBikkurim, the Day of Offering the First Loaves.

It is also called “the day of firstfruits” (Num 28:26), and “the Feast of the Harvest of Firstfruits.” (Ex 23:16) The loaves of bread are called firstfruits, the first bread to be eaten after completion of the wheat harvest. (Lev 23:17) In the Jewish mind, their deliverance from Egypt began at Passover but was not completed until the law was given at Mt. Sinai. This idea was symbolized in the dedication of the harvest with the presentation of the first omer of barley at Firstfruits, followed by the firstfruits thank offering of the two wave loaves of wheat bread at Pentecost, which thus completed the grain harvest. *In a very real sense, Pentecost completed the firstfruits that Passover had begun.*

The 120 meeting in the upper room (representing a minyan, 10 from each tribe, the quorum needed by Jewish tradition for public prayer and worship) understood this. They expected that the Passover sacrifice of their Lord Yashua would be completed at Pentecost, though they did not know what form that would take. Thus Pentecost is known to the Jews as Hag haAzereth, meaning ‘Feast of the Conclusion’, or just ‘Azereth’, ‘Conclusion’. But remember that this was only the conclusion of the firstfruits! This becomes exceedingly significant, as I said before. The symbolism of the firstfruits is profound. There are two firstfruits Feasts before the full harvest, which is complete at Tabernacles, the Feast of Ingathering. That which was started at Passover and completed at Pentecost is still just the firstfruits. *What is it?*

I’ll tell the stories in later volumes, but in summary, here is what happened. A **holy nation** was born at the first Passover, when the children of Israel left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. The new baby nation was given the law at Mt. Sinai, the first Pentecost. Theoretically, she was now ready to enter the Promised Land and conquer the giants of Canaan (the world). This is a physical type of the church, the spiritual holy nation born when Yashua arose and presented Himself to the Father as the firstfruits of all who rise from the dead. The baby church was weaned (when Christ returned to heaven after 40 days) and given the law (the New Covenant, led by the Spirit) at Pentecost. Thus the church matured to sonship, empowered by the Spirit to conquer the giants in the Promised Land.

Traditional theology ends it there. The church grabs what she can and skips off to heaven, leaving the rest to rot in hell forever. But if you believe that, you’ve missed it because you do not understand the two firstfruits. This ‘holy nation’ born at Passover is a Kingdom! The Kingdom of God! It has a King – Jesus with His many-membered Bride. He, in union with His Bride is the *first* firstfruits, from Passover. But this holy nation also has many brothers of the King, called the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to rule with Him. The church is the *second* firstfruits. *Pentecost only completes the firstfruits.* We want to think that the church is the total completion of God’s eternal plan, but it is not. It has barely begun. The full harvest is yet to come.

So this holy nation, the Kingdom of God, is Israel and all adopted into the family of Israel. However, I don’t think anyone would say that the nation of Israel, God’s ‘Chosen People’, set apart for His holy name (ref. Deut 26:18-19 & 28:9 ff), was intended to have an exclusive on heaven! God’s intent was always that Israel would become “a light to the nations.” (Isa 42:6) He says “to those who turn from transgression in Jacob” (Israel) that “He will come like a rushing stream which the wind [breath, Spirit] of YHWH drives” (speaking prophetically of Pentecost). So why is He coming? *To renew His covenant with Israel.* “This is My covenant with them, says YHWH. My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth or from the mouth of your offspring... from now on and forever.” (Isa 59:20-21)

Most people stop there. Please don’t! The next chapter continues the theme, telling **why** He puts His Spirit in their mouths. “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of YHWH has risen upon you. For behold darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples. [The nations are blinded by sin.] But YHWH will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. *And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*” That’s it! That is God’s Plan of the Ages. God has always intended that the glory of His righteousness and splendor of His Spirit shine forth in spectacular beauty from His chosen people, His holy nation, His church, so the rest of the world, which is otherwise steeped in the deep darkness of sin and idolatry, will see the great light!

“It is too small a thing that You [Messiah] should be My Servant to raise up [only] the tribes of Jacob and to [just] restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make you a light to the nations, so that My salvation will reach to the end of the earth.” (49:6) That is why Jesus could say, “Salvation is from the Jews.” (Jn 4:22) That is God’s plan, to make His holy nation Israel/the church glorious, that the Gentiles (heathen) would ultimately, perhaps in the ages to come, be irresistibly drawn to the light.

Unlike Passover and Tabernacles, Pentecost is only a one-day Feast. Because of that, many at the time of Christ did not think it significant enough to travel all the way from their homes to Jerusalem in obedience to YHWH’s command. Consequently, *all those who were there were particularly zealous for YHWH* – or they would not have been there. They came eagerly expecting a blessing. They knew the ancient prophecy of Jeremiah: “Behold, the days are coming, declares YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put My Law within them; on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother saying, ‘Know YHWH!’ for they shall all know Me, from the least to the greatest of them, declares YHWH, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer 31:31-34)

They expected that prophecy to be fulfilled at Pentecost! They did not come just to eat, drink, and party. They knew that the Mosaic law given at Mt. Sinai had not completed their deliverance, because they were unable to keep it. They were looking for a greater deliverance when Messiah would come to write Torah upon their hearts. These were Torah-centered people! The celebration of the Feasts all these years had primed them for this. Not just the 120 but all the Jews were eagerly awaiting Messiah. Also, partly because the mild spring weather made it easier to travel, this Feast was more popular with travelers from abroad. Thus on Shavuot zealous Torah-lovers from every nation under heaven had gathered, eager for the blessing, hoping this was the year Messiah would come. (I tell the story of that famous 31 AD Pentecost in Volume Five.)

THE HARVEST LEADING UP TO TABERNACLES

Before we get to the Fall Feasts, let's talk about the full harvest leading up to them. The Fall Feasts as a group are called the Feast of Ingathering (of the harvest, Ex 23:16; 34:22). All the Feasts of Israel are harvest festivals, but as I said, Passover and Pentecost were just the firstfruits. The three Fall Feasts are called the Feast of Ingathering because they symbolize the completion of the harvest at the end of the age, toward which the firstfruits festivals both pointed. The symbolism here is huge. If you don't get anything else in this study, get this. Passover firstfruits symbolizes Jesus Christ in union with His Bride. Pentecost firstfruits symbolizes the true church, the sons of God. Then the Feast of Ingathering symbolizes the final great harvest for the Kingdom – *all the rest of humanity*.

The reason this concept of the final harvest becomes so incredibly significant is that from the perspective of the modern church, the definition of 'the harvest' changed. Churchmen of the Dark Ages taught that the harvest is only the Bride of Christ, and all the rest go to hell and are tortured for eternity. But the Feasts of Israel do not teach that. The Bride is only a firstfruits. Those invited to the wedding feast (the remaining Jews and the church) are a second firstfruits. Then comes the great harvest.

The concept behind the Feast of Ingathering is that it is not a firstfruits. The harvest is complete, finished. This Feast celebrates abundant fullness. Everything is gathered in. Nothing is left to harvest. That's why it symbolizes all the rest of humanity. Many who have been invited to the wedding feast will refuse to come, because of rebellion and iniquity. (Ref. Matt 22:1 - 14) Some will be cast into hell to burn up their hardness of heart. Does that negate God's desire for all to be saved? No, God is patient and faithful, not willing for any to perish. It simply means that the Feast of Ingathering will be celebrated annually, for ages of ages if necessary, until the full harvest is reaped. (Zech 14:16) Though I think the harvesting will go a lot faster once the harvesters are one with the Lord of the Harvest!

The Spring Feasts occurred in the first and third months, followed by a long, hot summer. Rain was rare during the summer, so harvesting went on all summer. Grapes, figs, and olives were harvested in the month of Av. The grapes were vinted into new wine (grape juice) and the olives were beaten into olive oil. Then in Elul they brought in pomegranates, oranges, apricots, almonds, walnuts, dates, and virtually everything else remaining in the fields or on the trees. Their goal was to complete the harvest by the first of Tishri, the agricultural new year, so they could celebrate the Fall Feasts and await the early rains in preparation for plowing the ground.

The symbolism here has been sadly lost by the modern calendar, but on God's calendar, the trumpets of Tishri would sound at an unpredictable time, depending on when the two witnesses sighted the first sliver of the new moon over old Jerusalem. The long summer is therefore symbolic of the long and undefined period of time between the fulfillment of the Spring Feasts at the time of Christ and the end of the age. Then the trumpet shall sound at a day and hour which no one knows save the Father, announcing Christ's triumphant return for His Bride in awesome power and glory.

This period has been termed the 'Age of Grace' which is a misnomer. That term implies that there was no grace before the birth of Christ, and there will be no grace in the age to come. God's grace is a part of His own nature and character, and as such is infinite and eternal. In fact, the Scripture promises that in the ages yet to come God will display to all the universe the surpassing riches of His grace toward us. (Eph 2:7-8) Every age is an age of grace! In every age since Adam, mankind is called to make his choice to receive God's grace or be condemned for his sin. Scripture assures us that God's grace will still be available during the Millennial Age. (Rev 22:17) Yes, when Satan is released a multitude from the nations 'like the sands of the seashore' will be deceived and will reject it and be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone. (Rev 20:7-10) But man's failures cannot negate God's eternal character.

A better term would be the 'Age of the Gentile Harvest', or 'the times of the Gentiles' as Jesus calls it. (Lk 21:24) Bear in mind that the main purpose of God's calling out the Israelites as a special holy nation unto Himself was so that they would be a light to the nations (Gentiles, pagans – Isa 42:6 & 49:6) so that His salvation would reach to the end of the earth. Yes, you heard me correctly. *God originally called Israel to be His harvesters!* I didn't invent that. It is in the Scripture. The long summer of harvesting was just a physical picture of a long, undefined period of time in which Israel was to be a light to the nations, to bring in the bountiful harvest for the Kingdom of God. Everyone who believed and came to the light from every nation on earth was to be received, purified, and adopted into the family of Israel, in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would be the 'father of many nations'.

They blew it, fulfilling Jesus' parable of the harvesters. (Matt 21:32-44) After they killed the landowner's son, Jesus said, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and will rent out the vineyard to other vinegrowers, who will pay him his share of the harvest at the proper seasons. Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief Cornerstone; this came about from YHWH, and it is marvelous in our eyes?' Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it... And when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them, and... they sought to seize Him..." (v 41-46)

So for the past 2000 years the Gentile church has done the harvesting for the Jews. Does this mean that God has forgotten His people? Some say yes, but I don't believe that for a minute. Dozens of Scriptures say otherwise. I quoted some in my chapter on anti-Semitism; here are a few more:

"... All who were angry at Him shall be put to shame. In YHWH all the offspring of Israel will be justified, and will glory" (Isa 45:24-25)

In Haggai 2, God speaks to Zerubbabel while he is rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem: "Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea, and also the dry land. And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory... the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says YHWH of Hosts, and in this place I shall give peace." (v 6-9) That is speaking of a greater temple than Solomon's. It symbolizes the spiritual temple, the church (the temple of living stones making up the many-membered body of Christ). But I believe that God will fulfill it in the physical as well. The church of the Dark Ages did us a great disservice in spiritualizing away all of God's wondrous promises. God is big enough to fulfill all these prophecies literally as well as spiritually.

"In that day I will raise up the fallen tabernacle of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old." (Amos 9:11) Many other prophecies have been fulfilled with the return of the Jews to the physical land of Israel in my generation, but we still do not see the new temple there, *nor do we yet have peace in Jerusalem!* "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you. May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces." (Ps 122:6-7)

The phrase "In that day..." is repeated many times in the Old Testament. Most of the time it refers to the grand and glorious "day of YHWH" (Joel 1:15, 2:1; Isa 13:6 ff), or "day of the Lord" (1 Thess 5:2 ff; Rev 1:10). This is the period of time which I call the 'Second Appearing' of Christ, at the end of the age when He will show us the true meaning of the Fall Feasts. We will talk more about it later. For now, look at all the things specifically prophesied for God's chosen people, Israel, 'in that day'.

"The burden of the word of YHWH concerning Israel. Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the peoples... *in that day* I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it... *In that day* I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot... so they will consume... all the surrounding peoples... *In that day* YHWH will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem... *In that day* I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the **Spirit of Grace** and of supplication, so that they will look on Me, Aleph Tau [first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, referring to Jesus], whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him... *In that day* a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and impurity... Two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third part will be left in it. *And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.* They will call on My name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'YHWH is my God.' ... *in that day* His feet will stand on the Mt. of Olives... and the Mt. of Olives will be split in the middle... and you will flee by the valley of My mountain... Then YHWH, O my God, will come, and all His holy ones with Him... *in that day* there will be no light; for the luminaries will dwindle... And it will come about *in that day* that living waters will flow out of Jerusalem... and YHWH will be King over all the earth... All the land will be changed into a plain... but Jerusalem will rise... people will live in it, and there will be no more curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security... and any who are left of all the nations that went [to war] against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, YHWH of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Sukkot [Tabernacles]. ... whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, YHWH of Hosts, there will be no rain on them... *There will no longer be a merchant in the house [temple] of YHWH of Hosts in that day.*" (Zech 12-14, excerpts)

Some also try to spiritualize this passage away. But I am a believer, and I believe in a very big God. I see a lot of things here: Israel will be restored as the chosen people of God; she will be repentant of her sins (especially the sin of piercing her Messiah), and cleansed of her impurities, refined through fire to be pure as gold or silver; Jerusalem will be restored and become the capital of the world, from there God will rule the earth; the land will be changed so that Jerusalem is the only hill; every other hill will be brought low and every valley will be filled (Isa 40:4; Lk 3:4); the sun and moon will go out, but "the Lamb is the Light" (Rev 21:23); the curse on the land will be broken; the nations of the world will be required to celebrate at least the Feast of Tabernacles during the Millennium; and, did you catch it? There will be a restored temple, and this time YHWH will tolerate no merchants in it!

“And I shall set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. And the house of Israel will know that I am YHWH their God from that day onward. And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity, and because they acted treacherously against me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them. Therefore, thus says the Lord YHWH, ‘Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the entire house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. And they shall forget all their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely in their own land with no one to make them afraid.’

“When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them back from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. Then they will know that I am YHWH their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,’ declares YHWH.” (Ezek 39:21-29)

“I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be... there has come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice... those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened, just as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not, and ears to hear not, down to this very day... I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! By their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous... for if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?! ... for God is able to graft them in again... This mystery... that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; **and thus all Israel will be saved...** for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” (Rom 11, excerpts)

There are many others, but you get the picture. We are now still in the long hot summer. The fields are ripe for a bountiful harvest, but the harvesters are few. Therefore, call upon the Lord of the harvest, that He may send forth laborers. (Lk 10:2; Jn 4:35) God will answer that prayer; it is His desire as well. Only He knows how short are the days before the last trumpet call. Only He knows when to graft Israel back in again, so that all the surviving remnant of Israel will be saved to help us complete the harvest. I believe He will do it, for I believe His Word. We Gentiles have struggled for 2000 years, yet we, too, have failed to bring in the harvest. But God never fails in what He sets out to do. That final, full, bountiful harvest will be reaped, no matter how many ages it takes to finish it.

“And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations [ethnos – ethnic groups], and then the end shall come... and there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no flesh would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short... *but immediately after the tribulation of those days*, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, *and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky* [as He left – Acts 1:11] *with power and great glory*. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet [the Last Trump – 1 Cor 15:52], and they will gather together His elect [this is the rapture of the church] from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” (Matt 24:14-31)

Please note that there is no secret pre-tribulation rapture here, or anywhere else in Scripture. Many godly believers have fallen for this heresy, which I define as Jesus coming secretly to silently snatch up His Bride to heaven before the seal or trumpet judgments fall. (Rev 6 - 11) There will be a rapture, but not one verse of Scripture says that it will be either secret or silent. Every passage dealing with the rapture says that tribulation will come first, and gives a warning to be alert and ready, to stand firm and overcome through it. The secret, silent pre-trib rapture heresy can only be supported by taking a very few verses out of context and reading into them hidden meanings, implications, or symbolisms of which even the writers were not aware. It is not a doctrine of the Scriptures. It is a doctrine of men, discovered in the mid 1800s. The few passages in Revelation and the Epistles which can be taken out of context and twisted to imply a pre-trib rapture are more easily understood by the simple sequence given by Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 17 and 20. Jesus clearly warned us (Matt 24:9-21) about “great tribulation” (v 21 – I believe this refers only to the seal and trumpet judgments of Revelation 6-11) and He declared that the rapture (v 31) will be “immediately after the tribulation” (v 29) and that the one who “endures to the end... will be saved.” (v 13) This passage is very clear. It is incredibly arrogant for someone to take Jesus’ own words and twist them around to mean something that they do not say.

One problem here is that end-time prophecies cannot be understood without understanding the Feasts of Israel, which the modern church has all but ignored. In addition, we Protestants have never gotten past perverted Roman Catholic doctrines like futurism, replacement theology, and their views of heaven and hell. They still color our thinking and make us misinterpret end-time Scriptures. This chapter is my attempt to straighten it all out.

To accept a pre-trib rapture you have to believe that Jesus Himself was ignorant of His Father's plan. Either His warnings to His own disciples were in error, or they applied only to unbelieving Jews or Gentiles and not to the very believers to whom He spoke. You also have to believe that the apostles whom God inspired to write Scripture were equally ignorant of what the Father was saying through them, since they all strongly warned the disciples to be ready for tribulation, with never a hint that there would be an end-time generation of disciples that would escape tribulation. I simply don't believe that God would go to such great lengths to deliberately mislead us. God has always used tribulation to refine and purify His people and prepare them to walk with Him; so why should the end-time saints be any different?

Pre-tribulation rapture theologians have published volumes to try to explain this. It takes a lot of explaining. I've read their books and studied all their Scripture 'proofs' but I don't buy it. They will never quote a whole passage of Scripture to see the context; they just take a single verse or two out of context and 'proof-text' it. They rarely try to look at the meanings of the key words to try to find what the author intended to say; instead they start with what they feel it ought to say, and try to twist the meaning of each verse to fit their presupposition.

I do believe in the rapture of the church, dear Reader. The word rapture, like the word trinity, is not in the Bible. But also like trinity, we believe the doctrine of the rapture by numerous direct Scripture references which, when put together, form a solid base upon which we can rest our faith. By definition 'rapture' means 'the state of being transported by a lofty emotion; ecstasy'. That is actually a wonderful word to describe our meeting with Christ at His Second Appearing, and I don't mind using it, as long as we correctly understand the meanings of the scriptural terms. We will indeed be enraptured with Him at His appearing, and in fact we should be enraptured with Him daily when we come into the secret place of His presence in prayer. However, 'the rapture' refers to a specific event (or events) near the end of this age when the saints first meet their Savior face to face. But the Bible uses other terms, such as "the first resurrection," "the day of the Lord," "the day of YHWH," "the day of Christ," "the last day," "that day," "the end of the age," "day of judgment," "our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body," and "the revealing of the sons of God." Each of these terms has a particular significance, and each adds to our understanding of the doctrine of the rapture. So let's look briefly at them.

The "first resurrection" is the resurrection of the saints at the end of the age. (Rev 20:5-6) In other places it is called "the resurrection of the righteous" (Lk 14:14), or "the out-resurrection from the dead." (Phil 3:11) This is not the resurrection of the wicked before Judgment Day at the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-15), which doesn't occur until after the Millennium.

The first resurrection is tied to the rapture in, of all places, one of the key verses used to 'proof text' the pre-trib rapture "... the dead in Christ shall rise first [clearly the 'first resurrection']. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." (1 Thess 4:16-17) *So when is the first resurrection?* The book of Revelation puts the first resurrection (20:6) in the same time frame as the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:7-10), the destruction of the wicked (19:11-21), the binding of Satan (20:1-3, and the thousand year reign of Christ in His saints. (20:4-6) But this is not much help, as it is not a single event, but a whole series of events, as shown by the "great multitude which no one could count" (7:9) who are still "coming out of great tribulation" (7:14 – lit. Gk.) before the trumpets have even begun to sound.

Another primary passage is where Martha confessed, "I know he [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection [the 'first resurrection'] *on the last day.*" (Jn 11:24) So how did Martha know when the first resurrection would be? Jesus had already told her, back in John 6: "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, *but raise it up on the last day.* For this is the will of My Father, that every one who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal Life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal Life; and I will raise him up on the last day." (v 39-40, 54) *So, when is the last day?*

In the Jewish culture a day can be a period of time just as easily as a 24 hour day. This is clearly the case here. The 'last day' is speaking of the period of time that leads up to the climax of the return of Jesus in great power and glory.

It is called "*the day of judgment*" in places such as, "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation [trial, tribulation], and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." (2 Pet 2:10), and "By this, love is perfected, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world." (1 Jn 4:17) It is called "*the day of the Lord*" (or YHWH, or Christ, or God) in numerous places, such as "Wail! For the day of YHWH is near! It will come about as destruction from the Almighty." (Isa 13:6; similar in Joel 1:15, 2:1 & 11) "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of YHWH" (Mal 4:5), "... awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 1:7-8), "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil 1:6), "the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." (1 Thess 5:2) and many others. This is often coupled with descriptive words such as "a day of YHWH's vengeance," (Isa 34:8), "the day of YHWH's sacrifice," "the great day of YHWH," and "the day of YHWH's anger," (Zeph 1:8, 14 & 2:2), and "the day of vengeance of our God." (Isa 61:2)

And “YHWH alone will be exalted *on that day*. For YHWH of Hosts will have *a day of reckoning ...*” (Isa 2:11-12) “... you are storing up wrath for yourself in *the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*” (Rom 2:5) “Each man’s work will become evident; for *the day* will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire...” (1 Cor 3:13) “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for *the day of redemption.*” (Eph 4:30)

In the above passages, the length of ‘that day’ is not specified. It could be a single day, a week, a month, a year, seven years, or a thousand years. We just don’t know from the words ‘the last day’ how long it is, which is why we call it the ‘end times’. That is why there is such a controversy over the relationship of the rapture with the judgment or tribulation that nearly always accompanies any scriptural mention of it. Most Scriptures seem to just lump everything together on ‘the last day’. But all Bible scholars agree that more than one 24 hour day is required for all these things to take place.

As you can quickly see, ‘the last day’ is a very common theme in Scripture. Putting all these verses together should give us a solid footing for a doctrine of the rapture. One passage that ties some of these terms together is 2 Peter 3, which puts “the day of judgment” with “the day of the Lord” and “the day of God,” all in the same setting with the return of Christ “like a thief,” “the destruction of ungodly men,” and “a new heavens and new earth.” Peter sounds a clear warning to the saints to be prepared: “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God... therefore, beloved, since you are looking for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.” (v 11 & 14) Peter clearly did not know of a pre-trib rapture; he expected the saints to be right there.

However, time-wise Peter is not much help either. He combines things that happen at the very beginning of the Millennium (mockers, v3) with the “new heavens and a new earth,” which happens at the end. Thus “the last day” for Peter is a thousand years, and he even states “... with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (v 8) It fits with the rest of Scripture; we have had six days of labor – the seventh will be a day of rest, the “day of the Lord” – the Lord’s Sabbath – literally “the Lord’s day.” (Rev 1:10) I see no theological problems with this view of a thousand year ‘last day’.

However, many Scriptures are more specifically directed to events which occur at end of this present age and the beginning of the Millennium. The “day of the Lord” in these Scriptures is the period of time leading up to and including the Second Appearing of Jesus Christ (often called the ‘Second Coming’). It is His day, for He shall then be revealed for every eye to see (Rev 1:7) in awesome power and glory as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Some pre-trib rapture teachers used to distinguish between *the day of Christ* and *the day of the Lord*, saying that the former is the secret rapture, but the latter, seven years later, is the day of judgment. On the surface that seemed to hold water. But we are talking about one person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and when He returns He will return both as Jesus Christ (Savior, Messiah) to the saints and as Lord (Boss, Judge, Ruler) over the wicked. In themselves, the terms “the day of Christ” and “the day of the Lord” does not require the events to be at different times. In fact, Paul combines them as “*day of our Lord Jesus Christ*” and places it firmly at the end of the age. (1 Cor 1:8) So we obviously must dig a bit deeper to end this controversy.

At least seven Greek terms describe our Lord’s Second Appearing. All are translated by a form of ‘coming’ or ‘appearing’ at least some times in some translations:

Parousia (Strong’s 3952) means ‘presence’. It never indicates the act of coming, but the presence of one who has already arrived. “Be patient... unto the coming [the presence] of the Lord... the coming [the presence] of the Lord is at hand.” (James 5:7, 8)

Apokalupsis (Strong’s 602) means ‘unveiling’ or ‘appearing’. It is the revealing and disclosure of one who was already there but who had been hidden. “... fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation [the unveiling] of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 1:13)

Epiphaneia (Strong’s 2015) means ‘manifestation, a display, brightness’. It comes from a verb meaning to shine upon, bring to light, appear, as of a star which was there but unperceived all day, and suddenly its brightness becomes manifest by the night. “In the future is laid up for me the crown of righteousness... also to all who have loved His appearing [manifestation].” (2 Tim 4:8) This is a combination of two words: epi (at) and phaneroo:

Phaneroo (Strong’s 5319) means to declare or show oneself openly, to make manifest or apparent to one’s perception. “When He shall appear [become apparent to our perception] we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him just as He is.” (1 Jn 3:2)

Erchomai (Strong’s 2064) means the event itself – the actual act of coming. “Behold, He is coming [is in the act of coming] with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him...” (Rev 1:7) This verb is in the present indicative tense, implying more than just a single act; rather a present continuous coming. This verse could well be translated: “Behold, He has been coming, is still in the act of coming, and will continue to come with the clouds, so that eventually every eye will recognize Him, even those who pierced Him.”

Heko (Strong’s 2240) stresses the point of arrival at a specific place or to a certain individual. “Nevertheless, hold fast what you have until I come [to you, personally].” (Rev 2:25)

Optomai (Strong's 3700) is a physical appearing, stressing seeing something special with the eye; to gaze (as at something remarkable), to see with open, clear vision; it should not be translated 'coming' but rather 'appearing'. "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared [physically] to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 9:17) "Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear [physically, for every eye to see] a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation." (Heb 9:28)

A full study of these seven words is profitable, but is beyond the scope of this book. I only mention these terms because some preachers of the pre-trib rapture heresy have used them to try to prove a secret rapture. They have claimed (for example) that the word 'parousia' refers only to their secret rapture, while the others refer to the actual 'Second Coming' in power and glory for every eye to see.

Finus Dake's *Annotated Reference Bible* states: "It [the parousia] refers to the rapture, not the second advent of Christ. It is the same as in 1 Thess 3:13; 4:13-17... These two comings should not be confused. Not one passage refers to both events as if they were one." And Carl Sabiers, in *Where Are The Dead?* agrees: "The two phases of Christ's Second Coming are clearly distinguished in the Greek. The 'parousia' ... is His coming for His saints... the 'apokalupsis' (the revealing, the unveiling, the making manifest) is His coming with His saints."

Many pre-trib rapture teachers are now backing off from this dogmatic position, as it is clear that it is based on poor scholarship and is unsupportable from Scripture.

In fact, when talking about Christ's Second Appearing, Scripture often combines several of these terms to describe both the rapture and the destruction of the wicked. For example, "... relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed [apokalupsis] from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God... when He comes [erchomai] to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at in all who have believed... with regard to the coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together with Him [the rapture] ... Let no one in any way deceive you, for [that day will not come] unless the apostasy comes [erchomai] first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed [apokalupsis] ... And then that lawless one will be revealed [apokalupsis], whom the Lord shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the brightness [epiphaneia] of His coming [parousia]." (2 Thess 1:7, 10; 2:8)

This single passage totally puts the lie to Sabiers' and Dake's thesis, as the antichrist is first revealed, then slain at Christ's 'parousia'. And as always, tribulation (affliction) comes first. Finally the Lord is revealed in retribution against His enemies and to be glorified in His saints.

"... where is the promise of His coming [parousia] ... The day of the Lord will come [heko] like a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with rushing sound and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and all its works will be burned up. Since then all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and [even] hastening the coming [parousia] of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning. (2 Pet 3:4-12)

There are others, but you get the idea. There is simply no way any honest scholar can justify from Scripture reserving the use of 'parousia' for a secret pre-trib rapture. It is clearly used for His coming both for the saints and to judge the wicked.

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we **suffer with Him** in order that we may also be **glorified with Him**. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for [the rapture? no] the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption [bondage to decay] into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails [suffers childbirth pains] together until now. Not only this, but also we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." (Rom 8:18-23)

This presents a biblical sequence that does not follow our natural inclinations. I do not see an easy ticket to heaven for everyone who recites a little prayer and has some priest sprinkle holy water on his head. The sequence here is very clear: suffering with Christ first – glorified and reigning with Him second; groaning and travailing first – our adoption as sons second; subjection to futility first – the freedom of the glory of the children of God second.

This is absolutely consistent throughout the rest of the Scriptures. There is no place anywhere in Scripture where God promises that anyone can be snatched up to heaven without first going through suffering, trials, tribulations, discipline, and testing of our faith.

There is a reason for this, and it has to do with the ways of God. We in the all-American 'instant' generation have trouble with this, but God did not create robots to be instant sons. That is not His way. Time is made for change. Maturing is often a slow process. Jesus Himself "learned obedience through the things that He suffered" (Heb 5:8), and He wants us to follow in His footsteps. "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness." (Heb 12)

THE SCRIPTURAL RAPTURE – THE STORY

So, what is the fallacy that permitted the church to accept such grievous heresy? Yep, you guessed it. The old Roman Catholic doctrines of heaven and hell, in which the righteous **all** go to heaven and the wicked are **all** cast into hell. Done. We get eternal life, they get eternal torment. Time ends. No more chances for repentance or growth. No more grace or mercy. God changes to a god of infinite wrath instead of infinite love. Forget all those verses about “every knee shall bow” and God becoming “all and in all.”

But once we toss out that simplistic doctrine, these conflicts in Scripture can be resolved. The Bride no longer must be snatched up to heaven to shack up with her fiancé before the wedding. The rapture and wedding of the Bride can now occur at the last (seventh) trumpet of Revelation where it belongs, and everything else fits into place as well.

This is why I was so insistent about the manyfold nature of Christ’s coming. The rapture too is more than one event! The Bride is but a small subset of all Christ’s brothers and servants. She is only those “144,000s” who received the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Those “days are cut short”; the moment she is completed and purified through tribulation, the first rapture and wedding feast occur. This is toward the end of the great tribulation.

The Bride is relatively few, but those invited to the wedding feast are myriads. This feast is bigger than we’ve been told, and gets bigger every year, for it includes all who receive Jesus as their Messiah throughout the ages, both the ages before Christ and the ages after His wedding. This is why it is celebrated annually at the Feast of Tabernacles. (Zech 14:16) After the wedding, the Bride goes out to call the rest of humanity (who do go through the wrath of God at the end of the tribulation), saying, “Come! Come, all who are thirsty. Come drink the waters of Life without cost.” (Rev 22:17) Thus the wedding feast grows larger.

One thing that helped to confuse everyone is, what happens to the Jews? They were certainly called to the wedding feast, and Scripture affirms that in the end “... all Israel will be saved.” (Rom 11:26) They are Christ’s own brothers, His Chosen People! But at the time of the rapture they have not yet received Him as their Messiah, so they are left behind. That is why they “will look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn for Him.” (Zech 12:10)

The Jews are a physical picture of the spiritual Bride. Jews who haven’t yet accepted their Messiah at the rapture of the Bride will fulfill the Fall Feasts in the physical realm, but not until the end of the tribulation. The days aren’t cut short for them. God covers them in Azel to protect them from His wrath. Israel thus fulfills in the physical realm all that the Bride previously fulfilled in the spiritual realm. The Feast of Tabernacles then becomes Christ’s wedding anniversary. The Jews will attend it, not as Christ’s Bride, but as His brothers. Each year at the Feast, more will come. *So the rapture is actually multiple raptures, first for the Bride, then for the Jews, followed by others each year.*

Pulling together many Scriptures into a single picture, here is how I expect those ‘end times’ to unfold. I’ve made guesses in tying together some of the details, as there is no one Scripture passage that lays out the whole sequence, but I think I have come pretty close. This story outlines the scriptural doctrine of the rapture as I understand it.

Before the actual end times, we are to expect many and increasing wars, earthquakes, plagues, famines, storms, persecutions, and antichrists. This has been going on for years. In themselves they do not signal the beginning of ‘the last day’, though they are indeed encouragements for us to be warned and to prepare for it. (Matt 24:6)

The gospel of the Kingdom of God will be preached to every ethnic group in the world, and then the end times will come. (Matt 24:14; see also Rom 10:18) This is an important prophecy, and it is a formidable task. There are still several thousand totally unreached ethnic groups. Jesus cannot come ‘at any moment’ out of His love and His desire that every ‘ethnos’ (people group) have a chance to hear the gospel before Judgment Day.

Terrible tribulation will sweep nation after nation until it has spread over the whole world, as the Lamb opens the first five seals. (Rev 6) This will coincide with a general apostasy. (2 Thess 2:3) Those who are wicked will obtain public sanction for their wickedness (as in America with sodomites and abortionists). This will result in an ever-increasing spiral of God’s judgments on the earth. The saints will be blamed, and will be persecuted and martyred for their faith. The Bride of Christ will be spiritually sealed and protected during this time (Rev 7), but that does not preclude physical torture and death. (Rev 12:11)

Most people on earth will be ‘asleep’ and will have no clue that we are even in the end times. Many Christians will also be sleeping. However, as the judgments slowly increase in intensity they will begin to ‘wake up’ and start to forsake their compromises with the world and begin to walk with God. Anyone who does not, may not be one of the saints. This is one purpose of tribulation. (Heb 12)

The “man of sin,” the “beast of antichrist,” will be revealed during this time, inspired by the devil himself (the dragon). Most people on earth will see him as a savior from all the world’s troubles and will worship him. Only saints who are alert and prepared will recognize him for who he is. Knowing his time is short, Satan will have great wrath against the saints. He will make war with them, and overcome them. (Rev 13:7 ff)

However, the wrath of God will be directed at the wicked, not at the righteous. True Christians will allow the persecution to purify them as gold is refined in a furnace, and will become wholehearted in their hatred of evil and love of righteousness, eagerly focusing on “the blessed hope” of the return of Christ. (Dan 11:33-35; 12:10)

Many miracles will occur during this time. There will be miraculous deliverances, as God's judgment falls all around the saints but does not come near them. (Ps 91) There will also be an abundance of the gifts of the Spirit (prophecy, healings, etc) as God pours out His Spirit on all mankind. (Joel 2:28 ff) As the first five seal judgments grow severe (Rev 6:1-11) the distinction between the wicked and the righteous will become obvious; the wicked will become more wicked, hard-hearted, and unrepentant even as the righteous are purified. There will be no fence-sitters, no luke-warm, halfhearted Christians on that day.

The antichrist will also be doing miracles (reminiscent of Pharaoh's magicians). He will validate his authority in the eyes of the world by amazing signs and wonders, to deceive even the elect if possible. We must be careful not to rest our faith on miracles, only on the clear Word of God.

Also during this time, there will be two witnesses who will prophesy the word of YHWH to the Jews at Jerusalem (Rev 11) which will be the focal point of much of the great tribulation. They will minister for 3 1/2 years, prophesying terrible plagues upon the earth. (v 6) Their ministry will last through the sixth seal judgment (Rev 6:12; Joel 2:31; Matt 24:29), the first six trumpet judgments (Rev 7 and 8), the first two woes (Rev 8:13), and the seven loud peals of thunder (Rev 10:3). The two witnesses will be blamed for God's judgments and will be slain by the beast from the Abyss, with a great celebration. (I believe that by this time most – if not all – the other saints whom the antichrist had overcome will also be martyred.) After 3 1/2 days the two witnesses will rise from the dead and be taken to heaven, in full view of the party-goers. That could be "the sign of the Son of Man." (Matt 24:30) I believe this to be the precise moment of the last (seventh) trumpet and the rapture of the Bride of Christ. (Rev 11:12-19) Verse 13 implies that this may be the time that the remnant of the Jews will mourn over Him whom they had pierced (Zech 12:10) and accept Jesus as their Messiah, thus giving glory to the God of heaven. They will mourn because they are left behind!

The seventh and last trumpet (Rev 10:7 & 11:15; 1 Cor 15:52) signals the rapture of the Bride. She is united in holy matrimony with her Savior (on Tishri 1, the Feast of Trumpets). In my fiction story, she dances with her new Husband during the Ten Days of Awe, worships Him for five days beginning with the Day of Atonement, and then Feasts with Him for seven days at the marriage supper of the Lamb. (Rev 19:7) That will come on Tishri 15-21, the Feast of Tabernacles. For her, the Fall Feasts have already done their job of calling the saints into judgment, for the Bride has "made herself ready" with "the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev 19:7-8) and is "blameless." (Rev 14:5) There will be no sorrow or judgment at her wedding, only joy. "Let us rejoice and be glad..." (Rev 19:7) But is that it? No. The Bride is the "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb." (Rev 14:1-5) "Firstfruits" implies a coming harvest. That is why I insist on a need for multiple raptures.

The Bride is a tiny fraction of the great masses of humanity – as few as "144,000s." (Biblically this is plural, and may be some multiple of 144,000.) The rapture of the Bride is before the end of the 70th "week" (heptad or "set of seven" = 7 years) of Daniel 9:27, when Israel will be redeemed. The rapture must occur after the tribulation, but before the wrath of God falls. "Those days shall be cut short." (Matt 24:22) I am guessing that the rapture of the Bride will come two years early – just before the seven bowls of the wrath of God, called the seven last plagues, are poured out on the earth. (Rev 15:1, 16) That will include more terrible signs in the heavens, such as a supernova and darkening of the sun. (Rev 16: 8-10) It will also include another earthquake: "every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." (Rev 16:20 and Ezek 38:20) I believe that during these horrifying cataclysms, the 'lost tribes' of Israel will be awakened and rejoined to Israel.

So by the end of these two years, we are really getting to 'the darkest day' prophesied by the Feast of Trumpets. Not just Israel, but everyone remaining on earth are mourning because they saw Messiah come but were left behind. Now that dark passage in Joel 2 makes sense. I believe Israel (and others) will repent during the Ten Days of Awe and be ready for the Judgment of Saints (Bema) on Tishri 10 of the seventh and final year of the great tribulation.

As the seventh bowl of wrath is poured out, "It is done!" (Rev 16:17) Jesus, followed by the armies of heaven (the Bride), returns to earth to stand on the Mount of Olives. (Zech 14:4) Repentant Israelites are protected in Azel as the last of the wrath of God falls, utterly defeating all the Lord's enemies. (v 18-21) *Then we have the rapture of Israel!* For 5 days, Israel is judged, found worthy, and invited to what I call a wedding anniversary feast, not as the Bride, but as brothers of Christ. Thus "all Israel will be saved." (Rom 11:26) The vultures are given the flesh of the kings of the earth in "the great supper of God" at the same time. (Rev 19; Ezek 39:17 ff) Afterwards, Christ and His Bride return again to cleanse the earth. The beast of anti-christ, the false prophet, and those who worshiped them are cast into the lake of fire. Satan is bound. Christ reigns through His Bride over His brothers and servants during the Millennium. (Rev 20:4) From then on, the 'wedding anniversary' fulfillment of Tabernacles will be celebrated annually, as the Spirit and the Bride invite the rest of mankind to "Come! All who are thirsty, come!" (Rev 22:17)

Finally, Satan is released from prison, deceives whomever he can, and gathers them together to fight the saints at Jerusalem. Satan is summarily bound and thrown into the lake of fire. Then all the dead are resurrected and judged according to their deeds before the Great White Throne of Christ. The unrepentant wicked, death, and Hades are all thrown into the lake of fire, which is called the second death. The earth is again cleansed by fire and restored, and the Bride reigns in and through Christ over His brothers and servants "forever and ever." (Rev 22:5)

That is the story, in brief summary form. I'll go into much greater detail in the last volume of *God's Plan of the Ages*. For our purposes, that is enough to see how it meshes with the Feasts of Israel. Trumpets symbolizes the last call for Israel (including all the saints who are adopted into Israel) to accept her Messiah, at the new moon, the very darkest day of the month. The Day of Atonement symbolizes the judgment of the saints at which they receive their rewards for their deeds, good and bad, are finally freed completely from their sin nature, and receive their "adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." (Rom 8:23) And the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the marriage supper of the Lamb with His Bride, which Israel misses because the "days are cut short." However, it will be celebrated from then on as a wedding anniversary feast, allowing for multiple raptures of the brothers and servants of the Lord as they become saved, and continuing at least until the entire harvest of mankind is reaped, for that is what the Feast of Tabernacles is all about.

Thus Scripture does give us a solid basis for the rapture doctrine. It is tied into one consistent series of events. The rapture of the Bride comes before the final wrath of God, but not before the great tribulation without doing terrible violence to God's inerrant Word. I apologize for taking so much time on this, as it is controversial, involving an in-depth study of many Scriptures. But I cannot avoid it in teaching the Feasts of Israel. The Fall Feasts are prophetic of the end times. You cannot understand them if your thinking is distorted by the pre-trib rapture heresy.

When I first heard of this heresy (about 1980), I was shocked. As a pastor's son who has sat through biblically based sermons all my life (and actually listened and enjoyed my dad's preaching), I thought I already knew all the basic scriptural doctrines. But rather than talk to men about it, I did what I always recommend to others; I went right back and searched the Scriptures. (Acts 17:11) Since then I have literally read through the entire Bible and spent years studying; yes, just researching this one subject. But I have not found one single verse of Scripture which implies that Jesus will come back secretly or silently 'like a thief in the night', to steal away His Bride before the tribulation of the seal and trumpet judgments of Revelation. Just the opposite. The Scripture actually says: (1 Cor 15:51-58)

"... we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when... [this happens], then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory...' Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory [helps us to overcome] through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, *be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil [trials, tribulation] is not in vain in the Lord.*"

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief [without warning], in which the heavens will pass away [secretly? silently? no!] with a roar, the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." (2 Pet 3:10)

"For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who have fallen asleep [died]. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven [secretly, silently? no!] with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first [the first resurrection]. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

"Now as to the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night [without warning]. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly, like birth pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day [of the Lord] should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness... God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess 4:15-5:9)

Please note: contrary to the pre-trib rapture heresy, the day of the Lord does not overtake the saints like a thief – only those still in darkness – because the saints have had plenty of warning, right from Scripture, *unless of course they believed the secret pre-tribulation rapture heresy.*

Also note that the saints are not destined for the wrath of God, but for 'obtaining salvation'. The word 'obtain' is defined in the Greek as "to get possession by working; to procure, buy with money; to prevail, win the victory." The saints are not called merely to escape the tribulation, but to be victorious through it – to be 'overcomers'. (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) "I saw... those [saints] who had come off victorious [won the victory] from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass and holding harps of God." (Rev 15:2) "... and they [the saints] overcame [prevailed, won the victory over] him [the adversary/accuser of the brethren] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death." (Rev 12:11)

"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown. He who [is raptured? no, no, no!] overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God..." (Rev 3:10-12)

Notice that the word 'keep' in this passage is defined in the Greek "to watch carefully, to guard by keeping the eye upon; to observe and do, as in ordinances; to hold fast; to preserve." The same word is used in John 17:15: "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep [guard] them from the evil one," and again in 1 John 5:3 and 18: "For this is the love of God, that we keep [do, obey] His commandments... We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God [Christ] keeps [guards] him, and the evil one does not touch him." The word implies alert activity, as there is danger nearby from which you need to be guarded. That would be nonsense if the saints were snatched up to heaven.

The word 'keep' has no connotation of running away or escape. Scripture does promise help and deliverance in times of trouble, but never escape from all our troubles. "Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22b) "... if we shall endure [persevere under testing], we shall also reign with Him." (2 Tim 2:12) "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Tim 3:12) "... In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33)

This concept of being guarded by the power of God is common in Scripture. "... who are protected [guarded, kept] by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (that's at the rapture! – 1 Pet 1:5) "Now to Him who is able to keep [protect, guard] you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy..." (Jude 24) Those who believe that God cannot protect His saints through great tribulation without snatching them up to heaven first, have a god who is way too small.

Jesus did not believe in a pre-trib rapture. In fact, *He prayed against it and warned us against believing in it.* "I have given them Thy Word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep [guard, protect] them from [out of the power of] the evil one." (Jn 17:14-15) "And they questioned Him, saying, 'Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?' And He said, 'Take heed that you be not misled; for many will come in My name, saying I AM [Messiah] and "The time is at hand!" Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately... for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all these things [are completed], they will lay their hands on you, and will persecute you, delivering you to synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. That will lead to an opportunity for your

testimony... *for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute...* and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all on account of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish... these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled... Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled, and there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, [you, My disciples] straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Lk 21:7-28, excerpts)

This is a fascinating passage – read the whole chapter to get the context. But one thing Jesus very clearly does not say, or even imply, is that the saints will be raptured up out of it all. Just the opposite; we saints will be saved through the persecution because of our boldness to testify, *and though some of us will be put to death, not a hair of our heads will perish!* That takes a mighty big God!

As with Daniel's three friends when they were thrown into the fiery furnace, the fires of tribulation which slay our oppressors only set us free from our bonds, so that we can walk and talk with our Lord in the midst of the fiery furnace. (Dan 3:25 ff)

However, there is something else here that you may have missed. *Jesus warns us here against those who preach a secret pre-trib rapture.* Allow me to paraphrase: "Do not be misled. Many will come in My name, acknowledging that I am the Messiah, but preaching, 'The time is at hand! He could come at any moment! Nothing else has to happen before He returns, because He is coming back in secret like a thief to snatch away the saints before these terrible signs take place!' They speak heresy. Do not follow them. All these horrible things must take place, but the end does not follow immediately. Before these things are completed, you My disciples will suffer terrible persecution. But don't worry; I'll see you through it. I'll bring you before kings and governors for My name's sake. Jerusalem will remain in the hands of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. After that there will be awesome signs in the heavens and upon the earth (as the Scripture warns in Joel 2:31), and dismay among the nations, men fainting from fear. Then they will see the sign of the Son of Man, coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But you? Well, here is the answer to your question. *[Don't worry about it, you'll all be snatched up to heaven long before any of this comes to pass – No, no, no!]* When you My disciples see with your own eyes all these things taking place, straighten up and lift your heads, because it means that your redemption is drawing near."

Does this remind you of any Old Testament warnings against a pre-trib rapture? Isaiah, for example, has several, such as chapters 34 and 45, which speak boldly of God's day of vengeance and ties it together with the righteous being saved and set free to walk the highway of holiness right through it all. But I think the best is in Amos: "*All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say 'The calamity [great tribulation] will not overtake or confront us [because we'll be snatched up before it happens]!' In that day [the last day] I will raise up the fallen tabernacle of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old.*" (9:10-11) There is no place in all of Scripture that speaks favorably of those who hold to the secret pre-tribulation rapture heresy.

Some preachers of the pre-trib rapture agree that Jesus never taught it, claiming that His mission was only to the Jews (who will indeed go through the tribulation) so His teaching was never intended for the church. Again, this is too simplistic. The nation Israel is the physical type of the spiritual 'holy nation', the church. Everything Jesus said to the Jews applies to the church too, but the Jews fulfill it in the physical realm while the church is fulfilling it more in the spiritual. I would hate to think most of the Gospels are only for the Jews! Going back to Luke 21, the very next paragraph is a clear warning to both Jews and the church: "... when you [My disciples] see these things happening, recognize that the Kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation [that sees these signs come down] will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will not pass away. Be on guard, so that your hearts be not weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the worries of life, and that day come upon you like a trap [or a thief]; *for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of the earth [Jews, church, and pagans alike].* But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have **strength to escape** [endurance to overcome] all these things that are about to take place, and to stand [victorious, as overcomers] before the Son of Man [at His return]." (v 31-36)

That phrase "strength to escape" is interesting. The King James renders it "... that you may be accounted worthy to escape." The word for "escape" means "to flee out from, to run away out of, to escape out of by sudden effort," and the very word implies that you were in the middle of it and fled from it. The word for "strength" or "accounted worthy" is "to be completely entitled, to be fit, to deem entirely deserving." It gives the word picture of one who has won the race, overcome the battle, gained the victory, and now is deserving of the prize.

Based on these, I can paraphrase that last verse: "*Stay alert at all times, praying for strength both to endure and to overcome, so that you will be victorious, standing firm in faith before the Son of Man at His return for His own.*" I believe that interpretation is in harmony with this passage and the entirety of Scripture.

However, there is another valid interpretation of this passage as well. What is it that we need to escape? The great tribulation? Or the "dissipation, drunkenness, and worries of life" which are mentioned? I submit that you cannot escape the one without the other. I believe that Jesus in this passage is also saying, "*Stay alert at all times, praying that you may gain victory over the wickedness and worldliness which will flood the earth and result in God's wrath and judgment, so that you will still be standing firm in righteousness before the Son of Man at His return.*"

Tell me, how did Noah escape the flood? How did the Children of Israel escape the plagues on Egypt? How did Daniel's friends escape the fiery furnace? How did Daniel escape the lions? How was Elijah delivered from the 3 year drought? How was Rahab saved when the walls of Jericho fell down? You see, I believe in a very big miracle-working God, who has no trouble distinguishing the wicked from the righteous when His judgments fall. Yet none of them escaped without both faith and effort on their own part. They had to stand firm in obedience!

I believe that any doctrine which teaches that we don't have to pray for strength to endure the persecution – any pastor who preaches a 'greasy grace' of instant holiness without going through the fires of the Lord's discipline – anyone who promises you peace and safety, blessings and prosperity, just because you quoted the 'sinner's prayer' – any belief that says God is just too small to protect His saints right through the middle of the great tribulation – any minister who sounds no warnings to prepare the saints for the great battle in the heavenlies over the hearts and souls of men – any teaching that negates the many clear scriptural warnings for the saints to be alert, prepare, and overcome through tribulation – *is a dangerous and destructive heresy which will be weeded out of the true church by faithful preachers or by tribulation.*

One of the leaders of the true church in China confided some years ago that he regretted ever preaching a secret pre-trib rapture; so many people were totally unprepared for the persecution when the Communists took over in 1951. (I was in China at that time. It was not a pretty sight. Liberal fools who are pushing socialism in America do not comprehend the evils of socialism and how incredibly much human suffering it has caused.) In 1915 tens of thousands of Armenian Christians were slain by Muslim Ottoman Turks, because they did not heed the prophetic warnings that great persecution was near, having believed the pre-trib rapture heresy. Even to this day, thousands of Christians are being slaughtered all over the world. Now terrible persecution is coming to America. But American Christians are asleep, having believed a lie: that they would be snatched up to heaven any second now and would never see persecution. Many will be bewildered, crushed, despairing, and slain because the church leaders, shepherds of the flock, did not preach the clear warnings from Scripture prophesying persecution and tribulation.

These false shepherds of God's flock are guilty of what I term 'intellectual dishonesty' in how they handle the Word of God. This term refers to those who figure out what the people want to hear, whatever will draw crowds and keep the church-goers happy, then adjust their preaching accordingly, searching for Scriptures to back up their doctrines. (If you search hard enough you can always find a verse or two to back up whatever you choose to believe.) But that is intellectually dishonest. A preacher, one who spent years in Bible school and seminary and who has given his life to the ministry of the Word of God, has a responsibility to know the whole Word of God, and to discern true doctrine from heresy by whether or not it harmonizes with the whole Bible. The true shepherd of God's flock will always adjust his teaching according to the Word of God, rather than according to what others are saying or what he thinks the people want to hear.

An example, which is a big problem with the pre-trib rapture heresy, is its insistence that Jesus will return suddenly for His Bride, like a thief in the night or like a flash of lightning, to snatch them up to heaven, *and nothing else has to happen first*. This is a popular doctrine. People like to be told that at any second they could be caught up to glory without having to suffer first. But Jesus didn't believe that. In Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 17 and 21 He listed many things that have to happen first, some of which have already come to pass, and some of which haven't (such as the gospel of the Kingdom being preached to every ethnic group in the world, the sun and moon darkening, the stars falling from the sky, and the powers of the heavens being shaken). His warnings are consistent throughout Scripture, *except for one verse*, the "lightning" verse. (Matt 24:27 & Luke 17:24) Note that the "thief" verses are consistent, because only the wicked are overtaken like a thief; the righteous are alert and pre-warned so that the day of the Lord doesn't overtake them like a thief. (1 Thess 5:4 ff) But lightning – well, everyone knows that lightning can happen at any time, suddenly and without warning, and Jesus Himself affirmed that His coming would be like lightning. *Or did He?*

God's Word is inerrant and God is always absolutely consistent with Himself. So whenever there seems to be an inconsistency in Scripture, I go back to the original Greek or Hebrew and study the context. The original Greek word for lightning is 'astrape', which comes from the root word 'aster', referring to a star, planet, sun, or other shining object in the sky. The Greek for 'flashes' in Luke is 'astrapto', which has the same root, and means to lighten or shine. The Greek for 'flashes' in Matthew is 'phaino', which means to lighten, shine, show, reveal, or make appear. Admittedly it could be translated as lightning flashing, but that is not required by the words themselves.

Now let's look at the context. "For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be."

Even in this one verse we see an obvious inconsistency. Lightning usually goes up or down. It rarely goes from east to west. But there is another kind of lightening that always does: **the dawn**. So a word / context study reveals that the translators made a mistake. This verse should have been rendered: "For just as the dawning [the sunrise] comes out of the east and brightens [the sky] even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be."

This agrees with the prophecy by old Zacharias, "... the sunrise [dawning] from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Lk 1:78-79) Every other Scripture on the subject fits too, such as "For you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness will rise [the dawning] with healing in His wings..." (Mal 4:2); "... all things become visible when they are exposed to the light... for this reason it says, 'Awake, O sleeper! Arise from the dead and Christ will shine [dawn] upon you.'" (Eph 5:13-14); and "So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star arises in your hearts." (2 Pet 1:19) With apologies to our KJV-only fans, that mistake originated in the King James!

Now that it is fixed, we see a consistent picture throughout Scripture of how Jesus will return. "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day." (Prov 4:18) "And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time. At that time your people, everyone who is found written in the Book [of Life], will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but others [not in the Book] to everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Dan 12:1-3) Yes, Jesus is waiting for God's sons. As they are being prepared to rule with Him at His return, they mature "like the dawn."

"Alas for the day! For the day of YHWH is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty... Blow a trumpet in Zion! Sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of YHWH is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. *As the dawn spreads over the mountains*, so there is a great and mighty people; there has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations. A fire consumes before them; behind them a flame burns... Like a mighty people arranged for battle... They run like mighty men... Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness. YHWH utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is He who carries out His Word. The day of YHWH is indeed great and very awesome. Who can endure it?" (Joel 2:1-11)

How does the dawn come? Gradually. It is almost imperceptible at first. For those who are asleep, it certainly comes without warning. But for children of the day who are alert and fore-warned, the signs are unmistakable. It is only the mockers following after their own lusts who say “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation [uniformitarians].” For them “... the day of the Lord will come like a thief...” But for the saints, “... what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...” (2 Pet 3:4 -12 ff)

How can you hasten the coming day of the Lord? As you see things get darker, as you see wickedness get more wicked, as you see the evil one raging and gaining many victories, as you see the wars, storms, plagues, famines, earthquakes, persecution, and tribulations Jesus warned us about, remember this: the world only gets darker and darker so the saints, the sons of God, will shine brighter and brighter until the full day.

Jesus, though consistently warning His disciples to always be on the alert, told them through His parables that there would be a long delay before His return. “But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time...’” (Matt 24:28) “Now when the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep...” (25:5) “Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them...” (25:19), all given in the immediate context of His Second Appearing.

It is fascinating to me that those who teach that “Jesus can return at any moment to snatch the saints up to glory” are often the same ones who are perennially talking about the signs that His return is imminent, such as the Jews returning to their homeland, the earthquakes or storms getting worse, or the greater wickedness in high places. In so doing they place themselves in this ludicrously illogical position: claiming on the one hand that nothing at all needs to happen first before their secret rapture, and on the other hand pointing to various signs announcing the Lord’s coming. Oswald T. Allis, in *Prophecy and the Church*, states “... the attempt to prove by signs... that the... ‘any-moment’ rapture must be near at hand, really amounts to a surrender of the ‘any-moment’ principle.”

Jesus cannot return at any moment. Many things must happen before He can return for His Bride. *The foremost among these is His Bride must make herself ready*, and adorn herself with the fine linen, bright and clean, which is the righteous acts of the saints. (Rev 19:7-8) Those sons of God coming forth as the dawn, is the Bride purifying herself for the wedding, so Jesus can rule the earth through them. This purification can only be accomplished through discipline or tribulation, as fire refines gold. (Mal 3:2-3)

The letter of 2nd Thessalonians was written primarily to reassure a frightened and persecuted church that Christ

had not already come and left them behind. It is often used to try to prove a pre-trib rapture, but only by those of such intellectual dishonesty that they will not read the whole context. They pick and choose a few verses here and there, trying to prove their preconceived ideas by differentiating between the “day of the Lord” (in judgment), and the “day of Christ” (the rapture) as if they came at two separate times. But if you just sit down and read the whole passage, that distinction quickly breaks down over the very clear picture of Christ coming to give relief to the persecuted church and to pour out His wrath upon the wicked, both at the same time.

“... we speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God for which indeed you are suffering. For after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal [‘aionial’] destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...”

Before we continue, note that the persecuted church gets relief when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to the wicked. He is coming to be glorified in His saints... by secretly snatching them up to heaven? No, by rescuing them and afflicting those who had been afflicting them. It is their endurance and steadfast faith in the midst of great tribulations that brings great glory to Him at His return. “On that day” the Bride is lifted up even as God’s wrath falls. To continue...

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him [the rapture], that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed, either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord [lit. Gk: of Christ – this is the rapture] has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the rapture] *will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness [the antichrist] is revealed...* And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains [stays, keeps in check, retains, seizes, withholds possession, holds fast, holds back] will do so until he is taken out of the way [out from the midst, out from before them]. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming.” (2 Thess 1:4-10; 2:1-8 excerpts)

Much debate has raged around “he who restrains.” Teachers of the pre-trib rapture heresy maintain he is the Holy Spirit, who must be removed from the earth before the antichrist can be revealed, and that He is taken up to heaven at the rapture with the saints before the tribulation. This cannot be. How could there be a vast harvest for God’s Kingdom during the great tribulation (as the Feast of Tabernacles / Ingathering prophesies) if the Holy Spirit was not there convicting men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment? (Jn 16:8) No one can be saved without the work of the Holy Spirit! He is the only one who can “guide you into all the Truth.” (v 13) Besides, God promises us, “I will pour out My Spirit in those days... before the great and awesome day of YHWH comes” (Joel 2:29-30) which implies an abundance of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit rather than a Holy Spirit vacation.

So who is “he who restrains?” Some think he may be the devil, who seizes a place before the Almighty to accuse us day and night. Scripture makes it clear that he is not strong enough, and he will be “taken out of the way,” “thrown down to the earth” (Rev 12:9) in great wrath, knowing he has but a short time. There he persecutes the saints, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Rev 12:7-17) Others think he may be the Pax Romana – the Peace of Rome, which obviously was a restraint upon anyone proclaiming himself to be the Messiah. I tend to believe that he is the angel Michael, who “stands guard over the sons of Israel,” as prophesied in Daniel 12:1. At the “time of great distress” he “will arise,” implying his protection over Israel will be removed, so that’s the way I tell my story (Volume 5).

But regardless of who you think he is, this passage still cannot be used to preach a pre-trib rapture, because it clearly says that our gathering together with Him (at the rapture) will not come “unless the apostasy [falling away] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God [this is a restored temple!] displaying himself as being God.” (2 Thess 2:3-4)

According to Daniel’s prophecies, that will happen at or near the end of the tribulation. Daniel knew nothing of a pre-trib rapture. He states the antichrist will be “waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the Kingdom.” (7:22) “Those who have insight among the people [the saints] will give understanding to the many; yet they will [be snatched up out of it? no] fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for many days. Now when they fall, they will be granted a little help, and many will join them in hypocrisy [not in truth]. And some who have insight will fall in order to refine, purge, and make them pure [that is the purpose of tribulation], until the end time...” (11:3-35)

“Many will be purged, purified, and refined; but the wicked will act [even more] wickedly. And none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up [which according to Dan 9:27 is in the middle of the 70th heptad], there will be 1290 days [that is the 1260 days or 42 lunar months of Rev 13:5 – the time of the antichrist’s rule as described in 2 Thess 2:3-4 – plus another 30 days until Jesus returns with His Bride to reclaim the earth]. How blessed is he who keeps waiting [perseveres, hangs on, survives] and attains to the 1335 days!” (Dan 12:10-12) The 1335 days represents the restoration of Israel on the earth, as described in Zechariah 14:8-21. This implies that those of Israel who missed the rapture of the Bride will not be raptured until they “attain to the 1335th day.”

“Behold, He [Jesus] is coming with the clouds, *and every eye will see Him* [no secret rapture here], even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so, let it be.” (Rev 1:7) “When He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those [martyrs] who had been slain because of the Word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and brethren who were to be [raptured up? no] killed even as they had been, should be completed also.” (Rev 6:9-11)

Finally, “... there shall be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound [his trumpet], then **the mystery of God is finished**, as He preached to His servants the prophets... And the seventh angel sounded [the Last Trump of 1 Cor 15:52]; and there arose loud voices in heaven, shouting, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.’ And the 24 elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ‘We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was and who is to come, *because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign*. And the nations were enraged, and Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, *and the time to give their reward to Thy bondservants the prophets, the saints, and those who fear Thy name*, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.’” (Rev 10:6 & 7; 11:15-18)

That is the biblical rapture of the Bride – at the last trumpet right where it belongs. It also foretells the wrath of God, the Bema Seat judgment, and the beginning of the millennial Kingdom, when Israel is finally redeemed and given her rewards as prophesied by the Fall Feasts and when the sons of God in Christ begin to rule the earth.

Note that **the mystery of God** is finally finished. Which mystery? There are at least five possibilities, *and they all fit*. **First**, the rapture: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor 15:52) **Second**, the establishment of the Kingdom: “He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He [God the Father] purposed in Him [Christ] with a view to an *administration [Kingdom] suitable to the fullness of the times* [the end of the age], that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.” (Eph 1:9-10; also 3:3 & 9) **Third**, Christ dwelling in us in fullness: “... God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col 1:27; this is also called the “mystery of godliness” from 1 Tim 3:16) **Fourth**, the restoration of Israel as God’s chosen people: “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; *and thus all Israel will be saved...*” (Rom 11:25) **Fifth**, Christ joining the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man, bringing peace: “... the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets; to be specific, *that the Gentiles are now fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*” (See Eph 2:13 – 3:10.) This fivefold mystery is the gospel of salvation in Jesus the Redeemer (Eph 6:19 & Col 4:3), who won the keys of death and hell and opened up a door of faith. (Acts 14:27) He is the Door. (Jn 10:7) *He is the way, the only way, back to the Father!* (Jn 14:6 ff) A full study of the incredible revelation of the mystery of God goes beyond the scope of this book. I only wanted to emphasize that according to Revelation 10:7 the mystery of God is finished and all of the above are accomplished only after the seventh (last) trumpet, not 7 years earlier prior to the tribulation.

The wrath of God does not fall on the saints. We are “not destined to wrath” (1 Thess 5:9) for we put our trust in “Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.” (1:10) Of the many Scriptures which talk about the wrath of God, not one directs that wrath against the saints. It is always against the wicked, *or against any wickedness that remains in our own hearts, any of that old sin-nature with which we were born, but which has not yet been crucified with Christ.* And that, dear Reader, is precisely why there can be no pre-tribulation rapture. Until the saints see in full measure the wrath of God against sin, they will not “be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16) or “purify themselves, even as He is pure,” (1 Jn 3:3) for we are told to “cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of [the wrath of] God.” (2 Cor 7:1)

You see, it takes tribulation, discipline, suffering, and refining fire, with a view and appreciation of the terrible wrath of God against the sin that He knows will destroy us, before we ‘human beans’ began to take seriously the sin hiding in our own hearts. I think most of us are nowhere near ready for the rapture, though I suspect the persecuted churches in China or Africa or the Middle East may now be! Cheer up. Persecution has now begun in America.

Don’t get me wrong. I would like to escape the great tribulation as much as the next guy, and I fully understand why the new doctrine of the pre-trib rapture became so popular in such a short time. Bear in mind that not a single Christian organization prior to 1830 proclaimed a secret pre-trib rapture. And since it began, many church leaders rightly denounced it as heresy. Dave MacPherson, in his powerful book *The Incredible Cover-Up* traced its origins to self-proclaimed prophetess Margaret MacDonald of Port Glasgow, Scotland, who introduced it to John Darby of the Plymouth Brethren. John influenced Edward Irving, who then began teaching the secret pre-trip rapture in the Catholic Apostolic church. From there it came to America with two Bible and commentary writers: C.I. Scofield and Finis Dake. Their heavily annotated, footnoted Bibles and commentaries sold very well, thank you, and the doctrine was spread far and wide. Now, in fact, you can get yourself thrown out of some seminaries or Bible colleges if you try to teach the scriptural doctrine of saints overcoming through great tribulation. For more details on the history of the pre-trib rapture heresy, William R. Kimball covers it extensively in *The Rapture – A Question of Timing*.

It reminds me of Paul’s timely warning for our day: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.” (2 Tim 4:3-4) Note that he said that eight verses after saying that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (Not a popular verse in today’s churches!)

It also reminds me of some Old Testament warnings: “... the prophets are telling them, ‘You will not see the sword, nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place!’ Then YHWH said to me, ‘The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them. They are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility, and the deception of their own minds.’” (Jer 14:13-14) “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; *and My people love it so!* But what will you do at the end of it?” (Jer 5:30-31) “The prophet who prophesies of peace, *when the word of that prophet shall come to pass, then that prophet will be known as the one whom YHWH has truly sent.*” (Jer 28:9) Beyond any shadow of doubt, God hates that pre-trib rapture heresy!

Preachers of the pre-trib rapture eagerly (desperately) want the righteous to be 'snatched up' first. But in all His parables, Jesus very plainly taught the opposite. He said, "... first gather up the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them up. But [then] gather the wheat into my barn... Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will gather out of His Kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. *Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.* He who has ears, let him hear." (Matt 13:30-43) The sequence is repeated in His parable of the fish: "... So it will be at the end of the age. The angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt 13:49-50) It is always the wicked who are taken out first.

"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them [the wicked] all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there shall be two men in the field; one [the wicked] is taken, and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one [the wicked] is taken, and one is left. Therefore be on the alert, for you don't know which day your Lord is coming." (Matt 24:37-42) The parallel passage in Luke 17 adds, "Answering they said to Him, 'Where [will they be taken], Lord?' And He said to them, 'Where the [dead] body is; there also will the vultures [birds of prey] be gathered.'" (vs 37) The KJV translates this as "eagles," which are also birds of prey, but most Bible scholars now admit that this actually should be "vultures." (See Rev 19:17-18 for a fulfillment of this prophecy.)

Many have tried to twist this Scripture to say that the saints will be secretly and suddenly snatched away, but it just doesn't wash. *Jesus is consistent with His words and the rest of Scripture.* The ones "taken" are always the wicked, and they are taken to where the dead are (Hades). The ones "left behind" to inherit the earth are the righteous. Noah was left behind to repopulate the earth when the wicked were all swept away by the flood. He did not escape the flood; he was saved through the middle of it by believing God and building the ark as his hiding place from God's wrath. This is fully consistent through all of Scripture, which never teaches an escapism doctrine, but rather the salvation of the righteous right through the middle of the tribulation, by their faith and obedience.

Here is a basic misunderstanding of the rapture. It is not to snatch the church away off to heaven somewhere far away. It is to purify and unify the many-membered Bride with her Lord and to give her redeemed physical bodies, *so that she can rule with Him right here on the earth.*

"The righteous will never be shaken, but the wicked will not dwell [continually] in the land." (Prov 10:30) "For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be uprooted from it." (Prov 2:21-22) "For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for YHWH, they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there. But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity... the seed of the wicked will be cut off. The righteous will inherit the land, and dwell in it forever... Wait for YHWH and keep His way, and He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it." (Ps 37:9-11, 28-29, 34)

The return of Jesus with His Bride to earth will be like the days of Noah, just as Jesus said. (Matt 24:37) If you study the story of Noah, you will see that nothing in it implies a secret pre-trib rapture, either. He was not snatched out of the Flood; he had to go through it. It was sudden for the wicked, but Noah had plenty of warning. (In fact, he spent a hundred years trying to warn the people around him as he built the ark.) It could not have come at any moment; Noah had to prepare by finishing the ark first. The Flood was neither silent nor secret, but a great cataclysm which quickly caught the attention of everyone on the earth. Noah was saved through it not by being zapped up to the clouds, but by his own faith, diligent obedience, and perseverance in building the ark. Noah was an overcomer, saved by putting actions to his faith. Thus he is one of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11:7.

The equivalent Luke passage also mentions Lot. "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot; they were eating and drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; *but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom* it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed... Remember Lot's wife." (Lk 17:28-32) These passages do not even hint at a seven year span of time between the rescue of the saints and the destruction of the wicked. It is always "on the day Noah entered the ark," "on the day that Lot went out from Sodom," or "on the day the Son of Man is revealed."

Lot is really an excellent example. He barely escaped, "by the skin of his teeth." Even his wife turned back and didn't make it. He was really living too close to the world! He was not alert. He did not discern the signs of the times and the wickedness of the age in which he lived, and was caught unawares. Though he himself was righteous, none of his family escaped: his daughters took their worldliness with them, resulting in his descendants becoming God's enemies. (the Ammonites and the Moabites – see Gen 19; Ezek 25:1-11) "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss [*that's Lot!*]; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire." (1 Cor 3:15)

The end-time sequence is consistent in the Scriptures. Tribulation always comes first, then the rapture and the wrath of God. The judgment of the wicked and the rescue of the righteous are always occurring at the same time. The Lord of Glory will indeed receive great glory by delivering the saints from His wrath at the same time as the wicked are falling under it. The saints led by the Spirit will then “shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” (Dan 12:3) *Many will look to them, see the miraculous deliverance and the power and glory of God, and recognize Jesus in them.* Thus there will be a great harvest for the Kingdom. Those saints who are not ready, who are living too close to the world like righteous Lot, will still be saved, *but only through the terrible fires of great tribulation, which may burn up all they have and even singe the clothes on their backs!* (Jude 23)

God’s Word is consistent. He never has been interested in taking sinful human flesh, giving us instant holiness, and snatching us off to heaven to sit on a cloud playing a harp for all eternity. That is an old Catholic fable which the church somehow bought. *They have a twisted concept of heaven as lazing around with nothing constructive to do and all of eternity to do it in!* Well, I am a Protestant. I protest! Most Christians’ theology is tied up in escaping hell and gaining heaven. If you took a typical modern church and convinced them that there was no hell, half the people would leave and dive headlong into worldly pleasures. If you then convinced them there was no heaven, the other half would leave! Why? Their focus is on self. They say they love the Lord, but they actually only love what He does for them in delivering them from the torments of hell and promising them the joys of heaven. They have no real concept of loving Him for who He is and serving Him out of pure love. They don’t understand the reason God wants to deliver us from the sin nature, impart to us His divine nature, and develop in us His character, so He can live His Life in us and accomplish His good pleasure through us.

I do believe in heaven and hell, my friend. I do not negate their importance in the overall scheme of things. But that is not what God is doing right now. This long hot summer is not to save the lost – it is to purify the Bride so in the ages to come He can save the lost through her! Right now God is preparing us for battle with His enemies. We have heard the trumpet call, we are now facing the Day of Atonement (the Bema seat judgment of saints), and it is time to “labor that we may enter into His Rest.” (Heb 3-4)

Crossing the Jordan did not instantly give the Israelites possession of a land flowing with milk and honey. They had to gain the victory – to overcome! In the process, *the wickedness that was in them had to be exposed and judged*, as at the Day of Atonement, or they could not win the victory. Getting them out of Egypt was the easy part; getting Egypt out of them was much tougher. So it is with us, as we shall see in our study of the Fall Feasts.

THE FALL FEASTS

The Spring Feasts each had a specific historical event to celebrate: Passover – Israel’s protection from the death angel by the blood on their doorpost; Unleavened Bread – their deliverance out of Egypt; Firstfruits – Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea; and Pentecost – the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. But the story of the Fall Feasts isn’t nearly as much fun, since we don’t really have much of a historical narrative. There are a few places in Scripture where the Israelites are recorded as having celebrated the Feasts. The story of Solomon’s dedicating the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles is rather dramatic. But for the most part our story consists only of bits and pieces of tradition coupled with obscure Scriptures here and there, which I’ll later try to fit into my tale in *God’s Plan of the Ages*. One redeeming feature of the Fall Feasts is that they are packed with prophecy. If I catch even half of the wealth of prophetic insights hidden in them, I’ll consider myself successful.

The story could have been spectacular, for the Fall Feasts typify Israel’s **entry** into the Promised Land of Canaan (Feast of Trumpets), their **warfare** in cleansing and taking possession of the land (Day of Atonement), and their final **peace and rest** after obtaining their promised inheritance (Tabernacles). It is possible that God wanted to have specific events to celebrate, but the Israelites spoiled the picture. Their history is full of wickedness and immorality, direct disobedience, idolatry, stubbornness, unthankfulness, grumbling, and outright rejection of God’s rightful rule over them. They blew the Feast of Trumpets by rejecting God’s first call to go in and possess the land, and ended up wandering for 40 years in the desert. (Num 14) They blew the Day of Atonement by never clearing out the Canaanites from the land as God commanded, so all the idols of the Canaanites became a snare to Israel. (Jud 2:1-3) Thus they were never able to enter into the Rest God had planned for them (the Feast of Tabernacles), since you cannot enter God’s Rest until you are first cleansed. (Heb 3:16-4:6) However, that is not to deny God’s sovereignty here. Sure, the Israelites failed, only that God might provide something greater for them, and us! (Rom 11:11 ff) His plan of redemption is now open to all who will believe and “labor to enter into His Rest.” (Heb 4:11) Honestly, are we any better than they? Is not their sordid history a much-needed picture of the nature of every unredeemed human heart?

The Fall Feasts do clearly prophesy of present and future events. Every observant Jew knows that the Feast of Trumpets looks forward to Messiah’s coming in power and glory, the Day of Atonement points to Judgment Day, and the Feast of Tabernacles is prophetic of God dwelling with His people forevermore in a world governed by peace and righteousness. We Christians understand this to also prophesy of the Redeemer coming (present tense) into our hearts by His Holy Spirit, atoning for our sins, judging us by His righteousness, and abiding forever with us.

THE FALL FEASTS AS COMMANDED

The Fall Feasts begin the Hebrew month Tishri. From before recorded time the first of Tishri has been known as the beginning of the year. Most Jews believe that it is the day that God created Adam. Others believe (as I do) that the first of Nisan (Abib) was the 8th day of Creation, and the first of Tishri (after an unknown period of sinless bliss) marks the original sin. At the Exodus God changed the Hebrew calendar to make Nisan begin the religious year, but Tishri remained the first month of the agricultural and civil year. Thus the rains they pray for at the Fall Feasts are the 'former rains' or the 'early rains', while the spring rains are the 'latter rains'.

Hosea says that Messiah will come to us like the latter rain and the former rain to the earth, (6:3) implying two comings: first during the latter rains (at the Spring Feasts), and lastly during the former rains (at the Fall Feasts).

Many Jews do understand this, though those who do not know Yashua consider His first coming to have been at the Exodus and on Mount Sinai. Thus the Jewish leaders in Yashua's day believed the Spring Feasts to be merely past history, and could not see Yashua fulfilling them before their very eyes. They looked at Yashua, clearly heard Him calling Himself Messiah (they knew exactly what He meant when He said, "I and the Father are one" in John 10:30, which is why they tried to stone Him) and yet they could not believe Him because they were only expecting Messiah to come and fulfill the Fall Feasts.

They were looking for a Messiah who would come with loud trumpet sound, overthrow their enemies, judge the earth, set up His Kingdom with great power and authority, and pour out blessings upon His own people, themselves, because that is what the Fall Feasts prophesy. *And they knew it!* When Yashua came doing none of those things yet claiming to be Messiah, their faith demanded that they reject and even kill Him as an impostor.

Devout Jews still believe in Messiah's coming as prophesied in the Fall Feasts. So when they do see Yashua coming on the clouds with power and glory, when they see Him "destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem," when He does "pour out on the house of David and on the people of Jerusalem the Spirit of Grace and Supplication," then indeed "... they will look on Me, the Aleph Tau [the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End – Jesus], whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born." (Zech 12:9-10 – please note that, as in Genesis 1:1, the original Hebrew text does have that 'Aleph Tau' in it, though to my knowledge no translation includes it.)

Then their eyes will be opened. They will understand and gladly receive Yashua as their Messiah. But until then "... a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; thus all Israel will be saved..." (Rom 11:25-26)

"Three times a year you shall celebrate a Feast to Me. You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread... [This is assumed to include the Passover and the first fruits of the barley harvest.] and none shall appear before Me empty-handed. Also the Feast of the Harvest of the Firstfruits... [of the wheat harvest; this is Shavuot, or Pentecost]. Also the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times a year all your males shall appear before YHWH your God." (Ex 23:14-17)

"You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, the first fruits of the wheat harvest [Shavuot], and [then] the Feast of Ingathering [later called Tabernacles] at the turn of the year." (The first of Tishri – Ex 34:22)

"Again YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, "In the seventh month [Tishri] on the first of the month you shall have a Sabbath Rest, a reminder by blowing of **Trumpets**, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to YHWH. ... On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the **Day of Atonement**; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble [afflict] your souls and present an offering by fire to YHWH. Neither shall you do any work on this same day, for it is a Day of Atonement to make atonement on your behalf before YHWH your God. If there is any person who will not humble [afflict] himself on this day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute [forever] throughout all your generations in all your dwelling places. It is to be a Sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble [afflict] your soul.

"On the 15th of the 7th month is the **Feast of Sukkot** [Booths, Tabernacles] for 7 days to YHWH. The first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. For 7 days you shall present an offering by fire to YHWH. On the 8th day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to YHWH; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work. ... On exactly the 15th day of the 7th month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the Feast of YHWH for 7 days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the 8th day.

"On the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees [the aethrog or citron tree], palm branches [lulav], boughs of leafy [oak or myrtle] trees [hadav], and willows of the brook [arava]; and you shall rejoice before YHWH your God for seven days. ... It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations. ... You shall dwell in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am YHWH your God." (Lev 23: 23-43, excerpts)

There was a controversy between the Sadducees, who felt that these materials should just be used to build the sukkot (booths), and the Pharisees, who said the branches should be carried in the hands of the worshipers. They compromised and do both. The citron is held in the left hand, while a myrtle, a palm, and two willow branches are held in the right.

The Talmud notes, “These four emblems are different in taste, appearance, and odor, just as the sons of men are different in conduct and habits. The citron is a valuable fruit; it is good for food and has a pleasant odor. That is compared to the intelligent man, who is righteous in his conduct toward God and his fellow man. The odor of the fruit is his good deeds; its substance is his learning [i.e., of the law], on which others may feed... The palm brings forth fruit, but is without odor. It is compared to those people who are learned [of the law], but who are wanting in good deeds; those who know the law, but transgress its mandates. The myrtle is compared to those who are good by nature, who act correctly toward God and man, but who are uneducated [of the law – it is fragrant, but has no fruit]. The willow of the brook has neither fruit nor fragrance; it is therefore compared to those who have no knowledge [of the law] and who perform no good deeds.” The Talmud also says the four species represent the four elements: Fire (the bright yellow citron), Air (the high, waving palm), Earth (the lowly, dry myrtle) and Water (the willow of the brook). However, the citron alone also represents all four: Fire (its yellow outer skin), Air (its white, damp inner skin), Earth (its dry seeds), and Water (its juicy pulp).

“Celebrate the Feast of Booths for seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat. *You shall rejoice* in your Feast... Seven days you shall celebrate a Feast to YHWH your God in the place where YHWH chooses, for YHWH your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you may be altogether joyful. Three times in a year all your males shall appear before YHWH your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Shavuot, and at the Feast of Sukkot, and they shall not appear before YHWH empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of YHWH your God which He has given you.” (Deut 16:13-17)

God first commanded the Fall Feasts (and Pentecost) at Mt. Sinai. You can easily see from these passages that the Feasts of Israel are all harvest festivals. Note that the first mention of the Fall Feasts only calls them the **Feast of Ingathering**. At that time there was nothing else to tie it to; it was simply a celebration of the completion of the annual harvest and the beginning of a new growing cycle. But the Israelites were still in the wilderness (with no harvest) and thus they could not actually celebrate them. There was no precedent, no historical event to tie them to. So they could only be prophetic of future events.

THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

The Feast of Trumpets (**Rosh haShanah**) is prophetic of the coming “day of the Lord” (called the “day of YHWH” in the Old Testament). Seven in Scripture is the number of completion and perfection. The Feast of Trumpets, called “7th New Moon,” is celebrated on the first of Tishri, the 7th month. It is the only one of the Feasts of Israel to be celebrated at the dark of the moon. All the other Feasts occurred later in the month when the moon is bright. Again, no one knew the day or the hour. But they could see the signs of its coming as the moon got darker each night. Devout Jews spend the entire preceding week in fervent penitential prayers called ‘Selihot’ (pleas for forgiveness). Then one evening, suddenly, it’s here! The two witnesses sight the first sliver of the new moon rising over Jerusalem and report it to the priests. They sound the shofar to announce that the Feast of Trumpets has begun. *Bear in mind, this is not a joyful Feast, at least, for the sinner!* For the purified saint, it is the call heavenward in the rapture. But for the sinner it foretells the seven trumpet judgments up to Judgment Day at the end of the great tribulation.

“Alas for the day! For the day of YHWH is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty... **Blow a trumpet in Zion!** Sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of YHWH is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; there has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations. A fire consumes before them, and behind them a flame burns... Like a mighty people arranged for battle... They run like mighty men... Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness. YHWH utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His Word. The day of YHWH is indeed great and very awesome. Who can endure it?

“Yet even now, declares YHWH, return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your heart, and not your garments. Now return to YHWH your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him... **Blow a trumpet in Zion,** consecrate a **fast**, proclaim a **solemn assembly**, call the people all together, sanctify the congregation, summon the elders, gather the children and nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out of his room, and the bride out of her chamber. Let the priests, the ministers of YHWH, weep between the porch and the altar. Let them cry, ‘*Spare Thy people, O YHWH! Do not make Thine inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, “Where is their God?”*’ Then YHWH will be zealous for His land, and will have pity on His people...

“Then My people will never be put to shame. Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am YHWH your God and there is no other; and My people will never be put to shame. And it will come about *after this* that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions, and even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will display wonders in the sky and on earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of YHWH comes. And... whoever calls on the name of YHWH will be delivered... even among the survivors whom YHWH calls.” (Joel 1:15; 2:1-19, 26-32)

Besides its obvious use in heralding the start of new moons, Sabbaths, and festivals, the trumpet in Scripture is symbolic primarily of two things: a call to battle, and a warning that Messiah is coming and we need to prepare to meet with Him. Joel paints a good picture of both the Feast of Trumpets and the day of the Lord. The trumpet is a call to war, and the passage speaks extensively about God’s mighty army. Many Bible scholars feel this army is the locusts mentioned in Joel 2:25. I agree that they certainly could be a type or interim fulfillment of the passage. But I also believe that the saints of Psalm 149:5-9, Daniel 12:3, and Malachi 4:2-3 are typified here.

The other symbolism of the trumpet, that of warning to prepare for Messiah’s coming, is also in this passage. It talks of repentance with fasting, and earnest intercession. God’s response is, “He will have pity on His people.” God always warns. For those who will listen, He always gives time to repent. This passage makes it clear that, though there will be some who shake their fists at God, His people will repent and be saved on the day of His wrath.

“Near is the great day of YHWH, near and coming very quickly. Listen, it is the day of YHWH! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a **day of trumpet** and battle cry... And all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the earth’s inhabitants. Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O you nation without shame, before the decree takes effect—the day that passes like chaff—before the burning anger of YHWH comes upon you. Seek YHWH, all you humble of the earth who have carried out [obeyed] His ordinances. *Seek righteousness, and seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of YHWH’s anger.* [Please note: the saints may be hidden, as Noah in the ark, but not snatched up to heaven.] ... Therefore wait for Me, declares YHWH, for the day when I rise up to the prey. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger. For all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal.

“For then I will give to the people purified lips [Lit: ‘I will change to the people a clear lip’. It removes the curse of Babel], that all of them may call on the name of YHWH, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder... for then I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on My holy mountain. *But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people*, and they will take refuge in the name of YHWH. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths; for they shall feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble. Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel! Rejoice! Exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! YHWH has removed His judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, YHWH, is in your midst... a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy; He will renew you in His love; He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. *I will gather those who grieve [mourn] about the appointed Feast* [which they couldn’t keep because they were in exile] – they came from you, O Zion; the reproach of exile is a burden on them. Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors. I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says YHWH.” (Zeph 1:14-2:3; 3:8-20)

This is an incredible passage. It is clearly the day of YHWH, the dark day of the Trumpet. In it the warrior cries out bitterly. All the inhabitants of the earth face God’s wrath and are devoured in the fires of His jealousy. For them the trumpet is a battle cry, for the rapture has come and gone and they have been left behind! They did not heed the call of the Feasts to deal with the sin in their lives. They missed “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:14) They are in a precarious position. They are urged to “seek [more] righteousness, seek [more] humility” (2:3) so that they may be hidden (in Azel – Zech 14:4) in the day of YHWH’s anger.

But then they will be given “purified lips to call on the name of YHWH, to serve Him.” (3:9) After the tribulation is past, comes the Day of Atonement, symbolizing the rapture. The “remnant of Israel” missed the rapture of the Bride, but now they are purified in their trials for a second rapture (of the Jews) at the very end of the tribulation.

This is why I spent so much time on the pre-trib rapture heresy. It preaches a ‘greasy grace’ which says that as long as you prayed the sinner’s prayer, you don’t have to worry about dealing with the sin in your life. It is already taken care of once for all by the precious blood of Jesus, who for the rest of your life will only pour out His blessings upon you. When He judges the world for its wickedness He will make you instantly righteous and zap you up to glory without ever judging the sin in your own life.

That is totally unscriptural. God's judgment does not begin with the wicked; it always begins with the righteous, the saints. "It is time for judgment to begin with [or from] the household of God; and if it begins with [or from] us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? If it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless one and the sinner? *Therefore let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.*" (1 Pet 4:17-19) This is not just an isolated passage! All through Scripture God speaks to His people about the importance of dealing with the sin in their lives. I assure you, God is far more interested in dealing with the sin in a Christian's life, than He is in judging the wicked.

"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi [the Levites were already the holiest of the tribes of Israel] and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to YHWH offerings in righteousness... Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and then I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who speak falsely and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me, says YHWH of Hosts." (Malachi 3:2-5) Please note the sequence: first He uses the wicked and all their evil as tools to discipline and purify His own people, then He judges the wicked. That is always God's way. "For I, YHWH, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." (v 6)

This is the purpose of the Feast of Trumpets. It is both a warning and a call to battle. YHWH of Hosts, supreme Commander of the mighty heavenly hosts, comes to us with sword drawn. And when we ask Him "... are you for us, or for our enemies?" (Josh 5:13) He answers, "No!" He has not come to support us, nor has He come to support our enemies. He is the Commander. He has come to take over. There is a war going on. It is the battle over our own hearts and souls. YHWH has come to us to take charge and destroy His enemies – *within our own hearts!*

I hate to say it, but today's typical pew-Christian has not the slightest comprehension of the warlike nature of God. We've had a zillion sermons on His love but few on His anger and wrath – for a good reason! We were taught that we wouldn't have to experience His anger; that we'd all be zapped up to glory before He released His judgment. We forget that King David, a mighty man of war, was a man after God's own heart. Why? *One reason was because He loved righteousness and hated evil like God does!* Well, I have news for you, and you may not like it. Our God is the Lord of Hosts! He is full of anger at the evil that still lurks within us. True love is always full of wrath at all that harms the beloved. The greatness of His love is only equalled by the greatness of His hatred for all that would destroy us.

What did David tell Goliath? "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of YHWH of HOSTS, the God of the Armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day YHWH will deliver you into my hands. I will strike you down and remove your head from you. I will give the dead bodies of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, *that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*, and that all this assembly may know that YHWH does not deliver by sword or spear; for the battle is YHWH's, and He will give you into our hands." (1 Sam 17:45-47)

Yes, God is a God of peace... a God of love. I do not deny that in the slightest. *But true peace must be at war with all that would destroy the peace, and true love must hate all that would destroy the beloved.* "YHWH is a warrior; YHWH is His name." (Ex 15:3) "Who is the King of Glory? YHWH, strong and mighty, YHWH, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates, and lift them up, O ancient door [of our hearts], that the King of Glory may come in! Who is the King of Glory? YHWH of Hosts [those are warrior hosts], He is the King of Glory!" (Ps 24:8-10)

"I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are flames of fire. Upon His head are many diadems. He has a name written which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood. His name is called the Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He might smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written – 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'" (Rev 19:11-15)

The context places this passage after the rapture, in the same time frame as the wedding supper of Yashua the Lamb with His Bride, and the "great supper of God" when He gives the flesh of His enemies to the birds of the sky and throws the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire. (v 17-21) But there are several interesting aspects to it. Who are the armies following Yashua? The Bride! And how is the Bride clothed? "... the marriage of the Lamb has come and His Bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (v 7-8) Note carefully the wording: "... it was given her to *clothe herself*..." "... His Bride has *made herself* ready..." This is not speaking of salvation, which is a free gift by grace through faith. This is the sanctification process: the Holy Spirit pouring out His grace on us to overcome the sin in our lives. All who heed the trumpet call to deal with their sin now, will then be following the King on white horses, rather than crying bitterly in fear and repentance at that final, terrible Feast of Trumpets!

So how does the Bride “make herself ready?” Keep the Feast in spirit! Continually. Invite the Commander of the Host to deal with every sin hidden away in our hearts. The war within us, the judgment in our own hearts, must be completed before Yashua can use us in His army against the wicked. Then, “Let the godly ones exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishment on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with iron fetters; to execute on them the judgment written; this is an honor for all His godly ones.” (Ps 149:5-9)

There were many great battles in Israel’s history that the Feast of Trumpets could have celebrated: the triumph over mighty Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan, the incredible victory at Jericho when the walls came tumblin’ down, the awesome battle against the five kings at Gibeon when the sun stood still for a whole day... But no, no historical battle is celebrated.

I believe that is because God wants us to understand that the real battle is “... not against flesh and blood, but against the [spirit] rulers, against the [invisible] powers, against the world-forces of this present [spiritual] darkness, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the high places” of our own human hearts. (Eph 6:12)

So what are we supposed to do? Hide in a closet and wait for the rapture? Nope. “Put on the full **armor of God**, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes [attack methods] of the devil.” (v 11) This battle is won by the Belt of Truth, the Breastplate of Righteousness, Shoes of the Gospel of Peace, the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation, the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and that silver Trumpet of Prayer and Intercession. But we must put them on and put them to use!

I find it fascinating that the Jews seem to understand this. They preface the Feast of Trumpets with a week of penitential prayer, in deep and fervent repentance for their own personal sins. (Some start the month before; they call the 40 day period between Elul 1 and Tishri 10 ‘Teshuvah’, meaning ‘return, turn around, change, or repent’.) Then the Feast itself is both a solemn and a joyous occasion. They recite lengthy prayers and read long passages of Scripture, such as Micah 7:18-20, Psalm 118, Psalm 33, Psalm 130, and Isaiah 11.

They conduct a ritual tashlikh ‘casting off’ ceremony of throwing pebbles (or emptying their pockets) into a large body of water, symbolic of YHWH casting away all our sins into the depths of the sea. Sometimes they carry leavened bread crumbs in their pockets (the leaven symbolizes their sins), and empty them out over the water to feed the fish. Only after all that do they celebrate the New Year, first with a lengthy synagogue service (often lasting five hours or more), and then with ‘shana tovah’ greetings (wishing for each other ‘a good year’) and feasting.

They no longer call it the Feast of Trumpets (though they still blow the Shofar to announce it), but rather Rosh haShanah, ‘Head of the Year’. Though it is in the 7th month of their religious year, it is the first month of their civil / agricultural year. The New Year is celebrated with a festive dinner, inviting guests, wearing a new outfit, eating a sweet fruit (apples dipped in honey, or perhaps a fruit that was given up during the previous month of fasting, like dates or figs), and eating loaves of hallah bread, baked in a round shape like crowns to emphasize God’s Kingship.

We who have never celebrated the Feast of Trumpets miss much of the symbolism here. The preparation for Trumpets is repentance. No one knows when the trumpet will sound, so they start repenting a week early. They don’t need to travel to Jerusalem until Sukkot; Trumpets is an individual thing, with YHWH dealing with their own hearts. It is all about sin in their own lives, which must be taken away by YHWH and cast into the depths of the sea. Every individual is involved; no one is exempt. The Word of God is used to cleanse their hearts. It is a one day Feast (although later rabbi’s changed it to 2 days due to the uncertainty of when it would start), because when they come to YHWH with a repentant heart, it doesn’t take Him long to deal with the sin. It occurs every year; just because they are forgiven doesn’t make them unable to sin again. Once they are forgiven, they can celebrate with joy and look forward with faith and hope for the new year, in the knowledge that the King of the universe has renewed His blessings upon them.

Please don’t miss it! This is not Passover, in which the perfect Lamb of God was slain for our sin and we were brought out of Egypt, placed in right standing with God, and led towards Mt. Sinai in allegiance to our new Master. That is *justification*. The Feast of Trumpets represents the completion of the *sanctification* process, after which we are called up to give an account of our lives when Jesus returns. The Feast of Trumpets immediately precedes the **Day of Atonement**, Judgment Day for the saints. The trumpets are our call to prepare for that day.

In a real sense we are living in the Feast of Trumpets right now. The Spring Feasts and the long hot summer are past. The Feast of Trumpets is next on God’s calendar. We must “blow the trumpet in Zion” every day of our lives in preparation for that great day when YHWH orders that last trumpet to be blown. If you wait until then, you will be too late. The warning trumpet, the call to war, is sounding; the battle is raging in our hearts against all God’s enemies that still lurk there. Now is not the time to settle back into the slumber of personal entertainment and warm fuzzy self-satisfied feelings of faith in a rapture that will take us to heaven before any tribulation comes our way. Christians all over the world are suffering great tribulations. I believe that America may be next. More martyrs were slain for their faith in the 20th century than in all previous recorded history put together, and it is getting worse.

God has a controversy to settle with the rebel angels who followed Satan in his pride. They are the enemy, and the battleground is the human heart. God could have destroyed them long ago, but He has a better plan. *He will soon prove to the universe that the weakness of the human heart, in true righteousness received by faith through His grace, is stronger than all the powers of wickedness.* “For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil. *And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.* The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” (Rom 16:19-20)

So, where do these rebel angels who are God’s enemies hide out? Correct: the human mind and heart. I won’t argue with you over whether demons are able to possess a Christian or not; the fact is that even as Christians we are constantly being tempted to follow them in their rebellion against God. Don’t think you are exempt! Any ideas in your mind that you are fine, you don’t need God’s help on this one, you already have all the wisdom and intelligence you need to make this decision, you know right from wrong and are capable of making the right choices – is, quite plainly, iniquity. It is inspired by Satan and his demons, who are right there egging you on to set yourself up as your own lord over the situation. *“Here, buddy, have some more fruit from the tree... you, too, can be as God, knowing good and evil!”* (see Gen 3:5) And even if you choose the good, you have committed iniquity in your heart, for you have forsaken the leading of the Holy Spirit and followed your own choices, instead of eating of the Tree of Life and living only by the One who is Life, by the leading of the Holy Spirit within.

Yes, there is a battle going on, and men’s hearts will fail them for fear. (Lk 21:26) Why? Well, it is scary looking death in the face! People don’t want to give up the little idols they hold secretly in their hearts. Jesus is coming back, and this time He is not the sweet little baby or the meek sacrificial Lamb we saw before; this time He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. “In His right hand He holds the seven stars [which are the angels of the seven churches – He is coming to His church!], and out of His mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword; and His face is like the sun, shining in its strength.” (Rev 1:16, 20)

So, why would He come to His church with a sword? “For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” (Heb 4:12-13) Yes, it means exactly what it says. Yashua, the Word of God, is coming back as a warrior King, and He’s slaying those little idols we like to hide in our hearts. He is killing everything that is not of Him, all the way down to the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

“... it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment; so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation... By this we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Heb 9:27-10:14 ff) *Everyone who has ever sinned must die, and then face the judgment.* But Jesus died in our place, so He could snatch us right up to heaven, bypassing death and judgment, right? Wrong! *Everyone who has sinned must die, and then face the judgment.*

Yes, Jesus shed His own blood to pay the price for our sin, so that our blood would not have to be shed; but what about that old nature that still seems so bent toward sin? We who are saints are given a new nature: “... be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self [new nature], which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (Eph 4:23-24) But that old nature still needs to die, before we can face the judgment. And face the judgment we will, for Scripture makes it clear that “... YHWH will judge His people.” (Deut 32:36; Heb 10:30) and “... We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.” (Rom 14:10)

The difference between the saints and the wicked at that point will become evident, for the very word ‘judge’ also means ‘to vindicate’. On Judgment Day Jesus will present the saints before His throne perfect, faultless, in great joy. (Jude 24) His double-edged sword, so full of wrath against His enemies, will have done its perfect work of love in our hearts, perhaps through great tribulation, perhaps even through martyrdom, separating out and slaying the old sin nature as with a scalpel, so that our new nature may shine like the sun in the Kingdom of our Lord. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*” (1 Thess 5:23-24)

But I’m getting a bit ahead of myself. Judgment Day is symbolized by the Day of Atonement. Right now we are still in the Feast of Trumpets, battling for the lordship over our own hearts. Just don’t try to tell me that the Christian church is ‘ready at any moment’ to be snatched up into the heavenlies to stand before the judgment seat of God, because I know better. The church is not ready! Especially the church in America, where we have never had any real persecution. She is full of idols and compromises with the world, and if the rapture were to occur today, the church in America would have to be judged right along with the world. Only the purified Bride will rise in the rapture. God is Love. He has freely offered us both forgiveness from sin and His grace to overcome and walk free from sin through the double-edged sword of His Word. But God is also just. If we reject either gift we will fall under His judgment.

THE TEN DAYS OF AWE

The Feast of Trumpets occurs at the dark of the moon, Tishri 1. The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the most solemn high holy day of the Jews, occurs on Tishri 10. The ten days between the two are called the Days of Awe.

What is the significance of the number ten? Well, it could just be symbolic of a round number of completion, signifying that God has it all planned and He'll do it the way He planned it. God gave us ten fingers and ten toes, from which we get our decimal numbering system. Then there are the Ten Commandments, the ten lepers, the ten virgins, the ten silver coins, the ten talents, the ten minas, and many other biblical uses of ten.

However, the most interesting use of 10 was given by Yashua to the church in Smyrna: "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who claim they are Jews [this is talking about spiritual adoption into God's chosen family] and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. *Do not fear what you are about to suffer.* Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and **you will have tribulation ten days.** *Be faithful unto death,* and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." (Rev 2:9-11)

Could it be that the ten Days of Awe are somehow symbolic of the length of the great tribulation? Perhaps ten years, or ten sevens of years (70)? Or perhaps that is to be taken literally, and the church will only have to go through ten actual days of great tribulation? Or perhaps this is only talking about the martyrs of the tribulation period? The saints of Smyrna are asked to be faithful unto death, while the sister church in Philadelphia is promised "... because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep [guard] you from [being hurt or slain by] the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth." (Rev 3:10)

I believe each of the 7 churches in Revelation 2 and 3 is symbolic of different aspects of the church during the end times. Note that each of the 7 is required to overcome and remain faithful until Yashua returns. Even Philadelphia is told, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have in order that no one takes your crown. *He who overcomes,* I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God..." (3:11-12) None of them is promised an easy escape; for all of them some tribulation is promised or at least implied. Pergamum is told, "... Repent therefore, or else I will come to you quickly and I will make war against them [those who don't repent] with the sword of My mouth." (2:16) Thyatira is told, "... What you have, hold fast until I come. *And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end,* to him I will give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron... as I also have received authority from My Father." (2:25-27)

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of YHWH, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom YHWH loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son He receives... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness... Pursue after peace with all men, *and after that sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.* See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God..."

"For you have not come to the mountain that can be touched, to the blazing fire, to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of the trumpet... [All these physical things at Mt. Sinai only pointed to a higher fulfillment for the saints.] You [saints] have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the festal gathering and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, [the Feasts are celebrated in heaven!] and to God the Judge of all, *and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,* and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to [His] sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking!

"For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them from earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. His voice shook the earth then, but now He promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven!' This expression, 'Yet once more...' denotes the *removing of those things which can be shaken*, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb 12)

I don't know how long the great tribulation lasts. I don't think anyone does. The prophecy in Daniel 9:27 implies 7 years, or possibly the last 3 1/2 years after the antichrist breaks his covenant. The beast of antichrist is given authority to make war with the saints and prevail for 3 1/2 years. (Rev 13:5-7) But the timing of the entire tribulation (the seals, woes, trumpets, thunders, bowls of wrath, etc.) is never pinned down in Scripture. How about 70 years, the life-span of one generation? (Matt 24:34) Just a guess. If you look at the 7 seal judgments (Rev 6 & 8) you get the feeling we've already been through the first 5 or so. I'm just speculating. I have a sense that "all these things [Matt 24] will take place" within the generation that saw the land of Israel restored as a homeland for dispersed Jews, which occurred in 1948. 70 years would bring us to 2018, which leaves plenty of time for all the rest of the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation to come to pass. I'm not trying to set dates, just to give a sense of urgent perspective. We are not supposed to know the day or the hour, but we certainly should be alert to the times and seasons, so we'll be ready.

The apostle John hadn't ever heard about the secret pre-trib rapture, or he never would have had the seven churches hanging on until the very end. In fact, he clearly refutes one of the key doctrines of the heresy. Its apologists preach that the passages speaking of Jesus coming 'like a thief' imply a secret sudden coming to snatch up the saints before the tribulation. Well, John hadn't heard about that one, so he writes to Sardis: "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and you are dead. Wake up! ... Repent! *If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief*, and you will not know at what hour I come upon you." (3:1-3) This is entirely consistent with the primary 'thief' passage in First Thessalonians 5, which clearly says He will come upon the wicked like a thief in the night, while they are saying "Peace and safety!" and they shall not escape; but we saints are not in darkness that the day should overtake us like a thief.

Another major doctrine of the pre-trib rapture heresy is that the letters to the seven churches are only speaking of lesser tribulations prior to the great tribulation, and the church is not mentioned again on earth until it comes down out of heaven from God in chapter 21. That way the church neatly bypasses all the tribulation judgments of chapters 4 through 19. But in fact, the church is clearly referred to as "the saints" and "our brethren" in several passages, such as 12:10-11, 13:7, and 14:12. And those so-called 'lesser tribulations' the 7 churches do go through, last all the way "until the end" requiring that they "be faithful unto death." (Rev 2:10)

One final point before I put this to bed. The pre-trib rapture teachers try to get around the clear Word of God by saying that "the last trumpet" (of 1 Cor 15:51) isn't really the last trumpet at all, because Revelation hadn't been written yet and the apostle Paul didn't know about those seven trumpet judgments. They believe that he just meant the last of the series of trumpet blasts sounded each year at the Feast of Trumpets, with which he was very familiar. Well, I have a serious problem with those who claim the apostle Paul made a mistake in Scripture out of his own ignorance. People who believe that have a god who is way too small, and have too little faith in the inerrancy of God's holy Word. I believe that when the apostle Paul wrote "the last trumpet" it was just as inspired as any other part of Scripture, and that if God had wanted him to write "the last of the trumpet blasts at some future Feast of Trumpets" or even just "a powerful (but secret and silent) trumpet blast" He certainly could have told him so.

The Bible is a harmonious unit; every passage fits and agrees supernaturally with every other passage, regardless of the earthly scribe's ignorance. When the apostle Paul was inspired to say "at the last trumpet," I can be certain that he was prophesying by the Holy Spirit to the seventh and final trumpet of Revelation 11:15, where the actual rapture is beautifully described. If you don't believe that, then you don't believe in divine inspiration of Scripture.

We've already told the story of the end times. But to understand the ten Days of Awe, we need to take a closer look at the timing of it all. Pinning it down to a specific time sequence according to all the many interweaving prophecies in Revelation, Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Zechariah, Malachi, and so on, is very difficult, and open to a lot of controversy. Nevertheless, bold fool that I may be, I will try to do just that, based on the Feasts of YHWH. Bear in mind that I have never heard anyone else lay it out in just this way, and some of it is pure speculation based on my understanding of the prophetic nature of the Fall Feasts. However, knowing that the Spring Feasts were all fulfilled literally in precise detail to the very day and hour, I have a good precedent.

I've already told how the Feast of Trumpets has been going on continuously in the heart of every one of the "elect, chosen of God," both in its warning and in its call to war in the battle for the human mind and heart. That's a spiritual fulfillment, which must be complete before the rapture. My timing story now will focus on the physical, to be fulfilled by the Jews at the very end of the tribulation. Likewise, tribulation has been going on since the first sin, but I want to focus on what is termed the great tribulation (Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14) at the end of the age.

I'm guessing a total of 70 years (10 days times 7 years – the lifespan of one generation, because of Jesus' own words in Matt 24:34) for the entire great tribulation, up to the Bema Judgment (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; symbolized by the Day of Atonement). This is the period of the 7 seal judgments. (Rev 6-8) The final judgments all occur at the seventh seal. Of these 70 years, the last seven begin when antichrist signs the treaty with Israel on Tishri 1. For 3 1/2 years he builds his power base. Tribulations were severe before, but only in some areas. In the middle of the last 7 years, he breaks his treaty with Israel to begin a worldwide genocide of God's people. Now saints of every nation face martyrdom. The terrifying sixth seal is broken in response, unleashing the most severe judgments in history.

However, these days are cut short for the sake of the elect. (Matt 24:22) In my personal guess, two years before the 70 years are up, the seventh (last) trumpet heralds the rapture of the Bride (the first resurrection). Though it comes on Tishri 1 at the Feast of Trumpets, it is not a dark day for the purified Bride, who has "made herself ready." For her, it is a joyous rapture as the trumpet calls her up. As the Bride rises to heaven for her wedding, those who are left behind "mourn." (Zech 12:10) For two years the final plagues are poured out on the earth from the seven bowls of God's wrath. When the 70 years are up, the remaining Jews truly repent during the ten Days of Awe and are raptured on the Day of Atonement. Armageddon comes the same day, Tishri 10. (Zech 14:2) The repentant Jews are protected in Azel, judged, and invited to the wedding anniversary feast, which lasts until Tishri 22. Jesus then returns with His Bride to restore the earth.

Let's review again those final 3 1/2 years after the anti-christ breaks his covenant of death with Israel. I'll tell the story in terrifying detail in *God's Plan of the Ages*, but I'd like to summarize it here. With the breaking of the fifth seal, God promises the martyrs from all ages past that in only a little while, the number of their fellow-martyrs will be complete. That is our clue that the antichrist has broken his covenant with Israel and has revealed himself to be the slayer of God's people. I presume this will be the beginning of a coordinated effort to exterminate both Christians and Jews worldwide, which cannot happen before he breaks his covenant with Israel.

God's response to his efforts is the breaking of the sixth seal, at which the sun is extinguished, the moon becomes like blood, a great earthquake rocks the entire globe, the stars fall from the sky, and the sky is "split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up." (Rev 6:12-14) Men call this "the day of God's wrath" (v 17), but it is not; God's wrath does not fall on the earth until the saints of the Kingdom are "reaped" according to Revelation 14:14-20. (see 1 Thess 5:9) But the Bride needs an 'ark' of protection. She is given the seal of the living God. (Rev 7:2) I believe that at this point the saints from ages past, "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation..." (7:9) are resurrected to witness the seven trumpet judgments and the rapture. "The dead in Christ shall rise first..." (1 Thess 4:16) About a year passes while the martyrs "who have come out of the great tribulation" (7:14) are slain by the antichrist and assemble in white robes before the throne.

Then the seventh seal is broken. At this, seven angels prepare to blow their trumpets to herald the coming of the King of the universe. The first four of these go by rather rapidly, with the judgments falling on the earth in quick succession. At the fifth the 'eagle' angel prophesies the three great woes, to coincide with the last three trumpets. These take another five months. So when the seventh angel is ready to blow his trumpet, we are two years before the end of my 70 years of tribulation. Ten days before the 7th trumpet, the 7 peals of thunder 'speak'. They are sealed up, so nobody really knows, but my guess is that they are the voice of the eternal Father, giving direction and encouragement to the saints being slain, to prepare them to meet their Bridegroom.

Finally the seventh (last) trumpet is sounded and "the kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah." (11:15) That is the rapture and the wedding of the Bride, as I said. The remaining "seven plagues which are the last" (15:1), the "seven bowls of the wrath of God," (16:1) are then poured out on the earth. Two years later at the end of the 70th 'heptad' the surviving remnant (probably a third) of Israel repents, is raptured, and comes to the wedding anniversary feast, as the angel told Daniel. (Dan 9:24 ff; Rom 9:27, 11:26 ff; Zech 13:8-9) This will surely occur on Tishri 1, 10, and 15-21, precisely as the Fall Feasts prophesy.

Nobody really knows when all this starts, but I have a lot of company in my speculation that Israel is God's time clock, and the clock started when Israel again became an independent nation, on May 14, 1948. This would start the last 7 year period in the fall of 2011, the first resurrection in 2016, and the Bema Seat judgment in 2018. It would also mesh with my theory that we are now living in the days of the fifth seal of Revelation 6:9. When the sixth seal is broken some serious and very visible judgments will come down, so we will see. However, I'm not a date setter. This is all speculation. God may grant extra grace. Jesus said, "Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Lk 21:24) That may point to the Jews retaking Jerusalem in 1967, and it may yet be future. Muslims still hold the temple mount, and Jesus' promised return will not be to a Muslim 'Holy City'! We don't know God's timing! He may have added extra grace and postponed it all another generation. The only reason I talk about it is that the Bible warns us to be prepared. Jesus Himself said "Behold, I am coming quickly." (Rev 22:12) We all need to be impressed both on the reality and the imminence of these things.

As with the Feast of Trumpets, the Ten Days of Awe and Day of Atonement (Judgment Day) have been going on in the hearts of the saints for 2000 years. In a very real sense Christians have been living in the tribulation ever since the first generation church went out and "turned the world upside down." I believe that in a prophetic sense the saints are now living in the spiritual fulfillment of all the Fall Feasts, which are purifying us for the rapture.

Jews take the Ten Days of Awe very seriously. Their tradition is that during this period God reviews their life – whether they take His commandments in Torah seriously and whether they are repentant for their sins the previous year. God opens three books on Rosh haShanah (Tishri 1): a Book of Life for the Righteous, a Book of Life for the Wicked, and a Book of Life for the In-between.

Every individual's name is inscribed in one of these three books. During the ten Days of Awe, the Judge of the universe reviews the deeds of each individual to see if any changes need to be made. If someone has changed his ways that year, his name may be blotted out of one Book of Life and inscribed in another. Final judgment is passed on Tishri 10, the Day of Atonement. It is unappealable and irrevocable. Those recorded in the *Book of Life for the Wicked* will have their lives cut short the coming year, or possibly suffer some great tragedy to get them to change their ways. All those recorded in the *Book of Life for the Righteous* are mercifully granted another year of life and prosperity. And for the remainder, their lives hang in the balance during the ten Days of Awe; if they manage to impress the Judge of the universe with the sincerity of their repentance, He may grant them life for another year, but only on probation! The Judge will review their case the next Yom Kippur to see if they kept their promises.

Before we judge them too harshly for a salvation based on works, please note that this ancient Jewish tradition is not entirely inconsistent with the Scriptures. I'll list a few. At the Great White Throne judgment, "... 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." (Rev 20:12-15) "But now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin – and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!" And YHWH said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book." (Ex 32:32-33) "May they be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be recorded with the righteous." (Ps 69:28) "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick. Who can understand it? I, YHWH, search the heart; I test the mind, even to give to each man *according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds*." (Jer 17:9-10) "... I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds." (Rev 2:23) "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon the earth..." (1 Pet 1:17)

Is this a 'works-salvation'? No, it is a 'works-judgment'. Everyone, sinner or saint, will be judged by our works. But for those who don't know Yashua it is all they have left!

For pious Jews, the 10 Days of Awe are a solemn time of self-examination, repentance, and new-year resolutions. Joyful gatherings like weddings and birthday parties are often postponed until after Yom Kippur. Greetings are often, "Leshanah tovah tikatevu!" "May you be inscribed [in the Book of Life] for a good year!" We could learn from them. In the midst of all the fun and frivolity in wealthy America, we could learn a little godly fear and awe, a little reverence and respect for the Judge of the universe.

That is one of the primary problems I have with the secret pre-trib rapture heresy. It teaches that all our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus, so we don't have to fear Judgment Day – it doesn't matter how wicked we are now, as long as we've prayed the sinner's prayer we'll get snatched up to heaven and skate past the Great White Throne of judgment with a wave or a handshake. But the apostle Paul cautioned the carnal Christians at Corinth: "... each man's work will become evident; for the day [of judgment] will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, *yet so as through fire*." (1 Cor 3:13-15)

Are you ready for Judgment Day? Are your garments "fine linen, [washed] bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.?" (Rev 19:8) Will you stand before Yashua without shame when He appears, eagerly, confidently awaiting the most important words you will ever hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord! ... Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom which I prepared for you from the foundation of the world... To the extent that you [gave service] to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.?" (Matt 25:21, 34, 40)

Or do you hope He will postpone His return just a little longer; you are having too much fun; you want to enjoy your new (house, car, wife, sport, it doesn't matter what you insert here) for a few years first? Or worse yet, do you have some secret sin that you are holding on to, hoping that Judgment Day will be postponed long enough for you to deal with it, later? I speak to myself as well. We all could learn from these ten Days of Awe and practice a little repentance and self-examination ourselves! That is the purpose of this study on the Feasts.

Even for the saint, the humble, contrite attitude of repentance is a necessary and beautiful thing, for it is in that attitude that God comes, dwells, and works His plans and purposes. "Thus says the high and exalted One, who dwells in eternity, and whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit...'" (Isa 57:15) "Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it. Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. But the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit. A broken [humble, repentant] and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." (Ps 51:16-17) Pride blocks God, but humility makes us useful for His purpose.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; *but the one who does the will of God abides forever*. Children, it is the last hour; and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour... And now, little children, abide in Him, *so that when He is revealed we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming*. If you know that He is righteous, you know also that every one who practices righteousness is born of Him. See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. But we know that if He should be revealed, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And *everyone having this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*." (1 Jn 2:15-18; 2:28 – 3:3)

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT – YOM KIPPUR

As with the Spring Feasts, the Fall Feasts are integrally tied together. The trumpet call announcing the return of the Judge of the universe inexorably leads us through the ten Days of Awe to the Day of Atonement, culminating in the perfect justice, peace, rest, and joy of Tabernacles.

On God's calendar, the exact time between the Spring and Fall Feasts is impossible to predict, to represent the undefined period of time in which we are now living. But the time between each of the Fall Feasts is precise: 10 days from Trumpets to the Day of Atonement, plus another 5 days until Tabernacles. The generation that hears God's call at the Feast of Trumpets "will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows... Therefore be alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." (Matt 24:34-42)

As the angel explained to Daniel, the timing of the end of the age was deliberately sealed up until it actually began to unfold. No one was to know. We should live as if the King of the universe might return for us at any moment. "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the time of the end: many will travel back and forth [worldwide transportation] and knowledge will increase... [Scientific knowledge has indeed increased, but not wisdom.] Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the time of the end. Many [God's people] will be purged, purified, and refined [through great tribulation]; but the wicked will act [more] wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand; *but those who have insight will understand.*" (Dan 12:4, 9-10)

The purpose of this study is to gain insight. I believe the seals are being removed from the book because it really is the 'time of the end' and God's people are being given insight as to what God is actually doing in this generation. We have heard the trumpet call. "Surely the Lord YHWH does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) God's secret counsel for the time of the end has been hidden away within the Scriptures, especially within the symbolism of the Feasts of Israel, but now it is being revealed. "... *Those who have insight will understand.*" That is my personal life's work.

The Day of Atonement, called **Yom Kippur** in Israel, symbolizes **Judgment Day**. The Jews have always known this. Yom Kippur has always been the most awesome of the Jewish high holy days. To this day it is celebrated as the most solemn day of the year. It is a day devoted to fasting and repentance. Though there are many fasts in orthodox Judaism, this is the only fast mandated by the Scriptures. Comparing Leviticus 23:27, 29, & 32, which commands us to "humble [afflict] your souls," with Ezra 8:21, which proclaims a fast as the proper means to humble (afflict) yourselves, is taken by devout Jews as God's command to fast on Yom Kippur, or "be cut off from his people."

Kippur, like our word atonement, means to cover. Yom Kippur is the '**Day of Covering**'. The same Hebrew word is used to describe Noah's action when he "pitched the ark within and without with tar." (Gen 6:14) That covering of tar was what prevented the flood waters of judgment from reaching Noah and his family. In exactly the same way, the blood of the atonement becomes the saving, sealing, protecting agent whereby the sins of the people are covered and not charged against them when judgment falls. Note that judgment still falls. No one escapes it! Only those who are covered, those whose sins are atoned for, are saved through the judgment.

YOM KIPPUR – THE STORY, AD 30

Sin is an individual thing. Each individual must fast and repent. But sin is also a national thing, and is dealt with on a national level. The high priest bore the awesome responsibility to ensure the sins of the nation were covered for another year. Please note that as I tell this story I will use the most holy name of God, YHWH, freely throughout, as I believe God would want it used, even though the Jews at that time actually used it only ten times a year, and then only by the high priest on Yom Kippur. I will put those ten times in **bold** type. To avoid any possibility of taking the most holy name in vain, they would usually substitute 'the Lord', 'Adonai', or 'Ha Shem' (The Name). My story begins on Tishri 3, AD 30.

Joseph Caiaphas Cohen awoke with a sense of dread. Only one week before Yom Kippur, and so much remained unresolved. The peasant Yashua of Nazareth, for example. He couldn't be from God – even in His miracles He flouted the law. That was a direct challenge to his own authority as high priest, and Yashua's rabble-rousing might bring the Romans down on their heads! Another thing, the Ark of the Covenant was still missing from the most holy place in the temple. Just a two-inch foundation stone marked its place. Caiaphas dreaded going into that empty room. It reminded him of his empty heart. Oh, he was a good high priest, and he would fulfill his duties, and make it look good for all the people, but he knew that inside, it was all an empty ritual, like that empty room. All his ceremonial cleansing was just a sham – he loved his secret sins as much as the next guy, and it bugged him to have to appear so... clean in front of the people all the time.

His mind skipped back 3 days, to the afternoon of Rosh haShanah. He'd made an impressive figure in front of the people by the Pool of Siloam, when he had emptied the pebbles from his pockets and led the traditional tashlikh prayer: "Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity; who passes over the rebellious acts of the remnant of His possession? For YHWH does not retain His anger forever. He delights in His unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea!"

Thou wilt give truth to Jacob and unchanging love to Abraham, as Thou didst swear to our forefathers from the days of old.” (Mica 7:18-20) How regal, how majestic he had sounded! He loved to pray that prayer! The louder the better. It gave him comfort against the nagging guilt he felt for his secret sins.

Caiaphas lay back and reveled in his triumph in the synagogue that day. He had been magnificent, awesome, as he had led in the prayers, readings, and benedictions. 1) The Malkhiyot (Kingship): “May all the inhabitants of the world realize that to Thee every knee must bend, every tongue must swear allegiance... YHWH shall be King forever and ever.” 2) The Zikhronot (Remembrance): “Remember in our behalf, YHWH our God, the covenant, the kindness, and the solemn promise which Thou didst make to our father Abraham on Mount Moriah.” 3) The Shofarot (Ram’s Horn): “The whole world trembled at Thy presence. All Creation shook in awe before Thee, when Thou, our King, didst reveal Thyself on Mount Sinai... at the blasting of the shofar didst Thou appear to them.” Oh, how the people had trembled when his voice thundered out. Caiaphas swelled with pride. He had certainly looked impressive in his new ceremonial robes!

But in thinking of the first trumpet, the exceedingly loud shofar that had waxed louder and louder until all the people shook with terror at the voice of YHWH speaking to Moses, Caiaphas was struck with a new fear. Though the people had been properly awed at him, was God pleased with his performance? Was he really reminding the people of when God had spoken, or merely showing off? His mind flashed back to the famous passage in the Torah where YHWH had said to Moses “Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that all the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever.” (Ex 19:9) God had put on an impressive performance back when He had first come before the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, with the mighty trumpet sound, the quaking, smoking mountain, the thunder and lightning, and all. Was his own performance really to remind them of that, so they would never lose their fear of God and their appreciation of Torah, the Teachings of Moses? *Or was he just robbing God of His glory?*

Pushing that thought aside, he slowly rolled out of bed and began to dress, meticulously checking off in his mind each item he would need for the day. He would move to his temple quarters today, and he would not be permitted to leave for the entire week. Nothing could be allowed to present the possibility of his becoming ceremonially unclean before Yom Kippur. There could be no mistakes, everything must be accomplished according to the law. He carefully packed his handbag, then double checked before he closed it. He momentarily shuddered as he considered the monumental catastrophe and humiliation if he messed up somehow and was disqualified from performing his Yom Kippur duties.

He was glad the people could only see his outside; that part of him at least would be spotless! He would see to that! Caiaphas Cohen squared his shoulders, grabbed his handbag, nodded a perfunctory good-bye to his wife, and strode into the early morning sunlight toward the temple. As much as he hated the week’s imprisonment at the temple, the discomfort of the priest’s quarters there (compared to his own lavish suite), and all the silly rituals, he still enjoyed those fancy robes with the golden threads, being the center of attention, and all the people’s acclaim. All in all, it wasn’t a bad job, he thought as he parked his bag and mindlessly performed the foot and hand washing routine at the laver. He even managed to look quite pious and attentive as he expertly took charge of the morning sacrifice. He had done this a zillion times before.

But his mind kept drifting off as he went through the day’s activities. He had to struggle to hide his anger against all the problems weighing him down; anger against that young upstart, Yashua, and all His ignorant and foolish followers; anger against his forefather’s failure to recover the Ark after the dispersion; anger against the Romans and their tight control over his own leadership of the Jews; anger against the thousands of laws that tied him down but never provided relief to his guilt-ridden heart; even anger against YHWH Himself, who had promised so much and yet seemed to be aloof and holding back.

Five times a day he made a big show of kneeling in prayer, meditation, and repentance. After all, he had to set the example for the other priests, in preparation for Yom Kippur. But inside, his thoughts raged, and he chaffed against always having to wear a mask and put on a show. He considered sneaking out and spending a night in the taverns or brothels at the other side of the city, but he knew there was no way he could get away with it; the temple was well guarded and he was well known.

On the third day of his ‘incarceration’, Caiaphas was sprinkled with some ashes of the red heifer mixed with hyssop and aloes (making a good antiseptic soap) for his purification, just in case he had unwittingly been defiled by touching a dead body. It was another empty ritual which did nothing but remind him of the uncleanness inside his soul.

The 7th day finally came. After his ceremonial washing he again submitted to the sprinkling of the ashes of the red heifer. This would be his last practice day for the big day tomorrow, but having been high priest now for ten years, he felt confident in all his duties. Just the same, he was glad he didn’t have to do this every day of the year. He rehearsed in his mind the day’s duties: offering the regular morning sacrifice, sprinkling the blood, burning the incense... Those were all routine. Hmm. Was he missing anything? Every eye would be on him at this time tomorrow, and there could be no mistakes.

“Caiaphas! The Eastern Gate! Everyone’s waiting!”

Oops. He had forgotten. Today was the day to inspect the animals for the sacrifice tomorrow. As the high priest, he was responsible for verifying that each animal was perfect, without blemish. Especially the two goats. They had to be spotless, identical in size and value, and must appear handsome and well-cared-for as well. Caiaphas walked rapidly toward the Eastern Gate, trying not to appear hasty. He had put a lot of time into selecting those two goats; their keepers had better have them ready.

Finally the day's activities were complete – and just in time, too. There was the ninth-hour trumpet. Three hours 'til sundown. Caiaphas walked quickly over to kneel on his prayer rug for the obligatory meditation and prayer, then hurried over to the laver to wash up for dinner. Everyone else would have a feast, in preparation for tomorrow's fast; but as high priest, he was supposed to eat scantily.

He was not looking forward to fasting tomorrow, with all the work he had to do. He considered hiding some meat or fish in the folds of his robe, but again realized that as high priest there was no way he could get away with it. He would have to satisfy himself with snitching a few extra chunks of meat at the feast tonight, and hope that no one would notice how much he was eating. Eat scantily indeed. He would need the extra energy tomorrow!

Dinner was indeed a feast. Somewhere during the next three hours Caiaphas trod rather heavily on the fine line that separates dining from gluttony. But too much meat always made him drowsy. His drowsiness had become full sleep when the call rang out: "Where is Caiaphas? The two witnesses are waiting outside! Where is the high priest?"

He struggled to his feet, wiped the sleep from his eyes, and hurried toward the door. "Why is everyone in such a hurry today?" he muttered to himself. Then he caught his breath as he realized how dark it had gotten. He should have sounded the Shofar already. Yom Kippur had begun!

Caiaphas hurriedly went through the motion of taking the report of the two witnesses, then signalled the priests on the temple wall to sound the shofar. The distinctive blasts sounded immediately; at least the other priests weren't sleeping on the job. He sighed and waddled over to his quarters. He felt sick to his stomach, but realized it probably was just from overeating. "I'll get a good night's sleep and then I'll feel better," he reassured himself.

Sure enough, he was wide awake and dressed long before sunup. He felt great. This was his big day to shine, and a surge of adrenalin pushed him out the door. Twenty priests stood there waiting to escort him to the laver for the ceremonial hand and foot washing, and then to the special bath, set up only for this day. He glanced to the eastern hills; the dawning rays of the sun had not even touched them yet. At least today he was in plenty of time.

Nose in the air, he strode ahead of his escorts. He knew he was strutting, but he had a right to be proud of himself.

He stepped behind the linen curtain, very aware of his actions as seen by all the witnesses in shadow form on the curtain. He removed his garments and meticulously bathed, immersing himself completely as required by law. Then he carefully dressed, this time donning his 'golden robes', so-called because there were threads of gold woven into them. To the normal linen breeches, coat, girdle, and bonnet worn by all the priests, was added the beautiful dark blue and crimson 'robe of the ephod' (woven with golden threads interspersed and adorned all around the hems with golden bells and alternating blue, purple, and scarlet pomegranate blossoms), his golden breastplate, the ephod itself (of spangled gems representing the twelve tribes of Israel), and the golden diadem (miter) on his head. Finally he stood to his full height, thrust out his noble chin, and strode proudly out past the curtain, to the oh-so-satisfying gasps of his many admirers.

He lifted his arms toward the growing crowd. A cheer and thrill of excitement swept over the courtyard. Slowly turning so every eye could appreciate his magnificence, he noted with satisfaction that the rays of the dawning had just touched the tops of the eastern hills and begun to spread toward the west. What perfect timing!

Caiaphas walked majestically to the bronze laver, accomplishing the obligatory ceremonial hand and foot washing with a familiar flair. He then walked over to his prayer rug, which he found by the feel on his feet, since his eyes were fixed majestically on the heavens somewhere above the temple. Facing the most holy place, he raised his arms toward the sky and flung himself down on his knees with a satisfyingly loud but bone jarring thud, and held the rigid attitude of prayer and meditation for the prescribed length of time plus a tad for good measure.

Out of his half-closed eyes he noticed that he was the only one kneeling; all the others, including the other priests, were following his lead in prayer, but standing, as befits those less holy than the high priest. But his knees ached from the fall. Once again he grew bitter that he had to appear so holy in front of everyone, but again he pushed it aside. He bowed prostrate, kissed the ground, and arose to begin the morning sacrifices, ever careful to keep his arms high to avoid any chance of uncleanness.

With broad and authoritative hand-signals he directed those previously chosen by lot to cleanse the altar and light the daily fires. They lit four fires instead of the normal three, to set this day apart. Caiaphas nodded to them with solemn satisfaction, then walked with all the other priests to the 'hall of polished stones' for the second lot to be cast, by which two groups of priests would be chosen.

Carefully estimating the timing, Caiaphas Cohen directed a young priest to ascend to the pinnacle of the temple to determine if it was time to kill the daily sacrifice. He smiled to himself as the proper call came down, "The morning shineth already!"

“Is the sky lit as far as Hebron?” Caiaphas responded. Receiving the affirmative, he smiled broadly and gave the order for the sacrificial lamb to be brought up from Beth-Moked where it had been kept in readiness. Other priests went to fetch the gold and silver vessels of service while Caiaphas and his four assistants carefully inspected the lamb by torchlight, checking once again for the slightest blemish. This was the part that Caiaphas often had nightmares about. What if he had missed something the day before, and his assistants discovered it here, right in front of all the people?!

He breathed a sigh of relief as the four nodded their agreement. “**I find no fault in him!**” he shouted. The lamb was given water from a golden bowl, then led over and tied to the rings of the altar. Caiaphas signaled for the elders to open the main temple gates, then for the priests on the wall to sound the silver trumpets, announcing to the city that the morning sacrifice was about to be offered.

Meticulously moving down his memorized mental check-list, Caiaphas signaled to the priests chosen by the second lot to begin their duties: one group was to cleanse and trim the golden candlestick, the other was to cleanse the altar of incense, all carefully timed to be completed as he finished the morning sacrifice.

Caiaphas worked methodically, slaying the lamb and giving it to his four assistants to cut up, salt, and lay on the altar, while he carefully sprinkled the blood on the altar in just the prescribed manner. Glancing toward the holy place, he again noted with satisfaction that his timing was perfect; the candlestick was freshly re-lit just as he was completing the sprinkling. He wrapped up the sacrifice by pouring out the golden bowl of blood at the altar’s base.

Another ceremonial washing, and the priests again retired to the ‘Hall of Polished Stones’. There Caiaphas recited the traditional prayers and drew the third and fourth lots. The third lot was for him whose great privilege it was to offer the daily incense symbolizing the prayers of the people. The fourth and final lot was for the one chosen to fling the pieces of the sacrificial lamb upon the fire of the altar. This they did with great pomp and ceremony.

As he savored the delicious odor of roasting lamb, Caiaphas recalled ruefully that he had missed breakfast. He ignored his stomach, and carefully rearranged the meat on the fire. Then he signaled for the benediction. All the priests ranged on the steps to the holy place, lifted their arms above their heads, and joined the tips of their fingers in a mystical manner. Standing tall, Caiaphas led them, raising his voice so it would reverberate majestically off the back wall: “YHWH bless and keep thee; YHWH make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; YHWH lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” The crowd, now numbering in the thousands, gave the traditional response: “Blessed be Adonai Elohim, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.”

A priest brought him the daily meal offering. Caiaphas mixed the prescribed oil into it, salted it, and laid it on the fire. Then came the twelve daily loaves, which he broke in halves, presenting twelve halves before the altar and setting aside the remaining twelve halves for the evening sacrifice. Finally they gave him the drink offering, which he carefully poured out on the foundation of the altar.

There. That concluded the morning offerings, with no mistakes. Caiaphas waved to the musicians. Instantly the silver trumpets sounded, followed by cymbals, and a choir of Levites, accompanied by stringed instruments, began the traditional Psalm of the day. It was sung in three sections interspersed by a triple blast of the silver trumpets as the signal for all the people to bow down and worship. Caiaphas again set the example, falling on his knees with his hands raised high, smiling smugly to himself.

Thus closed the morning service. *But the job of the high priest had just begun.*

Again Caiaphas went to the special golden bath behind the linen curtain, again he performed the ritual cleansing, and again he changed his clothing. He would change them a total of five times on this special day. But this time he changed to pure, spotless white linen garments. They were brand new and uniquely made for Yom Kippur, for this was the day he would enter the most holy place.

Caiaphas was daydreaming about how good that roast lamb would taste if only he could get his hands on a hunk, when all of a sudden it occurred to him – the white linen symbolized purity! For all his ceremonial washing, he had a heart that still continually lusted after the pleasures of the flesh. He shuddered, wondering briefly if he would survive his trip into the most holy place, the Holy of Holies, this afternoon. Quickly pushing that thought away, he strode back out before the people, basking in their admiration at his magnificence.

The yearling bull Caiaphas had inspected and chosen was waiting between the temple porch and the altar where the priests ministered. He had selected it as the sin offering for himself and the priesthood. This was his big moment. He walked grandly up to the bull, turned its head properly toward the temple, and laid his hands firmly upon its head. Majestically he spoke the confession, first for himself: “Ah, YHWH! I myself have committed iniquity; I have transgressed; I have sinned – I and my house. Oh, then YHWH, I entreat Thee, please atone for my iniquities, my transgressions, and the sins which I have committed, transgressed, and sinned before Thee, I and my house – even as it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘For, on that day will He atone for you to make you clean; from all your transgressions before YHWH ye shall be cleansed.’” Each time he uttered the ineffable Name he paused, just long enough to give all the people time to fall on their faces in worship and respond, “Blessed be The Name; the glory of His Kingdom is forever and ever.”

Things were going very well. This would be his most impressive performance yet, Caiaphas thought, again pushing back his nagging doubts. Even his own personal confession did not seem to be reaching down to the secret sins he held in his heart.

His deputy high priest moved close to his right, and the chief priest of the weekly course joined him on his left, escorting him to the eastern side of the altar near the people. There stood the golden urn Calpi near the two identical goats he had inspected yesterday. Caiaphas held Calpi high and shook it dramatically. Then he set it down and plunged in both hands, drawing out a golden tablet in each hand and laying it on the head of each goat.

Confidently Caiaphas looked to the tablet on the head of the right-hand goat, paused dramatically, and loudly read the words, "For YHWH." A thrill of joy went through the people. They fell on their faces in worship, responding "Blessed be The Name; the glory of His Kingdom is forever and ever." Finding the goat 'for YHWH' at the high priest's right hand was the traditional sign of God's favor upon the nation of Israel for the coming year. That had happened every year in recorded history. Caiaphas beamed in delight. *Little did he know that this was the last time the high priest would draw 'for YHWH' in his right hand for the next forty years, until the temple itself was destroyed.*

Caiaphas read the tablet on his left, "For Azazel." He took the red sash from his deputy, tore it in two, and tied one piece to the left goat's horns. He then turned it to face the people, where it would wait looking at them until their sins be laid upon it. Next he took the other piece of the red sash and tied it around the throat of the goat 'for YHWH', which still faced him. Stepping back to view the goats, his doubts returned full-force. The goat 'for YHWH' looked pleadingly up into his eyes. He saw himself, with the red sash around his own neck. *He wasn't holy enough! He would be slain when he went into the most holy place!* The scene swam before his eyes, and he staggered, desperately trying to shake off the guilt and regain control.

His escorts saw. They moved beside him, guiding him back to the young bull. He laid his hands on the bull's head and recited the same prayer a second time, except this time confessing the sins of "the seed of Aaron, Thy holy people" (all the Levites) as well as his own. He surprised himself with the fervency of his confession, fully aware that he would be struck dead if it was not accepted before he entered the most holy place. Again the people responded joyfully each time he uttered the ineffable Name, making it a total of 7 times it had been uttered so far.

Caiaphas expertly slit the carotid artery of the bull, catching the spurting blood with a golden bowl. He gave the bowl to an attendant priest to keep it stirring lest it coagulate, and strode to the altar of burnt offering, trying to look confident. Now all his earlier bold bravado only seemed foolish and arrogant, and his knees trembled.

He picked up the golden censer (firepan) used only for the Day of Atonement. It was especially large and really quite heavy, so he was permitted to carry it in his right hand (on other days the censer was always carried in the left hand and the incense in the right). He then scooped up into the censer a few live coals from each of the four fires on the altar. Then he took two handfuls of incense (rather than the normal one), in a golden ladle, stood tall, and turned toward the temple.

This was it. Every eye was on him. The silence among such a vast crowd was profound. It was as if everyone was holding his breath. An attendant got a small rope and tied it to his right ankle. As Caiaphas waited, his eyes closed, a silent cry fervently burst forth from his heart. "O YHWH, forgive me. I'm just a wicked, lustful old man. Have mercy, I pray!" Then he summoned the courage to step forward into the holy place, where he passed beyond the view of the people. Past the table of showbread, the seven-branched golden lampstand, and the altar of incense... up to the heavy curtain in the back of the room. Not a sound could be heard outside; they were all listening for the bells on the hems of his linen garments, so they would know if he was struck dead. Again he paused, before the curtain, looking down at the rope on his ankle. Would they be dragging him out in a few moments? He paused to whisper, "YHWH! Have mercy! I plead with You to cleanse me now!" Then he slipped behind the heavy curtain.

Darkness; the only light being a soft red glow coming from the coals in his firepan. Stillness. Peace. Caiaphas just stood there, trying not to let the beads of sweat from his forehead soil his spotless white robes. He was still alive! *Praise YHWH's longsuffering mercy!* A flood of gratitude swept over him as he realized how little he deserved this mercy. He stepped forward, hearing the soft murmur of gladness from the people as the tinkle of his bells reached their ears. He set the censer down on the low foundation stone where the Ark of the Covenant should have been. He paused briefly to quell another flash of anger that the Ark had never been found after the Babylonian Captivity. He stepped back, carefully poured the incense into his right hand, and threw it on the coals in the censer. He waited while the smoke and fragrance filled the Holy of Holies, thankful that his life had been spared for one more year. Finally he retreated, pushing himself backwards past the heavy curtain.

Still facing the curtain, he prayed fervently: "May it please Thee, O YHWH our God and the God of our fathers, that neither this day nor during this year any captivity come upon us. Yet if captivity befall us this day or this year, let it be to a place where Thy law is cultivated. May it please Thee, O YHWH our God and the God of our fathers, that want come not upon us this day or this year. But if want visit us this day or this year, let it be due to the liberality of our charitable deeds. May it please Thee, O YHWH our God and the God of our fathers, that this year may be a year

of plenty, fullness, fellowship, and trade at low cost; a year with abundance of rain, of sunshine, and of dew; one in which Thy people Israel shall not require assistance from one another. And listen not to the prayers of those who are about to set out on a journey [and therefore would pray against the rains that are due]. As to Thy people Israel, may no enemy exalt himself against them. May it please Thee, O YHWH our God and the God of our fathers, that the houses of the men of Saron [who lived in a dangerous, flood-threatened valley] may not become their graves...” Thus he continued the prayers of the common people and the nation of Israel.

Even as he quoted the ritual prayer, his thoughts went back to the darkness of the most holy place. It had been so dark! The anger again rose within him. The Shekina Glory of YHWH should have been there lighting the room, but He was absent. Was it only because the Ark was lost? Or was it because Israel was too wicked for YHWH to dwell with them anymore? Or was YHWH absent because he, the high priest, was too wicked? No. He quickly pushed that thought away. He was no more wicked than anyone else. Besides, he had just come out of the most holy place, the Holy of Holies, alive! YHWH must be pleased with him!

Wiping beads of sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand, Caiaphas turned to triumphantly march through the holy place out into the sunlight. Seeing him still alive, the people beamed with delight, but after one brief murmur of joy they respectfully held their peace. He took the bowl of the bull’s blood from the attendant who had kept it stirring, and once more went into the Holy of Holies. Dipping a finger into the blood, he sprinkled it toward where the Mercy Seat should have been, once upward and seven times downward, counting out loud to prevent any mistake, and taking great care not to get any on his spotless linen garments.

Again he retreated backward past the heavy curtain. “This isn’t so bad, after all,” he thought, chiding himself for all his fears and guilt feelings. Setting the bowl down before the curtain, he went back to the people, killed the goat marked ‘for YHWH’, brought back its blood, entered the Holy of Holies a third time, and repeated the sprinkling as he had with the blood of the bull.

Again retreating backwards past the veil, he quickly and expertly completed the cleansing of the temple, using both the bull’s and the goat’s blood to sprinkle the veil itself as well as the altar of incense. When the required forty-three sprinklings were done, he went back out to the people and poured the remaining blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. The hard part was over, and Caiaphas smugly rejoiced that he had pulled it off without a single spot of blood on his beautiful new garments. He had a right to be proud of himself!

The goat ‘for Azazel’ was still facing the people. He walked to it and put his hands on its head.

“Ah, YHWH! They have committed iniquity; they have transgressed; they have sinned – Thy people, the house of Israel. Oh, then, YHWH! Atone, I entreat Thee, for their iniquities, their transgressions, and their sins, which they have wickedly committed, transgressed, and sinned before Thee – Thy people, the whole house of Israel. As it is written in the Law of Moses Thy servant, saying, ‘On that day it shall be atoned for you, to make you clean from all your sins before YHWH!’” As before, he paused each time he uttered the ‘ineffable Name’ for the people to bow and worship. (This made a total of ten times he had spoken ‘The Name’ that day. According to oral tradition it must not be uttered anywhere again by anyone until the next Day of Atonement, so that there was no chance that it could be taken in vain.) After the final utterance of ‘The Name’ the people worshiped, bowing prostrate to the ground. The high priest took his hands off the head of the goat and stretched them out over the worshiping people, and pronounced in his loudest, most triumphant voice, “**Ye shall be cleansed!**” prophetically assuring them that one day their sins would truly be removed from them.

An attendant priest untied the goat ‘for Azazel’ and led it to the Eastern Gate. The people began their chant, “Hurry and go! Hurry and go!” as he took off the bright red sash, tore it in two, retied one piece to the goat’s horn, and tied the other to the latch on the massive gate. He then led the goat over the arched bridge to the Mount of Olives, where he delivered it to a hired Gentile handler waiting there. The Gentile quickly took the goat one half Sabbath day’s journey to the next station, where he passed it on to the next handler. This continued through ten stations, like a relay race, until they officially reached ‘the wilderness’. Scripture specified that they should, “send the goat into the wilderness... and the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities into a land not inhabited.” (Lev 16:21-22) According to tradition, as long as the goat did not return, their sins were taken away. But in the time of our story, the Pharisees had arranged that it be pushed over a cliff, to absolutely ensure that the goat would not return!

As the goat was being led into the wilderness, Caiaphas proceeded to cut up the young bull and the goat ‘for YHWH’. He put the guts into a vessel for later, and gave to an attendant the carcasses to be burned ‘outside the city’. Then, still in his spotless white linen garments, he entered the ‘court of women’, where he read to the people from Torah regarding the laws of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16 & 23:27-32) and quoted by heart Numbers 29:7-11.

His readings from Torah were interspersed with a series of prayers, grouped into five categories:

Confession of sin and prayers for forgiveness, closing with “Praise to Thee, O YHWH, who in Thy great mercy forgivest the sins of Thy people Israel.”

Prayers for the temple, closing with “Praise be to Thee, O YHWH, who inhabits Zion.”

Prayers for Israel's safety and for her king, closing with "Thanks be to Thee, O YHWH, who hast chosen Israel as Thy people forever."

Prayers for the priesthood, that their service be acceptable to God, closing with "Thanks be to Thee, O YHWH, who hast sanctified the priesthood."

Voluntary prayers, entreaties, hymns, or petitions as chosen by the high priest, closing with "Give help, O YHWH, to Thy people Israel, for Thy people need Thy help; thanks be unto Thee, O YHWH, who hears and answers prayer."

The prayers ended, Caiaphas retired behind the linen curtain to his third ceremonial bath of the day, changing back to his golden robes. Once more he appeared before the people. Now the festive Yom Kippur offerings were sacrificed, including "one male kid of the goats for a sin offering" (Num 29:11) which the priests themselves would eat later that night, as well as the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and libations for the people to feast on. This part of the service concluded with Caiaphas burning on the altar the guts of the young bull and the goat 'for YHWH'. After that, Caiaphas could perform the regular evening sacrifice, which was like the morning sacrifice.

Somewhere during these proceedings, the goat 'for Azazel' reached 'the wilderness'. The red sash was removed from its horns and stuck in a crack of the rock for a testimony, and the goat was pushed over the cliff. The demise of the goat 'for Azazel' was telegraphed by flags from station to station, so that within minutes the people knew that the atonement had been completed for their sins. They eagerly looked to the torn sash tied to the gate latch—praise YHWH! As always before, it had turned from crimson red to snow white, showing that God had accepted their sacrifice!

Little did they know that this day was the last time that miracle would ever occur. For the next forty years until the destruction of the temple it would remain bright crimson.

The snow-white sash was cause for rejoicing! Dancing by the young maidens was the symbol for rejoicing in the Jewish culture. To demonstrate their joy, a special white robe was lent to any virgin girl who wished to participate (rich and poor were thus treated alike). Then they all met in the surrounding fields and vineyards to dance and sing. They joined in large circles, their flowing white robes and long hair released to the wind, with no veil covering their faces. It made a glorious sight! All of Israel rejoiced to see them, and many a young man's happy heart was captured by a dancing maiden's beauty on that afternoon.

But the work of Caiaphas was not yet complete. He entered the ceremonial bath for the fourth time that day, and again changed clothes, back to the spotless white linen Yom Kippur garments, washing his hands and feet before and after as always.

Then he went back into the Holy of Holies (for the fourth time that day) to fetch the censer and incense-urn which he had left there. On his return he washed once more his hands and feet, put off his linen garments, bathed for the fifth time, put on his golden vestments, and washed his hands and feet. His linen garments would never be worn again. They would become wicks for the four great golden lampstands which lit the court of the women.

The sun was setting. Yom Kippur was drawing to a close. Caiaphas hurried to complete the day's tasks: he burnt the evening incense on the golden altar of incense, trimmed the lamps on the golden menorah for the night, washed his hands and feet once more, took off his golden vestments, and dressed in his street clothes. At sunset he was escorted by all the people in procession to his own house in Jerusalem. The first stars of the evening were sighted, officially beginning the next day. Everything had been accomplished according to the law.

A big feast followed. Again Rabbi Caiaphas trod rather heavily on that mystic line which separates dining from gluttony. Relaxing with an abundance of fine old wine, he became a bit boastful in his recounting of the trip into the Holy of Holies that afternoon. Usually silent unless called upon for his wisdom, Rabban Gamaliel (grandson of the venerable Rabban Hillel) eventually spoke up. "Tell me brother Caiaphas, were you not fearful when first you entered beyond the veil? Did your knees not shake? Did your forehead not sweat? And did you not plead with God for mercy, even as you entered the most holy place?"

Startled into sobriety, Caiaphas bowed his head. "Yes, Rabban, I did. I was terrified. I really thought I was going to die. I knew I was not worthy."

"It is good, brother Caiaphas. And that is why you did not die. Be careful now not to lose that humility in your attitude. We who minister in the presence of YHWH (blessed be the ineffable Name forever and ever) must dwell continually in the fear of YHWH."

Caiaphas put down his half-empty glass of wine. Every eye was upon him. The Rabban's rebuke, though gentle, stung like a whip. He looked around, anger rising, and opened his mouth to defend himself. But then, suddenly realizing that his arrogance was indefensible, he turned back to Gamaliel. "Thank you, Rabban. I had thought I was the only one. It is good to know that others also have felt this fear and unworthiness."

"Yes, we all have." Rabban Gamaliel spoke slowly and softly. "That is why God gave us this Day of Atonement: so that we could learn of the fear and holiness of YHWH (blessed be the Name forever and ever). If we His priests do not learn it, how can we communicate it to the people?"

Caiaphas nodded his appreciation of the wisdom of the esteemed Rabban, and the feast went on, though in a more subdued tone.

Who then could possibly know that in a short six months, the next spring at the time of Passover, Caiaphas would be condemning to death the one Rabbi who actually could stand in the holy presence of YHWH without fear, Yashua of Nazareth? Who then could know that in a short forty years, the Roman General Titus would order all the Cohens (priests) to stand between the altar and the temple steps and have their throats slit, on that very spot where he had slit the throat of the goat 'for YHWH'.

Since that day, the Jewish people have been through more persecution and oppression than any other nation in history. Yet, at least some of them understood why. Now, inserted into the afternoon prayers on Yom Kippur, is this ancient Aramaic Musaf prayer:

"Our righteous Messiah is departed from us. Horror hath seized us, and we have none to justify us. He hath borne the yoke of our iniquities and our transgressions. He is wounded because of our transgression. He beareth our sins on His shoulder that we may find pardon for our iniquities. We shall be healed by His wounds..." So at least one ancient rabbi understood the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4-6 pointing to the crucifixion of Yashua haMashiach.

If this story seems unfamiliar to you, you are in good company. It is unfamiliar to all but a very few Christians in America. Even many Jews have become estranged from their own history, though the observant ones are currently learning it again in preparation for fulfilling their dream of rebuilding the temple and restoring the sacrificial system.

But is it biblical? Surprisingly, much of it is, as found in Leviticus 16 and 23, and Numbers 29. As always, Hebrew tradition has embellished it a bit; but overall it is pretty close. It certainly has some lessons to teach those who are teachable.

To begin with, the story actually started with the death of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu. (Lev 10:1) They had dishonored God by bringing their iniquities into His holy presence. God gave such detailed instructions for the Day of Atonement to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.

The lesson is clear: God is holy, holy, holy. As much as He loves us to come to Him, He doesn't appreciate us bringing our sins with us when we do. Is this a lesson that Christians need to hear? *It seems to me that we in post-modern America have never really learned the fear of YHWH! At least among my circle of Protestants, we seem a bit too casual about coming before the King of the universe.*

If we were invited to the White House to meet with the president of the United States, do you think we might spend a little time sprucing up first? Maybe take a shower and put on clean clothes? Possibly even a white shirt and tie? Then why do we think we can come before the King of the universe dressed in the filthy rags of bad attitudes, idolatries, self-centeredness, and secret sins?

I speak to myself as well. I only recognize the problem because I have been all too guilty of it myself. We who are leaders and ministers in the church (or in our own family) do bear a double responsibility. How can the sheep (or our children) learn if the shepherds (or we parents) are going astray? God will hold us responsible both for what we say and how we live, for those under us learn from one as much as from the other.

It saddens me deeply to hear the statistics of modern church-goers; their divorce rate, illegitimate birth rate, teenage rebellions, immoralities, and the frivolous ways they spend their time are roughly on par with the ungodly. Again, I see it in my own family – our self-centeredness, love of worldly amusements, and meanness to each other. It saddens me even more to hear the statistics of American pastors and evangelists. Their rate of divorce, adultery, embezzlement, and other crimes seems to exceed that of the world. Some try to excuse them by saying they are under a lot more stress, they are under more temptation, they are more visible, they are more often caught (God lets sinners get away with sins that He would never tolerate in His own people), and when they are caught the media makes a bigger deal of it as part of their effort to discredit Christianity. Perhaps those are true. Does that excuse it?

Do you really think the King of the universe is up there wringing His hands and saying, "I'm sorry. It's all My fault. My standard is too high and holy. I just gave you more temptation than you could handle. Don't worry about it. Just come up into My presence any old time you feel like it. We'll deal with all your sins and stuff at the rapture."?

I don't think so. My Bible says: "... Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable... I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. [*This is the apostle Paul writing!*] For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they were drinking from a spiritual Rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased, for they were laid low in the wilderness. *Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. And do not be idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play' [in their feast before the golden calf]. Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and 23,000 fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the adversary. Now these things happened to them as an example. They were written for our instruction, us upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it [not fall to it]. *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*” (1 Cor 9:24 - 10:14) That is the primary message of the Day of Atonement.

Salvation from sin is a free gift by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. *It is free, but it isn’t cheap!* The story of the Feasts of Israel is the story of redemption. Jesus paid the full price both for our salvation and our reconciliation back to God. The **Spring Feasts** symbolize salvation and baptism; getting us out of Egypt (the world). **Pentecost** then symbolizes our receiving the Holy Spirit’s power and grace to walk in victory over the bondage of sin, so that we can become His effective ministers to gather in the harvest for His Kingdom. The **Fall Feasts** symbolize God’s final judgment of our sin nature and our deliverance from it, and our complete reconciliation back to God (the Day of Atonement) so that we can dwell in the Promised Land of His presence, walk with Him in holiness, delight Him with pure worship, and be delighted in Him continually as He dwells with us (symbolized by the Feast of Tabernacles).

The Day of Atonement symbolizes the **judgment of the saints**, not the sinners. (Sinners will be judged at the Great White Throne judgment after the millennial reign of Christ—see Rev 20:11-15.) This judgment of the saints has no condemnation in it, for there is no condemnation for those who are “in Christ Jesus” by faith. (Rom 8:1) It is not punishment for sin. It is an atoning, purifying, cleansing judgment, for the specific purpose of preparing us for that final Day of Atonement, when our evil deeds, which by faith are covered by the blood of Christ, will all burn up, and we will be rewarded for our good (righteous) deeds.

This is a touchy subject. A guy can get himself thrown out of some churches over this. So let me make it clear right up front that the sinless perfection (sanctification) He demands of us before we can dwell in His holy presence has two distinct aspects. First: the righteousness of Christ is given to us. We receive it by faith and we receive grace to walk in it, trusting that it covers and nullifies our old nature with its ugly bent toward sin. Second: completion, perfection, full maturity, “You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48); saved to the uttermost (Heb 7:25); filled up with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:19); to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, after which we will no longer need any apostles, prophets, evangelists, or pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11-13), for everyone shall know Him from the least to the greatest. (Heb 8:11 ff) This is “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our [physical] body.” (Rom 8:23) And this is the “first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” (Rev 20:6)

The latter aspect, most Christians agree, is not actually complete until the Second Appearing of our Lord Jesus in great power and glory. The former aspect is where there is often some disagreement. Many people seem to be of the opinion that the righteousness of Christ imputed to us at salvation is all we will ever have until we get raptured. They are content to wallow through life bound by sin, trusting Christ’s righteousness by faith, until they are zapped up to heaven at the rapture and made holy.

That is wrong – flat, dead wrong. I am sorry to have to be so dogmatic on such a controversial subject, but this is not a topic on which anyone can afford to be wishy-washy. If there is any lesson at all for a Christian in the Fall Feasts, especially in the Day of Atonement, it is this. God has delivered us from both the guilt of sin and the power of sin in our lives; He has given us His Holy Spirit and grace to walk in His holiness; *and now He expects us to purify our lives, to treat Him as holy in our lives, and to actually walk in the righteousness He has provided.* Only then can He come to dwell (tabernacle) with us, have sweet fellowship with us, and lead us continually by His Holy Spirit. Sure our own righteousness is as filthy rags, but He doesn’t expect us to wear those rags into His presence; He has provided pure white linen garments, and He expects us to bathe, even five times a day if necessary, put them on, and wear them right into the Holy of Holies beyond the veil.

“... not with the blood of goats and calves, but through His [Jesus’] own blood He entered the [Holy of] Holies once for all [time, people, and places], having obtained everlasting redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for cleansing the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the everlasting Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works [iniquity] to serve the living God [with righteous works]?” (Heb 9:14)

“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... He [God] takes away the first [covenant] in order to establish the second [covenant] by which we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified... Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of [the] faith, having our heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water. *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together [at the Feasts], as is the habit of some [most], but encouraging one another all the more as you see the day drawing near.*” (Heb 10:4-25, excerpts)

Don't miss it! The precious blood of Christ is better than the blood of bulls and goats, which could cover the guilt of the sinner but could never take away the sin. *The blood of Jesus is able to take away the sin!* If the Bible has anything at all to say to us it is this: when Jesus died and rose again, He broke the power that sin and death had over our lives, *and gave us the power to walk in the newness of His eternal Life, right into His holy, holy, holy presence beyond the veil and into the most holy place.*

Good old Romans 6: "... We have been buried with Him [Jesus] through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, *so we too might walk in newness of life...* our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with and that we should no longer be slaves to sin; *for he who has died is freed from sin...* even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts... having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness... so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification... But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal Life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal Life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Hallelujah! Glory!

Intellectually you know God is unchangeable and that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Intellectually you know that God's personal name YHWH means He is the great I AM, not the I Was or the I Will Be. But when you read the Old Testament, do you read it to find out what God did? Or to find out what He is doing? When you read the New Testament do you read it to find out what God will do? Or what He is doing, now, this very moment, in and through you and me?

I am a Protestant, and I am finding more and more things to protest about; the Roman Catholic doctrine of heaven, for example. Heaven is indeed God's dwelling place for all eternity, but it is not some far away place where we go after we die to camp on the clouds playing a harp. No, no, no! Heaven is very close to each one of us, and we don't have to die to get there. We simply have to bathe ourselves in the precious cleansing blood of Jesus, put on the pure white robes of righteousness that He has provided, and step through the veil! Yes, right now, this minute! With our prayers ascending as fragrant incense before Him, we kneel at the Mercy Seat, His very throne on earth, and worship in His presence – that is heaven! While we are there, He tells us what to do, by His Holy Spirit within us, so that we can live throughout the rest of our lives dwelling in His presence, serving before His throne, being led by His Spirit, and doing His will. Oh, we can choose to leave, and go our own way, and do our own thing. God gave us a free will and He will never take it away. But we don't have to leave; never, ever again!

Do you get a mental picture when I say 'Mercy Seat'? The Ark of the Covenant is described in Exodus 25:10-22. The Ark is a box made of acacia wood, plated with gold. The Propitiatory Cover (Lid of Atonement) covers the box. Two angels (cherubim), stand facing each other on either side. Their forward hands rest on the front corners. Their rearward hands each hold a staff vertically at the back. The angels' forward wings are respectfully folded over their bodies, forming sides; their rear wings spread across the back, touching each other to form a backrest. These are all one piece, solid gold, so the Mercy Seat looks like a throne. If the lid is removed, it can stand on the angels' feet and on their staffs. (See picture page 236.) This is God's dwelling on earth, where He promises to meet with His people. "There I will meet with you; from above the Mercy Seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the Ark of the Covenant, I will commune with you..." (Ex 25:22) God's Shekina Glory is enthroned on the Mercy Seat! "YHWH reigns... enthroned on the cherubim..." (Ps 99:1)

This is heaven. For the saint, Jesus Himself sits on the throne of the Mercy Seat in the most holy place in our hearts. There He meets with us and speaks to us, by His Holy Spirit within us. It is from there that we are led by His Holy Spirit and enabled to do His will. Please notice that there is no sin in heaven; no iniquity, no self-will; all is perfect, without blemish. This is the Day of Atonement, when every sin is dealt with from the throne of God, and we are invited into His holy presence. Yes, He is able to keep us from sinning, and to make us stand in the presence of His glory blameless, faultless, with great joy. (Jude 24)

"... God is light... if we walk in the light, as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin... if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn 1:5-10)

Wonderful... *except I skipped 3 verses!* This explains why so many have so much trouble believing the clear words of Scripture. Here are the 3 verses I skipped: "If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth... If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us."

Do these verses conflict with each other? Did God make a mistake interspersing those three verses with the other three? Did God make a mistake tucking Romans chapter 7 right in between the glorious chapters 6 and 8?

No, my friend. There is no mistake in God's holy Word. He is entirely consistent with Himself throughout Scripture. We, every one of us, do indeed have a sinful, evil, desperately wicked and deceitful human nature which is irretrievably bent toward the lusts of the flesh, in selfish rebellion against God, and cannot please God.

We inherited this nature from Adam. It will be with us at least until the first resurrection. God had a purpose in mixing those passages on wrestling with sin with the ones on walking in righteousness. Remember old Caiaphas Cohen, the high priest? Yes, he was a wicked man, but, aware of his sin and unworthiness, he feared God and repented before he went through the veil; thus his life was spared. God alone is worthy. He tolerates no competition. No one trips gaily into His presence saying: "I've made it. I'm sinless. I'm worthy. Set a place at Your table for me, God, for I've achieved perfection." No, Lucifer already tried that. It backfired on him. The scriptural principle is "everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Lk 14:11)

The way to heaven, to the very presence of God the Father, is in the fear of God! This is a constant humility, repentance, meekness, awareness of our unworthiness, agreement with God regarding our sinful nature, and confession of our sins. It is also faith that the blood of Jesus is sufficient and available to wash us clean from the guilt of our sin and deliver us from its power in our lives so that we can now walk in His holiness. We must have both. Having only an awareness of my sins makes me a defeated and discouraged Christian. But having only an awareness of His redeeming power in me makes me a proud (therefore useless) Christian. Having both, makes me a servant of the King, useful for His plans and purposes in His Kingdom.

Did you ever wonder why Christians in America are, for the most part, rather powerless? I lump myself in with this indictment. Miracles are rare, if not missing entirely. Evangelism is sporadic at best. The gifts of the Spirit are often superficial and hypocritical – staged displays of human pride rather than God's power – and thus are mocked by the world as a sham. Many modern Christians don't believe in miracles anymore, choosing instead to believe in a god who used to be a communicating, miracle-working god back at the time of Christ, and who will be the same again one day (after the rapture), but unable (or unwilling) to believe in the great I AM, the same yesterday, today, and forever. If you find yourself in this boat, I urge you, forsake not the assemblies! Study the Feasts of Israel. Learn from them, especially the Day of Atonement.

There have been a number of significant revivals in our history, both in America and in our mother England. They were always accompanied by the fear of God, humility, repentance, public confessions of sin, and crying out to God for deliverance, and in every case, miracle results followed. I have studied revivals all over the world, and though the results do differ according to the needs and the faith of the believers, true revivals of the past have always included a greatly expanded vision for and effectiveness of evangelism, many answered prayers, including healings and other miracles, and a greatly increased depth and sincerity of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12 & Rom 12) and the fruits of the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-23)

Whenever this happens the world stops laughing at the church and starts sitting up and taking notice! In any true revival, the worldly culture around is inevitably impacted toward righteousness.

Wouldn't you like that for the church in America? I would! We have His promise, "... how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, *both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.*" (Heb 2:3-4)

"... As you go into all the world, preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved; but whoever does not believe shall be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues, they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover... and they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the Word by the signs that followed." (Mk 16:15-20)

I assure you, my friend, that will never happen through our own efforts or in our own pride. You can have all the right words, music, prayers, and church programs, fervent preaching, emotional hand waving, an abundance of finances, beautiful sanctuaries, lavish padded pews, organs and choirs, stained glass windows, Bible readings, earnest resolutions, vows, commitments, and tears, fluent 'speaking in tongues', bold 'prophesying the Word of the Lord', worship in ecstasy, with people lying around all over the floor 'slain in the spirit', and it may all be just a futile religious exercise if it is done by our own human intellect and not led by the Spirit of God.

You may think the apostle was talking about the world, but he was actually writing to the modern (American) church when he said, "Realize this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of self [egocentric], lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; *holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power...* always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth." (2 Tim 3:1-7)

Why can they never come to the knowledge of the Truth? *Because they want it their way and not God's way.* That "form of godliness" they hang on to is their religious traditions going clear back to the dark ages – comfortable, warm traditions that we all know and love so well. But where is the power behind it all? The power is the Holy Spirit leading each of us to walk with God, free from the sin in our lives, and that is exactly what they must deny.

They want the warm fuzzies and the fire insurance, but not the holy God. They want the freedom from guilt and the blessings of the Kingdom without the commitment to seek first the will of the King and His righteousness. They want their sins and self-centeredness covered by the blood of Jesus, but not taken away and cast into the depths of the sea. They want the good things of the Kingdom but they don't want to relinquish lordship of their lives to the King. They will not eat from the Tree of Life by inviting the Holy Spirit within to be their life. They are still addicted to fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, denying the leading of the Holy Spirit, demanding the right to make their own choice by their own knowledge of good and evil.

Satan gleefully tempts them, "Here, buddy. More fruit from the tree!" But the 'good' from the tree of knowledge is just as deadly as the 'evil', and more deceptive.

Why do I recognize all this so quickly? Because I'm in the same boat! *I have a human nature just like the rest, and my human nature is exactly as I have just described.* I am preaching to myself! Praise God that, "He knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." (Ps 103:14) Jesus laid aside His divine nature to become our servant. (Phil 2:5-11) He sympathizes with our weaknesses and temptations. (Heb 4:15) He was "made like His brethren in all things." (see Heb 2:9-18) He wants us to be delivered more than we want deliverance! So He provided a way.

His way is for each of us to catch the vision of the Day of Atonement and the fear of YHWH, humble ourselves in repentance and confession of sin, bathe by faith in the precious blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, don His pure white robes of righteousness, enter by faith beyond the veil into the most holy place of our Father's presence, and offer ourselves as a servant to do His will by the leading of His Holy Spirit.

Humility and repentance are not easy, because they go against the grain of the old human nature. Far easier and more common are the false humility that says, "I am unable and unworthy to actually walk in the power and glory of the righteousness of Christ Jesus, so I'll muddle along in my weakness and sinfulness until the rapture," and the false repentance that says, "I'm really sorry I am so wicked, but I can't help it, so I'll just trust in the blood of Jesus to cover my sins until the rapture." Both of those are utter baldfaced denials of the power of God to transform us and give us a new nature which by the grace of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit is both able and worthy to walk in the power and glory of the righteousness of Christ.

"... His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, [yes, right now!] having escaped the corruption of the world by lust." (2 Pet 1:3-4)

The church has taught that the primary reason Christ came to earth was to forgive our sins and impute to us His righteousness so we could go to heaven when we die. But Scripture, in an amazing (and rarely believed) passage, says, "You know that *He appeared in order to take away sins*; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him [which is where we are all supposed to abide] sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning. *The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.* No one who is born of God sins, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:5-9) So why did Christ come? What did it say? He came to take away sin and to destroy the works of the devil (who tempts us to sin); the result being that the Christian (anyone who abides in Christ) is now sinless – he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

I am not making that up. That is exactly what this passage says. Read it again. We have tried to make excuses for the clear words of Scripture by playing games with the word 'practices' (literally 'does') – sure the Christian sins, but whenever he does he quickly repents and forsakes it, therefore not 'practicing' (continuing to 'do') it. (I know; I have used that justification myself.)

But as I study the Feasts, I get the impression that the problem has a much deeper root than that. Let's just face the truth. The plain Word of God says the child of God cannot sin. Yet I, who believe I am a child of God, abiding in Christ, being led by His Holy Spirit, knowing Jesus as my Savior and Lord, still sin. I would love to stand in front of you and claim perfection, but it just isn't so. To try to justify my failures by attempting to reword the inerrant, unalterable Word of God would be dishonest.

The only other alternative is that the Word of God is perfectly true, but I am not as much of a "child of God, abiding in Christ, being led by His Holy Spirit" as I think I am. "Let God be true and every man a liar." (Rom 3:4) I am deceiving myself as to my true state of affairs. I think I am a mature son of God, when actually I am double-minded, or 'double-natured', having both the divine nature and the fleshly nature within. This is the message of the Feasts of Israel: yes, the seed of the divine nature was born in me at Passover; that seed was watered at Pentecost so it could overcome the weeds of the old nature, but it is not until the Day of Atonement that the weeds of the old nature are finally rooted out so the seed of the divine nature can become a mature, fruit-bearing plant. If the 'salvation' of Passover in the first month had finally, totally dealt with the sin problem, the Day of Atonement in the 7th month would not have been needed. Passover dealt with the guilt of sin, but it really isn't until the Day of Atonement that the nature of sin is abolished.

We can (and should) look at this in two ways: what is God doing ultimately, and what is God doing in me right now? Ultimately, God is preparing and perfecting a many-membered Bride for Yashua. After the wedding they will be one, as the head of Yashua's spiritual body the church (the second Adam) to rule over the earth for a thousand years. But YHWH is the great I AM! So what does this mean to me, right now? When I celebrate the Feasts in Spirit and in Truth and meet with Yashua on the spiritual Day of Atonement in my heart, what is the result? By faith in the promises of God I reckon my old sin nature to be dead and buried with Yashua, and my new divine nature alive and well in Christ my Lord, sinless and able to do the will of God on the earth. Though the seed of the divine nature is not yet mature within me, it is still a perfect seed, able to please God, *as long as my focus is on abiding in Christ* rather than on my old sin nature (which still abides in the world). Now, in Christ, I am able to live a righteous life, *to actually walk in His Rightness, to please Him by my good works, by the leading of His Holy Spirit*. That is meeting our Lord in the Feasts, the spiritual fulfillment of the physical picture.

The physical picture of the Feasts will still be fulfilled by the Israelites who are not ready and miss the rapture. They will mourn, as they suffer the terrors of the last two years of the "70th heptad of Daniel," but they will still be saved at the end. They will repent, heed the call of the final Feast of Trumpets, learn the fear of YHWH in the Ten Days of Awe, be judged and rewarded at the Bema Seat of Christ on the Day of Atonement, and join Christ and His Bride on the holy mountain at the Feast of Tabernacles. But the Bride has done all that in the spiritual realms before Christ appears. She has "made herself ready" by daily meeting the Lord in the Feasts and walking in His miracle provision through great tribulation, even martyrdom. That is why she will be raptured up to marry Yashua her Lord before the darkest day, before the final fulfillment of the Fall Feasts. Those who are unprepared for the rapture will miss it because they have forsaken the Feasts of Israel.

I believe the greatest prayer in the Bible is the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. But the second greatest prayer is the disciple's prayer (commonly known as the Lord's Prayer) in Matthew 5:9-13. You all know it by heart, so I won't quote it here, but allow me to paraphrase the first 2 verses in light of what we have learned about the Feasts of Israel.

"Our Father, who is sitting on the throne of the Mercy Seat over the Ark of the New Covenant in the most holy place of heaven, may Your name be so holy to me that I come into Your presence only with repentance, humility, and holy reverence and fear, and even then only after I have bathed in the cleansing blood of Jesus and put on His pure white robes of righteousness. Then Your Kingdom shall come, and Your will shall be done perfectly, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, in and through even me, this lump of earth, as long as I remain here in the heaven of Your presence."

I've been dancing around this subject far too long. Now it is time to speak it out boldly, and if you toss me out as a heretic, so be it. Yes, salvation from sin is a free gift by God's grace through faith in Yashua. Yes, sanctification is also a free gift, which He works within us day by day by His loving discipline and the inspiration of His Holy Spirit to make us more like Himself. There is no controversy so far, and I believe those just as much as you do.

But there is no fear of YHWH there, and no Day of Atonement, and thus no Feast of Tabernacles. Herein is the controversy. We saints will be judged, not on our faith, but on the basis of how well we received the grace of God to actually walk in His righteousness – yes, we saints will be judged *according to our deeds*.

You did not want to hear that. You would much rather believe what you've all been taught, that the full gospel is "salvation solely by grace through faith in Christ, not of works lest anyone should boast." (Eph 2:8) Well, I'm not talking about salvation now, and that is not the full gospel. The full gospel is, for example, in Romans 6 through 8, where it not only says that "the free gift of God is eternal Life in Christ Jesus our Lord," but also says to "present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification..." and "... you also were made to die to the law, through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God... so that we serve in newness of Spirit, and not in oldness of the letter," and "... if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God... if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we might be glorified with Him." (Rom 6:23, 19; 7:4-6; and 8:13-17; excerpts)

This is not salvation by good works! You can be saved without one good work, except to believe on Jesus Christ as did the thief on the cross. This is the **judgment of the saints**. (See 1 Pet 4:17 ff.) It begins as God's discipline of believers for our sanctification. ("He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness." Heb 12:10) But it ends at the *'judgment seat of Christ'* (Greek 'Bema') before which all believers must stand. (2 Cor 5:10)

"... for we [Christians, saints] shall all stand before the judgment seat ['Bema'] of God. For it is written, 'As I live,' says YHWH, 'Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' So then, each one of us [believers too] shall give account of himself to God." (Rom 14:10-12) "... I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds... *He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end*, to him I will give authority over the nations [the millennial reign of Christ], and he shall rule them with a rod of iron... as I also have received authority from My Father." (Rev 2:26, 27)

“We have as our ambition, whether at home [in the body] or absent [gone to Hades], to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat [‘Bema’] of Christ, that each one may be recompensed [paid back, rewarded] for his deeds in the body, *according to what he has done, whether good or bad*. Therefore, knowing the **Fear of the Lord**, we persuade men... For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf... Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Cor 5:9-18, excerpts) “You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; *for they are worthy*. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the Book of Life...” (Rev 3:4-5) “Behold, I stand at the door [of the church!] and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. *He who overcomes*, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne [overcomers will rule with Christ in the Millennium] as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Rev 3:20, 21)

This is the reason I spoke so sternly against the secret pre-tribulation rapture heresy. It is crucial that you understand this, so I will put it very bluntly, and if you do not get anything else in this study, get this! *The judgment of the saints at the Day of Atonement is according to our deeds, whether good or bad, and it is only faithful overcomers who will reign with Christ for a thousand years.*

I know, a lot of modern theologians (those who insist on a pre-trib rapture) will howl ‘salvation by works’ and try to toss me out as a heretic, but go back and read the above Scriptures again. That is what God’s Word says, pure and simple. We ignore it at our peril.

This seems at first to conflict with what I said in the previous section – that the believer’s sins are covered at the Day of Atonement so there is no condemnation. But there is no conflict when you realize that the Day of Atonement for believers is not to punish us for our sins – Jesus already took our punishment when we placed our faith in Him, at salvation, symbolized by the Feast of Passover. The Day of Atonement has a different purpose: to cleanse us, sanctify us, purify and perfect us, so we can have an intimate bridal relationship with a holy God. We have this mental picture of standing before the judgment seat of Christ; when He asks, “Why should I let you into My heaven?” we respond, “Because I trusted in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cleanse me of all my sin.” So He opens wide the pearly gates and welcomes us to eternal bliss. Yes. That is salvation. The Feast of Passover. The first Feast. Now move on a bit to the last Feasts, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Day of Atonement is not salvation. And you can’t get to Tabernacles without it.

The Day of Atonement is purifying our lives so we can dwell (tabernacle) in intimate relationship with a holy God. As with all the Feasts of Israel, this applies to each of us individually right now, every day, as well as to the future fulfillment to which it points.

The eternal God is always working ‘right now’ in each of His chosen ones. “Today, if you will hear His voice.” This is the sanctification process. It is both a free gift and something God tells us to pursue. “Present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.” (Rom 6:19) No matter where you are in your spiritual walk, He is always calling you up higher (the Feast of Trumpets) and sending you His discipline (the ten Days of Awe) so that when you stand before Him on the Day of Atonement (where the believer has no condemnation), He can reward you for your good deeds, while your evil deeds are burned up in the pangs of an awakened and cleansed conscience. This spiritual fulfillment of the Feasts should happen daily (or more often) for the sincere Christian. For a ‘carnal’ Christian, it may happen rarely or not at all.

Even if your works all burn up and you suffer total loss, you are still saved by the flames of true repentance as you are enabled to finally see yourself as God sees you. (1 Cor 3:11-17) As a believer, you are always judged as righteous (the righteousness of Christ makes up the difference wherever you fall short) and are thus welcomed into the presence of the Father at the Feast of Tabernacles.

But some day there will be a ‘final’ fulfillment. I believe that the judgment seat (‘Bema’) of Christ for each person, though symbolizing the daily sanctification process, is actually fulfilled for that person at or shortly after his or her death. This is a rather huge subject, and it involves some speculation on my part, as I have not yet died. Let’s go over a few of the many Scriptures involved and see if we can put them together into a reasonable scenario.

“It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that, the judgment.” (Heb 9:27) For the sinner, that just spells Judgment Day, every time. But look at the next verse. “So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sin of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, but for those who eagerly await Him for salvation.” This is written to saints, who will also face judgment after death. Theirs is not at the Great White Throne, but at the Bema Seat.

“Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious jewels, wood, hay, or straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day [of Christ] will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built upon it [the foundation, Jesus Christ] remains, he shall receive a reward [according to his deeds]. But if any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss, *but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.*” (1 Cor 3:12-15) This is clearly talking about the judgment of saints, not sinners.

“Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness, and disclose the motives of men’s hearts, and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” (1 Cor 4:5) I believe that is a key part of the Bema Seat judgment: it removes all our self-deception and reveals to us the motives of our hearts.

“Do not judge, lest you be judged. For in the way you judge you will also be judged, and by your standard of measure, it will be measured back to you.” (Matt 7:1-2)

“Therefore you are without excuse, each of you who passes judgment, for as you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and then do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubborn, unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, *who will render to every man according to his deeds*; to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. Tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek; for there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; *for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified*. For when the Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law unto themselves, in that they demonstrate the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness [to themselves] and their thoughts alternately accusing or defending themselves on the day when according to my gospel God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.” (Rom 2:1-16)

This Romans passage is clearly speaking of both sinner and saint. Again, with sinners, the message is quite clear. Judgment Day will reveal every wicked deed and every selfish motivation for what it is: the direct violation of God’s Law. They can’t claim ignorance, for the Law was imprinted on their hearts. Thus they will acknowledge that their punishment is just. But notice, with the saint this passage seems just as stern! As much as we would love to add it in here, there is no mention of the saints getting off scott-free. Other Scriptures do affirm that Jesus has taken all our punishment, but that is never even mentioned in Romans 2. Is there a conflict in the Holy Scriptures?

No. There is no conflict in the inerrant Word of almighty God. God’s judgment is much bigger than we’ve been taught. In fact, I believe these passages are the key to understanding all of God’s judgment, whether for sinner or saint. He is the righteous Judge of all the earth, and His judgment is absolutely just, according to our deeds. The difference between the judgment of sinners at the Great White Throne and the Bema Seat judgment of the saints is only in how the punishment is applied. For sinners, once they truly see that their punishment is just, they accept it and pay the penalty set by the Law. They have no choice. They rejected the substitutionary sacrifice of the Messiah, so the torment of their sins falls upon themselves.

But saints also must acknowledge that the punishment for their evil deeds is just! And the same punishment still falls! However, because they have accepted the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, it does not fall upon them, but upon Jesus Himself. “Where is the punishment in that? Sounds like he got off scott-free to me!” No, no, no. If you think that, you don’t understand the cleansed conscience. The saint has developed a true love of Jesus his Savior. When he is finally hit with the full impact of the terrible cost Jesus paid for his salvation, and when he finally understands both all that he could have had and done if only he had fully believed the promises of God, and all the suffering he caused by his foolishness and unbelief, the pangs of conscience will be like a fire in his bones, bringing forth true repentance and gratefulness.

That is the ‘Bema Seat’ judgment. Whether daily or at our death, or when we meet our Savior at the rapture, our “wood, hay, and stubble” is burned up when we finally fully see ourselves as God sees us. This is the two-edged sword exposing and judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

So let’s try to imagine the story. [Note – there will also be saints “... who are alive and remain...” (1 Thess 4:17) when Christ returns. This story does not apply to them. I’ll tell a second story to illustrate how the Day of Atonement will be fulfilled on the day Christ returns for His Bride.] We’ll imagine a saint who has just died. We’ll call him Joe Average Christian. He certainly trusted in the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood for his salvation. He attended church pretty regularly, and stayed away from the biggies like adultery, murder, and theft. At least he never got caught. And he took care of his wife and family. That’s gotta count for something! His soul now hovers over the car wreck he caused. He feels no pain (he is dead, remember), but he does feel vaguely unhappy for several reasons. He wasn’t really done living. He had lots of things he’d planned for, but never finished. Who is going to take care of his family now? Why did he have to end it this way, in anger against another driver who cut him off? What a stupid, petty thing to end a life over! What about those secret ‘little’ sins that he had planned to deal with, later? Besides, he never made it to the rapture he so fervently believed in.

So, with all these disquieting thoughts flitting through his consciousness, Joe Average is slowly drawn away from the scene of the accident. He sees a long dark tunnel ahead, with a brilliant light at the end. “No!” he thinks in panic. “I’m not ready to meet the Lord! That wasn’t fair! My family! My new home and car! They aren’t even paid for yet! I have stuff to do, stuff to take care of. I have plans, good intentions. My life can’t be over yet!” Nevertheless, he is inexorably drawn toward the Light. Soon he stands in shame before the King of kings, who is seated at the ‘Bema’, the judgment seat of Christ. Myriads of adoring angels surround them at a little distance, bowing reverently and not interfering with his private meeting.

The King is silent, but a welcoming smile lines His face and a look of greatest love brightens His eyes. Joe Average smiles in response (and relief), kneels, and bows before Him in awe and holy fear, worshiping, ever so glad he had placed his trust in Jesus for his salvation. No words pass between them for a long time. Joe does not dare to speak the first word (no one would be so forward with the King of kings) but he becomes aware that he doesn’t need to – the King is reading his thoughts. At first Joe has a sense of horror that his most private thoughts should be so open and freely accessible to the King! All his motivations, plans, ambitions, and desires, as well as all his deeds, good and bad, are laid out before them both, and Joe knows without question that the King sees every one. He cringes in dismay as all kinds of wickedness comes up, stuff he had meant to repent of, offenses against others that he’d never made right, stuff he hadn’t realized was so bad, even good stuff that he had done for self-centered reasons. But wait. Joe glances up to the King’s face again. Yes! He sees no condemnation. Praise God, it’s true! Joe falls on his face in grateful adoration. *The blood of Jesus covered it all. I’m forgiven! Accepted!* Still smiling, the King stands to speak the first words: “Welcome, My beloved, into Paradise, where you will learn to know Me as I know you.”

The King takes Joe’s arm and leads him up a narrow, difficult path. Along the way, flames flare out to scorch them. The King bears the pain quietly, shielding Joe from most of it, but Joe’s conscience begins to trouble him. With horror he realizes for the first time that Jesus suffered the fires of hell for all those sins that he had so lightly dumped on Him. Joe turns his face to hide his tears.

Joe sees in the distance that the path leads to a garden filled with flowers, trees, and animals of all kinds, as well with smiling people feasting together. That must be the Paradise the King mentioned. As they approach, Joe screws up the courage to ask, “Uh, Lord, where are the mansions, and the streets paved with gold? And is that the wedding feast? You know, the one where we get to be Your Bride? What about the thrones and crowns, where we rule with You over the nations? And...” Joe looks up into the King’s kind face, “What did You mean when You said, ‘... you will learn to know Me as I know you?’”

The King, still smiling but with a touch of sadness too, looks deeply into Joe’s eyes. “All those things of which you speak – they are rewards for My faithful brothers, My overcoming bondservants who suffered with Me, all who learned wisdom through great tribulation and who got to know Me intimately by purifying themselves as I am pure. You did not do that. You did accept My sacrifice for your sins. For that I gladly welcome you into My paradise. But everything else that I required, you rejected as ‘works-salvation’. You continued to be double-minded by trying to love Me while still loving the world and all its tainted pleasures. Every difficulty or discipline I sent, you refused to receive with rejoicing as I commanded, choosing rather to cry out to Me for deliverance. The trials I sent; the things I hoped would teach you wisdom; the sicknesses, injuries, and accidents I allowed to encourage you to call out to Me – you sought the world’s wisdom. You went to doctors and lawyers instead of coming to Me and placing your trust in Me. The people I sent, the poor and hurting people who were your opportunity to minister to Me in the least of these My brethren, you were too busy to help. But you had plenty of time for all the people My adversary sent, rich people like yourself who looked so good on the outside.

“You do not know Me, Joe. You do not understand My wisdom or My ways. You have no comprehension of the terrible price I paid for your salvation. You loved Me for what I do for you, but you never really loved Me for who I am, nor did you ever really love or obey, or even try to understand, My Word. Therefore you never really got to know Me. Your works, all of them, are as wood, hay, and stubble; they must all burn up here in Hades. Then you will learn to know Me as I know you.”

“Hades? I thought You said this was Paradise! Besides, not all my works are bad. I loved my wife and never cheated on her. I took care of my family. I went to church, a lot! And I even put money in the offering plate someti...” Joe stops abruptly, remembering that he doesn’t believe in works-salvation.

“Yes, you did, though your motives were usually self-centered.” The King smiles at Joe and chuckles. “I don’t condemn you. You’re forgiven! I don’t believe in works-salvation either! But the fact remains that you did not get to know Me on earth, so I must leave you here in Hades until you do – no one can get to the Father but through Me. Here I will awaken and cleanse your conscience. Thus all your works will be burned up as you are tormented by the regrets of all that you could have had and done if you had only loved and believed My Word enough to obey it. Yet Hades is still Paradise, for the downward pull into sin by the adversary is gone. You are free to get to know Me and My wisdom and ways, and to love Me, as I know and love you. Rejoice that you will never be imprisoned in Tartarus or tortured across the chasm in Gehenna, for you did accept My salvation. I am with you always, guiding you into My perfection, until Resurrection Day.”

Resurrection Day? Joe thinks of his dead body still lying in the crushed car on earth. He brightens up. “The rapture? When the dead in Christ shall rise first and then those who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet You in the air?” He knows that verse!

“No.” Again a look of sadness sweeps over the King’s loving smile. “That is the first resurrection. It too is only for those who have washed their robes with righteous deeds, who have purified themselves as I am pure, who have suffered with Me, died with Me. Your resurrection is not until the last day when you face the Great White Throne judgment. But fear not! By then you shall be holy and shall enter into Life with Me, for I shall see to it! I will purify you, complete you, and teach you to know Me.”

With horror Joe Average remembers snippets from Revelations 19. “... the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready... her... fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints... Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” He looks up at the King with a question mark on his face.

“I am so sorry, Joe.” The King is crying. “You are not a member of My Bride. You are not My brother, nor invited to My wedding feast. You must remain here in Paradise until the Millennium is past. During that time you will become My faithful bondservant, having finally learned the humble joy of service.”

I believe that the vast majority of Christians who have died have had a meeting similar to Joe Average, and that the Bride of Christ and those first attending the wedding feast will be relatively few.

As I said in the section on the scriptural rapture there will be many Christians who will wake up and get serious about “purifying themselves as Christ is pure” during great tribulation. Yashua will have a pure Bride when He returns! So let’s briefly tell the very different story of the Bride of Christ during those last days near the rapture.

We’ll call this fellow Sam Spiritual. He is much like Joe Average – all the same weaknesses, self-centeredness, sins, failures – with one major difference: he hates all that, and really does love the Word of God and try to obey it. But Sam, having been steeped in the pre-trib rapture heresy and having never even heard about the **fear of YHWH** or the **judgment of the saints**, is having motivator trouble.

Just like Joe Average, Sam struggles with besetting sins and the love of the world, and cries out to God for grace to overcome. God hears his prayer, *and sends trials his way*. Sometimes Sam complains, especially when he sees his evil neighbor prosper while he suffers! But Sam learns, day by day, to trust God to see him through the trials, and even begins to rejoice to learn that when he is weak, God shows himself strong, and all things really do work out for good because his God is sovereign, almighty... and loves him!

One of these ‘trials’ is a friend named Freddy Fearful. Fred is a basket case, definitely “one of the least of these.” Sam sticks with him, helping, teaching, and encouraging him not to be so fearful. Fred sees every war, earthquake, storm, or disaster in the earth as apocalyptic, and is so terrified that he has become non-functional. At first, Sam tries to encourage him by assuring him that they both will be raptured up any moment now. But then a widespread earthquake flattens their houses, injures some of their own family, kills some of their friends, and royally messes up their theology. Now they both are scared! So they get together and cry out to God for direction. The government sweeps through the land, puts America under emergency military law, confiscates all registered guns, and requires everyone to wear a special mark in their hand or forehead, “to capture the evil lawbreakers and reduce looting.” Their church goes along with it, teaching that, “The mark is important to recover from the disasters. It can’t be the mark of the beast, since the rapture hasn’t come yet.”

Sam and Fred spend a day fasting with intense prayer. They study the Scriptures regarding the end times. Sam is amazed. He has never seen Fred so bold! Obviously this disaster has matured him. He now seems less fearful than Sam! When the day is over, Fred looks at Sam and affirms, “I see everything more clearly now. I’m not going to take that mark. I’d rather suffer the wrath of my government than the wrath of my Lord.” Sam gulps and agrees. They shake on it. Both are now highly motivated to no longer love or trust the world, their government, or even their church leaders. The Spirit of God has spoken to them directly through His Word and in their prayers, and they are determined to obey.

The months pass. Sam and his family become martyrs – they are accused and convicted of conspiracy against their government for failing to accept the mark. Freddy Fearful now fears only his beloved Lord, who has led him to take his family out into the woods where they live off the land and escape the persecution which sweeps through all the sleeping Christian churches. They are still alive, though barely, when the sun goes supernova.

Freddy Fearful rejoices! He knows their time is near! For 10 days the earth is blistered with fervent heat. Then the two prophetic witnesses, who have been warning this would happen, are blamed for the catastrophe and slain. Every Christian who can be found is slain as well. By that time the sun has cooled, so everyone parties for 3 ½ days. But now the sun is extinguished entirely. Its glowing embers make the moon look like blood. Great meteorites streak through the atmosphere and fall to the earth. Storms and earthquakes wrack the globe. Everyone left alive wails in terror, calling for the rocks to fall on them or casting themselves from cliffs or bridges – except Freddy Fearful and those few like him who studied the Scriptures. They knew what was coming and were prepared. They look up, knowing their redemption is very near.

A great trumpet sounds, long and loud, so that every ear can hear. With it, a new sun appears in the heavens – no, not a sun, a glowing cloud descending toward the earth! Every eye is focused upon that glorious cloud, a ray of hope in a doomed, dark world. Fred remembers his faithful friend Sam. He takes his family to Sam’s grave, where he had buried him after his martyrdom.

“Why do you bring us here?” one of the young Fearfuls asks. “I thought we were in hiding?”

“We need to hide no longer!” Freddy shouts, joy beaming from his face. “Remember what I taught you from Scripture about the true rapture? *The dead in Christ rise first!*” At that very moment the earth shakes violently. Great cracks open in the ground, one over Sam’s grave. Freddy calls into it. “Brother Sam! Have you gone up?”

“Nope. I just came back.” Sam laughs, pulling himself out of the crack. “I was in the heavenlies with Yashua. We were all worshiping around His throne, but Yashua told us it was time for the first resurrection. He sent us back to get our bodies. Tell me, is my head screwed on straight?” He feels around where his neck had been severed.

Freddy throws his arms around his friend in a big bear hug, noticing as he does that there is no smell or even hint of the corruption of death on his body. About this time, Sam’s family comes to join them, floating swiftly through the air like angels. Freddy glances down to see that Sam’s feet don’t quite reach the ground, either. Of course not! His resurrection body was freed from the limitations of gravity. “C’mon, you all. It’s time to meet our Savior in the air!” Sam shouts to the gathering group. They head up toward the glowing cloud.

“Wait!” Freddy cries, hopping up and down. “I’m still earthbound! Father, please! Remember me? Send your mighty angels!” Immediately a great angel appears and lifts Freddy up. “My family! My family! You forgot my family!” Freddy turns to look.

The angel smiles. “I am empowered only by your own prayer. Your family knows how to pray.”

Sure enough, his family members have thrown themselves to their knees in prayer, and an angel appears by each. They all stream toward a meeting place under the cloud. Saints from all over the earth join them, overcomers and martyrs from all throughout the ages. At first they joyfully greet each other, but slowly the crowd is silenced, as a spirit of awe and worship settles over them. The scene below them is fearful, as huge hailstones fall to earth, mixed with lightning, and a global earthquake shakes the land, leveling every church building, temple, cathedral, or mosque. Every religious institution crumbles; every government is thrown into chaos; every powerful ruler is brought low. But every saint, in eager expectation, turns his or her focus away from the world and all its ‘stuff’ and looks at the glory cloud.

Now Yashua the King appears, descending from the cloud. He walks among them, greeting each one with great joy. “Welcome Sam Spiritual, My beloved! Well done! Your faithful deeds of service honor Me; and everything else is covered under My blood. You are worthy, for you purified yourself to obey My Word, and you overcome through great tribulation! I grant you the crown of life!” This welcome is repeated for Freddy and all the others.

The heavenly cloud closes over them. From it the Father speaks, “Your preparations are complete. I have purified you in My fire. I declare to all the universe that you are a worthy Bride for My Son.” They are miraculously all joined into one glorious woman in purest white, whom the King welcomes with open arms. The eternal Father Himself reaches into the cloud to perform the wedding ceremony. While judgments are still falling on the earth, the King and His new Bride celebrate in the heavenlies until the end of the age. Then Yashua invites His faithful servants and brothers, a great multitude which no man can count, to His earthly wedding feast. Not the least of these is the surviving remnant of Israel, who mourned when she was left behind but has now repented and accepted her Messiah. The King sits at the Bema Seat judgment to assign penalties and rewards according to their deeds. Then they all feast for 7 days with the King and His Bride, at the grandest wedding anniversary celebration in history.

All who attacked Israel in the battle of Armageddon were slain at the return of the King, so the vultures also have a great feast. When the two feasts are over, the King and the ‘armies of heaven’ (His many-membered Bride) return to the earth on white horses. The beast and false prophet are cast into a lake of fire. Satan, the ‘god of this world’, is demoted and cast into the Abyss. The King reclaims His right as Master of Creation. Over the next 75 days, the earth is recovered, cleansed, and restored.

The overcoming saints then rule with Christ and His Bride throughout the Millennium. Their tasks are many; among them are: 1) Guarding the Holy City, to ensure that “dogs, sorcerers, immoral people, murderers, idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying” stay “outside the city.” 2) Inviting them to, “Come! Let everyone who hears come! Let the one who is thirsty come! Let the one who wishes take the Water of Life without cost” whenever they are ready to repent. 3) Guarding the pit where Satan is bound, to learn wisdom from his imprisonment. 4) Freely visiting every part of Hades where the dead remain: places of torment, places of burning, up to Paradise, encouraging them to come “further up and further in,” and teaching them about Yashua the King. 5) Ruling over everyone, mankind and angels. 6) Ruling over the natural world, including animals. Teaching the animals to no longer be antagonistic toward mankind, thus beginning to finally fulfill mankind’s original created purpose. (Gen 1:26, 28) And, last but not least, 7) Worshiping at the temple of God on top of Mount Zion [which used to be Mount Moriah].

This is the lesson of the Day of Atonement. It is our judgment, but not our condemnation. It is our cleansing and rewards for our good deeds. The rewards for carnal believers are few – time to allow their “wood, hay, and stubble” to burn up in Hades while they learn to know and serve the King. But the rewards for overcoming believers are intimacy with Yashua the King, and usefulness in His Kingdom. “The fear of YHWH is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of YHWH are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more to be desired than gold... sweeter also than honey... by them Thy servant is warned; *in keeping them there is great reward!*” (Ps 19:9-11)

“The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom. A good understanding have all those who do His commandments...” (Ps 111:10) If you fear Him in the right way, you will do His commandments. You will obey Him. You will purify yourself. “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him [Yashua] purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 Jn 3:3) All those wondrous promises about “reigning with Christ” during the Millennium are conditional upon obedience, diligence, faithfulness, and our endurance to overcome through suffering, even through great tribulation.

“The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Prov 9:10) To fear Him is not to be afraid of Him. It is to stand in awe of His majesty and to so admire His wisdom and His ways that we are willing to sell everything for that pearl of great price. (Matt 13:46) “That I may know Him, in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the out-resurrection [first resurrection] from the dead... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the highest call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:10, 14) “Therefore let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His Rest, any one of you should... come short... those who formerly had the good news [gospel] preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience... There remains therefore a Sabbath Rest for the people of God... Let us therefore be diligent [work hard] to enter that Rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example [as the Children of Israel] of disobedience.” (Heb 4:1-11, excerpts) Some will fail to enter; some will fail to attain to the first resurrection – those who have not learned that: “The fear of YHWH is to hate evil.” (Prov 8:13)

Throughout this study I have made a distinction that Christians do not want to hear. I know; I don’t want to hear it, either. As a Universalist, I really like the idea of the total reconciliation of everyone, in which everyone ultimately becomes a member of the Bride of Christ. I want to believe it, but as the story of Joe Average illustrates, I can’t. God’s Word won’t let me. I must agree with Scripture that some will never be a member of Christ’s Bride, or even rule the earth as His brothers, the “sons of God.” His Bride “made herself ready” by the “righteous acts of the saints.” She “purified herself as He is pure.” She overcame.

Go back to the four Categories I described starting on page 40. **Category 1** is the Bride, a very limited subset of the saints. **Category 2** is all the remainder of the saints who overcame through great tribulation. Scripture says of them, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” (Rev 19:9) “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection... they will be priests of God... and reign with Him...” (Rev 20:6)

But some will not attain to the first resurrection. Some are not invited to the wedding feast. Some did not overcome through great tribulation, and are still on earth or in Hades during the Millennium. Some are the ‘lost’, to whom the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!” (Rev 22:17) It is only “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.” (Rev 21:7) Categories 3 and 4 did not overcome. They did not receive “the adoption of sons, the redemption of our body.” (Rom 8:23)

They are ultimately saved, I believe with all my heart, as I have already described in great detail. But saved to what? Not to become part of the Bride. Not sonship. Not ruling with Christ as kings and priests to God. I believe that they are ‘the ruled’, saved to the lofty status of **bond-servant**. Exodus 21 sets the outward sign of a bondservant. He loves his master and will not accept his freedom, so he is taken before God to have his ear pierced, indicating his lifelong commitment to serve his master. (Ex 21:6)

All the saints of God start out as bondservants, though we no longer use the sign of the pierced ear. In fact, though we overcoming saints are elevated to rule and reign with Christ, we remain bondservants as well, in willing service to the King of kings. There is no shame in being a bondservant to our God! But the distinction I want to make now is that all those in **Category 3**, and ultimately all those in **Category 4** as well (once they have paid the penalty for their sins), remain just bondservants forever. In God’s Kingdom only the overcomers rule; the rest are ‘the ruled’.

The one exception is unsaved Israel, Yashua’s brothers in the flesh who were unrepentant at the rapture. They were all Category 3 or 4. They were left behind to endure the terrible wrath of God. Scripture assures us that they will mourn for Him whom they pierced, and the survivors will repent at the end of the age. So at least the repentant remnant (and maybe repentant Jews in Hades, too) will be invited to the wedding feast as **brothers** of Yashua, “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” (Rom 11:29)

Salvation is still by faith. But rewards are based on deeds. An overcomer builds upon his foundation of faith in Christ with gold, silver, and costly stones. The rest use wood, hay, and stubble, and are saved only through the fire. (1 Cor 3:11-15) A bondservant is not a slave. There is freedom and joy in willing service to the King. All who receive Him become “children of God.” (Jn 1:12) But I urge you by the fear of God to strive for a higher prize: the call to become kings and priests unto Him. (Rev 1:6; 5:10)

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

The Ark of the Covenant, with cherubim forming the beautiful Mercy Seat of pure gold, is at the heart of Yom Kippur. As I described in the story of Caiaphas Cohen, observant Jews mourn its loss. When the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC, the Ark of the Covenant was lost. It was never mentioned again in the Hebrew Scriptures, and history does not record its fate.

But there has been a great deal of speculation about the Ark, and a lot of fables concerning its supposed location. The Apocryphal book of Second Maccabees implies that it is hidden in a cave on top of Mount Nebo in Jordan. Some people believe that Pope Vitalianus found it in 657 AD and it is now stored in a secret heavily guarded subterranean chamber deep under St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. The Damascus Document, re-discovered in 1896 at Ibn Ezra Synagogue in Cairo and published in 1910 as the 'Zadokite Fragments', claims that in the 'last days' the 'Sons of Zadok' (high priest during the rules of David and Solomon) will be led to Damascus in Syria, where they will find the old tabernacle, complete with all its furnishings including the Ark. (This is the fable I find least likely.)

Many Jews believe the old tabernacle, Ark and all, is in the Cave of the Column on the northeast shore of the Dead Sea (just north of Qumran), based on clues given in the Copper Scroll, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. That story has some merit. Excavating this cave, archaeologist Vendyl Jones found (in 1988) the holy anointing oil and (in 1992) the actual incense used in temple worship from roughly 2000 years ago. The Copper Scroll states that the tomb of Zadok is farther back in this cave, and that the priceless Kalal of the ashes of the red heifer is hidden nearby. Vendyl found a large tombstone, but the Israeli Department of Antiquities prevented him from excavating any further or even verifying that it is Zadok's tomb. According to the Copper Scroll, the tabernacle of Moses' time is stored in a chamber behind Zadok's tomb, along with many other things, such as priestly vestments and garments.

However, the Copper Scroll does not mention the Ark of the Covenant or other furnishings such as the table of showbread, the menorah, or the altar of incense; if these were also there, they certainly would have been listed separately, as they are great national treasures. So I agree that the old tabernacle might be there, but not the Ark.

There are many ancient churches, monasteries, and synagogues in and around Jerusalem, and they all have their stories and legends. A good example is the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Cross. Monks there believe that the three angels who dined with Abraham at the announcement that Sarah would bear a son, left their staffs behind when they went to Sodom to visit Lot. After his incest with his two daughters, Lot came to Abraham and asked how he could atone for his sin. Abraham told him to take the 3 staffs and plant them just outside Jerusalem.

Abraham told Lot to water them with water from the Jordan River. If the staffs bloomed, it would be a sign from God that Lot was forgiven. Lot planted the staffs, but Satan prevented him from getting the water to them for 40 years. Lot's persistent desire for redemption finally prevailed, however. When he watered the staffs, they immediately blossomed and grew into a tree with three trunks, one of pine, one of cedar, and one of cypress, entwined together.

During Solomon's reign, this tree was cut into two special timbers for use in the temple, but later these were rejected, as Solomon found no appropriate place for them. They were discarded in Jerusalem until the time of Christ. Pontius Pilate found them and recognized their uniqueness. As a sign that he acknowledged Jesus as the innocent King of the Jews, Pilate used them to make His cross.

Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, supposedly found the true cross on Golgotha, and later discovered the stump of the tree from which the cross had been harvested. (She hired an eastern mystic to do her 'psychic' locating.) Constantine gave the site to a Georgian prince from the Caucasus named Myrian (about 300 AD), whose successor, Tatian, erected a huge monastery there a century later, known as the Monastery of the Cross.

General Belisarius, under Roman emperor Justinian, supposedly recovered the treasures and furnishings of Solomon's temple in 536 AD when he recaptured Rome from the Vandals. He placed them in the magnificent Nea Church, which Justinian built in Jerusalem and dedicated to the Virgin Mary. When the Persians attacked Jerusalem in 614, Christians took the treasures outside the city to the Monastery of the Cross. There the monks built a secret chamber deep underground to hide them. Finally in 796 Arab Muslims raided the monastery and killed all the monks. Even to the death, they refused to give up their secrets. Thus the hiding place of the temple treasures under the monastery remains unknown to this day.

I have only told one thread of many conflicting legends which revolve around this ancient monastery. It makes for fascinating storytelling, for the gullible. The Monastery of the Cross is spectacularly beautiful, and the church within its walls is said to be the oldest completely preserved Christian church in Jerusalem. Its inner walls are covered with glorious frescoes telling the story, and until the 15th century, pilgrims could still see the stump of this famous tree behind the altar. I doubt that any of this story is true.

Another legend claims that Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak conquered Jerusalem and entered the temple after the days of Solomon, took the Ark with the temple treasures, and had it buried somewhere out in the Egyptian desert. (That story made it into the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.) Good king Josiah's death supposedly occurred because he was trying to get the Ark back from then Pharaoh Necho. (2 Chron 35:21 ff) I do not believe this legend, as Scripture makes it clear that Josiah had no just cause to fight Necho.

Another intriguing theory is that the Ark was removed by reverent priests at the time of evil King Manasseh and taken to Egypt. It ended up in Ethiopia, where it now resides in a subterranean vault under the Church of Zion in Axum. A variation of this tale is that it was taken to Axum by Prince Menelik I, son of Solomon himself. That makes a rather interesting story, though I don't believe it. The way some tell it, King Solomon had an affair with the queen of Sheba, and had a son by her. When he sent her and his infant son back to her native Ethiopia, "... King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she had requested..." (1 Kings 10:13) which according to this tradition included the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, Solomon didn't really intend to give her the Ark; it was too sacred. So he had an exact duplicate made for her. She, however, being no dummy, had her servants pull a switcheroo behind his back. She then took the real Ark with her, leaving the copy in the temple, where it was destroyed by the invading Babylonians. Tradition has it that the Ethiopian Jews are descendants of King Solomon's son, and they are still jealously guarding the true Ark of the Covenant in a secret place under their synagogue.

An ancient Ethiopian epic, *The Glory of the Kings*, tells that story a little differently. It claims that the queen of Sheba married King Solomon, and that their firstborn son, Menelik I, was educated by Solomon in Jerusalem until he was 9 years old. Then he heard news that his mother, who had returned to Ethiopia, had died, so he prepared to return home to take over as king. King Solomon decided to give Menelik a replica of the Ark to take back with him. However, Prince Menelik was very concerned with the fact that his father, Solomon, was now placing idols in the temple to please his many pagan wives. Therefore, right after a grand banquet given in honor of his going away (when everyone else was drunk, including Solomon) Menelik switched arks, leaving the replica in the temple and stealing the true Ark, which he reverently took to Ethiopia for safekeeping until Israel should return to the pure worship of YHWH. Since that never happened, the Ethiopians never returned the Ark.

I personally don't believe any of these traditions, because I don't think God would have stood by and idly watched all those shenanigans with His sacred Ark. I think He would have slain somebody right on the spot. In order to make a replica, pull the switcheroo, and haul it off to Ethiopia, somebody had to profane the Ark. God doesn't treat casually those who mess with His sacred things! Remember Uzzah, who was struck down just for trying to steady the Ark to keep it from tipping off the ox cart? (2 Sam 6:7) And remember the men of Bethshemesh who were slain by YHWH just for peeking into the Ark? (1 Sam 6:19) Also, the Ark of the Covenant was an archeological treasure of the first magnitude; its value was incalculable! If the invading Babylonians had found, even a good copy, it would not have been destroyed! It would have been

paraded into Babylon in triumph. Yet the various records we have of the booty taken into Babylon (2 Kings 25:13 ff, 2 Chron 36:18; Jer 52:17 ff) and the booty returned from Babylon (Ezra 1:7 ff) make no mention of the greatest treasures of the temple: the Ark, table of showbread, altar of incense, and golden lampstand. If they had found them they certainly would have mentioned them. No, that story doesn't hold any water with me. If the queen of Sheba took anything, it was just a copy, probably made from memory rather than by actual inspection in the Holy of Holies.

I recently heard the story of a Messianic Jewish believer who paid a very large sum of money to actually see the Ark which the Ethiopian Jews claim to have hidden in a crypt deep under their temple. When he was taken down to see it, he saw nothing. When he complained and tried to get his money back, they refused and told him that it was there, but only those who are holy enough can see it, and he obviously wasn't holy enough. Sounds like fraud to me; like the 'Emperor's New Clothes'. Even the unholy men of Bethshemesh could still see the ark!

However, I do tend to believe a story I recently heard from a Messianic Jewish rabbi (Michael John Rood) who says that the Ark has been found hidden under the temple mount, in one of the many caves and passageways there. It is a pretty far-fetched tale, but loads of fun. He uses the research of archaeologist Ron Wyatt to back up his claims.

The way Rabbi Rood tells the story, Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, spent 40 years warning Israel that God's judgment would come if they did not repent. When the Babylonians came to subdue Jerusalem, Jeremiah actually told the people to submit to them, so he was accused of treason. (Jer 38) During the final days of the siege, when the Babylonians were about to breach the walls and enter the city, Jeremiah, under God's direction, brought some trusted priests into the temple. Together they carried the Ark and other irreplaceable temple furnishings deep underground, hiding them in 'Jeremiah's Grotto'.

One of the priests evidently carved a sign on the wall of the passageway to indicate the direction in which the Ark was hidden. This sign has been found: it was carefully chiseled off the wall and taken to the Palestine Exploration Office in London for evaluation. They date it to the 7th century BC. It appears to be a guardian cherub, similar to the cherub guarding the palace in Samaria.

This story agrees with the pseudepigraphal book *The Paralipomena of Jeremiah* (4 Baruch), which states that Jeremiah, obeying God's command, hid the sacred objects from the temple just before the destruction of Jerusalem. It also agrees with the story in 2 Maccabees 2:4-8, with two differences: a cave on Mount Nebo across the Jordan River (in Jordan, where Moses had seen the "inheritance of God") was used instead of Mount Moriah, and the priests following Jeremiah to mark the way were unable to, because they couldn't find the place.

Ron Wyatt, of Wyatt Archaeological Research, has written a book on the subject: *The Ark of the Covenant*. He feels that the story in 2 Maccabees was mistranslated; it should say that the Ark was hidden under the mountain that Moses saw when he viewed the Promised Land. He feels (and I agree) that it would be impossible for Jeremiah to get all the tabernacle furnishings out of the city and across the Jordan, due to the Babylonian siege. I'll try to summarize Ron's book here as briefly as I can.

Ron Wyatt does his archaeological research in a rather unique way. Being a committed Christian, he starts from God's Word, waits for the Holy Spirit's direction, then works with constant reference to the Scriptures, in the faith that every word of Scripture is true. Where there seems to be a conflict between archaeology and God's Word, Ron takes that as God's encouragement to do some more praying and some more digging. Ever since 1977, when he went to Turkey to research Noah's ark, Ron has been excited about more discoveries verifying the truth of the Holy Scriptures. He has been involved or instrumental in the discovery and identification of Noah's ark, Babel and Ur of the Chaldees, a grain storage city of Joseph, the route of the Exodus, the real Mt. Sinai, and many other related things, as summarized in his book *Discoveries Volume*.

In 1978 Ron and his two sons were back in Jerusalem after a diving trip looking for Pharaoh's chariot wheels in the Red Sea (He has found some dating from the time of the Exodus). He was sightseeing along an ancient stone quarry known as the 'Calvary Escarpment' and began chatting with a local Israeli official involved in Roman era antiquities. At one point his left arm lifted and pointed to an old trash dump nearby, and his mouth exclaimed, "That's Jeremiah's Grotto. The Ark of the Covenant is in there." The official responded, "That's wonderful! We want you to excavate it. We'll grant your permits, put you up, and even furnish your meals."

Ron realized this was a supernatural experience. After much prayer and planning, He and his two sons returned to the site in January 1979 and began their dig. To make short a very long story, they found niches in the wall which the Romans used to place signs identifying the crime of those being crucified, and a hole carefully chiseled high in the rock wall, probably used as a pulley to raise the crosses into their base holes. Digging deeper, they found an elevated cross-hole, dug into the bedrock wall on a four foot high platform above some other cross-holes. They also found a large altar stone and the foundations for an ancient church built over the entire area. Beside the altar was a huge round tomb-sealing stone which is the right size and shape to fit the entry to the garden tomb where legends say that Jesus was buried. The cross holes were over 20 inches deep. The one on the elevated platform, obviously intended for the 'featured criminal', had a large, deep crack, evidently caused by an earthquake, extending out from it.

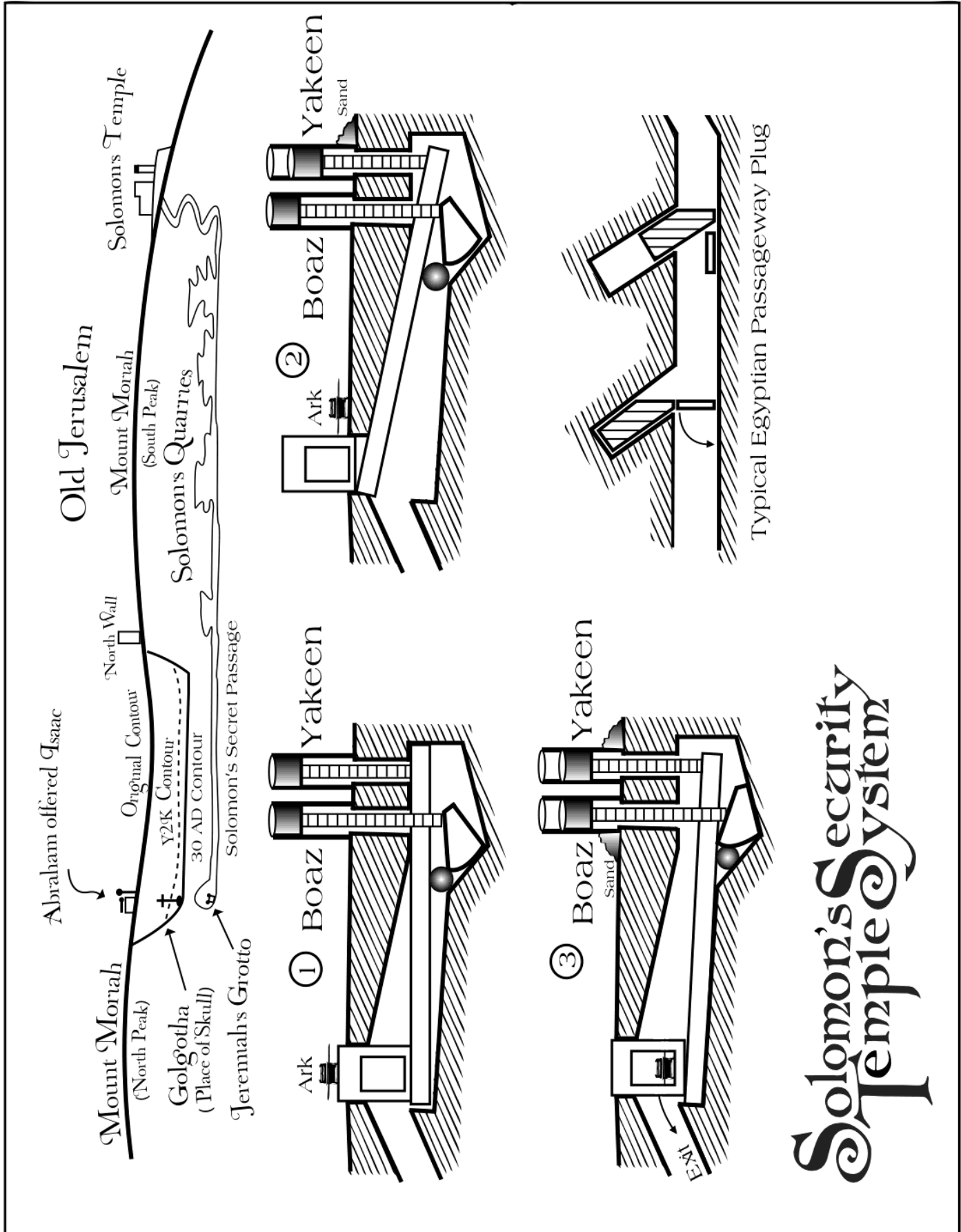
Ron and his boys had been working for almost two years, but they didn't stop there. It would be over a year later that Ron would learn the depth of this crack: it extends straight down over 20 feet through solid bedrock – into Jeremiah's Grotto!

They kept digging, and found a huge cave system deep under the bedrock. Again skipping many details, on Wednesday, January 6, 1982, after much discouragement, sickness, and even some deaths, Ron's last remaining helper fled in terror from a tiny opening in the cave wall. Alone, Ron enlarged the hole and squeezed through. It was Jeremiah's Grotto! The first thing he saw was a gold table, carefully covered and protected, with a raised molding around the side in an alternating pattern of bells and pomegranates. It was the 'table of showbread'.

Looking up, Ron saw that crack in the ceiling of the cavern. There were stains of a black substance within the crack. Directly below the crack was a large stone case. The top lid of the case was split in two, and the black substance also stained this split. Realizing that the black stain was human blood, and that the crack in the ceiling extended clear up to the crack in the cross hole 20 feet above, Ron suddenly knew that the Ark of the Covenant was in the stone case, and that the very blood of Jesus the Christ had fallen directly through the cracks onto the Mercy Seat of the Ark. When the impact of what he had found hit him, Ron fainted.

Fast forward about three years past many other details. Ron has identified many of the items in Jeremiah's Grotto, including positive identification of the Ark in the stone case, the table of showbread, the golden altar of incense, a golden censer, a 7 branched lampstand with bowl-like golden oil lamps built into each tip, a very large sword, an ephod, a miter with an ivory pomegranate on the tip, a brass shekel weight, numerous other oil lamps, and a brass ring which appears to be for hanging a curtain. All were covered with dry-rotted dark-colored animal skins, then dry-rotted wooden timbers on top of the skins, and finally large rocks piled over everything. There is a small cubicle behind the Ark in which seems to be the scrolls of Exodus through Deuteronomy, written on animal skins, possibly by Moses himself. They were in good condition, though the book of Genesis seems to be missing. Other things are there but so closely packed they cannot be examined.

There was no way Ron could remove anything, since the passageways through which he had come were very tiny and torturous. After much research, he permanently sealed up the entrance he used, with everything left just as it was when he found it. Since then he has done a lot of research to find the original entrance that Jeremiah used, and believes he has found it. It was carefully blocked in numerous places; some of these blocks he has cleared. At least 5 people have died attempting to interfere with the archaeological operation.



Solomon's Security Temple System

Israeli authorities, realizing the impact if this was to be made public, have now prohibited Ron from saying any more about it. On the one hand, they realize everything is quite safe where it is, thank you. On the other hand, they realize the full scale war that could result if Orthodox Jews were to be inspired by the Ark to try to rebuild the temple on Mt. Moriah and resume the sacrificial system.

Ron has had samples of the blood analyzed. The results were staggering – so much so that he has refused to release more information until double independent verification has been accomplished. Rabbi Michael John Rood, who has helped support and finance Ron's efforts, told me that the preliminary tests showed it to be definitely human blood, with the full complement of 26 chromosomes from the mother, but with only a single 'Y' chromosome from the Father. It is scientifically impossible for such a man to be conceived, as we understand conception. So we will leave it there until further research is done.

However, according to Rabbi Rood, when some Jews tried to retrieve the Ark, they were slain by YHWH because they were not holy. A second time the Jews went in to retrieve the Ark, this time at Passover with 6 Cohens (priests) who had been through all the ceremonial cleansing possible at that time. They also were slain by YHWH.

The Jewish leaders are therefore waiting until they have the ashes of the red heifer to complete the cleansing process before trying again. Though no Jew has seen it, they are quite sure it is there because of the deaths of those sent to retrieve it. Its location is so far into the passageways under the temple mount as to be beyond the city wall and under the road to Jericho. I know this story sounds incredible, but I like it. We have an incredible God. I will incorporate it into my narrative of the life of Yashua.

Ron Wyatt and other archeological sleuths have a neat theory of how Jeremiah got the Ark safely out of Solomon's temple. Again, this is a long story, which I will shorten to a couple pages here. The Scriptures tell of two huge brass pillars Solomon made for the temple, the right one named Yakeen and the left one, Boaz. (1 Kin 7:21) They were immense, about 31 feet high and 6.5 feet in diameter. Of course they were hollow; the wall thickness being about 5 inches. Still that is a lot of bronze. It was all broken in pieces and carried to Babylon. (2 Kin 25:13)

But there seems to be a biblical error here. At least three passages in Scripture say that the heavy solid brass capitals on top of the columns were 5 cubits (about 8.6 feet) high, (2 Chron 3:15; 1 Kin 7:16; Jer 52:22) but one passage (2 Kin 25:17) says they were only 3 cubits high. Ron found that both were true, at different times. King Solomon was no dummy. The Ark of the Covenant is world famous! It is quite possibly the most valuable treasure in the universe. Solomon knew there would eventually come a time when some heathen nation would try to overrun Jerusalem with the goal of stealing it for themselves.

So he built a security system to protect it. The two huge brass pillars were the engine to drive the security system. Someone trying to hide the Ark can't just walk through the streets of Jerusalem with it; there is too much risk from others prowling the streets. So Solomon developed a way to hide it from within the temple itself.

Solomon named the two pillars: the one on the right is Yakeen, typically translated, "YHWH will establish"; the one on the left is Boaz, translated, "in it is strength." (1 Kin 7:21) But a more literal translation could be: Yakeen – a fixed vertical force; and Boaz – a base or foundation, or a fulcrum. King Solomon didn't make his alliance with the Pharaoh of Egypt for nothing! He obtained the secrets of the Egyptian pyramids; secrets of moving and sliding huge stones using leverage and gravity; and he got Pharaoh's daughter as his wife to keep him in line so that the secrets didn't get out. (1 Kin 3:1)

The hollow brass columns were filled with sand; but not before a stack of red granite blocks were placed inside. The heavy bronze capitals were then placed on top. As far as we know, they were solid bronze, roughly 6.5 feet in diameter and 8.6 feet high. At 550 pounds per cubic foot of bronze, that is roughly 80 tons each. That is a lot of force.

So let's imagine the story. Jeremiah is warned by YHWH in a dream or a vision to hide the Ark. Few people were privy to Solomon's security provisions, since everything was constructed elsewhere and assembled on site without the sound of a hammer or chisel. So Jeremiah may not have known about it; but the high priest certainly did, and probably was in on this. Jeremiah gathers the priests at the temple. They all enter the holy place. First they take down the heavy curtain veiling the most holy place. Next they move the Ark (touching it only by the long poles by which it is designed to be carried) to just in front of the heavy stone slab upon which it had been resting. This is a 12 x 12 foot square stone slab designed to look like a fit foundation stone for the Ark. They gather the rest of the temple furnishings there, too.

Then, at Jeremiah's signal, a priest opens a door at the base of Yakeen, the huge pillar on the right of the entry to the temple. Out streams the dry sand from inside of the column. No longer supported by the sand, the big 80 ton capital starts to drop, pushing down the red granite blocks, which in turn push down on a massive cedar beam. The beam is a lever, rotating on a fulcrum (round base), such that as it drops, the other end of it lifts the square stone slab in the most holy place. The leverage is such that a 2 cubit drop in the capital results in a 4 cubit (almost 7 feet) rise in the stone slab. But pushing up under the slab is an elevator room made of cedar, just big enough for those precious temple furnishings and Jeremiah's helpers.

When the elevator reaches the right height, the door at the base of Yakeen is closed, stopping the flow of sand, thus stopping the motion. (Yes, this is sand hydraulics.)

When all the temple furnishings, the heavy veil, and Jeremiah's helpers are in the elevator, he signals the high priest, who opens the door at the base of Boaz. The 80 ton capital on top of Boaz starts to drop, pushing down the base (the fulcrum) under the huge cedar beam. This causes the beam to drop back down, taking the elevator with it. When the capital on top of Boaz has gone down two cubits, the elevator has reached its original resting place, and the door at the base of Boaz is then closed.

The security system has now done its job, and it can never be used again. Even if the 80 ton bronze capitals could be lifted, the huge cedar beam and its base, the round fulcrum, are resting on solid rock and can no longer be lifted to reset the system. The elevator never again will rise, so no enemy could pursue. That is why Solomon was careful to name the great bronze pillars and write the names on the pillars; if someone had gotten them confused and operated Boaz before Yakeen, the system could never have worked at all. (My diagram on page 232 is my own personal guess as to how such a scheme might have worked – I have not actually seen any details.)

Jeremiah and the priests gather up all the furnishings and the heavy veil, and move through a series of pre-cut subterranean tunnels, prepared by Solomon just for this purpose. All along the way, especially at the beginning, Solomon has prepared huge stone plugs, which Jeremiah releases as they pass through. Once released, they slide down at an angle into the tunnel, completely blocking it against any possibility of pursuit. In fact, they make it look like the tunnel has reached a dead end. (Similar plugs have been found in the pyramids.) There was at least one of these plugs under the temple mount, another just in front of Jeremiah's Grotto, and probably more. Jeremiah heads north, going along the carefully laid-out course around (or even through) Solomon's granite quarry, under the city wall, and under the north peak of Mt. Moriah.

At the end of his journey, Solomon has prepared a huge stone case to protect the Ark, within a grotto carved out of the solid bedrock. The Ark is put in its resting place, covered only with a thick stone slab. The other treasures of the temple are distributed around the grotto, covered by the veil, and protected by heavy wood beams and stones.

When all is protected, Jeremiah and his men retrace their way to Solomon's quarries, sealing the tunnel behind them, so as to make it look like no tunnel was ever there at all. When they get to the quarries, some of them carve a guardian cherub in the wall to mark the tunnel, for which Jeremiah reproves them. They escape by taking other tunnels (used by the workers) out of the stone quarries, to the entrance at the base of the north city wall.

Mount Moriah must be pretty special to God. He told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac there, near its northern peak. Going south, it takes a slight dip and rises up to a plateau, where David and Solomon built the first temple.

However, in Jeremiah's day the north wall of Jerusalem lay between the two peaks. The wall itself was only about 10 feet tall; but just north of it, a huge trench was cut in the hill all along the wall, making its effective height about 40 feet. The heavily-used Jericho Road went through this cut. It was along this road that Yashua was crucified (Romans often did their crucifixions beside a main road, to impress the most people). So I calculate that Jesus must have been crucified about 30 feet directly below where Abraham offered Isaac, and about 20 feet directly above Jeremiah's Grotto. See my diagram of Solomon's security system for a schematic representation of this layout.

Solomon left us a scriptural riddle as a clue to what he had built. It is in 1 Kings 8:12, where he says in traditional Hebrew poetic form,

“YHWH said that He would **permanently dwell**
in the thick cloud, **obscured** from men's eyes.
Surely I have built a **house of loftiness** for You;
a **settled place** for You to abide in forever.”

In each of these four lines, there is a word for a type of dwelling place. The first is 'shakan' (Strong's 7931), meaning a permanent residence, rest, established resting place. The second is 'araphel' (6205), meaning a place obscured from the eyes of men. The third is 'zebul' (2073), meaning an exalted or splendid residence, a home, an honored dwelling place, a house of loftiness. The fourth is 'makown' (4349), meaning a settled, fixed place, a base or foundation upon which other things rest. The message, repeated twice, is that Solomon built two places for YHWH to dwell: first, an exalted, honored home; second, a secret place hidden from the eyes of men. Most readers will quickly assume that they are one and the same place, since the exalted 'most holy place' was indeed obscured (by the heavy veil) from the eyes of men. Only those with eyes to see would recognize the riddle and discover that Solomon had built two places for the Ark, one public and the other secret and hidden.

Anyway, when Nebuzeradan, the commander of the Babylonian army, finally overran Jerusalem, what did he do? (2 Kin 25:8 ff) He ransacked the whole city and burned all the houses, including the king's house and the temple. He broke in pieces the great bronze pillars and the laver, and took away all the bronze and other furnishings into Babylon. He killed those who resisted him, but deported those who submitted to him to Babylon, although he left the poorest of them to be vinedressers and plowmen. But in all this, both from the biblical record and from secular history, there is not one mention that he ever got the Ark of the Covenant, the greatest plunder of all. Why? *Because it wasn't there when he got to the temple!* Jeremiah had beat him to it. He never did find it. Even breaking down and burning everything, he never figured out the puzzle. He never even got past the elevator, much less into the secret grotto under the mountain. Solomon beat Nebuzeradan, big time. Three cheers for the wisest man who ever lived!

Another side note: Hiram, the king of Tyre, the master mason who supplied materials and helped Solomon build the temple, has been preserved and honored in history in a rather interesting place. As Hiram Abif, he is universally acknowledged as the founder of what is now known as Freemasonry. He is always assigned the rank of Grand Master over the Supreme Council of Grand Masters, the highest position of the Blue Lodge, during Freemasonry's secret rituals. The lodge where they celebrate these rituals always has two pillars at the entrance; the right one is labeled with a 'J' (for Jachin / Yakeen) and the left with a 'B' (for Boaz). However, ask any Mason, up to and including 33rd degree Masons, the significance of these names. Though he will correctly identify them as from Solomon's temple, you will find that he doesn't actually know what the names mean. King Hiram preserved the secret of King Solomon's temple security system very well, thank you.

Though claiming to be a Christian organization, the **Freemasons** (sometimes known as Shriners) have a rather sordid history. This is a very long story, of which I will only skim a few highlights here. As near as I can research, King Hiram of Tyre did not try to start any secret masonic order. Many claim that the Masonic Guilds of the era of Catholic Cathedral building during the 10th through the 17th centuries started the Freemasons, but that is only a partial truth. As a secret society, Freemasonry actually got its start from the French Catholic Crusaders, who went to Palestine to liberate the Holy Land from the Muslims. By the year 1061, the Crusaders had conquered the city of Jerusalem. They later established Godfroi de Bouillon (of the Merovingian royal bloodline) as the king of Jerusalem. Claiming to be of the lineage of King David, de Bouillon organized a super-secret society called the 'Order of Zion' in the year 1099. This order still exists, and is the secret power behind the Freemasons. Don't expect any Mason to acknowledge that; many don't even know it, but they wouldn't tell you if they did. The Freemasons were first organized by de Bouillon and his friend and supporter, Hugues de Payen in 1118, as the **Knights Templar**. It was established as a 'front' for the Order of Zion. Its first Grand Master was Baudoin, the brother of Godfroi de Bouillon.

The Knights Templar began with nine men, who called themselves 'poor knights of the temple'. They 'unselfishly' pledged themselves to guard the highways to Jerusalem in order to protect pilgrims coming to worship. They vowed to be subject to the pope alone, and to no other political or ecclesiastical authority. They took quarters in the palace of King Baudoin, which had been built on the temple mount and is today known as the Al Aqsa Mosque.

The Knights Templar only kept to their original pledge for about ten years, after which they returned to Europe, *wealthy beyond belief*. In later years, they become famous as 'the guardians of the holy grail'. They built castles and funded cathedrals all over Europe, and generally ruled over kings and nations.

It is now believed that their pledge to guard the highways to Jerusalem was only a ruse; their actual mission in Jerusalem was to plunder the treasures of King Solomon's temple. They knew that Solomon's empire was incredibly wealthy, and that Solomon had taken steps to protect his wealth from invading nations. They also knew that the invading Babylonians had found very little of it, and the Romans in 70 AD had found even less. So they spent ten years secretly excavating under the temple site in the hopes of finding the fabulous treasures of King Solomon.

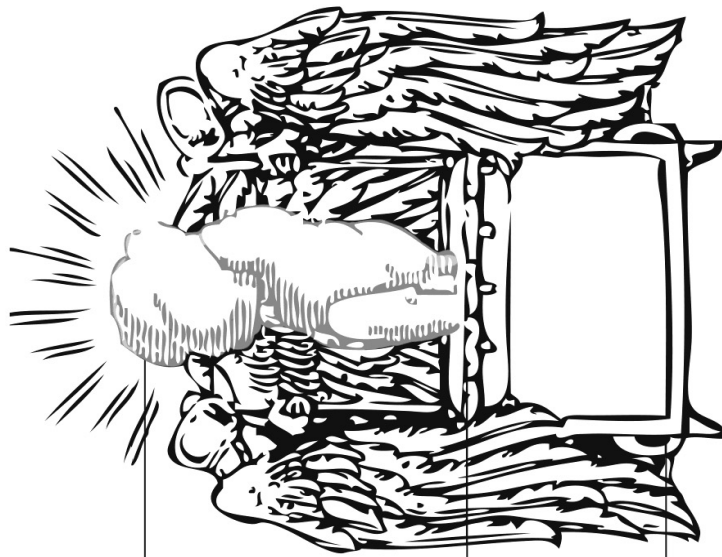
The Knights Templar evidently succeeded – beyond their loftiest dreams. With that wealth, they instituted an international system of banking across Europe from which they gained economic control of the entire sub-continent. Repudiating their allegiance to the pope, they became subject to no one. They would start wars and secretly fund both sides through emergency 'war loans', thus bringing nations and kings into their debt. They invented the means to transfer gold from one city to another by means of paper notes, now called 'checks'. Their real purpose (or rather the purpose of their super-secret backers, the 'Order of Zion') is to capture the wealth of the world, establish a one-world government through economic slavery of all nations of the world, and introduce their king upon the throne of David in Jerusalem. A few of them have admitted that they are the behind-the-scenes controllers of the world's currencies, and that they do have the temple treasures. One evidence: look at your dollar bill. The symbol you see there of the Masonic pyramid with 'Osiris' the all-seeing eye on top is one of the primary symbols of the Order of Zion. Yes, they own your money.

The Order of Zion financed both the North (through the Bank of England) and the South (through the Bank of France) in the U.S. Civil War, resulting in the National Banking Act of 1863 and the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, which allowed them to control our money supply through their 'front' organization, the Federal Reserve. They also financed both Germany and the Allies in World War II, bringing nearly the whole civilized world into their debt. Total world debt to these bankers now exceeds 50 trillion dollars, which is utterly impossible to ever pay off. Their first two goals are virtually complete, now all that remains is for them to set up their world ruler in Jerusalem. They consider themselves to be 'illuminated ones' (Illuminati). They have formed numerous other 'front' organizations to further their goals of world government, including the Bilderbergers, the Tri-Lateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, the League of Nations, and the United Nations. They believe it is their destiny to rule the world, and I assure you that their rule will be neither benevolent nor philanthropic.

Many will laugh at such 'conspiracy theories' and claim that the above organizations are neither secret nor malevolent, but rather 'dedicated to the betterment of mankind'. We shall see. Very soon.

Ark of the Covenant

(Mercy Seat)



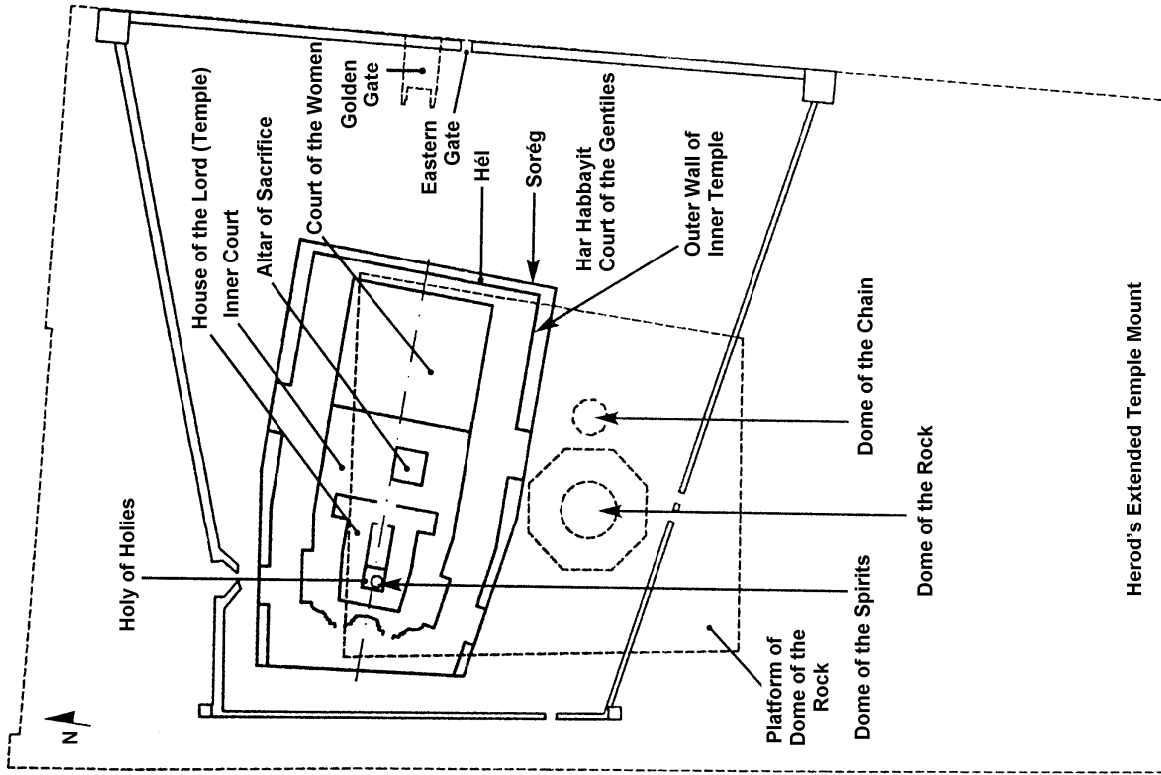
Shekina Glory

Cherub's rear wings form a Throne

Cherub's front wings folded over body

Mercy Seat

Ark



An analysis of the location of Herod's Temple overlaid on the current Temple Mount by Asher S. Kaufman. Reproduced from Biblical Archaeology Review magazine, Mar/Apr 2000, page 61. Used with permission, courtesy of Asher Selig Kaufman.

Mr. Pierre Plantard de Saint-Clair, then Secretary General of the Order of Zion, was interviewed in Paris, France in 1979. When asked, “Does the Order of Zion possess the treasures of the ancient Jewish temple?” he admitted, “Yes. And they will be returned to Jerusalem when the time is right.”

One more side note before I put this to bed. The exact location where the Ark of the Covenant sat in Solomon’s temple has been discovered. The heavy stone slab which formed the roof of the ‘elevator’ discussed above is still mostly intact, visible today. It is not in the Muslim ‘Dome of the Rock’ shrine on the temple mount, as some modern scholars would have you believe. It is in an open area of the temple mount about 150 feet north of the exterior of the Muslim Shrine. There is a small open Muslim dome over it, called the ‘Dome of the Spirits’ or ‘Dome of the Tablets’ (of the law). Its location places the Muslim Dome of the Rock entirely in the ancient ‘outer court’ or ‘court of the Gentiles’. Thus the Dome of the Rock would not have to be destroyed in order to rebuild Israel’s temple in its correct location. I make use of this fact when I tell my story.

This location is verified in several ways. First, **Dr. Asher S. Kaufman** has done some brilliant archaeological work locating Herod’s temple (which I believe was on the same site as Solomon’s temple). It is detailed in his book *The Temple of Jerusalem*, published by Har Ye’ra’eh Press in Hebrew in 1991. His work was reviewed in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR) magazine (March/April 1983 and March/April 2000 editions), which is where I found it. Second, Mishnah Torah, Hilchos Bais Habechirah 6:5, describes with surveyor’s precision the measurements and directions which allow the priest during the sacrifice of the red heifer on the Mount of Olives to see in a straight line through the Eastern Gate, the Gate of Chayl, the Gate of Nicanor, and into the entrance hall of the Holy of Holies. This is only possible if the ancient temple stood in the empty area to the north of the Dome of the Rock, and directly opposite that Eastern Gate. Third, this area has never been built on. Rabbi David Qimhi (about 1160-1235 AD), in his commentary on Isaiah 64:10, states, “And [the temple] is still in ruins, [in] that the temple site was never built on by the Gentiles.” That eliminates the Dome of the Rock site, as the Dome of the Rock was built by Omar of Arabia in the seventh century, well before Rabbi Qimhi.

When Rabbi Rood visited the site, he was allowed to see the heavy rock slab under the Dome of the Spirits. But when the Arabs noticed him walking on the slab taking careful measurements and sightings they threw him out, claiming that this was a most holy site and accusing him of being a Jewish spy. (He said that he was an American Christian, but they countered, “Everyone is a Christian, but are you Jewish?”) They finally got some Jewish guards with rifles to come and escort him away. Rabbi Rood also personally believes that Dr. Kaufman’s research is correct, and that this is the actual temple site.

The Gospel of Revelation has an interesting prophecy. “I was given a measuring rod like a staff. And someone told me, ‘Rise up and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it. *And leave out the court which is outside the temple [that is the court of the Gentiles], and do not measure it*, for it has been given to the nations [pagans, Gentiles] and they will tread under foot the Holy City for 42 months [3 ½ years]. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1260 days...” (That is 3 ½ 360-day years – Rev 11:1-3) After that, the two witnesses are slain. They lie in the street of Jerusalem for 3 ½ days and then are taken to heaven. Immediately after that is the seventh (last) trumpet (v 15), the rapture of the saints, and the judgment of “those who destroy the earth.” (v 18) The last verse in this chapter is fascinating. “the temple of God which is in heaven was opened, and the Ark of the Covenant appeared in His temple. And there were flashes of lightning, sounds, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.”

This prophecy is consistent with the possibility that the Jewish temple will be rebuilt just north of the Dome of the Rock, setting the stage for Yashua to return through the currently-sealed Eastern Gate to His temple after the great tribulation is past (as prophesied in Ezek 43:1-5). The Ark of the Covenant is restored to the “temple of God which is in heaven,” which could mean a sanctified Jewish temple, or the heavenly reality of which the earthly temple was just a copy. I am just speculating here, but Orthodox Jews are doing a lot more than that. They are planning and preparing to rebuild their temple! “And when these things began to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads; for your redemption is drawing near.” (Lk 21:28)

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE? ISRAEL’S DESTINY

This is a huge subject, well beyond the scope of this study on the Feasts of Israel. But it is such a fascinating rabbit trail – do you mind if I skim the highlights before going on? The history of the Jews is a story of miracles; recent years are no exception. If the full tale were told, there have probably been more miracles in Israel in my own lifetime (I was born in 1947), than there was in Yashua’s lifetime!

Understanding the past is a key to interpret the present and prepare for the future. In America, the liberal Marxists who want to enslave us in their socialist ‘paradise’ are working to destroy our godly heritage and our Judaeo-Christian foundations by rewriting our history to delete the miracles, to deny the hand of God on our nation, to give secular or evil motives to our founding fathers, to ignore or dishonor our nation’s greatest heroes, to reinterpret our Constitution and other national documents, to change our customs and laws so they are no longer based on God’s Word, to exaggerate our national errors and sins, and to mock and destroy traditional morality.

They do not know the horror they are creating. It will probably turn out even worse than the nightmares we've read about in Red China, the USSR, Nazi Germany, or other socialist 'paradises'. We Americans should know the truth, for we have already experienced the promise that, "Blessed is the nation whose God is YHWH." (Ps 33:12) *But we have yet to see the converse*: how cursed is the nation who turns from YHWH into idolatry. In our arrogance we think all our power and prosperity is a result of our own abilities, and that we can lightly throw out God and His law from our public life. What terrible tragedy we will reap.

Israel has seen this in full measure. They are returning to their roots, rediscovering their history, and, I believe, rediscovering YHWH their God. They know, possibly more than any other nation, that their destiny lies in remembering their history!

'Palestine' used to be called 'the Holy Land' or 'the Promised Land'. The name 'Palestine' is derived from the Philistines of the Bible, the Peleset Sea Peoples who came about the time of Rameses III. For thousands of years, those who hate Israel have called it 'Palestine' to try to erase the Jewish connection to the land and insult the Jews with a name derived from their ancient enemies.

'Palestine' was then much larger than we realize. It included what is now Israel, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, and southern Lebanon. It was a desolate land. During the Turkish occupation (1517 to 1917) the fertile Jezreel valley was just a swampland infected with deadly mosquitos. Sand smothered the coastal plain, and the famed 'mountains of Judea' were mounds of barren, lifeless rocks.

When Great Britain drove out the Turks holding Jerusalem, they estimated that there were fewer than a thousand trees in all of 'Palestine', due to foolish Turkish laws taxing live trees. When Britain occupied it after World War I, it contained a mix of people from many lands, mostly Jews and Arabs, all known as 'Palestinians' at the time. But there were few settlers; the entire population could have lived in one small city. Less than 10,000 Jews and 5000 Arabs were estimated to live there in 1864. Note that the land was also holy to Arabs, who are cousins to the Jews through Abraham's son Ishmael, his other sons through Keturah, his nephew Lot, and Isaac's son Esau, also known as Edom. But the Arabs and the Jews never got along very well together, so their settlements were always kept separate. I say 'settlements' loosely, as most of the Arabs there were Bedouins, migrants or nomads. But both groups wanted to be near Jerusalem, and they tended to settle on the surrounding hills.

In 1917 British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour declared British support for establishment in 'Palestine' of a national homeland for the Jewish people. Their ulterior motive was to gain the Jews' support for expelling the Ottoman Turks – a worthy motive which succeeded well.

A month after the Balfour Declaration, on December 9, 1917, British General Allenby liberated Jerusalem from the Turks without needing to fire a shot. To the Turks, he was 'Allah-bey' – prophet of Allah. His army's flight over Jerusalem marked the first time the Turks had ever seen military aircraft, fulfilling Isaiah's promise, "Like flying birds, so YHWH of Hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it; He will pass over it and rescue it." (31:5) The Turks panicked and fled. Later, at a reception honoring General Allenby in London, he told how as a boy he was taught to pray, "O Lord, we would not forget Thine ancient people, Israel. Hasten the day when Israel shall again be Thy people, and shall be restored to Thy favor and to their land." He said, "I never knew until now that God would give me the great privilege of answering my own childhood prayers."

So the Turks (with their allies, the Germans) lost World War I. You knew that, but did you know why? One reason was the invention of a new, better way of making explosives – by a Russian Jew, Dr. Chaim Weizmann. After the war, Britain officially honored Dr. Weizmann for his contribution to the war effort. The Prime Minister of England credited him with saving the British army, and offered him a reward. He responded, "There is nothing I want for myself, but there is something I would like you to do for my people..." And he asked for a national homeland for the Jews in 'Palestine'. God gave him favor with the Allies. They agreed. Dr. Weizmann later became the first president of the State of Israel.

In 1920 the League of Nations agreed in principle to the creation of a homeland for the Jewish people. In 1922 they divided 'Palestine' into two areas: 77% of the land was named **Transjordan**, which was to be a homeland only for Arab Palestinians. (Jews were not allowed to settle there.) The remaining 23% became a new British mandate called '**Palestine**', where both Jews and Arabs were allowed to settle. I know, it doesn't sound fair, but that is what they did. The Jews accepted the mandate, though it was only a quarter of what they had hoped and even (from Scripture) expected. They had been persecuted to the death all over the world. They were grateful for anything at all.

Jews from many nations began flocking to what they called **Israel**, with high hopes of starting their own nation. Local Arabs objected, starting their own nationalism movement. They were unhappy with the 77% of the land given them. They wanted it all. Because of their 'ancient hatred' of the Jews (Ezek 35:5), they didn't want Jewish refugees living nearby. When enthusiastic waves of Jews began returning, even the British objected, capitulating to the Arabs because of their need for Arab oil. Britain set up 'White Paper' quotas for Jewish immigration, blockaded the coastline against the 'invasion' of Jewish refugee ships, and sent captured Jews to crowded refugee camps on Cyprus. By 1946, they had 80,000 troops patrolling the coast of Palestine just to keep the Jews out!

But the Jews kept coming. Persecuted all over Europe, tortured and killed by the Nazis during the war, they were desperate to come to their ancient homeland. They formed an 'underground railroad' helping European refugees to escape, flee to the Austrian Alps, cross the Alps by foot, make their way down into Italy, then purchase old rickety Italian coastal vessels to cross the Mediterranean. Out of hatred for Britain, the Italians helped them. Nearly every other nation was against them except for the United States, who aided them in their covert operations and supplied some money and small arms.

In 1947 British control of 'Palestine' expired, and on November 29 the UN voted to partition it into a Jewish State and an Arab State. Bear in mind that *Transjordan had already been given to the Arabs*; it was now the land of Israel that was being divided up into thin slivers for the Jews and the majority to the Arabs (including Jerusalem). Jews all over the world supported the UN plan, though again it only gave them about one fourth of the territory they had hoped for (several indefensible plots about 10 miles wide at the middle, with Arab lands all around).

However, Arabs from the surrounding countries began to mobilize against the Jews, complaining that all of Palestine should be another Arab state, starting terrorist attacks against the Jews, and declaring that they would fight to the death rather than allow any Jewish state in Palestine. Five-star General George Marshall said to David Ben Gurion, "For God's sake, tell your people in Palestine they shouldn't proclaim a Jewish state. If they proclaim a Jewish state, within 10 days, or a maximum of 15, not a single Jew will remain alive in Palestine."

Nevertheless, the British mandate expired at noon, and Israel proclaimed herself a republic at 4:00 PM on May 14, 1948. At 6:10 PM President Truman's statement of the United States recognition of Israeli statehood was received. At 5:25 AM the next morning, David Ben Gurion was broadcasting Israel's thanks to the United States for such prompt recognition, when an explosion was heard in the background. A bomb had just fallen upon Tel Aviv.

The combined armies of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia attacked the hastily-assembled make-shift army of Jews, outnumbering them by 50 to one. General Marshall already had his 'I told you so' speech prepared, and the press was alerted to cover the massacre. Every columnist in America already had Israel's obituary written. Everyone in the world thought that the ill-equipped and hastily trained Jewish defenders would be annihilated in a matter of hours. After all, what was a total Jewish population of 650 thousand compared to the 50 million Arabs around them?

The invading armies were well-armed. They had vast quantities of surplus WW II heavy weapons, aircraft, tanks, guns, bombs, and ammunition, obtained at bargain-basement prices in Europe after the war.

The Israelis, because of their lack of political status, had for the most part been shut out of this giant weapons rummage sale. They did have some small arms brought with them from Europe, stolen from British military bases, purchased from stores of captured Axis armaments, and given them secretly by American supporters. But their ammunition supplies were perilously low, and much of what they had was not interchangeable between their mishmash of obsolete weaponry. The heaviest weapons they had at the start of the war were four large howitzers which had been used by the French army in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. However, they had frightfully few shells to fit their heavy artillery.

But they had two secret weapons: the prayers of God's people in America (who had heard about the crisis and were praying frantically) and God's Word. "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah [the Jews] and Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered against it... in that day will I make the governors of Judah [there was no king, prime minister, or president yet] like a hearth of fire among the wood, or like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left; and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again [by the Jews] in her own [rightful] place... in that day YHWH shall defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and even he that is feeble among them shall be as David..." (Zech 12:2-3; 6, 8) General Marshall never got to give his little sympathy speech.

In one battle, for example, 45 Syrian tanks were advancing upon the oldest kibbutz in 'Palestine', where Colonel Moshe Dayan had his headquarters. It had been hurriedly fortified with two of the old French howitzers. Col. Dayan ordered his men to fire only upon the lead tank to conserve ammunition. Their first shot scored a direct hit, knocking out the lead tank. The entire column of tanks immediately turned around and fled in panic, never to return! Had they known how poorly equipped the Israeli defenders were and continued their advance, they could surely have used their superior numbers and fire-power to capture Col. Dayan's command post, possibly ending the war then and there.

For months, fanatic Muslim gangs blockaded the Jews in Jerusalem, preventing food from reaching them by attacking their convoys of supply trucks, slaughtering the drivers, burning the trucks, and stealing the food. The starving Jews turned to the Lord in prayer, who provided miraculous relief by sending unseasonable rain, causing a spinach-like weed called khubeiza to sprout up. The Jews are quoted as saying, "Ah. The Lord is with us. The last time when we left Egypt, He sent us manna. This time He has sent us rain for our cisterns and the khubeiza."

However, Israeli casualties were very high. Over the next 8 months six thousand Israelis were killed. Israel would have been overrun had it not been for U.S. support, both official and private. There was an outpouring of financial support from American pro-Israel groups, both Christians and Jews. The Americans also helped Israel to modernize her weapons.

In January, 1949 when the war was all over, the small, ill-equipped Jewish militia had developed into a seasoned fighting force supported by modern tanks and fighter planes. Not only had the Jews survived, but they had increased their territorial perimeter by six hundred miles, gaining 21% more land than they had originally been given by the UN, including half the land which had been planned for the Arab state. More importantly, they had taken and held the western half of Jerusalem, which the UN wants to put under international control. The Israelis swore they would never leave Jerusalem again, *a promise they would sacrifice their lives to keep*. The UN cease-fire accord allowed the Israelis to keep the additional land they had captured. However, Transjordan held the 'West Bank', Egypt held the Gaza strip, and Syria held most of the Golan Heights, which the UN also allowed them to keep.

The first official action of the State of Israel after their War of Independence was to overrule the hated 'White Paper' quotas, opening up immigration to all Jews from around the world. In the 18 months following, over 340,000 Jews arrived in their homeland. By June of 1953 the population of Israel had doubled.

Egypt still controlled the Sinai and the heavily-armed Gaza strip, from which they continued to harass Israel. They also prevented Israel from using the Suez Canal, and blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba with big guns at its entrance. In July, 1956, Egypt seized the Suez Canal from its British and French owners – a big mistake. Israel responded by invading Egypt on October 29, 1956, soon joined by the British and French. By November 5, the Israelis occupied the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula, and the British and French controlled the Suez Canal once more. Egypt had again underestimated the resolute response of tiny Israel and was caught unprepared, giving Israel an easy victory. They determined it would be different next time.

The UN arranged a cease-fire and sent troops to keep the peace. They took charge of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza strip, and they protected Israeli shipping through the Gulf of Aqaba to their important southern seaport at Eilat.

"Next time" came in 1967. The Arab world had spent ten years strengthening and modernizing their military forces, thanks (in part) to over three billion dollars worth of military aid from Russia. They were really ready this time, with the latest Russian planes, tanks, and guns. Egypt's President Nasser (leader of the Arab world), boasted of his intention to destroy Israel completely – to push her into the sea and annihilate every Jew.

On May 15, 1967, on the 19th anniversary of Israeli independence, Egyptian forces moved back into the Sinai. Nasser demanded that the UN peacekeeping forces be removed. On May 17th, Cairo Radio's *Voice of the Arabs* proclaimed, "All Egypt is now prepared to plunge into total war, which will put an end to Israel." On May 18th The *Voice of the Arabs* announced, "As of today, there no longer exists an international emergency force [the UN peacekeepers] to protect Israel. The sole method we shall apply against Israel is a total war, which will result in the extermination of the Zionist existence."

Russia joined the propaganda war by sending inflated accounts of Israeli troop movements and war materials to both Syria and Egypt, which fanned the flames of patriotic passion and fear among the Arabs. On May 28th, Nasser declared, "We will not accept any coexistence with Israel." And on May 30, he announced, "The armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon are poised on the borders of Israel to face the challenge, while standing behind us are the armies of Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, Sudan, and the whole Arab Nation. Today they will know that the Arabs are arranged and prepared for battle. The critical hour has arrived." Finally, in a flagrant act of war, Nasser again closed the crucial Israeli port of Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba.

Israel had finally heard enough. On June 5 they ran a pre-dawn triple preemptive strike against the Egyptian Air Force, as well as on military air bases in Jordan and Syria, virtually wiping them out in one day, destroying most of their planes on the ground. The vast army of Egyptian tanks mobilized in the Sinai. Russia warned the world to keep their hands off, expecting a quick Egyptian victory. Israel was outnumbered and outgunned at least 30 to one, and this time the Arabs were trained and ready! But YHWH is the God of miracles, and by the fourth day the Israelis again occupied the Gaza Strip, the entire Sinai Peninsula, Jordanian territory west of the Jordan River, and even Jordan's half of Jerusalem! By June 10th the war was over, with Israel capturing the Golan Heights back from Syria. In just six days, the combined armies of the Arab nations were utterly defeated and routed, to the extent that Russia was demanding peace and threatening to intervene to keep Israel from taking all the land from the Euphrates to the Nile!

Stories of miracles during the Six-Day War abound. Tales of angels batting away bullets, of brave Arab soldiers turning back with no visible opposition or having heart attacks just before pulling the trigger, and of new, modern equipment that mysteriously breaks down at a crucial moment. But the story that meant the most to the Jews was the taking of Old Jerusalem; for the first time in 1900 years, the Jews had regained control of the entire beloved city! One of their first official acts after the war was to declare Jordan's half of Jerusalem part of Israel. The entire world was astounded. Jews all over the world wept on their knees, hands raised with joy.

Nasser was humiliated – this was the third time mighty Egypt had been defeated by tiny Israel. The Russians were appalled at their loss of 3 billion dollars worth of military equipment (of which the Israelis captured over a billion dollars worth). But did the Arab world give up? Does Satan give up, though he knows he was defeated at the cross? No, they rebuilt their military (again through massive Russian aid, not to mention millions of dollars of aid from the World Council of Churches, who never sent a dime to Israel – now you know whose side they’ve taken!) and prepared to try again. This time, they would not warn Israel of their coming. In fact, this time, they would attack on the Israeli Sabbath, when all the Jews are at rest. Furthermore, this would not just be war, it would be **Jihad – holy war** – war to the death, with promises for special eternal rewards for Muslims who died for this ‘holy’ cause.

Egypt’s President Nasser died in 1970. It was left to his successor, Anwar Sadat, to fulfill his dream. October 6, 1973 was Yom Kippur, the most holy Jewish Sabbath day, the **Day of Atonement**, so nearly all Jews were fasting, praying, and resting in their synagogues and with their families. At 2:05 PM the combined military forces of Egypt and Syria, with soldiers and equipment from eleven other Arab nations, made a surprise attack on Israel at the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. 2000 Egyptian cannons opened fire on the Israeli Bar Lev line in the Sinai, raining 10,500 artillery shells down on Israeli positions in the first minute. The shelling continued like that for 53 minutes. At the same time, the Syrians shelled the Golan Heights.

With meticulous timing, 400 Egyptian aircraft and numerous long-range missiles headed for other strategic Israeli air fields and defense missile sites, as 100 Syrian aircraft were doing the same to the north. By the next day, after a dramatically successful canal crossing, there were 90,000 Egyptian soldiers, 1000 tanks and 1200 heavy artillery in the Sinai and the Israeli defenses there were completely overrun. Syria put an additional 1200 tanks and 600 heavy artillery along the northern front. In total, 800,000 Arab troops were involved in the surprise assault, and 3000 Russian ‘observers’ were in the field directing.

Caught by surprise and weakened by fasting, the Jews were devastated. Israeli casualties were heavy, and in some places they were forced to retreat. The world again waited breathlessly for Israel to be wiped off the map by the vastly superior forces arrayed against them (more than 30 to 1) and more so since so many in the Israeli military had taken leave to celebrate the holy day with their families. But once again, YHWH is the God of miracles, and in a miraculous recovery, the Israelis returned, stood firm, and began to push the invaders back. Of 1200 Syrian tanks attacking the Golan Heights (against only 70 Israeli tanks) only 240 managed to retreat when the battle was over. After that initial surprise, the Israelis fought like no soldiers ever before – like they were *inspired*. Stories of miracles and heroism were so common they became almost routine.

In one case, for example, an Israeli tank was knocked out by a direct missile hit. All aboard were killed but one young soldier. He got the main gun working, turned it on the advancing Syrian column and began firing, knocking out 16 Syrian tanks before the rest retreated in panic.

After successfully defending their own positions, the Israelis went on the attack. On October 12, their northern division launched a counter-offensive that brought their tanks within 18 miles of Damascus. By the 16th, their southern division crossed the Suez, knocked out the Egyptian command posts and missile sites at the north end of the Bitter Lake, and headed for Cairo. They were in prime position to completely cut off the entire Egyptian Third Army in the Sinai Peninsula. Had that been done, they could have destroyed the Egyptian army with no threat from Egyptian missiles or air support.

With both Syria and Egypt now in deep yogurt, Russia again cried foul and demanded peace. When UN cease-fire agreements went unheeded, Russia threatened to join the battle and began assembling their forces. The situation was exceedingly tense. President Nixon ordered a worldwide alert of U.S. military forces, preparing to join the battle if Russia did. *We were that close to World War III.*

But instead of wiping out the 100,000 Arabs trapped in the Sinai, the Israelis fed them, directed them back to the Suez, and allowed them to cross unharmed. The Israelis then retreated, asking the world to simply allow them to exist in peace. They do not hate their Arab neighbors; they know they are brothers. They only hate all the killing.

When the Arabs captured Judea and Samaria in 1948 (renaming it the ‘West Bank’), they destroyed Jewish places of worship and holy sites, drove the Jews from their homes, and confiscated their lands. They allowed no Jews to live in the Jordanian-occupied ‘West Bank’. But in 1967 when the Jews recaptured it, the Arabs were permitted to remain in their settlements, and Muslim holy sites (including the Dome of the Rock on the temple mount) were carefully protected by the Jews. Frankly, it is only due to the mercy and kindness of the Jews that so many ‘Palestinians’ are living there now.

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat acted like he had won the Yom Kippur war. He refused to accept a cease-fire unless Israel agreed to his terms, which included giving up all the territory they had gained since the 1967 war, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. U.S. President Jimmy Carter pressured Israel to accept this unfair compromise with Sadat. President Carter successfully negotiated the ‘Camp David Accords’ in 1978 and the 1979 peace treaty’ between Egypt and Israel, requiring Israel’s withdrawal from the Sinai, and giving the Arabs autonomy to govern the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. God was furious with President Carter for bartering with His covenant land. From then on his presidency slid from one catastrophe to another.

During Carter's negotiations, our ally the Shah of Iran was forced to resign and the radical Islamist Ayatollah Khomeini took power. Our Embassy in Iran was overrun and 52 Americans taken hostage. President Carter's efforts to get them back were a series of failures, up to the bungled rescue attempt in which 8 of our soldiers died and we lost 7 helicopters and a tanker. Right after the peace treaty with Egypt was signed we suffered our worst nuclear disaster ever, at 3-Mile Island. The catastrophes kept stacking up: deadly tornados and hurricanes, major unemployment, 'stagflation', a huge oil crisis, the oil well blowout in the gulf, the worst air disaster in history (killing 364 people and grounding all the DC-10s), the Mt. St. Helens volcano, the Russian war over Afghanistan resulting in the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Osama Bin Laden... God does not bless us when we push His people to give up His covenant land!

In the meantime, the Arabs had changed tactics. If they couldn't defeat Israel militarily, they would defeat them economically. They cut back their production of oil in November 1973, and embargoed any nations that were friendly to Israel, such as the United States and Holland, resulting in worldwide recession and high prices at the gas pumps. Many believe that this was the reason Americans turned against Israel in the Camp David peace talks.

Had the Arabs finally won? Actually, no. In the process of accepting this peace agreement, Anwar Sadat did what no Arab in modern history had been willing to do; *he accepted the fact of a Jewish State in Israel!* He had no choice; Egypt was devastated by years of war – all defeats – and Israel was now a modern, powerful nation at their back door, able and obviously willing to defend herself, thank you. However, Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981 by Muslim fundamentalists for his peace treaty.

Another war was fought between Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Russia that you probably never heard about, because the liberal U.S. press refused to report it correctly, consistently siding with the Arab terrorists. This story starts back in 1970, when the Muslim extremist (terrorist) Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was thrown out of Jordan by King Hussein. They moved to Lebanon, where they stepped up their terrorist activities against Israeli civilians (they were afraid to target real soldiers), and also worked to control the Lebanese government. By 1975 they succeeded in starting a civil war in Lebanon, fighting against the legitimate (democratic) Muslim and Christian government there. So in June 1976 the Syrians moved in, claiming to only be a 'peace-keeping force' but actually wanting to annex Lebanon to Syria. The Syrians joined the PLO against the Lebanese government, and soon controlled the 60% of the country that the PLO didn't control. At that time Major Haddad raised up a 'Christian' army in the south (which was actually more Muslim than Christian), which, along with Maronite Christians in the north, was able to reclaim about 20% of the country for the legitimate Lebanese government.

The PLO continued their terrorist attacks against Israel and against the Lebanese Christian armies in the north and the south. They fired Russian-made Katyusha rockets at random into civilian population centers. They hijacked or shot down civilian aircraft. They bombed schools, apartments, bus stops, and markets. They also committed incredible atrocities against the Lebanese people (which the liberal U.S. press never reported), such as the regular rape and murder of Lebanese children as young as 12, forced conscription of young Lebanese boys into the PLO, and the kidnapping of Lebanese civilians to supply blood for wounded terrorists – they just took all their blood and dumped the bodies with the syringes still attached. By the time this war was over the PLO had killed 100,000 Lebanese, mostly civilians, while the U.S. press turned a blind eye.

Though Israel showed remarkable restraint in her retaliation for the unprovoked attacks upon her people, the U.S. press greatly exaggerated every Israeli 'atrocities' against the PLO in Lebanon. One problem was that the PLO deliberately placed their terrorist headquarters in heavily populated areas, including Beirut, so the Israelis couldn't counter-attack without endangering the civilian Lebanese. I am actually understating the problem with the U.S. press. They didn't just bias the facts, they out-and-out lied to try to turn U.S. public opinion against Israel. I am not saying that the Israelis did no wrong and made no mistakes. I am saying that the level of atrocities done by Arabs is 1000 times that done by Israelis, yet the U.S. press reports it the other way around. Please remember that the next time you are tempted to believe anything reported by the liberal U.S. media.

On November 13, 1979, PLO strongman Yasser Arafat sat down in the Kremlin with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko with a clear-cut proposal. Arafat first complained that America was supplying the Israelis with sophisticated weapons, for which the PLO had no match. He concluded therefore that the real battle was with the Americans (and Canadians). He then proposed a joint effort, using the PLO headquarters in Beirut as a springboard from which the PLO could wipe out Israel, enabling Russia to take control of the entire Middle East, to hold a knife to the throat of American oil interests there. Russia took the bait, with unbelievable results.

Israel's Mossad is considered by many to be the most effective intelligence network in the world. They got wind that something was up. One of their sources was American Christians. The U.S. government and the entire U.S. press were siding with the PLO, but American Christians were praying for the peace of Jerusalem and for God's chosen people. On at least two occasions, American prophets sent word to Israel warning that the Lord was impressing Ezekiel 38 upon them. It foretells of an invasion of Israel in the latter days by 'Gog and Magog' (Russia). This was about to be fulfilled, unless the Israelis took action.

For example, Chuck Smith put out a 'Prophecy 1982' tape detailing this scriptural prophecy, which Dr. Lambert Dolphin, senior research physicist with SRI and a devout evangelistic Christian, promptly sent to Stanley Goldfoot, the Orthodox Jew who heads up the Temple Foundation in Jerusalem, and who is leading the endeavor to rebuild the Jewish temple on Mount Moriah. Goldfoot circulated the tape to key government leaders, where it was taken seriously by the Mossad and by Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Pat Robertson, host of the 700-Club on national TV, also publicly took Israel's side against the PLO, stating, "... when reprisal comes it will fulfill the prophecy of the prophet Ezekiel, who in the 38th chapter foretold of an invasion of Israel in the 'latter days' by Russia, joined by Iran, Ethiopia, and Libya. That invasion... is very near... possibly as near as the fall of this year [1982]." Even some venerable orthodox rabbis in Israel predicted the Russian invasion, based on dreams and visions given them.

Russia's invasion for the conquest of the Middle East was actually planned for August 4, 1982. You did not read about this in the U.S. press, though the information was widely available to them. What you did read was that on June 5th Israel began an 11 hour bombardment of Beirut, Lebanon, in retaliation for PLO border violations.

The press was outraged, never mentioning that the bombardment was aimed only at the PLO headquarters in Beirut, and that Israel tried very hard to minimize civilian casualties, the exact opposite of standard PLO tactics. With world opinion (including American) turned against them by the liberal press, the Israelis proceeded to invade Lebanon anyway, pushing the PLO forces back into downtown Beirut by the end of the first week. Everyone was insisting, "Enough already, Israel. You've retaliated, now back-off!" but Israel continued to advance against the now disoriented and frightened PLO. The PLO terrorists were quite comfortable attacking unarmed civilians, but were unable to stand up to armed soldiers.

The U.S. press feverishly tried to use their considerable influence against Israel, greatly inflating the numbers of civilian casualties caused by the Israelis, reporting damage which had been done by the PLO as if it had been done by Israel, and flat out lying. For example, a baby girl was pictured by the ultra-liberal New York Times in a blanket, saying that she had both arms blown off when the Israelis bombed a hospital. In reality, the baby had merely broken her arm. Another example is the Christian town of Damor, which had been totally devastated in 1976 by the PLO. They had killed between 6000 to 10,000 of Damor's inhabitants, while the rest had fled in terror. They had utterly destroyed the city, burning most of the homes and using churches for target practice. But the U.S. press went in and filmed the devastated streets of Damor to make it look as if the Israelis had done all that damage within the last few days during their invasion of Lebanon. Like Satan, the U.S. press' agenda is to harm God's chosen people.

One American missionary to Lebanese Christians said, "The American press is not geared to honesty. Our press does not even have the concept of honesty. If they did they could not have taken and shown pictures of devastation that took place years ago and make it appear as though it was something current... I was there in 1976 just after the PLO destroyed Damor."

Yet the determined Israelis under the command of General Ariel Sharon continued to advance in spite of all the worldwide political and psychological pressure and threats against them. For the actual story within Lebanon was very different from what you heard on the 10 o'clock news. The Lebanese people welcomed the Israelis as their saviors, with open arms, sobbing for joy before their liberators. Muslims and Christians alike, in town after town, ran to the Israeli soldiers with cakes, cookies, cold drinks, rice, and gifts. They sang and danced in the streets. The remaining Christians of Damor, when told by Prime Minister Begin that they were free to return, joyfully came back and began to rebuild. "We have all been dead," one said. "If somebody doesn't have a home and doesn't have a village, what does he have to live for? Now we have started to live. My age is one hour old." Another said, "Outside Damor I felt myself like a dead man; but coming back here I am very happy." When he found his home was gone, he said, "It is totally destroyed. Nothing remains. But we are happy anyway. We are returning to our village, our land." Another, turning to an Israeli soldier, said, "What more can I say than, thank you that you brought us back to our place. *And God help you to get back to your place.*"

In fairness, I must add that when confronted with their flagrant dishonesty, a few American reporters did become a little more truthful, and even the ultra-biased New York Times quietly retracted a few of their more blatant lies (such as the baby with the broken arm, and the fabrication at Damor), though they still haven't changed their ways. To this day the liberal U.S. press is actively siding against Christians, Jews, and traditional biblical morality.

But the American national press never reported what the Israelis found in the city of Saida (Sidon), halfway between Beirut and the southern city of Sur (Tyre). The Russians had installed their top secret military command post and weapons storage facility underneath the city of Saida. It was huge. It included about 40 miles of underground tunnels and caverns filled with sensitive military documents and weapons, as well as tents, blankets, food, and every other conceivable need for a large army. There were modern missiles, entire SAM sites, cannons, tanks, and armored vehicles. There were hundreds of thousands of weapons and tens of thousands of tons of ammunition. They had their own power generators, water and sewer systems, barracks, offices, even storage areas large enough to shelter a whole fleet of helicopters. An ultra-modern radar and electronic communications system occupied a self-contained wing of the complex.

The PLO had an army of maybe 15,000 worldwide. But this was enough to supply an army of more than a million – over two billion dollars worth of armaments. The captured documentation, all in Russian, detailed their plan for conquest of the Middle East starting August 4, 1982. It contained detailed military plans for every conceivable region and operation. Extensive files were discovered on terrorists, spies, and Communist sympathizers all over the world, all working under secret direction from Moscow.

The Communist Soviet Union had been bringing all this war material in by special freight submarines which entered underground docks carved out of solid stone, so that no one could see them coming or going. When Israelis read the captured documentation, they found that this build-up started in late 1979 shortly after the Camp David accords with Egypt. Yasser Arafat was furious with Egypt's capitulation to Israel, and had gone to the Soviets to plan Israel's destruction. He had promised to help them take control of Arabia if they would help him annihilate Israel.

The plan was to have the Palestinians attack Israel from Lebanon, and when Israel fought back, the Soviets would counter with a million troops, wipe Israel off the map, and sweep through to seize Arabia and the oil fields there. At the same time, they had terrorists in Canada who planned to enter the U.S. to poison our water supplies and blow up our communications centers and power stations as a prelude to a Soviet invasion of the United States.

In short, this would be the start of World War III, Armageddon, as in the prophecy of Ezekiel 38 & 39. Except it was not time yet, so Israel was led by YHWH to persevere in their invasion of Lebanon, with every other nation against them (except the Lebanese), until they found and captured that big military installation at Saida. Yes, Israel won WW III two months before it had even started, and we never even thanked her. Most of us never knew that our safe and secure, comfortable lifestyles had been saved by Israel's invasion of Lebanon, which foolish Americans condemned so strongly in the U.S. press.

Yet we still continue to buy, watch or read, and believe the U.S. press! Will we never learn? It seems obvious that wicked people will do wicked things, liars will continue to lie, and the liberals, progressives, socialists, globalists, and communists who control the mainstream U.S. media will continue to twist the truth however they can to make you think that their way is right, though it has impoverished and enslaved people everywhere it has been tried.

Leftist and anti-Semitic bias in the U.S. press became legendary. For example, newspapers across the country published a famous photo of an unarmed teenager, blood dripping from his head, standing under a fierce, imposing Israeli policeman holding up a club. Everyone was appalled to see that Israel's police could be so brutal. The caption under the photo just read, "An Israeli policeman and a Palestinian on the temple mount."

But it turned out to be a lie. The photo was taken in an Arab neighborhood of Jerusalem. An American Jewish student (Tuvia Grossman) was pulled from a taxicab by an Arab mob and severely beaten and stabbed. He would have been killed but for the protection of the Israeli policeman, who was standing over him and guarding him with a club when the photo was taken. The New York Times retracted their story, but only after massive public outrage. Sadly, the U.S. Media still today biases their reporting to try to justify Palestinian violence and to vigorously condemn any Israeli attempt to defend themselves. This bias barely even paused when the Arabs attacked us on 9/11.

In case you think that the U.S. media has reformed and now only reports the unbiased truth, I recently found an interesting news article on the recent Israeli elections which mentions, in passing, "Rightwinger Ariel Sharon, lifelong public servant and former general, is best known as the mastermind of the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 that entangled Israel in Lebanon for the next 18 years." (*Tacoma News Tribune, Feb 5, 2001*) That is all it says. It intentionally leaves a bad taste in your mouth, as if Israel's presence in Lebanon should be condemned. The facts it reports are true, but there is no mention of the war with Russia that General Sharon prevented, or of the protection from Syrian takeover that Israel gave Lebanon. There is no praise for the brilliant way that General Sharon worked to weed out the PLO terrorists from Beirut while minimizing the civilian casualties, or the great love and admiration for him among both Lebanese and Israeli people.

So why was Israel 'entangled' in Lebanon for 18 years? To keep Russia from rebuilding her military command post there; to keep the PLO from reestablishing their headquarters there; to keep Syria from taking over the Lebanese government; to help stabilize the legitimate Lebanese government while they built up their strength; to protect the Lebanese people (including both Christians and Muslims) from the atrocities of both the PLO and the Syrians; and to protect their own people from attacks from the remaining terrorists in Lebanon.

How do I know all this? I have the book by David Allen Lewis, founder of Christians United for Israel, entitled *Magog 1982 – Canceled*. In his preface he writes, "Here are some of the almost unknown facts about the Israel-PLO-Lebanon war of 1982. They are not unknown because they are unknowable, but because for some reason the western press has remained almost silent on some of the most important aspects of the conflict. We can say that Israel's action, far beyond being merely a strike against terrorism, actually prevented the Russian takeover of the oil rich Middle East and/or the dreaded third world war. If Russia ever takes control of the Middle East it will bring the West to its knees and provoke the worst economic depression in history. It may be, in the final analysis, that far from being Israel's protector, the United States of America will be seen as having been saved from ruin by Israel."

I have just briefly described the miracle victory of tiny Israel at least five times against countries that were far more numerous and powerful. As Scripture prophesies, every nation in the world has turned against her. Though the U.S. has given her much support, aid, and armaments as our 'valued ally', yet political pressure has been applied by every U.S. president since Truman attempting to get Israel to compromise with the nations who have sworn to annihilate her. Even President Reagan, a conservative Christian, said, "... the Arab-Israeli conflict should be resolved through negotiations involving an exchange of territory for peace. This exchange is enshrined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 242... in return for peace – the withdrawal provision of Resolution 242 applies to all fronts, including the West Bank and Gaza." (Sept 1, 1982) Remember, it was Reagan who pressured Israel to stop bombing Beirut and let all the terrorists walk free, weapons in hand, during that war in Lebanon.

Will we foolish, meddling Americans ever realize that the land is not Israel's to give away? It is YHWH's land, and He will give it to whomever He chooses. He has chosen, in precise fulfillment of Scripture, to give it to Israel, and has confirmed that with at least five miracle military victories since 1947. Those who oppose Israel's restoration to God's land will find themselves fighting against God Himself. And those who pressure Israel to compromise with her enemies who are sworn to destroy her, will find themselves destroyed along with Israel's enemies.

To correct a common misconception – the Arabs, Muslims, and 'Palestinians' living in or around Israel are not Israel's enemies. Most of these good people are peace-loving, welcome neighbors to the Israelis there. Many are Israeli citizens, with full voting rights, and representation in the Israeli Parliament. The Arabs have all benefited by the Israeli presence, with high-paying jobs in Israel, the protection of the Israeli police, and the freedom to conduct their affairs and to come and go as they see fit. The desert that was there before the Jews came has truly bloomed! Israel has given them a great deal of local autonomy, overseeing only in security matters to protect the Arabs as well as the Jews against any terrorism. The Jews are aware that the Arabs are their brothers, and that Scripture prophesies that the sons of Ishmael (Arabs) will live in the midst of their brethren (Israelis). They are not the enemy!

The true enemies of Israel are all those demonically inspired leaders of the Arab countries who have sworn to annihilate Israel, and are so filled with blind hatred against the Jews that they even destroy their own people to kill them. In one sense, even the American government is Israel's enemy, since it has taken the side of those Arabs against Israel and is still working to pressure them to 'trade land for peace' – as if negotiations with terrorists and thugs could ever bring peace. The people of America, Egypt, or Syria are not Israel's enemies unless they support the evil intentions of their governments.

But what are God's purposes in bringing back the Jews to the land of Israel? How can we be in support of what God is doing there? Is this just all about the Jews and their national homeland? Or is there something greater going on here? Passages such as Isaiah 43 and Jeremiah 31 imply to me that God is restoring Israel so they can fulfill their created purposes: to bring honor to YHWH's name and to be a light to the nations.

My favorite Bible passage is Zechariah's prophecy of the last days. I quoted parts of it near the beginning of this section; allow me to quote a few other key parts to close it. "*In that day YHWH will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David like God, with the angel of YHWH before them. And it will come about in that day that I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me, Aleph Tau [the first and the last, referring to Jesus Christ], whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly for Him, like the bitter weeping over a first born.*"

"In that day a [cleansing] fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity... For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle... Then YHWH will go forth and fight against those nations... in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives... and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley... and you will flee by the valley of My mountains... Then YHWH, O My God, will come, and all the saints with Him! ... And YHWH will be King over all the earth... and there will be no more curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security... Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, YHWH of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles... *and there will no longer be a merchant [trader] in the house [temple] of YHWH of Hosts in that day.*" (Zech 12:8 - 14:21, excerpts)

The picture I get from this and other Scriptures which speak of the soon-to-come Millennial Age is that YHWH is preparing a cleansed people among whom He will dwell and through whom He will reign for a thousand years as King over all the earth in great power and glory. We can (and many do) spiritualize all this away, to say that now God's chosen people is His church, the many-membered body of Christ, His temple of living stones. I don't disagree with you; that is clearly taught in the New Testament. But as I said in the very first section of this study, scriptural prophecy may be multi-layered, having fulfillments at multiple times and places in different ways. Fulfilling these prophecies *spiritually* in and through the church does not preclude God also fulfilling them *physically* through the literal sons of Abraham, His chosen people.

Yes I know, in the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21, *after the Millennium is over*, there will be “no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.” (21:22) But for at least a thousand years, I believe that God will dwell here on earth in the actual physical city of Jerusalem with His people, the Children of Israel, and that He will fulfill in them what He intended from the beginning, to make them a light to the nations.

That implies a temple, a dwelling place of God on earth. I believe there will be a Jewish temple before Yashua returns for His Bride. Daniel’s end-time prophecy says that the antichrist will “put a stop to the sacrifice and grain offering” (9:27), and until there is a temple there can be no sacrifice. Virtually all sincere Jews will agree with me here; there has to be a **Jewish temple**. It may take many miracles to actually build it on the top of Mount Moriah where it belongs, but one way or another that has to happen. It is only a matter of time. After all, YHWH is a God of miracles! Every Jew in the land of Israel today is there because YHWH is the God of miracles who faithfully keeps His promises to His people.

Here is one of His promises. Can you believe it? “Thus says YHWH Adonai: *Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel*; [Judea and Samaria; the ‘West Bank’] and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places to which they have sinned, and I will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. And they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever. And David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will give to them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary [temple] in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations [including all the Arab nations around them] will know that I am YHWH who sanctifies Israel, *when My sanctuary [temple] is in their midst forever.*” (Ezek 37:21-28)

That may refer to a spiritual tabernacle coming down out of heaven. (Rev 21:1-3) The physical temple may be only needed long enough for the antichrist to profane it. (Dan 9:27) But one way or another, God will have a place to dwell with His people on earth as He has always wanted. In my story (in Volume 5) I make it a ‘Garden of God’.

That Daniel 9 passage is fascinating, and controversial! It speaks both of the redemptive sacrifice of Messiah and the redemption of Israel at the end of the age. At 82, Daniel has been fasting and praying about “the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, 70 years.” (v2, prophesied in Jer 25:11) Gabriel tells him, “70 heptads [sevens of years, i.e. 70 times 7 = 490 years – these are 360 day ‘prophetic years’ = 483 365 day years] have been decreed for your people [Israel] and the holy city [Jerusalem], to finish [end] the transgression [give His people the power to no longer transgress], to make an end [seal up] sins [to break the power of sin over us], to make atonement [reconciliation] for sin [thus delivering us from its guilt], to bring in everlasting righteousness [He also gives us His righteousness], to seal up [wrap up, fulfill] vision and prophecy [every vision and prophecy will ultimately have its fulfillment in Him], and to anoint the most holy [to sanctify again the most holy place in the temple by His presence].” I believe this speaks of both the spiritual temple which we are, and the temple at Jerusalem, which is the subject of the entire passage. Another valid interpretation is to anoint the most holy Ark of the Covenant with His blood.

“So you [Daniel] are to know and discern [understand] that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem [Artaxerxes I King of Persia 465 - 424 BC, given to Ezra on March 27, 458 BC, and then again to Nehemiah on Nisan 1, April 4 446 BC. I believe He starts the clock on this latter date] until Messiah the Prince there will be seven heptads [49 years; to 398 BC] during which time it [Jerusalem] shall be built again, with plaza [streets] and moat [walls, defenses], even in time of distress. [see Ezra 4 & Nehemiah 4 & 6. The walls were completed by 420 BC; the city was rebuilt over the next 22 years.]; and sixty-two heptads [434 prophetic years = 428 actual years, up to AD 31, the year Jesus was crucified].

“Then after the sixty two heptads [totalling 69 of the 70 first mentioned], Messiah will be cut off [crucified in AD 31] and have nothing [no one; all His disciples will be scattered]. And [in about 40 years] the people of the prince [the antichrist] who is to come [some time in the future] will destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary [the temple, leaving not one stone upon another].

“And his [the antichrist’s] end [final destruction] will come with a flood [the lake of fire, Rev 20:10]. Even to the end [of the antichrist, an indeterminate time, the 2000 years of church history] there will be war; desolations [caused by the work of the ‘people of the antichrist’] are determined.

“He [the antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many [presumably all the nations of the Middle East; I believe this covenant will permit the Jews to rebuild their temple next to the Muslim Dome of the Rock and resume their sacrificial system] for one heptad [the last of the seventy – the final seven years].

TRYING TO SOLVE THE ISRAELI / PALESTINIAN PROBLEM

“But in the middle of the heptad [after 3 1/2 years, presumably right after they get the temple finished and are about to begin their sacrifice] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering [God allows the temple to be rebuilt, but not so they could go back to the old sacrificial law]; and on the wing of abominations [the lies, double-crosses, treachery, political intrigue, and deceiving miraculous signs and wonders which he uses to rule], will come one [the beast of antichrist] who makes desolate [this is the peak of the great tribulation mentioned by Jesus in Matt 24:15, which says he will stand in the holy place of the temple. This is described in Daniel 11 and 12], even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed [see Dan 11:36] is poured out on the one who makes desolate [described in Rev 20:10].” (Dan 9:24-27)

This incredible prophecy provides an overview of the entire redemption of Israel from their dispersion through their acceptance of Messiah as their King. It even gives times and dates, which are accurate if we use the 360 day prophetic year of King David’s time. It is easy to tie the past dates to specific events in history (as I have done). It is also pretty easy to see the indeterminate time of the Church Age (which Jesus calls the times of the Gentiles [Lk 21:24] and I call the Age of the Gentile Harvest) hinted at in verse 26, though this time is not directly addressed since the passage deals with Israel’s history, not the church.

Speculating on the length of the Church Age has been a favorite sport in the church for the last 2000 years, and I am no exception. My personal guess (and it is just a guess) is that this undefined period is 2000 years – the 40 years of the Israelite’s wanderings in the desert times the 50 year Jubilee cycle. This puts the conclusion of the age into our lifetimes. It also neatly fits the story of the Feasts of Israel. The Israelites were supposed to hold the **Passover** Feasts in the first month, the **Pentecost** Feast in the third month (at Mt. Sinai), and proceed right into the Promised Land to keep the **Tabernacle** Feasts in the seventh month of the same year. They blew it in their rebellion and fearfulness, and had to wander in the desert for 40 years before they finally got to come into the Promised Land. Similarly, the church has by faith been through **Passover** (at the cross) and **Pentecost** (at the infilling of the Holy Spirit), but through rebellion and faithlessness has failed to enter into **Tabernacles**, thus is relegated to wander in the (spiritual) desert for 40 Jubilees. Why do I pick Jubilees instead of another multiplier like 70? Because I see the prophetic symbolism of the Jubilee as the same as the prophetic meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles: the captives are set free so they can dwell with each other and with their Maker in the land in harmony and fruitfulness.

The rapture of the church is not mentioned in this passage. That final ‘heptad’ involves the great tribulation, the restoration of the Children of Israel as God’s chosen people, and the destruction of the wicked, bringing in the millennial reign of Christ.

Since I finished the above in 1999, a lot has happened in the Middle East. In fact, things are happening there so fast that I probably could never fully bring this up to date, so I won’t try. But, bold fool that I may be, I will lay out a few suggestions as to how the discord between the Israelis and the Arab so-called ‘Palestinians’ could be solved, and a few predictions as to what I think might happen instead.

The problems there are not simple. Only an ignorant fool could say, “Just carve out an independent state for the Palestinians and everything will be fine.” It wouldn’t, and everyone over there knows it. The ‘Palestinians’ don’t want their own state next to Israel; they want all the land, and they want the Jews all annihilated.

However, before we can even talk about solving the problems there, we need to define a few terms and learn a little history. It actually gets rather complicated, but I will try to abbreviate. First, there really is no such thing as a ‘Palestinian’. There never was a Palestinian people and there never has been a Palestinian State, ever. Second, those who claim to represent the ‘displaced and oppressed Palestinians’ do not. They represent Satan, who inspires them. Third, this problem actually has very little to do with relieving the poverty and oppression and providing homes for the ‘displaced Palestinians’. That’s a deliberate ruse. There’s more, but we’ll start with that.

Canaan originally belonged to the Canaanites. They were very wicked, so God told the Israelites to wipe them out and take their land, renaming it the land of Israel. They never quite succeeded, leaving (among others) a sizable Philistine population in the area of the Gaza Strip. (The word Palestine is derived from those Philistines, though the present Palestinians are not descended from them.) There is a lot of history I’m going to skim through here; God promised the land to the Israelites forever if they would keep His covenant, but they failed. They were overpowered by the Assyrians, then in turn by the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Ptolemies and Seleucids, the Romans (who renamed it Judea for its largest tribe, Judah), Arabs, Byzantines, Seljuk Turks, Crusaders, Egyptians, and Ottoman Turks (among others). During this period they were slaughtered, tortured, and dispersed, as God had promised them if they failed to keep His covenant. Very few (a tenth or less) were left in the land.

Under some of their captor nations, the Israelites were exiled to other nations. Other captives were brought into Israel to replace them. By the time of the Crusades there was a mix of Israelites and Arabians scattered across the Levant from Turkey to Egypt. Most Arabs converted to Islam in the 600s. Though at first they were tolerant of other religions, they became increasingly intolerant as they grew strong, leaving a primarily Islamic culture there at the time of the Zionist movement in the mid 1800s.

Please note that nearly all of those living in the land were immigrants; very few remained from when Israel was a state. Also note that these people were very poor; the land itself was poor, mostly desert, barely able to support them. Finally, note that there never was a Palestinian State. Though the land was at various times annexed to Egypt, to Lebanon, to Syria, or to Turkey, the mixed immigrants living there never formed their own state government.

But with the 1800s came incredible persecution of European Jewry, stimulating a Zionistic fervor to return to the 'Promised Land' of their fathers. The population of Jews in Israel grew from about 25,000 to 85,000 between 1880 and 1911. They did not steal any Arab's land; they bought it, often paying exorbitant prices for it! *As the Jews returned, the land began to blossom, as God had promised.* Rainfall increased. Many trees were planted. Deserts and swamps were reclaimed. Naturally, the Arab population also benefited, immensely, swelling to above 700,000.

Between World Wars I and II there were several attempts to divide the land into Jewish and Arab states, including the British Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the UN Special Commission on Palestine on Nov 29, 1947. In each case, the Jews accepted the offer, but the Arabs rejected it. They consistently refused to acknowledge the Jewish presence in their midst.

Why? Because the Israelis are willing to live side by side with peaceful neighbors, even though their land is much smaller than their fathers had. They trust YHWH to enlarge their borders when He chooses. But Arab leaders are unwilling to live in a world with Jews in it. Note again that I say Arab leaders; the people themselves would be willing (at least those who haven't been brainwashed from infancy to hate the Jews). In this, the Arab leaders are not representative of their own people.

They do not have the best interests of their people at heart. They have an agenda, the destruction of Israel, and they are willing to harm or kill their own people to achieve it. They promise rewards in the hereafter. They pay the families of those who blow themselves up killing Jews. They foment hate, claiming that the Jews are responsible for the poverty and oppression of the Arabs, and for the loss of their homes in the six-day war.

But let's examine that. The 'Palestinians' have always been an oppressed, poverty-stricken people. Ever since the Israelites were dispersed and replaced by conquered peoples from other lands, Palestinians have been (and still are) oppressed by their conquerors. As to their poverty, the land itself has been under a curse since the dispersion. It was only when the Jews started returning to the land of their fathers that the curse began to be broken and the land again began to bloom, benefiting Jews and Palestinians alike. In fact, the prosperity of the local Palestinians has increased dramatically under Jewish rule. *All who live in peace with the Jews have prospered, just as God said.*

As to the Palestinians being 'displaced from their land' – well, in the first place, it was never really their land; and in the second place it was the Arabs who displaced them. During their preparations to destroy fledgling Israel in 1948, they told the local Arabs to leave their homes until the war was over, promising that they could return and have all the lands and possessions of the Jews after the Jews were driven into the sea. Nobody thought the Jews could win, so many local Arabs took this advice. But then the attacking Arab nations were soundly defeated, leaving many 'poor Palestinians' dispossessed and dependent upon those who had deceived them.

Even before the war, the Israelis understood this. They sent sound trucks through Arab settlements, pleading with them to remain in their homes and not flee as their leaders were saying, and promising to protect them and their homes if they stayed. Many Arabs did stay, and the Israelis have kept their promise. Those who left sorely regret it, for they are prevented by their own leaders from returning. Forced to remain in desperate poverty all these years in ghettos and makeshift refugee camps, they are being used by their leaders as a political weapon against Israel. *The lying press (American and Arab) blames Israel for their plight!* Arab leaders fill the refugee camps with propaganda fomenting hate against Israel. They could easily have resettled these poor people into homes and integrated them into their society if they cared about them, but their Muslim culture places little value on human life, valuing more the sympathy they get from liberals.

Some of these abused Arab people formed a loose knit terrorist group in Jordan in 1964 called the 'Palestinian Liberation Organization' (PLO). Terrorist Yasser Arafat was given control of the PLO in 1969. In 1970 they attempted to seize the throne of King Hussein. After their defeat they moved to Egypt and stirred up trouble until they were driven out. They then fled to Lebanon, from which they terrorized the Middle East until General Sharon's timely 1982 bombardment of Beirut. The PLO is still a terrorist group, though it supposedly became respectable at Camp David by the blessing of Bill Clinton in 2000. Arafat's self-proclaimed goal is to "liberate the land from the Zionist entity," i.e. get rid of all the Jews.

That leads into my **proposed solution**, which I believe would be best for all concerned. This will never actually happen; I'll predict what will happen later. My premise here is that everyone wins when we agree with God. He has clearly promised the restoration of His chosen people to the land. So give the entire land, including the West Bank, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, all of Jerusalem, and the Sinai to the Jews as a permanent possession. Assure Arabs all over the world that Israel will treat them well, including giving them permanent rights of pilgrimage to their holy site at the Dome of the Rock on Mt. Moriah; *so long as Israelis are also permitted free access to their holy sites, including the temple they must build at its original site.*

Allow a year or two for the Arabs living there to apply and meet requirements for Israeli citizenship. Prohibit non-citizens from carrying a weapon, upon the threat of permanent extradition. For those unwilling to live in an Israeli state, buy their land to pay for their relocation to a neighboring Arab state of their choice. But for any Arabs who refuse to assimilate or relocate, round them up and forceably extradite them to whatever state wants them, confiscating their land as compensation for the trouble. In the process, if any turn out to be terrorists, try them and execute them. *From that day on, 'trade land for peace' the right way. When Arabs break the peace, they lose their land, permanently.* A state sponsor of terrorism doesn't deserve to have a state. If Arabs really want another 'Palestinian' state, they can bloody well donate a bit of their own vast land for it, instead of trying to carve it out of tiny Israel. It is a blatant double standard to allow the attacking Muslims to keep all the many lands they've conquered, but insist that Israel return the lands it won in its defense.

If these actions start World War III (as some say), YHWH is perfectly able to protect Israel just as He did in the five previous conflicts. But if the Arabs reject this, it will not be 'for the Palestinians'. It will be because their leaders actually care nothing for the Palestinians, but only want the destruction of Israel, since my solution would be the best for all peace-loving Arabs, both those who move to Arab states and those who assimilate into Israel.

Without a major miracle, that will not happen. Here is what may happen instead. Weak Israeli statesmen will bow to international pressure to 'give the Palestinians one more chance' and establish a self-governing state by a 'democratic' election. The whole thing will be a farce, as the brainwashed Palestinians are incapable of holding a free election, much less actually governing themselves. The United Nations, which is just as anti-Semitic as any Arab state, will move in and 'help' them. Under cover of UN rule, Russia and the Arabs will use the new Palestinian state to prepare for another military strike against Israel, hoping to annihilate them before the U.S. has a chance to object. When the dust settles, the new Palestinian state will be bombed back to the Stone Age, and Israel will again 'occupy' the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, all of Jerusalem, and the Sinai Peninsula. The surviving Palestinians, Russia, their Arab allies, and the United Nations will all cry 'foul' and demand that Israel retreat and give those 'poor oppressed Palestinians' one more chance. Then it will happen all over again.

So far I have avoided saying much about their religion, which is primarily Islam. I don't want to be critical, as there are many zealous, sincere Muslims who, like Jews and Christians, do believe in one God and their accountability to Him. Their zeal often exceeds that of many modern American Christians. God is their judge. He will reward them according to their faith and the spiritual light they were given and ultimately will open their eyes to the truth.

But I have a big problem with some aspects of Islam. The word Islam comes from a root meaning peace. But it is not what you and I think of as peace. In Islam there are only two kinds of land, the House of Peace, and the House of the Sword. All lands currently under Islamic rule, submitted to Allah, are in the House of Peace; all other lands are in the House of the Sword. The word Islam means only the 'peace' of total submission to Allah. Peace, for them, is impossible where any land or its people are not submitted to Allah. All religions have a desire to convert the rest of the world; Islam is no exception. But with Islam, the 'rest of the world' is still the House of the Sword. There can be no peace in the House of the Sword! Islamists must use any available means including violence, treachery, and war to conquer every nation and people, until all the world is at 'peace' – in submission to Allah.

This is a serious criticism. It creates a double standard, inherent in Islam. Although Islam does teach right and wrong similar to the Christian faith (it is wrong to kill, or steal, or lie, or covet, etc.) yet it also teaches that *all those things are justified if the end goal is bringing others into submission to Islam.* Thus Islam justifies its long history of conquering other nations using violence and deception. Making a peace treaty in Islam is meaningless, as their concept of a peace treaty is simply a cessation of hostilities until they are strong enough to take over. For example, their prophet Mohammed signed a ten year peace treaty with a Quraish tribe who controlled Mecca. Then 18 months later, when he was strong enough, Mohammed violated the treaty and captured Mecca, wiping out the Quraish. All peace treaties with the Muslims are similarly just a ruse. Their definition of peace demands that they be in charge. They do not appreciate true freedom or value human life, and cannot tolerate living near those who do.

Another fundamental belief of Islam is almost as bad. Any land, once in the 'House of Peace' (submitted to Islam), can never revert to its previous owners. This also creates a double standard. It is fine for Islamists to conquer lands by violence or whatever is necessary to force them into submission to Allah, but it is unthinkable for anyone else to take back conquered lands or to conquer their own lands. If such a catastrophe occurs, as it did during the Crusades in Israel, all Muslims are duty bound to a 'Jihad' (holy war) to recover 'Allah's land' at all costs, including lies, murder, terrorism, and martyrdom. In their minds, Israel will always be theirs because they conquered it, in spite of 2000 years of prior Israeli ownership. (Arabs who had recently adopted Islam conquered it 635 - 641 AD.)

There is also a personal aspect to this principle. Like all religions, Islam wants converts. But it is inconceivable that someone should convert away from Islam. Anyone who tries must be resubmitted to Allah, by force if necessary, or slain. There is no alternative. This would not be so bad if Islam were primarily a religion of the heart, like Judaism and Christianity. Only God can see and judge the heart.

But Islam is an outward religion. You must respect and confess faith in Allah, in Mohammed as his prophet, and in the Qur'an. You must pray five times daily toward Mecca and make one pilgrimage to Mecca. You must fast during the holy month of Ramadan. And of course you must give them alms. If you do those things, you are a good Muslim no matter what evils, immoralities, or rebellious thoughts lurk in your heart. If you do not, you are a hated infidel, no matter how righteous and loving you may be in practice.

This has profound implications. Islam spreads its religion by the sword, bringing fear and intimidation among conquered peoples. Many (if not the majority) of its 'believers' simply go through the motions to avoid the persecution, but are not Muslims in their hearts. These are good, even godly, people! They would probably accept Judaism or Christianity if allowed to freely choose. *But Islam holds them in bondage.* In the minds of Islamists, since they go through the motions, they are submitted to Allah and can never leave. Those who do convert away from Islam are often tortured and/or slain, sometimes at the hands of their own family and usually with the consent of Muslim authorities. Thus their religion is maintained by fear and coercion even among their own.

As a national system of government, Islam does not work well, often resulting in poverty, oppression, and abuse, unable to advance much beyond the 15th century. Many smart Muslims have recognized this and fled their own nations, settling in Europe and the Americas, to reap the benefits of societies which are more free and tolerant.

But do not make the mistake of thinking that they have converted to a western worldview! Even knowing that Islam does not work to rule a society, they are bound by their religion to pretend a compliance (even patriotism) toward their new nation only until they have grown strong; then they must take over, and submit their new nation, by force if necessary, to Islam.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that the battle is only over Israel and the Jews. Chamberlain made the mistake of thinking Hitler would be satisfied with Poland. Islam is also at war with America, Western Civilization, and Truth itself. If we are unable to speak the truth about the evils inherent in Islam out of fear of offending them, then they have already won and Western Civilization is doomed. We misjudge them to our peril. Israel's leaders are being exceedingly foolish in still thinking that they can ever negotiate land for peace with Islam.

Peace can only come with the Prince of Peace. Some individuals have received Him, but nationally Israel isn't quite ready to acknowledge her Messiah. One day, I hope very soon, an Israeli statesman will stand in the Spirit of YHWH to publicly avow that the dispersion is over and Israel has returned to her King, YHWH, and to faith in His covenant. Israelis will rally 'round and fervently bless Him who comes in the name of YHWH – Yashua haMashiach.

Yashua will respond by returning with His Bride, to bring peace to Jerusalem and rule the universe through her from Mt. Zion. Finally the "times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24) will be fulfilled. Finally Islam (and other false religions) will no longer tread down the Holy City. "Then you will know that I am YHWH your God, dwelling in Zion my holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, and foreigners will never again invade her." (Joel 3:17)

That will happen. Scripture foretells it, and I believe it. "Thus all Israel will be saved." (Rom 11:26) But it won't happen today, or tomorrow. Several things have to happen first, not the least of which is a general recognition among Israelis that it was their forsaking of YHWH's covenant that caused the dispersion, and it will be their renewed commitment to His covenant that will restore them.

After that, the secularism, materialism, humanism, and atheism so prominent in Israel today will give way to a spiritual revival. Only then will YHWH cause even their enemies to be at peace with them. (Prov 16:7)

I'll use Ezekiel 35 and 36 to close this section. As you read, remember that "the Mountains of Israel" are Judea and Samaria (now misnamed the 'West Bank') and "Mount Seir" and "Edom" are in modern Jordan.

YHWH is speaking to Ezekiel. "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir. Prophecy against it, and say to it, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH. "Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. I will lay waste your cities, and you will become a desolation. *Then you will know that I am YHWH.* Because you have had everlasting enmity [ancient hatred, anti-semitism], and have delivered the sons of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity [the dispersion], at the time of the punishment of the end, therefore, as I live," declares the Lord YHWH, "I will give you over to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you. Since you have not hated bloodshed, therefore bloodshed will pursue you. And I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation, and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and returns. And I will fill its mountains with the slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain by the sword will fall. Thus I will make you an everlasting desolation, and your cities will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am YHWH. Because you said, 'These two nations [Judea and Samaria] will be mine. We will possess them,' although YHWH was there... As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it had become desolate, so I will do to you. Therefore you will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all of Edom, all of it. *Then they will know that I am YHWH.*"

"Son of man, prophecy to the Mountains of Israel [Judea and Samaria] and say, 'O Mountains of Israel, hear the word of YHWH. Thus says the Lord YHWH, "Because your enemy has spoken against you, crying, 'Aha! The

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everlasting heights [Judea and Samaria] have become our possession.' . . . therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel. Say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH, "Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations. Therefore . . . I have sworn that surely the nations which are around you will themselves endure their insults.

"But you O Mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come. For behold, I am with you. I will turn to you, and you shall be cultivated and sown. I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt. I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful. I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly, and will treat you better than at the first. Then you will know that I am YHWH. Yes, I will cause men – My people Israel – to walk on you and possess you, so that you will become their inheritance and never again bereave them of children . . . And I will not let you hear the insults from the nations any more, nor will you bear disgrace from the peoples any longer," declares the Lord YHWH."

"Then the word of YHWH came to me saying, "Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds . . . Therefore, I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. Also I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them. 'These are YHWH's people; yet they have been evicted from His land.' *But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am YHWH,"* declares the Lord YHWH, "When I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you to your own land.

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people and I will be your God.""

In 1926 the *Jewish Chronicle* published a lengthy article by Rabbi Isaac Herzog entitled, *Man's Smallness and Greatness*. It epitomizes the Jewish perspective of the Feast of Tabernacles (**Sukkot**) including Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur (the Day of Judgment/Atonement). It is too long to quote, so I will try to condense and paraphrase it here.

Rosh haShanah (Head of the Year) is the day when the Shofar awakens us to self-examination. We must sit and take stock of our life and conduct, for Rosh haShanah is the first of the ten Days of Repentance (Awe). Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishri, is preeminently devoted to self-scrutiny and ardent self-improvement. Then on the eve of Tishri 15, Sukkot is ushered in. Does the Festival, the Season of Our Joy, have any logical connection with Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur? The homiletic genius of our ancestors found no difficulty in forging many connections. Rabbi Isaac Arama, chief among the medieval masters of Jewish homiletics, has discovered in the Sukkah a central idea which seals to us the whole series of spiritual lessons brought home by Rosh haShanah, the ten Days of Awe, and Yom Kippur.

The Sukkah, principle feature of the Festival, points out a moral of inestimable value. Unless this is taken to heart, the effects of the New Year and Day of Atonement will prove but of transient nature. "**The Sukkah visualizes our life.**" For what is the Sukkah? It is a frail, temporary shelter intended only for seven days. Such is life. The normal span of life, the psalmist declares, is seven decades. Under favorable circumstances, we may prolong our stay in this Sukkah into the eighth day – Shemini Atzeret.

How fragile is life! It is like the Sukkah. In fine weather, in the sunshine of health and happiness, we imagine that we are under cover, perfectly sheltered. How slender is that cover! How easily we may fall prey to all manner of mishaps, of accidents and misfortunes, which may upset our frail Sukkah, or cause it to tumble down altogether. Even in the best case our Sukkah has its time limit. What a simple thought. Nothing in the world is plainer; yet how apt we are to lose sight of it and forget our inevitable end. Assuredly the man who lives, strives, and acts under the delusion that this life is a *dirat keva* – a permanent home – and not a Sukkah, will not easily submit to the notes of warning and alarm sounded by the Shofar, to number our days and so apply our hearts to wisdom, and will often cast to the winds the most vital moral standards or values.

Tell me not of the danger of frequent thoughts about death tending to paralyze effort and activity. God has seen to that. Life in its fullness and richness cannot be scared away by the prospect of death. But the very thought that our days are numbered, that we dwell in a temporary home, will exercise a chastening, a purifying influence, and will surely help us to lead a life worth living.

This is the main idea that the Sukkah suggests. Its cover reminds us of the end, of earth, of the awful fact that sooner or later we shall return to the dust. For the *schach* (cover of the Sukkah) must be directly from the earth. But the lesson does not end here. There is another provision limiting the choice of the *schach*. The law lays down that it must be of such material as will not contract *tuma'h* (pollution, uncleanness in a Levitical or sacred sense).

The brooding over death could beget contrary effects. It may give rise to an epicurean attitude of mind flouting all ethical standards and restraints, setting up base pleasures and the satisfaction of sensuous cravings as the principle aim in life. But the Sukkah as an image of life is meant to elevate, to ennoble, to purify. Lying in a Sukkah one looks up, not down into the dirt beneath. *The schach must not be capable of becoming polluted.*

This slender cover reminds us, the moment we look up, that for all practical purposes we live under heaven's canopy. *The schach should not be laid on too thickly.* The stars should be visible through the cover of the Sukkah. When we lift up our eyes, we are reminded of the heavens, suggesting to us the divine, the sublime, the infinite, the eternal. It points us toward the ideal.

The Sukkah calls attention to our dual nature. *Man is at once great and small.* Viewed from our physical aspect, how small is he! His home of brick and mortar, the stones in the street upon which he tramples, will far outlast him. Yet this tiny mite we call man, whom a chill or a pinprick can demolish and reduce to dust, even as a fresh breeze can blow down our frail Sukkah, has evolved a civilization wonderfully rich and complex, has forced nature to yield up so many of her secrets, has delved into the mysteries of the universe, has produced inventions which seem to rival the works of nature herself. He sweeps the oceans, rules the hills, commands the winds, soars to the clouds, and fathoms the deeps.

This puny creature when he rises heavenward cannot but realize his own greatness. He alone in the world can examine and contemplate the marvelous works of the Supreme Architect and Artist. His small brain measures the terrific dimensions of the countless worlds racing through space, and determines the eternal laws by which they revolve. His little heart yearns and aspires after God, the everlasting source of all existence. *Therefore he knows that his little Sukkah cannot be his all in all, his beginning and his final end.*

But while mankind discerns his greatness through his intellect by which he scales the heavens, he dare not grow arrogant and presume divine ability to see everything at a glance. He must not imagine that while he is encased here in his earthly shell, in his Sukkah, he can obtain a complete view of reality and can understand it all. *The schach must also be sufficiently compact to make the shade predominate over the light.*

He must realize that while on earth he is precluded from attaining to a clear, complete view of the mysteries of creation and of the ways of God. He can only catch a glimpse here and a glimpse there.

The Sukkah, moreover, must not be too high. Man dare not think himself so great that he can solve the riddle of the universe solely by the light of his own sense-perceptions. Yet on the other hand, *the Sukkah must not be too low.* Man must not think himself too small and thus fall into the error of agnosticism, thinking that the greatness of the creation in comparison with his own insignificance precludes his establishing a sympathetic love relationship with the almighty Creator.

"You are not God, yet you are not insignificant!" the Sukkah admonishes us. Even in this Sukkah of yours, even in your mortal frame, you are of great importance. You are at once small, and great. And it is under the sense of this dual nature, of your smallness and greatness at the same time, that you must regulate your life and conduct.

The Festival of Sukkot culminates in the feast of Shemini Atzeret (the 8th day, ending Tabernacles), in which you leave your Sukkah for a permanent dwelling. Your temporary Sukkah is not your whole career. *There is a magnificent feast yet to come.* It is symbolized by only one day. No number of days could adequately represent it, for it is endless. One day is sufficient to symbolize this grand vision of heavenly glories.

During your stay in the Sukkah, what shall be your outlook upon life? Shall it be so morose, so somber as to incline you toward pessimism? No! For the command is, *"You shall rejoice!"* Sukkot is the Season of our Joy. There is one central, master-thought that will make your view of life with all its trials and sufferings, life with its melancholy end, in a cheerful mood: *the conviction that you are living and moving in the presence of God,* who is the author and disposer of your life and destiny. He it is who has built your Sukkah for you, and He has promised, "I will make My Sukkah (dwelling) among you, and My soul will not abhor you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people." (Lev 26:11-12) He who gave you this promise is the absolute good. Life, therefore, cannot be a tragedy as pessimism would have us think.

There are some schools of thought which, taking a starting point from life's Sukkah-like character, and fixing their gaze upon Shemini Atzeret, upon the 'Spiritual Beyond', come to regard this world as a valley of tears and our earthly existence as the soul's prison. But this, too, is foreign to the genius of Judaism. The religion of Israel is essentially a *Torat Chayim* (Law of Life). It vibrates with the joy of existence. It throbs and pulsates with life. While fully awake to the frail, fleeting nature of our Sukkah, we are to feel happy all the while, for we are passing our seven days in the presence of God. "You shall rejoice before the Eternal your God seven days." (Lev 22:40)

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES – THE VISION

What is the outcome of full atonement? Peace? Joy? Loving one another? Unity of Spirit? A celebration? Rest (inward and outward)? Yes, yes, all of those, but again, let's look at it from God's perspective. What does He desire out of all this?

God's love for us is so great that He actually yearns with an earnest longing to come to us and dwell with us. In fact, the word 'tabernacle' in its root simply means a dwelling place. The verb form of this word is used in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt ['tabernacled'] among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

He has always wanted to do that. He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden. He told the Children of Israel to "... construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them." (Ex 25:8) And He promised that when they built it, "I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory... And I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am YHWH their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, so that I might dwell among them; I am YHWH their God." (Ex 29:43-46) "In My Father's temple are many dwelling places... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, *and We will come to him and make Our abode [dwelling place] with him.*" (Jn 14:2, 23) He wants to dwell with us not because we are so good, so handsome, so witty, or so much fun. No, He wants to dwell with us just because He loves us.

So is it any wonder that the Feast of Tabernacles comes right after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement? God is holy beyond our comprehension and cannot dwell with sin. Only when our sin is atoned for can He come to us and dwell with us. Therefore, just as the Day of Atonement symbolizes Judgment Day, when the saints are finally fully separated from their inherited sin-nature and given their redeemed physical bodies, so the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the millennial Rest when Satan will be bound and King Jesus will dwell with/in His Bride at Jerusalem, reigning through her with a rod of iron over all the earth for a thousand years. (See Rev 20:1-7.)

After that, at the end of the Millennium, comes another fulfillment, this time the final fulfillment. The final Day of Atonement is at the Great White Throne judgment, when everyone who ever lived is resurrected to stand before Yashua's judgment seat and the saints are separated from the wicked as sheep from goats. All sin is then conclusively purged from the universe and not only the wicked but even death and hell itself are thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:11-15) The heavens and earth are burned with fire, and thoroughly purified. (2 Pet 3:10-13) Then comes that final Feast of Tabernacles, that awesome 'age of the ages', the final ages mentioned in Scriptures, as described in Revelation 21 and 22. Allow me to quote some excerpts:

"I saw a new [renewed] heaven and a new [renewed] earth, for the first... passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, '**Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His peoples. God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, crying, or pain; the first things have passed away... I make all things new...**'"

"And He said to me, 'It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the Water of Life without cost. *He who overcomes shall inherit all things*, and I will be His God and he will be My son...' 'Come here, I shall show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations [Gentiles] shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it... He showed me the river of the Water of Life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of the street. And on either side of the river was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations [Gentiles]. And there shall no longer be any curse... and there shall no longer be any night; they shall not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever [to the ages of ages]."

What an inspiring passage! Just reading it helps to reset our priorities as to what is worth living or dying for. But let's put aside our traditions and prejudices and really look at what it says. I see a lot of things here that conflict with the old Roman Catholic view of heaven.

First, the renewed heavens and earth (21:1) are not metaphors for God's dwelling place in eternity. They are physical. Second, God dwells among us, we don't go 'up to heaven' somewhere to dwell with Him. Third, the nations (Gentiles) are still around, and they will need healing. Fourth, the curse of sin is broken. Fifth, there are still tears, but God shall wipe them all away; there are still thirsty people, but God will give them to drink freely of the Water of Life from His throne, and He will abolish death, pain, and crying. Sixth, this renewed earth has the Tree of Life, as in the Garden of Eden, and we will eat its fruit instead of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And seventh, a temple is there, but it is not a building, it is a Person: God Himself, as Jesus Christ the Lamb.

Many have tried to spiritualize this all away, but it doesn't wash. God's heaven, His dwelling place in eternity, doesn't need renewing. This is speaking of our heavens and earth, our universe. In this context, the 'heavens' are simply our own atmosphere (called 'mid-heaven' in Rev 19:17). "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since our fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.' When they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the Word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. *But the present heavens and earth by His Word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men...* But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens [our atmosphere] will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and all its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat. *But according to His promise we are looking for a new [renewed] heavens and a new [renewed] earth, in which righteousness dwells.*" (2 Pet 3:3-13)

The heavens and the earth were destroyed once by water, at the time of the Flood. Noah inherited a new (renewed) heavens and earth. They are now reserved for destruction in the same way (according to Jesus – Matt 24:37), except this time it will be by fire instead of water. So *what will the saints and martyrs inherit after the earth and all its works are burned up?* "The righteous will inherit the land, and dwell in it forever." (Ps 37:29) This is consistent throughout the Scriptures, which clearly imply a cleansed and restored physical Earth.

You see, the old Roman Catholic concept of heaven, which includes us dying and going up to heaven to lounge on a cloud, play a harp, and sing praises forever before the Father's throne in His eternity, don't fit here.

I do believe that there will be an end to time: "Then the end, when He [Yashua] delivers up the Kingdom to God the Father, *when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power...* when all things are subjected to Him, then the [many-membered] Son Himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor 15:24-28) At that point, time will have accomplished its purpose; we all will fully enter eternity. There will be no more rule, authority, or power – no more Kingdom. The Kingdom of YHWH and of His Christ shall only last forever and ever throughout time, but when we fully enter into God's eternity there can be no Kingdom and no ruling over anything, for God will be all in all.

But that does not happen at the end of this age. God gave Adam and Eve a world *and a mandate to rule it*, and they flubbed it. But almighty God does not fail in His plans and purposes! The present destruction by fire will only purify and cleanse the earth so that God can restore it to how it was in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. He will bind Satan, and will restore our bodies to the pre-sin state. Then we, the Second Adam, God's chosen family of Israel, in renewed physical bodies on a renewed physical earth, will have another go at it.

Scripture makes it clear that where Adam and Eve failed, we will succeed, by the power of Jesus Christ ruling in and through us. "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." (Rev 20:6)

Why am I making such a big deal of this? It is the 'pigeon hole' principle. Dealing with incoming mail can be such a chore; some of us would rather categorize it and stick it into various 'pigeon holes' to deal with it later, or never. It is the same with various themes in Scripture – it is difficult, so we'd rather 'pigeon hole' it and deal with it 'later'. We have all our pigeon holes carefully labeled: the end times, rapture, heaven, hell, eternity, and so on. But they are each just an excuse not to deal with an important biblical topic in the present. Few topics in Scripture are more important than the end times, the rapture, heaven, hell, and eternity. Those subjects are vast, exhausting, and difficult to deal with in the present. It is easier to pigeon hole them to deal with them 'later'.

That reminds me of the classic tale of the American evangelist in Russia, preaching the gospel on a cold winter night to a small group of starving peasants. When no one responded to the altar call, he asked why. One old Russian babushka responded, "You promise only pie in the sky by and by. I want some on my plate right now!"

I'm not saying this stuff is not still in the future. I am saying that the future may be much closer than any of us thinks, and we need to deal with it now if we are going to be ready for it when it comes. I do not view the Word of God as a book of symbols, fables, moral parables, and witty proverbs. I view it as in fact the infallible, inerrant Word of almighty God Himself, word-for-word inspired down to the very 'jot and tittle' of the original languages. It is the 'owner's manual' for this 'human bean' and if I want to know how I work, what I am good for, how to spruce me up and keep me going, what I am destined to become, and what I should do about it today, I had better read the owner's manual, appraise myself as my Maker views me, and discover what His loving intentions are for me.

The Feasts of Israel – especially Tabernacles – is a beautiful picture story of what the Father's kind intentions are for us in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:9) – to reconcile all things to Himself. (2 Cor 5:19; Col 1:20)

Yes, at the rapture, at the last trumpet, "... the Mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets." (Rev 10:7) But we are not there yet. Allow me to paraphrase Ephesians 1:8 - 14. "In all wisdom and insight God already made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His own kindness which He has determined to pour out on us who are in Christ; that is, His Kingdom administration! Ultimately all things in heaven and earth will be summed up in unity in Christ. In Him we were made to be an inheritance! We who were the first to hope in Christ are sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, and are given a special purpose: *to bring great praise to His glory*. In Christ we not only receive our own inheritance, *but also we are predestined to obtain for Him His inheritance, the redemption of God's own precious possession.*"

Most versions translate verse 11 "In Him we have obtained an inheritance." But the margin of my NASB gives the alternate, "In Him we were made a heritage." My paraphrase is an attempt to take the focus off of us and what we get, and put it on God and what He gets out of all this. Look beyond our inheritance: "... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints..." (v18) He gets something, too: us! We are His inheritance. The following chapters clearly affirm that in the ages to come He plans to use us, the saints, to "... show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (2:7) and "... to preach among the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church [the saints] to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies." (3:8-10) He gets us, and we get to take a role in helping Him obtain His inheritance! "Blessed is the nation whose God is YHWH, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance!" (Ps 33:12)

There is an unusual promise in Scripture that most of us have never seen before. "For I will drive out the nations [Gentiles, pagans] before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land – when you go up three times a year to appear before YHWH your God [at the Feasts of Israel]." (Ex 34:24) This is an incredible promise, which those of us who minister in the church should take to heart.

We are so concerned about our church building, our church membership, church growth, our denomination, our creeds and doctrines, our property, guarding our little flock against pagan influences, and so on. But this passage implies that if we would just leave it all behind and "go up three times a year to celebrate the Feasts before YHWH," He would take over that task. He promises to guard our land so no one will want to take it, enlarge our borders, and drive out the pagans before us. What a beautiful vision!

All the Feasts of Israel (especially Tabernacles) are a beautiful picture of the **unity of the saints**. At Tabernacles not only did they all assemble at Jerusalem, but even those who lived in the city left their nice homes and gathered with the rest in little temporary 'tabernacles' (booths, huts, dwellings). The rich, poor, elite, commoner, male, female, young and old alike shared in the simplest manner of living, all crowded together in the city streets and the surrounding hills. There were no mansions with lavish banquets contrasted with the beggars in rags at their gates. There was simply a common sharing and rejoicing around a common faith.

But is this unity of the faith even possible? It is more than possible; it is certain! Yashua Himself prayed for it. (John 17) God even tells us the means He uses to achieve unity: it is what we call the ministry gifts. "He gave some [to be] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the **unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:10-13) He will do it. The only question remaining is, will we be among those who gather before Him three times a year to celebrate the Feasts, with open hearts to receive His ministry gifts as He fulfills His promises to His church? Or will we despise His Feasts, despise His ministry gifts, despise His promises, try to do it by ourselves in our own way, and get left behind?

Once again, I am treading on dangerous ground. This is another one of those subjects that you can get yourself thrown out of a church for nothing more than reading the wrong Scripture verse! Each church organization must, out of necessity, develop a careful strategy to prevent the abuse of the gifts of the Spirit. Too many churches, like the one at Corinth, have been torn apart by the powers of the spirit realm unleashed within immature, self-centered, arrogant believers. The apostle Paul addresses this in his first letter to the Corinthians. He acknowledges that "you are not lacking in any gift..." (1:7) But then he turns right around and exhorts them, "... that you all agree [speak the same thing], and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete [united] in the same mind and the same judgment." (v 10)

Why did he have to exhort them to be in unity? Because the very means that God has given to unify the church was being abused by those who were "men of flesh [carnal, worldly, double minded] ... babes in Christ... there is jealousy and strife among you..." (3:1-3) "... you have become arrogant..." (5:2) "... divisions [schisms] exist among you..." (11:18) In short, the Corinthian church, though full of the gifts of the Spirit, was a basket case of carnality and strife. They were using the ministry gifts in pride to advance their own agendas. They had forgotten whose church it is, and were trying to take over!

One common solution to this is for a church to have a strong pastor / teacher who runs everything, and to deny that apostles, prophets, and evangelists even exist anymore in the church – oh, possibly in the deepest jungles of Africa, but not in the civilized American church! For this scheme to work, all the other gifts of the Spirit as discussed in chapters 12 and 14 must also be denied or at least squelched. The result is quite predictable. The pastor who is leading gets very good at what he does – after all, he is exercising his ministry gifts. And the people become pew potatoes. The order of ‘worship’ changes from the Hebrew pattern in which a leader gives everyone a chance to freely respond, to a Greek or Roman pattern, in which the leader leads and the rest passively follow.

With this solution, there is indeed a form of unity within the local church – the pastor makes sure there is no division in the church by controlling everything that goes on. But the unity of the saints as pictured in the Feast of Tabernacles is impossible. Each local church becomes molded after the gifts and abilities of its pastor, and since each pastor has different gifts and abilities, there is bound to be as many different sects, denominations, and creeds as there are pastors following this solution to unity.

Many local churches have seen the fallacy of this false unity and are working to encourage more participation of all believers in the church according to their individual gifts and abilities. This is a good start! I would like to encourage it along, by presenting my own interpretation (paraphrase) of the famous (in some churches infamous) First Corinthians chapters 12 and 14.

“Now concerning the ‘spirituals’, brethren, it is exceedingly important that you not be ignorant. When you were pagans, it was easy for you to be led astray. *But not so when you are led by the Spirit.* Simply discern whether someone is bringing honor or dishonor to the name of Jesus, and you will know whether he is being led by the Holy Spirit or not. For though there are a variety of gifts, it is all by the same Spirit; a variety of ministries, but the same Lord; and a variety of motivations, but the same God who works in every believer. He gives some form of spiritual manifestation to each believer for the common good. Whether a special word of wisdom or knowledge, a special gift of faith, the gift of healing or working miracles, the gift of prophecy, discerning of spirits, or the speaking or interpretation of other languages – this delightful variety of gifts all flow from one and the same Spirit, who distributes these gifts through each believer individually as He desires. *His purpose is the unity of Christ’s body!* For we are all members of the same body, whether Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free – whatever our race or status, we are all created to drink deeply of the same Spirit. Just as a physical body has many members, each important to the overall functioning of the body, so is the body of Christ, in which God has placed each member just as He desired, for the common good.

“The weaker members are necessary, and in fact the members hidden away in secret often turn out to be even more important than the more-visible members. *God does this so that there will be no division in the body of Christ,* but rather so that each member will learn to appreciate and care for every other member, regardless of which gifts they have and which they lack. Just as in the physical body, if one member suffers, the whole body suffers. And if one rejoices, all rejoice with it.

“Now, you, the church, are Christ’s body; each of you is a member of it. *To ensure this unity of which I speak,* God has appointed the ministry gifts in the church; first in importance: apostles; second: prophets; third: evangelists; fourth: pastor / teachers; fifth, the rest of the ministries, which include those who work miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, and language workers. God deliberately divides up these gifts among you so that you will see your need for each other. No one local church can be made up of all apostles, all prophets, all pastors, or all healers! Neither can any individual have all the gifts at one time (for that would lead to pride). It is good that you Corinthians are desiring the greater gifts; but your definition of ‘greater’ tends to be the gifts that are showier! *There is a better way: desire instead the gifts that show the most love for each other!*

(Here I skip to chapter 14.) “For example, a gift like speaking another language is flashy, fun, exciting – a real spiritual thrill! I’ve done it myself. But it is not really very edifying to those who don’t understand that particular language. But a gift like prophesying the Word of the Lord – pouring out the heart of God, the infinite love of God, for His people; consoling them, exhorting them – *now that is really edifying!* That is the sort of gift that you ought to be pursuing. Yes, do be zealous for the spiritual gifts. *But even more, seek to excel in edifying the church.*

“It is good to be ignorant children in regard to evil, but in your thinking be mature, discerning adults. If you all pursue a showier gift like babbling in an unknown tongue, visitors in the church will think you mad! But when you pursue a more important gift like prophesying the Word of the Lord in love, an unbelieving visitor will be convicted and called to account. Then the secrets of his heart will be disclosed so he will fall on his face in worship, declaring that surely God dwells among you!

“So, here is the bottom line. When you assemble for worship, don’t come empty. Let each one come with whatever the Holy Spirit has gifted him for the edification of all. One may come with a psalm, another a teaching, another a revelation, prophecy, or exhortation, another a tongue or an interpretation – God works differently in each person. It will encourage others to hear what God is doing in you.

“Just make sure it is all done for edification, and not for personal glory. Give each person in turn a chance to share what he has brought, *and let all the others discern to be sure it is bringing honor, not dishonor, to the name of Jesus.*

“When one is speaking, let the others keep silent and listen, for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace. Do desire the best gifts, such as the gift of prophecy, but do not forbid the lesser gifts, such as speaking in foreign tongues. So let each of these gifts of the Spirit be exercised in an appropriate and orderly manner, so that the church will grow in maturity and unity of the faith.” (1 Cor 12 & 14, expanded and paraphrased)

I believe that each believer has at least one of the gifts of the Spirit, and as he exercises that gift he will probably find other supporting gifts as the needs arise. I also believe that God places each member into a local church body in such a way that all of the gifts and ministries that are necessary are actually available as the needs arise. It is His church, and He is very capable of providing for all her needs!

But I see at least two reasons why a church may not actually experience the full power and glory of the church triumphant, as described in the book of Acts. First, the believers themselves are not seeking for the continual filling of the Holy Spirit and for the gifts of the Spirit, especially the best gifts such as the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching ministries. The clear implication of the above passage is that though God does sovereignly grant gifts as He desires, yet we also ought to pursue the best gifts. If God gave me a great gift, but I never pursued it, never even tried to exercise it, it would be a waste! I believe that many pew potatoes in the modern American church have great gifts of the Spirit and don't even realize it, because they never attempt to put them to use. Why? Fear of being 'used'? Fear of failure? Fear of what others may think? Fear of being expelled from church? If all these fears are replaced by the holy fear of YHWH, the gifts of the Spirit would flourish.

But there is a second reason why the true gifts of the Spirit are not reaching their full potential in the American church today. Besides that common fear of believers to exercise their gifts, there is a fear on the part of the leaders of the church to encourage or even allow any expression of the gifts of the Spirit within 'their' church. This is quite understandable. The Hebrew method of leading a worship service, when any male was permitted to stand up in the synagogue and teach (as in the days of Jesus and Paul the apostle), has been all but lost in the modern church. Nowadays a worship service must be led by paid professionals, the 'clergy', who have exercised their gifts and are very good at what they do. Us 'lay' folk just can't compete. Besides, if the leaders were to allow any believer to lead out as the Spirit moved them, why, they might lose control, and who knows what would happen? There have been too many times in the past, ever since the Corinthian church, when churches have been torn apart by the abuse of the gifts of the Spirit. Modern shepherds of the flock can't be too careful in this. Thus the priest-hood of every believer is forgotten, and we revert back to the old Roman Catholic patterns from the Dark Ages.

But hey! I'm a Protestant and I protest! I don't want some pope or Catholic priest to go to God for me and then return to feed me the left-over crumbs. I believe that their ancient traditional hierarchical religious structure is straight from the devil, and is intentionally designed to keep 'their' people from experiencing God and walking by the power of the Holy Spirit for themselves. My Bible insists that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5), not ten levels of priests, bishops, cardinals, popes, saints, and the 'holy virgin'!

[Although I rightly condemn the Roman Catholic hierarchy where it fails to line up with Scripture, I must be careful not to judge Roman Catholics themselves. God has His precious ones there, too. There are many true and faithful believers who are still bound within the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The Holy Spirit is able to set them free, and I believe He will. God alone knows their hearts.]

In our church we have had a good start away from that. We have recently had 'revival' services, at which we all were encouraged to wait on God, to hear and know His voice for ourselves, and to be quick to obey Him when we do. We've tried sharing times, when we are encouraged to share publicly what the Lord is doing in and through us. We have public prayer, where everyone is encouraged to pray as the Spirit leads, and a little silence waiting on God is OK! We are still a little hesitant about it, because it is all new and strange, and we are still a little fearful. So I want to encourage us all: just do it! Be bold! It is the scriptural pattern; it is right; and it is necessary for a Holy-Spirit-led church. Sure there will be some awkward stumbling around and even falling on our faces at first. Most of us have gifts of the Spirit that we've never tried to exercise; perhaps some gifts that we've had for years and don't even know about. We can expect to be a bit flabby and out of shape. Remember, any good exercise program starts with the determination to just do it, unfit though we may be.

But there is a caution here. It takes a lot of discernment to be sure that everything is done according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore honoring to the name of Jesus. It is too easy for that familiar spirit of pride, greed, lust, ambition or whatever to slip in and lead us astray. Even though we reckon it dead, that carnal nature will be with us until the Last Trump. That is why the apostle Paul exhorts us to, "Let 2 or 3 prophets speak and let the others pass judgment" (i.e. give their discernment—1 Cor 14:29). In fact, he makes it clear that this lack of discernment is the "reason many are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged [discerned] ourselves rightly, we would not be judged." (1 Cor 11:30-31) This passage is usually applied only individually, but I believe it applies just as well to the whole local church. Speaking of the Lord's Supper, "... he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself, *not discerning the [many-membered] body of the Lord.*" (v 29) We really should be more discerning of the Lord's body and of our place in it.

By using the word ‘discern’ I have made a distinction between judging one another by some human standard, which Jesus says is wrong (Matt 7:1), and being discerning with one another by the Spirit, which is essential for the health of the church. The kind of ‘judging’ Jesus condemns is comparing ourselves with each other, in pride putting people down, or in false humility putting ourselves down. Both are wrong because men can judge only according to the outward appearance. God alone can judge the heart.

But another kind of ‘judging’ (I call it discerning) is scriptural, and even essential. God has a holy, righteous standard defined in His Word. The true saint is learning to know and love that standard, and everything he says or does or even thinks ought to be based on that standard. This includes where he goes, how he reacts, how he votes, and especially his relationships – the people he associates with. “... I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge [discern] those who are within the church? But those outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.” (1 Cor 5:11) Does this mean to physically bar such a person from the congregation? Maybe not. But it certainly means that he should not get a platform during the worship service to voice his immorality, covetousness, or idolatry!

If each of us is correctly “discerning the body of the Lord,” there should be total freedom for any member to speak out or lead however the Lord is leading him or her, yet still a polite discerning of the ungodliness in our midst, and a refusal to give a platform for things that do not bring honor to the name of Yashua. This is the responsibility of us all, not just of the leaders and elders among us (though they do bear the primary burden of it).

This brings up another controversial subject: what about women of the church leading out? The apostle Paul says, “Let your women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is a shame for a woman to speak in church.” (1 Cor 14:34-35) While I do believe that all Scripture is word-for-word inspired by God, and that this passage clearly teaches that church leaders, pastors, and elders should be male, I also believe that this passage has much more to teach us than that. I will deal with it more in the next section. For now, let’s just say that I believe it is speaking to all of us, whatever gender, as we are actually all female as members of the Bride of Christ. *We all ought to keep silent in church, and learn from our husband, Yashua, at ‘home’, which is where He dwells in our heart.* Then when He wants to speak out through us, we will be in tune enough with Him to voice what He is saying through us, whether we happen to be of male or female gender, for He within us is the Man!

PURPOSE OF THE FEASTS – TO PREPARE US FOR THE WEDDING?

From this point on we are in for a bit of a wild ride, so please fasten your seat belts and put your tray tables in their upright, locked positions. Who meets with whom at the Feasts? “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord YHWH.” (Ex 23:17) All the males, the sons of God, meet with YHWH. But doesn’t that imply reciprocal action, that YHWH will come down to meet with the sons of God as they assemble in obedience to His command? Who are these sons of God, anyway? Could they be the Bride, the future wife of the Lamb? (Rev 19:7) Could the Feasts of Israel be the times which the Lamb has established to ‘date’ His future Bride? When was the last time you got stood up on a date? Do you think YHWH would like it if He made a date with His fiancé and she never showed up? Are we that fiancé? Have we been ‘standing Him up’ on the dates He made?

These are not trivial questions, and I am not making light of The Holy. I believe exactly that. We saints (male and female) are adopted into ‘sonship’ by the heavenly Father. Jesus is not ashamed to call us His own brothers. (Heb 2:11) Our sonship now is as Jesus was; we are being conformed to His image that He might be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:20) for a purpose: that we might rule with Him, in Him, and through Him over His creation, for at least a thousand years. (Rev 20:6) Ruling is a male trait and that is how the rest of the world will see us.

But our relationship to Him is very different from our relationship with Him before the world. We will never rule Him. He is Lord! Before His Lordship we take a female support relationship: quiet, obedient, and submissive, learning respectfully from our Husband at home, (Eph 5:22-24; 1 Cor 14:34-35) This is why we are called the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. (Rev 19:7; 21:2 & 9)

But we are not yet the Bride! We like to call ourselves that, in anticipation of the great wedding feast to come. But as yet we are still in the courtship stage, the ‘betrothal’ stage. This is a little tough for us Westerners to understand, because we tend to turn our children loose to play the dating game even from before puberty, and it often results in a horrible mess of broken hearts, emotional scars, and moral perversions. So let’s tell the story from the eastern perspective, which I believe is a lot closer to God’s perspective and His design for us.

Come here, Yoseph. Sit up on my knee and look at me. I have something very important to tell you. You are ten years old. A few more years and you will be a man. You must begin to prepare now. When you are ready to take your wife you must be able to protect and care for her and for the babies that you will have. You must develop your strengths and your talents, and you must keep yourself pure and free from sin, as any impurity could bring terrible disgrace upon yourself, your family, and your wife.

But Daddy, who is my wife? I don't have a wife.

Yes, my son, you do. I have kept it a secret from you since she was born, because you were not ready to understand. But now that you are almost a man, I tell you. Do you remember our visits to Heli and Rachael? And do you remember their little baby, Mariam? You played with her, and you got to hold her and help feed her, and last time we were there you held her hand as she was learning to walk.

Yes, Daddy... but Mariam is just a baby!

Heli and I have already agreed in covenant to betroth you to her. Babies grow up fast, and in about fifteen years she will be the loveliest flower in all the land. I figure it will take about that long for you to prepare yourself for her. There is much to do before I will allow you to court her. You must learn to know and understand Torah so you can lead her in worship. You must learn to work hard so you can support her. You must develop wisdom and godly character so you can protect her. You must learn...

Daddy, what is "court her?"

Why, Yoseph... uh, to "court her" is to win her heart. She is yours by covenant, but she does not really know you, and she does not love you. She only loves herself and her parents. Even though Heli and Rachael will try to teach her, she might just grow up to be a spoiled, selfish, angry brat who could never make you happy as your wife, unless you listen to me carefully and do just as I say.

Oh! Yes, Daddy, I will listen and obey.

Good. Always remember that a girl must be led, never pushed; they might push right back! You lead her by being strong and wise and good, knowledgeable in the Torah and skilled in your trade. You lead her by being morally upright, wholehearted, and single-minded toward her. When she is grown her father will tell her about you and about our covenant. Then she will look you over and ask herself these five questions: Is he good? Is he strong? Is he wise? Does he know and love Torah? Will he be able to take care of me and all the babies I hope to have? So tell me, how will she answer herself, Yoseph?

Uh... I don't know, Daddy. How could I know?

She will answer herself, "Yes!" And she will love you, and will gladly take you as her husband, and will support you and give you great joy all the days of her life. And she will never be selfish or spoiled or angry with you, because her love for you will be so great. Do you know how I know all this?

You, ahh... you must be a prophet!

This has nothing to do with prophecy; it has to do with principle. She may be a baby now, but she's no dummy! Did you see how she smiled at you and reached out to you when you played with her and helped her walk? You were just being good to her; kind, caring, helpful, and strong.

She will love you because she will see what you are really like, and by then you will be the very best man in the world for her. I will work with you as long as it takes, ten years, fifteen years, twenty years if that is what it takes, for you to be ready for her. Now, are you ready to begin our lessons?

Yes, Daddy! And thank you for wanting my best!

You're welcome, my son. That is lesson number **one**. Instant, joyful, and grateful obedience to me. You have YHWH's faithful promise that as long as you always honor and obey me, He makes things to go well for you and gives you a long and prosperous life on His earth. If you can always be that way, our lessons will be greatly shortened.

Now here is lesson number **two**, and it is one you must not forget, even for a moment. *You are not ready for her yet.* You will never be able to tell when you are ready, because you can see yourself only with eyes of pride. Only your father can tell you when you are ready. If you try to court her – if you try to win her heart – before you are ready, you will spoil everything, because she will look at you and answer "no" to some of those five questions and will not love you with her whole heart. Then even if you win her, you will not want her, because she will not commit herself to support you and make you happy. You must wait, and trust me to tell you when it is time to go and win her whole heart. Will you trust me to know the right time?

Yes, Daddy, I sure will! That would be awful if I only won half her heart – and someone else won the other half! Please remind me of this lesson often.

I sure will, my son; all of your lessons will be repeated again and again. You will remember them forever, and someday you will teach them to your sons as my father taught me and as his father taught him.

Now for lesson number **three**. YHWH made girls very different from boys. You are made to lead, to protect, to guide, to know and understand, and to teach. God gave you an ability to see from a wide view, consider all possible results, and make wise decisions. Mariam is not made that way. She is made to support you, to offer her perspective but follow your leadership, to help you, to give you joy and happiness, to care for you, and to bear and care for your babies. If you do not learn to be what YHWH made you to be for her, she will not be able to be what YHWH made her to be to you. *Your responsibility to her always comes first.* Always thank YHWH that you were not born a woman, but never blame her for any fault she may have. You must be the leader! If she has any faults, it is only because you have not yet become to her the leader YHWH created you to be. That is why you must work hard at your lessons, my son. Only when you are the very best husband you can be to her, will she be the very best wife a man could ever have.

Wow... my wife?! Oh, Daddy! I know I am not ready. Thank you for teaching me! Please help me to get all ready, so my wife will be perfect toward me.

Yes, my son. That brings us to lesson number **four**. I will teach you all that I can, as best as I can, but I am not perfect and I do not know everything either. If you only learn from me, you cannot have a perfect wife. You must go to YHWH Himself, study His holy Word, love Him with your whole heart, and learn from Him just like a wife must learn from her husband. YHWH is perfect. As you learn to know Him, to understand His wisdom and His ways, and to keep His commandments, then you will become perfect like Him. Your wife will be able to be perfect toward you only as you remain perfect toward YHWH.

But Daddy, I can't be perfect. I'm no better than you, and you just told me that you're not perfect!

That is true, my son. And that is lesson number **five**. Celebrate the Feasts. There God will atone for your lack of perfection. Go up to the assemblies at Jerusalem every year. Love them, and participate wholeheartedly as we always have done. There, your mistakes and failures are washed away, your sins are cleansed by the blood of the lambs, all your imperfections are forgotten, and you are given a fresh start three times each year. I may not always be able to be with you, but YHWH will always be with you in the assemblies. Your perfection can then grow greater year by year, as you learn directly from YHWH in His Feasts. Lesson number six will be detailed instructions in how to keep the Feasts as YHWH commanded. When you start your own family, you will be responsible for always leading them according to YHWH's commandments.

Yes, Daddy! I already love the Feasts. I'll try to learn all of YHWH's commandments as fast as I can. I love Torah!

I know you do, my son. But don't be anxious. All in its proper time. Lesson number **seven** is the greatest lesson of all – that of the Sabbath Rest. Nothing else will go right for you, nothing at all, unless you keep the Sabbath and learn its meaning. YHWH created the universe and He holds it in the palm of His powerful hand. When you obey Him and enter wholeheartedly into His Sabbath Rest, waiting on Him in love and worship, when you learn from Him and delight yourself in Him to do His pleasure on His holy day, then He promises to make you ride on the heights of the earth and feed you with the heritage of your father Jacob. (Isa 58:13-14)

Thank you, Daddy. That sounds like a big, important lesson. Tell me about our father Jacob. Is that the Jacob of 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'? The Jacob we call Israel? And what is his heritage?

Right! Very good, my son. Israel is your father, many times removed. His heritage is in the covenant that God made with Abraham, and renewed with Isaac and Jacob, first to give to their descendants (that's us) the Promised Land. But even more importantly, to be our God and make us His people, and to care for us and prosper us in the land, as long as we keep His commandments.

So if we don't keep His commandments, we lose our heritage? That would be awful. Teach me how to keep them, and I promise I will never disobey.

As long as you keep such a good attitude, you could be ready to court Mariam by the time you reach 25. I'm really proud of you, Yoseph. You will be a great man someday. Thankful, respectful, eager to learn – you're showing yourself to be that wise son in Proverbs who makes a glad father! (Prov 10:1) YHWH bless you, my son!

This is obviously a fictitious and simplified story, yet there are some truths here that we need to catch. The American way of children choosing their own partners, playing the dating game, 'falling in love' (if you can call all those sensual feelings 'love'), getting married, fighting and arguing, figuring out that they don't really like each other after all, getting divorced, dating someone else, and so on, is not God's way. The American culture has a tradition of freedom, asserting our independence, submitting to no one. Women are granted equal rights and are encouraged to make their own decisions and have their own career. Children are waited on hand and foot by their parents and given freedom to do as they please (with some restrictions regarding their education) until it is time to get married, and then all of a sudden are expected to know how to put aside their play and shoulder adult responsibilities.

But to understand our relationship to Yashua in the Feasts, we need to at least understand another culture. In the ancient eastern culture women were subservient to men, were rarely educated except in domestic matters, and were never given authority outside the home. They were rarely even listened to; their opinions or feelings just didn't count. They really were second-class citizens, and were often treated no better than slaves. Women existed to give a man pleasure, to cook his meals, clean his house, tend his garden, and bear and raise his children. And if she displeased him in any way, he was free to discipline her, beat her, even throw her out on the street with nothing but a certificate of divorce! Yuk.

Jesus did a lot, probably more than anyone in history, to bring about a balance. He treated women with respect. He cared for them, helped them, healed them, provided for their needs, listened to their feelings, and showed deepest compassion for their griefs, all without taking advantage of them for His personal pleasure. He taught men to guard their eyes and not treat women as objects of lust, and to honor their marriage vows. (Matt 5:27-32) But if you will read through the Gospels, *you will never find a single hint that He intended to change the male-dominated culture!* Just the opposite: As far as we know from Scripture, everyone He placed in any leadership position was male. His twelve disciples were all male. Those women who followed Him were respected, loved, and cared for, but they were never given authority, or sent out to preach or heal or cast out demons or anything.

The book of Acts shows a dramatic improvement over the eastern culture, at least among Christians. Christian women were finally nearly equal with men in receiving the things of Spirit; they prayed along with men (1:14); they received the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost along with men (2:1); they were allowed to prophesy (2:17-18); they were clearly an accepted part of the fellowship of the believers (2:42-47); they were consulted and listened to, and their opinions were valued. (5:1-11) But again, do you notice? In every single case the leadership, the preaching, and the authority was carried by men.

Similarly in the Epistles, women are encouraged to participate, yet required to submit to the men and stay under authority (1 Cor 11:3-16), be quiet in the church but rather learn from their husbands at home (14:34 ff), and never exercise authority over the men. (1 Tim 2:12 ff) Again we learn that the male-dominated culture is the standard for the church.

Now we Americans have a tough time with this. Right now you all are probably about to stone me. Please, turn your cell phone back off and keep your seat belt fastened, our wild ride is not over yet. I am not trying to change our culture, nor would I want to go back to the old days even if I could. I truly am delighted to have my wife as my partner rather than my slave.

But we must understand the eastern male-dominated culture to understand our relationship to Yashua in the Feasts. He is the man, and we are the woman, the many-membered Bride. YHWH the Father betrothed us to Him when we were yet babies, ignorant, foolish, dependent, and totally self-centered. Wanting the best possible bride, and knowing that only He had the authority and ability to make her so, He willingly subjected Himself to His Father in all things. In so doing, He became *the most beautiful man who ever lived*, perfected in every way through the things that He suffered (Lk 2:52; Heb 2:10; 5:8-9), and ready and able to woo and win His Bride. He is now 'courting' her, giving her presents (the gifts of the Spirit), and leading her to know and love Him. Let's try to imagine the story.

"Father, O My Father! How glad I am to see You again! It is finished! I completed all You gave me, with My whole heart. I remained in total perfect obedience, honoring You in all I did. Even when they killed Me, I never opened My mouth against them. I only said what You gave Me to say."

"Yes, My Son. Welcome back! I am very pleased and proud of You. You have indeed won a mighty victory over the usurper, and have redeemed Your Bride back to You. You have earned the right to become her only Lord and Husband, having fairly defeated the only other one who held any claim on her. You now have My permission to begin courting her, and preparing her for Your wedding. But tell me, My Son, what have You learned about her? You have seen what she is like: foolish, stubborn, rebellious, ignorant, and self-centered. Do You still want her?"

"Want her?! O Father! I gave My life for her! That question was settled long ago! I have chosen to love her with My whole heart, and nothing in heaven or earth can ever change that. Sure, I see her faults – I know they are many – but Father, You've got to cut her some slack. She is still just a baby. When she grows up, she will be the most beautiful flower in the universe! I see her as the glorious Bride that she will be, and I am very, very pleased! She doesn't know Me yet. She can't see Me as I am. She is just ignorant – that is what makes her so self-centered. She knows nothing of My wisdom, power, and righteousness. Once she sees Me, understands all that I have done for her, once she gazes upon My beauty and grace and receives My gifts of love, she will change quickly, I know! She cannot help but love Me when she sees Me as I am. In her growing love she will be changed, perfected, and glorified through chastening, just as I was perfected through My suffering out of love for her."

"Yes! Just as We planned from the beginning of time. The first phase of Our plan is finished. Now You may take all the rehearsal celebrations which were pointing forward to this time, and turn them into special courting times with Your Bride, so she will come to know You and learn to love You."

"But Father, already the usurper has discovered how to pervert our courting times. He is twisting things, changing times, distorting the truth, trying to turn My Bride's heart away from Me back toward himself and his pagan rituals. Why, he has even..."

"Yes, yes, My Son. I know. It's all good. He has already been defeated, remember? Send forth Your Word, to restore the courting times the adversary perverted. It will take time (I won't tell You yet how long), and it will take some extra effort and a lot of intercession, but in the end You shall have Your Bride! And You will find her to be stronger, wiser, and more glorious because of the difficult times You had to go through while courting her. You have My blessing on Your relationship, and that is worth more than all the usurper's curses. Court her with confidence, and even when she gets the times wrong and stands You up, or mixes paganism and idolatry with her love for You, or fails to understand the significance of all You have done, I promise that in the end it will all work out for good.

"So woo her in love, with firmness and discipline; it is only as You lead her through the difficult times that she will learn to really love and trust You. Her weakness, foolishness, and wickedness will glorify Your righteousness, wisdom, and power in her eyes. She will appreciate all the more what You have done for her when she sees clearly all that You are in comparison with all that she was."

"Thank You, Father. I accept Your promise. I gladly do as You say, and rejoice in the challenge of courting her. She shall indeed be a perfect Bride at our wedding. For I will see to it!"

So, what about us? Are we willing to be courted by the perfect Husband? Are we men willing to take the female role before Him? Are we willing to go to Him, in His time and His way, be still before Him, wait on Him, bow before Him, listen to Him, learn from Him, accept His discipline and correction, serve Him, obey Him even when we don't understand? Those are second nature for the women, but it's tough for us men to keep quiet in church (1 Cor 14:34) until the Man (Jesus, by His Holy Spirit) chooses to speak through us. He is taking each of us (of either gender) as we are and changing us from glory to glory into His own image and likeness, into a Bride worthy to bear His holy name!

That is what the Feasts of Israel are all about.

If it is any consolation, guys, if we can only humble ourselves enough to make it through this 'taking the female role in subjection to Christ' time, there is another stage beyond that. It is called the ruling and reigning in Christ stage, in which we all (whether of the male or female gender) get to be male, and in which we inherit all things as joint-heirs with Christ. "For you are all *sons of God* through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Therefore, if you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's offspring [Israelites, God's chosen people] and heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:26-29; Rom 8:14-23.)

The Jewish concept of the betrothal covenant is worth investigating more deeply. It is a covenant, not a contract. It is based on the good names of the covenanters; to break it would bring great shame upon their family names. It used to be only verbal, although now there is usually a confirming contract also written up. It is considered just as binding as marriage; to break it requires a certificate of divorce. It is always arranged by the parents (primarily the fathers); the bride and groom may have a vote, but do not have the final say. It always involves a male dowry or 'mohar' paid by the groom or his father to the father of the bride, partly to compensate him for the loss of his daughter and partly to demonstrate to him that the groom's family is wealthy enough to provide for his daughter. It is usually arranged well in advance, often years before the actual wedding, but not for the purpose of getting the children together so they will 'fall in love'! Instead, the focus of the time before the wedding is on preparation for marriage. Both bride and groom are expected to prepare themselves, but especially the groom has a lot to do. The fathers do not allow the wedding until the groom has his own home, a line of work that will support them, and an adult level of maturity, and demonstrates godly character and respect for Torah and Jewish traditions. 'Love' does not have a lot to do with it, except that the bride and groom are expected to commit to love each other, whether they like each other or not! If they have properly prepared themselves, they will usually learn to like each other, eventually.

Since the groom has the major preparations to do, the bride is often left in the dark until close to the wedding. She may never see her husband or even know who he is until the day of the wedding. Her preparations are to keep morally pure, cultivate her talents, and (when told about the betrothal) to beautify herself for her husband. When the groom's father approves of all his preparations, he is permitted to 'court' his bride. He then comes to her and gives her presents. This could be on the day of the wedding or it could be as much as a year in advance. If she accepts his presents, it is like the bride accepting an engagement ring in our culture. If she does not accept his presents, he must work to convince her. He will continue courting her until she accepts. (The two families may also add a little pressure here.) The only justifiable reason for breaking a betrothal is if sexual infidelity is found in either party. This would be a monumental tragedy, bringing lasting shame on the whole family (unlike in modern America, which seems to have lost all proper sense of shame).

When the bride accepts the groom's presents, they seal their covenant with a glass of wine. Then the groom goes away to prepare for the wedding. The bride has one more preparation to make. It is called the 'mikvah', (baptism) – the traditional ceremonial bath. I assure you, this baptism is total immersion, never sprinkling or a shower. The bride then just waits. She has no more preparations except to keep herself pure, beautiful, and ready until he returns for her. She knows the wedding will be soon, but does not know the day or the hour.

When the groom's wedding preparations are complete he goes to the bride's house, is announced with a shout and/or the sounding of a shofar, and claims his bride according to their covenant. (If he has a written contract, he presents it to the bride's father.) He then takes his bride to his father's house and presents her to his father before witnesses. His father first interrogates them to be certain the preparations are complete and there is no moral impurity on either side, and then indicates his approval by taking the bride's hand and placing it in the hand of his son. This is known as the presentation; it is equivalent to the minister saying "I now pronounce you husband and wife," in our culture. All their friends and relatives have gathered to witness the presentation. They now celebrate the wedding with feasting, which may last for days.

Being ancient Hebrew tradition, this is not a perfect picture, but it is close. We, the Bride, have accepted the Groom's presents. Yashua gave us the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit as the "earnest [guarantee] of our inheritance." (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14) With the Holy Spirit He gave us the "spiritual gifts" (1 Cor 12 & 14) and gift ministries. (Eph 4:8 & 11) We have drunk the cup of wine with Him (the holy communion). We have gone through the mikvah (ceremonial cleansing immersion) of baptism. We are now purifying and beautifying ourselves for Him, and awaiting His triumphant return.

Yashua will come for us suddenly one day with a shout and a blast on the shofar (the last trumpet). He will take us to His Father's house, where our preparations and moral purity will be judged and found perfect, for we will already be cleansed by participating in the Day of Atonement in our hearts. The Father will then place our hand into the hand of Yashua, Jesus Christ our Lord, and present us before the universe as Husband and wife, with glory, authority, and power to rule with Christ over the earth for a thousand years. Our wedding feast will fulfill the Feast of Tabernacles, Tishri 15–21.

This is the rapture. It will surely come before the end of the age, but we don't know when. We don't even know which year. We know it will be soon, but due to God's method of calculating time (using sightings of the new moon) we cannot know the day. *That is intentional. God wants us to be alert and ready at all times.* The Father will not authorize Jesus' return to take His Bride until every member of the Bride has made herself ready, which for some, can only occur through great tribulation. Once we all are ready it will happen very quickly. Just as the Spring Feasts were fulfilled to the day, hour, and minute, so will the Fall Feasts, but not necessarily according to our human understanding.

Do not try to insert a seven year tribulation into the sequence between the rapture and the Wedding Feast. It just isn't there. They will happen the same month. Though the rapture must happen at the Last Trump, following the tribulation, it does not have to coincide with any physical Feast (though it may) because the Bride has already purified herself and made herself ready. When the great tribulation has done its job those days are 'cut short'. (Matt 24:22) *She has been keeping YHWH's Feasts in her heart.* The Bride has learned to listen continually for the **trumpet** call, to walk by the Holy Spirit and to do battle with God's enemies – the wickedness that was hidden in her heart. She lives in meekness, repentance, and gratefulness that the blood of Christ has **atoned** for all her sins. She dwells in fellowship with her Lord in **Tabernacles** in the secret place of her heart. The instant this many-membered Bride is complete her Husband will return, for through tribulation she met Him and purified herself to be like Him.

My guess, especially as I look around at all the lukewarm, double-minded Christians in America, is that the Bride of Christ will be smaller than most people think, and that the majority of Christians who make a profession of faith and go warm a pew once or twice a week, and therefore consider themselves a part of the Bride, are actually not. I'm not saying they aren't Christians – who am I to judge? I am saying that even though all saints start out as bondservants, only a relatively few receive the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14) to press on for something higher than servanthood. Only by overcoming through great tribulation will they receive the prize of the highest calling of God to be part of Jesus' Bride.

THE TRINITY PORTRAYED IN THREE FEASTS – ULTIMATE RECONCILIATION!

From the human perspective in God's dealings with man, many things are in twos: saved or lost, good or bad, accepted or condemned, righteous or unrighteous, stand or fall, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, rich or poor, sheep or goats, sow and reap, heaven or hell, – Yashua made these contrasts very vivid in His parables and teachings throughout the Gospels.

However, the deeper things of God seem to come more often in ones, threes, or sevens, as a reflection on His unity and His triune and sevenfold nature. Three is a fascinating number. It is just one more than two. Profound, huh. By himself, man is two dimensional, flat. He has only body and soul, with no possibility of hearing or understanding the things of spirit, for they are foolishness to him (1 Cor 2:14) because he is dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph 2:1)

But when the Holy Spirit quickens him, one is added to two, and he is transformed into a three-dimensional being, made in the image of God Himself. Now he is body, soul, and spirit. But he is not yet trinity. God's goal is not that we be three, but one in three! His program is to first quicken (make alive) our spirit by His Holy Spirit, then to cleanse and restore our soul, and finally to redeem our physical body, all ruled by His Holy Spirit. (Rom 8:23 ff) As long as there is any double-mindedness in me, as long as my flesh nature still sometimes overrules my spirit-leading, I am not yet trinity, one in three.

"Hear O Israel! YHWH is our God. YHWH is one!" (Deut 6:4) We do not worship a multiplicity of gods; there is only one God, and He is YHWH. But more significantly, **YHWH is one**. Though He reveals Himself in many ways to help us understand His awesome greatness, He is always in perfect harmony with Himself. He reveals Himself as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; yet the Son only does the Father's works, the Holy Spirit only reveals the Son, and the Father only gives access to His throne through the Son. The Son never comes pleading with the Father to grant us more mercy or compassion; the Spirit has no contention with the Son over who gets the glory; and the Father is never upset with His Son as He humbles Himself to fraternize with us sinners.

YHWH also reveals Himself as seven Spirits (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) which are given as: the Spirit of YHWH, the two Spirits of Wisdom and Understanding, the two Spirits of Counsel and Might, and the two Spirits of Knowledge and the Fear of YHWH. (Isa 11:2; also see Prov 8:12-14; 9:1) They roughly correspond to the seven Feasts in that order, though each of the Feasts also corresponds to all seven, for the fullness of the seven Spirits of God is upon Yashua, who is the fulfillment of each of the Feasts. These seven Spirits are never in competition or contention with one another. They are always working in perfect harmony to achieve the Father's good pleasure.

God is one. His mercy is in perfect harmony with His justice; His grace is in perfect harmony with His holiness; His compassion is in perfect harmony with His wrath and righteous vengeance; His awesome creative power is in perfect harmony with His incomprehensible peace, rest, and sustaining power; His infinite love, even for a sinner, is in perfect harmony with His equally infinite hatred of sin; **God is ONE!** Justice, darkness, vengeance, judgment, sin, and death are not a problem to His eternal Life, Light, holiness, grace, mercy, and love! There is no conflict, no inconsistencies, and no double-mindedness in God. His incredible Plan of the Ages had a beginning and will reach its conclusion just as He planned it, with not a failure or an error, not a wasted minute, not a wrong turn, not an idle word from His mouth, precisely according to His desires and purposes from the very beginning. We serve a mighty big God, an awesome God!

This is important to keep in mind as we study the seven Feasts, or three sets of Feasts. In trying to communicate to us, God sometimes breaks it up into threes or sevens, but is still a unified message: *the story of man's redemption and reconciliation back into fellowship with a holy God*. The Bible, in 66 books and many stories from many authors, is still a perfectly unified divine message with absolutely no contradictions. If you find an apparent contradiction in the Scriptures, you've just found an area in which you need to grow in Wisdom and Knowledge and the Fear of YHWH. Ask Him for Understanding and Counsel by the Power of the seven Spirits of YHWH!

In the same way, God's plan of redemption is a single grand, unified story – literally the greatest story ever told – with no contradictions or ambiguities, even though from our limited understanding it must be broken down into many stories, woven around seven Feasts, grouped in three sets.

We've already looked at each of the seven Feasts. Now let's look at the three sets of Feasts to see what they reveal about God's Plan of the Ages. "Three times a year you shall celebrate a Feast to Me... the Feast of Unleavened Bread [Passover] ... the Feast of the Harvest of Firstfruits [Pentecost] ... also the Feast of the Ingathering [Tabernacles] ... Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord YHWH." (Ex 23:14-17) It is rather obvious to see the Trinity in the Feasts; **Passover** = God the Son, the Savior of the world. **Pentecost** = God the Holy Spirit, firstfruits of our inheritance in Christ. **Tabernacles** = God the Father come to dwell (tabernacle) with His people. It may be obvious, but it is stunningly profound just the same. The Trinity is a deep mystery, yet even a child can understand that God came in the Person of Jesus Christ at Passover to save His people from their sins; God comes in the Person of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to indwell and empower His people; and God is coming very soon in the Person of the eternal Father at Tabernacles to finish His redemptive work and give His people Rest.

However, God is one. Jesus, also known as "the Eternal Father" (Isa 9:6) and the one who indwells us by His Holy Spirit (Jn 14 & 15), is the perfect, complete manifestation of the eternal Father to us in our time-based realm. So another way of looking at the same thing is to see Jesus' first coming as **Savior at Passover**, second coming as the anointed **Messiah at Pentecost**, and third coming as the **Judge and King at Tabernacles**. That is what His name means: Jesus Christ the Lord; Yashua ha-Mashiach Adonai → Yashua = YHWH saves; ha = definite article ('the'), meaning the only one; Mashiach = God's anointed King / Priest, or the one who comes to anoint His saints as kings and priests to God; and Adonai = Lord, Master, King, Judge, 'Boss'.

This demonstrates the three primary functions or ministries of Jesus: Priest, Prophet, and King. He came at **Passover** as our great High Priest, making the once-for-all atonement for our sins on the cross; He came the second time at **Pentecost** as the great Prophet of God, proclaiming and illuminating the Word of God to our hearts by His Holy Spirit; and He comes the third time at **Tabernacles** as the King of kings and Lord of lords, to claim His Bride and establish His everlasting Kingdom over and through each of us by His infinite power and authority.

This also illustrates the spiritual course of our lives. **Passover** is at the beginning of the harvest, symbolizing our spiritual birth. **Pentecost** is the middle of the harvest, symbolizing maturity and fruitfulness throughout our Christian life by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Tabernacles** is at the final ingathering ending the harvest, symbolizing entering into His Rest at the conclusion of our lives.

A Jewish year is not from Passover to Passover as some might expect, but only from Passover to Tabernacles, whence begins the new year. In one sense for the Jew, the new year begins the evening after the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the "Last Great Day of the Feast," which symbolizes the commencement of the millennial Rest.

It was on the morning of that day that Jesus stood up and said, "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." (Jn 7:37) During the Millennium that thought is repeated when "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' Let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who wishes take the Water of Life without cost." (Rev 22:17)

Thus the Feasts tell the story of our spiritual walk with God and our growth into His Kingdom. In **Passover** we see the picture of our justification, our sins forgiven. Then in **Pentecost** we have the picture of our sanctification, our baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, the "first-fruits of our inheritance" as the sons of God. **Tabernacles** portrays our glorification, our entrance as perfect, mature sons into the fullness of our inheritance in the Kingdom of God.

Thus in a very real sense the three assemblies portray three phases of our relationship with God, three aspects of the redemption process, or three stages of our restoration to a holy God. First, at *Passover our relationship to Jesus is restored*. By faith we accept His perfect sacrifice on our behalf, reckon our old nature dead and buried with Him, and receive Him into ourselves as our life. This can happen very quickly, even instantaneously, for it is all a work of faith in our hearts. At this point there is little visible change in us. So the Lord gave us two visible signs to demonstrate this inward change of heart: He commands us to publicly proclaim our faith through water baptism, and to eat the supper of communion with the saints (both done in remembrance of what Jesus has already done for us). We are now justified before God, but not yet sanctified.

Then at *Pentecost our relationship with the Holy Spirit is restored*. Our faith takes on a whole new dimension as it begins to change our lives from a self-centered existence to a practical new way of living, walking by the Spirit, led by the Spirit, and ruled by the Spirit in each area of our lives. We learn to die to self and become His bondservant. This is sanctification. It must of necessity take time, often years, as the Holy Spirit searches out all the hidden wickednesses and perversions in our being and transforms us from glory unto glory even into His own nature and character.

Finally, at *Tabernacles our relationship with the eternal Father is restored*. The sinless, perfected, completed saint is ushered into glory and allowed to enter God's Sabbath Rest. (Heb 4) In Scripture this is glorification. No longer under the rule of the Holy Spirit, we now walk with God, hand in hand, and talk with Him as a man talks with his friend. Our 'bondservant' status changes to 'brotherhood', as we receive our inheritance as sons of God. We are given the awesome responsibility to rule and reign with Him in glory over all creation, reconciling all things back to His original created design. Since God is perfectly holy, this cannot happen until justification and the sanctification process are both completed. Thus it is part of 'the blessed hope' of seeing Jesus face to face and being found to be just like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2) This final step involves the future resurrection of our physical body and the restoration of our entire being to perfection, so that God can dwell with us and we with Him in the secret place of His presence, the Holy of Holies.

But from God's 'eternal' perspective, it is all right now. The newborn Christian is saved by the blood of the Lamb, filled with the Holy Spirit, and brought into the peace and rest of God, but only on a limited basis. After salvation God gives him opportunities to go through the process again: God reveals to him some sin in his life, brings him to repentance, and delivers him from it (Passover). He is filled anew with a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), and again receives the peace that passes understanding as he walks on with God (Tabernacles). This can (and should) be a daily experience.

In a very real sense 'saved' is not a past tense verb. I do consider myself saved (past tense), but I certainly am not 'saved to the uttermost'. Not yet! "... He [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Heb 7:25) "For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor 1:18) From the devil's standpoint, there certainly was a time that I was (past tense) delivered out of his kingdom of darkness and into God's Kingdom of Light. But from God's eternal perspective I am still being saved, still being filled with the Holy Spirit, and still coming through the veil to tabernacle with Him. We can and should 'reckon it done' for He sees the end from the beginning, but He sure seems to enjoy the process!

We 'human beans' are so quick to put it back into two dimensions. It is so much less intimidating to stick it all into the past or the future. But God's redemption is in threes! He is far more interested in the present tense than either the past or the future. Yes, He is transcendent. He is also the right-now, personal, immanent and ever-present 'I AM', who reaches through the vast gulf between time and eternity to touch us with His love and change us from glory to glory into His very image and nature.

True, He has created us to be based within time; we must have a past and a future. But God is one in three, three in one, and if we dwell only in the past and/or future we will miss Him. The old reprobate who claims, "I was saved when I was a boy, and I'm goin' to heaven when I die, so don't bother me now!" has probably never met God at all. The true saint says, "I know I was saved and I know I'm going to heaven *because God is working on me now*. He is disciplining me, delivering me from my sin, blessing me, changing me, teaching me to hear and obey His voice, leading me, comforting me, using me, revealing Himself to me so I am beginning to know and love His wisdom and His ways, and giving me grace to do His will, right now!"

This principle becomes obvious in such passages as Luke 9:23, in which Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." The cross is here symbolic of the death to our self-nature and our acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Master over our life, just as Jesus died to self as He went to the cross. (Mk 14:36) This occurs at salvation. So why does Jesus say, "... take up his cross daily..."? Because it must always be in the present tense! *Every day* we lay down our self-lives in *Passover* and reckon our self-nature (our human ego and selfish desires) dead and buried with Jesus, the Passover Lamb of God. *Every day* we are raised up at *Pentecost* by the coming and infilling of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Resurrection Life of God. And *every day* we are led by His Spirit into the presence of the Father at *Tabernacles*, to dwell with Him, worship Him, love Him, hear His voice, learn from Him, share His joy, seek His face, know His heart, and do His will on the earth.

Both individually and in their groups, the Feasts are beautiful pictures of the entire process of salvation. The ancients didn't have the written Scriptures to learn about God's plan of redemption, so God gave them the Feasts. Everyone participated with the priests, so everyone had opportunity to learn; even a child could learn all about God's great salvation, though it remains hidden from the sophisticated self-righteous who despise the Feasts. Jesus said, "... I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to babes..." (Matt 11:25) We are three: body, soul, and spirit. **Passover** symbolizes the salvation of our spirit, which was dead in trespasses and sins, but is made alive by faith in the atoning blood of the Passover lamb. **Pentecost** symbolizes the salvation of our soul, which was self-focused and fearful but by the power of the Holy Spirit becomes God-focused and led to boldly do His will. **Tabernacles** symbolizes the salvation (redemption – Rom 8:23) of our physical bodies, finally totally cleansed of sin and restored, 'reconciled', to the pre-Fall state.

All three Feasts also portray a baptism, but in the reverse order. **Passover** is the baptism of water for the cleansing of the flesh. It gets us out of Egypt, but not into the Promised Land. It changes our physical location, our allegiance, but not our heart.

Pentecost is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire for the cleansing of the soul. It gets us through the wilderness by setting up the Holy Spirit over our soul as our guide and protector, our cloud covering us by day and pillar of fire lighting our way at night, our daily manna and springs of living water from the Rock who is Christ, our healer from poisonous snakes, our supernatural strength and miracle provision so that even our sandals don't wear out. By the Holy Spirit we are led into the Promised Land. This takes time. It is dependent upon learning to obey His leading; going our own way can result in wandering and even dying in the desert. Following the leading of the Holy Spirit ensures that we gain the victory over the giants in the land.

Tabernacles is a different kind of baptism which we rarely consider. To understand it, you have to know that the term 'baptism' means immersion. The old Catholic 'sprinkling' (which many Protestants never got around to protesting) just doesn't cut it. Just as Passover is a baptism for the cleansing of the flesh, and Pentecost is a baptism (total immersion) of the human soul in the fire of the Holy Spirit, so Tabernacles symbolizes the total immersion of the human spirit (which was quickened – made alive – back at Passover) into the fullness of the consuming, refining fire of God Himself, so that nothing remains of the sinful nature. This is very different from Passover and Pentecost, which both speak of the firstfruits, the earnest of our inheritance. The baptism at Tabernacles speaks of completion and total fullness, the perfection toward which everything else in our lives has pointed. Now perfectly holy, we dwell in peace with the holy God.

At Pentecost our soul was baptized (immersed) in the Holy Spirit; it was led – ruled – by God's Spirit. We learned to obey His leading and do His will as His bondservant. But at Tabernacles our spirit is baptized (immersed) in Him who is Spirit. We have sweet fellowship and communion with the holy God, spirit to Spirit, joined in unity (Jn 17:23), merging in a oneness that can only be symbolized by total immersion. *We no longer have to be ruled by the Holy Spirit, as a child with a wayward nature.* No! Our very nature is transformed at Tabernacles to be in tune with the Holy Spirit, so He can now rule over His creation through us. Only after Tabernacles can it be said that we are perfect, complete, in Christ. (Col 1:28) "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete [perfected], without blame, at the coming [presence] of our Lord Jesus Christ [at the greatest fulfillment of Tabernacles]. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." (1 Thess 5:23-24) Only then do we "... attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:13)

Does this put the baptism of our spirit into the future? In the primary sense, yes. Until the great fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of the age, we cannot escape the inherited double-mindedness which requires that His Holy Spirit rule over our soul as at Pentecost. On that great Day of Atonement our double-mindedness will be removed; then there will be no more rule, authority, or power over us (1 Cor 15:24), for God will be all in us. (v28)

Then He will dwell (tabernacle) with us and we with Him in perfect peace and harmony. He will not have to tell us to do anything (Heb 8:11), for our spirit will be so tuned to His Spirit, our will to His will, our desires to His desires, our nature and character to His, and our whole being immersed in His, that His rule, authority, and power will naturally flow through us to accomplish His will in the earth. Then and not until then, we will also be a 'trinity' in the image of God, with our entire body, soul, and spirit in perfect harmony.

But in another sense, and I praise God for His eternity perspective, *it is all right now!* Yes, it is not complete right now; we still struggle with it, for the downward pull of the sin nature is still with us. We must be diligent, as we labor to enter His Rest. (Heb 4:11) We still must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil 2:12) We still "groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of the body." (Rom 8:23) We still purify ourselves, just as He is pure, for we dwell in that blessed hope that we shall be like Him (future) when we see Him as He is. (1 Jn 3:2-3) But by faith we reckon it done. We choose to look at it as the eternal Father sees it. "Whom He predestined, He also called. Whom He called, He also justified. Whom He justified, He also glorified." (Rom 8:30) Past tense. It's a done deal!

Here is how the apostle Paul says it. He starts with what may be the third greatest prayer in all Scripture, asking that the Father "... would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, *that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.* Now, to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations of the age of the ages. Amen! I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace – one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is [right now] over all, and through all, and in all." (Eph 3:16-4:6)

Yes, for us it seems a difficult labor. But it is still three in one, one in three. Three baptisms during the three phases of our Christian life, yet all three are right now from His eternity perspective. We see three baptisms, but He sees only one. We see our body, soul, and spirit as separate and unique; He sees only one body, one hope of our calling, one Spirit. We see our sin nature and the sins of the whole world in open rebellion to Him; He sees from eternity one God and Father of all who is over all, through all, and in all. We see His rule and authority and power; He from eternity sees all things perfectly subjected to Him, all His enemies under His feet, and all rule and authority and power finally abolished, so that **God is all in all.** (1 Cor 15:24-28)

We, being time-based life-forms, cannot understand this; we cannot fully comprehend His eternity perspective. We never could understand a many-membered Bride or the Second Adam. We can't even understand the Trinity, much less God becoming all and in all, or filling all things (and all people) with Himself. (Eph 4:10)

When we try to understand it, it raises questions too big for us. That little 'all' is a mighty big word. How will God bring all things into subjection to Him? What about Hitler? Pharaoh? The antichrist and all who worship him? Demons? Satan? Will they ever be in willing subjection to Him? Or in their torment in the lake of fire will they remain forever in total rebellion? The natural mind can't answer these questions. To even think about them makes me feel very, very small, like a little child in a vast universe. All I can do is recommend to you the whole counsel of God in His eternal inerrant Word. This is what God said: "He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, **that He might fill all things.**" (Eph 4:10)

That is God's desire, His goal – to fill all things. He is "reconciling the world to Himself." (2 Cor 5:19) "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him." (Jn 3:17) The only question is: **Will He succeed? Or will He fail?** How can He ever fill someone who has chosen Satan and his ways, or who is filled with demons? To us, indeed it looks impossible, but from His eternity perspective it is already done. "Christ is all, and in all." (Col 3:11) "And He [the Father] put [past tense] all things in subjection under His [Jesus Christ's] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who [right now] fills all in all." (Eph 1:23)

These are not just isolated passages! There are many such 'alls' in the Scriptures. This is the good news of the gospel. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him [Jesus Christ] and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself." (Col 1:20) "That He [the Father] may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of *restoration of all things*, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times." (Acts 3:21) "For from Him and through Him and unto Him are all things. To Him be glory forever." (Rom 11:36) "In Him all things were created, both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through Him and for [unto] Him [for Him to fill]. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together [endure]." (Col 1:16-17) "Who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." (Phil 2:21) "If their [the Jews'] rejection be the reconciliation of the [entire] world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ... and thus all Israel will be saved." (Rom 11:15, 26) "And I... will draw all men unto Myself." (Jn 12:32)

That is God's desire. I repeat the crucial question. *Will He succeed, or will He fail?* The prophets foresaw His reply, "YHWH of Hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain... He will swallow up [abolish] the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations; and He will swallow up death for all time; and the Lord YHWH will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will [finally!] remove the reproach of His people [the Jews] from all the earth [there will be no more anti-Semitism]. For YHWH has spoken." (Isa 25:6-8)

God is bigger than we comprehend. He "is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine." (Eph 3:20) This utterly boggles our little minds, but if we believe the Scripture we must accept what it says. "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to YHWH, and all the families of the nations will worship before Thee." (Ps 22:27) In the end, God wins. Satan loses and all his works are destroyed. (1 Jn 3:8) *This is the ultimate reconciliation of all things to God's original created purpose.*

So what about those “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” (Rom 9:22) “The Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.’ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.” (Rom 9:17-18) Pharaoh makes a good illustration of Satan; we can study him to find out how Satan works to keep us in bondage, and how God overrules and turns it all out for our good and His glory. That is why God made Pharaoh and why He hardened his heart. (Ex 9:12)

“... If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand he also will drink of the wine of the **wrath of God**, mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger. He will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and... the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever [lit. to ages of ages]. They have no rest day and night, all who worship the beast and his image and take the mark of his name. *Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*” (Rev 14:9-12) Get the picture? *You sure will in that day!* The torment, the unspeakable horror and agony of the ‘death’ to which God’s Law condemns sinners, will be there at the throne for all to see. Here indeed is the perseverance of the saints! When we fully see the wages of sin, which is the “second death, the lake of fire” (20:14), we will never again be tempted to rebel against God. Thus even the wicked serve an essential purpose, displaying to the universe the consequence of rebellion – *death*.

This provides us a powerful incentive to preach “... Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come,” (1 Thess 1:10) and to “... buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Cor 9:27) But most Christians stop there. Their focus is only on getting people saved, which in their minds is merely a change of ownership, a transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Yes, Jesus bought us back to Himself by His blood. But the Feasts of Israel go far beyond that. Redemption is more than a change of ownership. Tabernacles speaks of total reconciliation, ‘salvation to the uttermost’. (Heb 7:25) God is holy. The Fall Feast portrays the completed harvest of souls dwelling with The Holy in perfect holiness.

What is holiness? What is righteousness? It goes way beyond the blood of the lamb covering up our sins. Jesus came to take away sin (1 Jn 3:5) so that we could be one with Him as He is one with the Father. (Jn 17:21) He came to destroy the works of the Devil (1 Jn 3:8) and reconcile the world back to Himself. (2 Cor 5:19) That is why He came. *Will he succeed?* Will He use those keys of death and hell He won at the cross (Rev 1:18) to free the captives? (Isa 61:1) **Yes!** “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.” (1 Cor 15:22) Thus Scripture affirms, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (v 55)

“He [God the Father] delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. And He [Jesus] is the [visible] image of the invisible God, the firstborn [first from the realm of eternity into a visible realm] of all creation. For in [and out from] Him all things were created... all things have been created through Him and for [unto] Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together... it was the Father’s good pleasure [desire] for all the fullness to dwell in Him *and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself*, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Though you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach – if indeed you continue in the faith...” (Col 1:13-22)

That’s it! How can it be clearer? His goal is to reconcile all things to Himself. *It starts with us, if we continue in the faith!* “... if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all these things are from God, who [at **Passover**] reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation [at **Pentecost**], namely, that God was in Christ *reconciling the world to Himself*, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has [now] committed to us the word of reconciliation [to gather the full, final harvest – that’s **Tabernacles!**]. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us: ‘*We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!*’ He made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin [to be] the sin [offering] on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor 5:17-21) Thus the three sets of Feasts are a profound revelation of the three-fold nature of God’s mighty, worldwide redemption.

“Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, that they may be ready on your lips. So your trust may be in YHWH... have I not written to you **excellent things** of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may rightly answer him who sent you?” (Prov 22:17-21)

The Hebrew word that is here translated ‘excellent’ is ‘shalesh’. It means tripled, a triangle, threefold, weighty. The excellent things of God are the threefold, weighty, tripled things, things with three layers of meaning. Let’s summarize the threes we have found so far in the Feasts.

Each of the Feasts has three aspects: a memorial or historical aspect (looking to the past), a prophetic aspect (looking to the future), and a present-tense personal and individual aspect (which is the most important of all for us right now).

Passover is a memorial of Israel's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt; it prophesied of Messiah's death and resurrection to deliver us from the bondage of sin; it gives us each a picture of our spiritual birth and our justification before God, cancelling out our debt to sin and imputing to us the righteousness of Jesus. **Pentecost** is a memorial of the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai; it prophesied of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, writing the Law of the New Covenant on our hearts; and it pictures our sanctification by the baptism of the Holy Spirit which each saint receives as the 'firstfruits of our inheritance'. **Tabernacles** is a memorial the Israelites entering into the Promised Land and taking possession of their inheritance; it prophesies the Second Appearing of Christ in great power and glory, the millennial Rest when the saints receive their rewards and rule with Him, as well as the ages to come in which we receive our full inheritance in Christ; and it pictures our glorification, in which by faith we are even now seated in heavenly places in Christ where God is all in all.

God is Trinity. In **Passover** we meet the Son, Jesus, the Savior of the world. In **Pentecost** we meet the Holy Spirit of Christ, the anointed High Priest and the Anointer of His people. In **Tabernacles** we meet the Father, YHWH, Lord of lords and King of kings.

We, in God's image, also become trinity. In **Passover** our spirit is quickened (made alive) in His Spirit and our body is baptized with water. In **Pentecost** our spirit is tuned to hear and obey His Spirit and our soul is baptized with the fire of the Holy Spirit so we can be ruled (led) by Him. In **Tabernacles** our spirit is baptized (immersed) in God's Spirit, our body is redeemed, and our nature is transformed from one of rule, authority, and power, to one of love, in willing, eager delight to please the Father. All of this occurs in a limited sense in the past when we first believed; and will occur in fullness in the future when Jesus returns for His Bride; and is occurring right now as we reach up to dwell with YHWH by faith, spirit to Spirit, in a greater and greater way as we are transformed from glory to glory into His own nature of self-sacrificing love.

At **Passover** we meet Jesus as our **Savior from the guilt of sin**; He passes over us; He literally 'hovers' over us, covers us, and protects us from the death angel, who is the destroyer, the adversary, the accuser of the brethren, Satan. Jesus' blood on the doorposts of our heart cancels our guilt and breaks the bondage sin had over us, saying, "Not guilty!" whenever the adversary tries to accuse us. When we meet Jesus at Passover, we are covered and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Satan and his demons have nothing on us anymore; we don't need to fear them; they need to fear us! We are dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, covered by His wings; abiding under His shadow. (Ps 91:1) There is no more condemnation, for we are in Christ and He in us. (Rom 8:1) This should be in the past tense as well as in the present continuous tense for us.

At **Pentecost** we meet Jesus Christ as our **Savior from the power of sin**; He fills us, indwells us, inspires us, leads and guides us, teaches us all Truth, empowers us to walk free from sin, and anoints us to live in His righteousness. He writes the law of the New Covenant on our renewed hearts, so we can willingly submit to His Lordship in our lives to do His will in His time and way by His wisdom and power within us. Yes, you heard me correctly. He rules over us, in power and authority. But it is not a rule by force. It is a rule by invitation, as we discover His rule to be only for our best, and willingly submit to His authority. We make the daily choice to become His bondservants. That is our joy! We chose to die daily to self so that the power of His eternal life may flow into and through us.

Here is grace upon grace; here is the well of water springing up unto eternal Life; here is the peace that passes understanding; here is our in-dwelling Comforter, Healer, Sustainer, Provider, and Friend; here is the salvation of the soul; here is the Helper of all our infirmities who makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered; here is Life abundant, full of gifts and fruits of the Spirit; here is all Truth, Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding, Counsel, Power, and the Reverential Fear of YHWH: the fullness of the sevenfold Holy Spirit. This is the firstfruits of our inheritance in Christ – a touch of heaven here on earth – a taste of the glories yet to come. It is available to every Christian right now in the present continuous tense and it is increasingly available the more we seek Him and the more we receive, believe, and walk in what He has given so far. If you have not yet met the Lord at Pentecost, I urge you – do not delay! Seek Him while He may be found!

Finally at **Tabernacles** we meet the Lord Jesus Christ as our **Savior from the nature of sin**; He immerses us into His Spirit, into His own nature and character, so we can see from His perspective, love what He loves and hate what He hates, delight in the things that delight Him, and do His will out of the sheer joy of it, not as a servant but as a son. Our flesh nature is dead, buried with Jesus at Golgotha. Our bodies are redeemed. Our new nature is transformed from glory to glory into His very image and likeness.

No longer does His Spirit have to rule over our soul. At **Tabernacles** our entire spirit, soul, and body are brought into harmony with His Lordship, so that as King of kings He is now free to rule the earth through us according to the original mandate He gave to Adam. *We are the kings He is King of!* This is in the future tense; it is not yet fulfilled; it cannot be until that fabulous Feast of Tabernacles at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Yet we can get glimpses of it now and then as we wrestle to keep that fleshly nature "buried with Christ" according to Romans 6. Everything He does in the first two Feasts works toward this supreme goal! "So let us know [present continuous tense], let us press on to know YHWH. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the latter rain and the former rain to the earth." (Hos 6:3)

TABERNACLES FULFILLED IN THE FUTURE – THE BLESSED HOPE – CHRIST UNLIMITED

Passover and Pentecost both portray a firstfruits of the harvest. Passover is the firstfruits of those redeemed out of Egypt (the world). Pentecost is the firstfruits of those redeemed into right standing with God – God’s chosen people who willingly submitted to His Law at Mt. Sinai. But Tabernacles is different in a spectacularly beautiful way. It is at the end of the agricultural year. It is celebrated after the entire harvest is fully gathered in; thus it is called the Feast of Ingathering. (Ex 34:22; Lev 23:39) Everything that we receive at Passover and Pentecost is partial, both on an individual, personal level, and on a corporate, ‘body of Christ’ level. We do not have the fullness of redemption from sin; we await the redemption of our body from the sin nature. We do not have the fullness of the Spirit; only the firstfruits of the Spirit, the earnest of our inheritance. (Rom 8:16-23; 2 Cor 1:22) “For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.” (1 Cor 13:9-10)

This is why Tabernacles must be prophetic of the end of the age. It no longer speaks of firstfruits, it speaks of the fullness. It is the ‘perfect’, which we now have only ‘in part’. It is the goal, the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus for which we press on. (Phil 3:14 ff) Everything in Tabernacles speaks of perfection, fullness, and completion. The Feasts all point to Tabernacles just like the 7 days of the creation week all point to the Sabbath Rest, just like the furnishings in the tabernacle all point toward the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place, just like the travels of the Israelites from Egypt all pointed toward the Promised Land, and just like the seven Spirits of God all point to the Spirit of the Reverential Fear in Awe of YHWH. Tabernacles is perfect holiness, peace, rest, and joy. It is perfect wisdom and understanding, perfection in all the nature and character of God. Tabernacles is full redemption and full maturity. It is a restored relationship with God in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, revealing all previous fillings of the Holy Spirit to be but dim shadows.

Tabernacles is the final completion of the process of redemption, completion of our times of testing, discipline, and purifying, completion of our integration (unifying) into the many-membered Bride of Christ, the wife of the Lamb, and completion of our adoption into God’s family as sons of the Heavenly Father. There will indeed be a great harvest for the Kingdom just before that great Feast of Tabernacles at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

During the Millennium, Scripture does not mention Passover or Pentecost. However, Zechariah prophesies that all nations will go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in that day when there is no more curse and YHWH is King over all the earth. (14:9-21) Something clearly has changed. “... when the perfect [Tabernacles] comes, the partial [Passover and Pentecost] will be done away.” (1 Cor 13:10) I believe that after the marriage supper of the Lamb, the Feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated like a ‘wedding anniversary’ every year.

Jesus has not changed from Feast to Feast. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is we who must change as we meet Him in each Feast. The process of our redemption and reconciliation back to God is just that, a process. Every time we meet God at any level, we are changed. *Our capacity for Him is enlarged*, so that the next time we are ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ we ‘have more of God’ (He has more of us) than before. We must never get complacent and settle for what we know of God so far, but rather “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:14) “We are no longer to be children... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.” (Eph 4:14-15)

However, there is an end. Everything within time had a beginning and will have its conclusion. God created time for change, for growth, and for maturing. Only eternity is the dwelling place of the great ‘I AM’ who changes not. God’s plan of redemption, as great as it is, will be finished some day. At the proper time Jesus will return in awesome power and glory for His Bride and the heavens and the earth will be restored. God’s Plan of the Ages will unfold second by second in perfect precision as He planned in the beginning, through to the end. I love to see things from God’s perspective in eternity. But we live within time.

Many New Testament Scripture passages, written by the apostles who were filled with the Holy Spirit of Christ within, still speak of the ‘Jesus Christ who is to come’. Here are a few: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also [future tense] will bring it to pass.” (1 Thess 5:23-24) “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He [future tense] may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, *whom heaven must receive until the [future] period of restoration of all things*, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” (Acts 3:19-21)

That “period of restoration of all things” is a fascinating concept. Jesus “always lives to make intercession” for us (Heb 7:25), for “Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” (9:24)

How long will He remain in heaven continuing His intercession? “But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.” (Heb 10:12-13; see also 1 Cor 15:25) This clearly points to that future “period of restoration of all things” mentioned in Acts 3:21.

This is mind boggling. This goes way beyond the completion of the Bride. This is speaking of the ends of the ages, when all things will be reconciled back to God and restored to their original created design. Christ's Bride will then be with Him and will no longer need His intercession. So who is Jesus interceding for all that time? Not the Bride! We have some clues. "... [God] raised us up with Him [Jesus] and seated us with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." (Eph 2:6) "Seated" implies that His job is finished from God's eternity perspective. "At the right hand of God" implies the full power and authority of Father God. "He must reign" says He is the King, no longer restrained by time and space as He was before His death. He is **Christ Unlimited**. He has heaven, hell, past, future, and all His creation in the palm of His royal hand. My conclusion is that He and His precious Bride ("seated us with Him"), are interceding for all those who have not yet believed.

So, what do you think? Will His intercession bear fruit? Or is He just wasting His time? You already know what I think. He is interceding for every lost soul then in torment in hell, because He knows that eventually, when the penalty of every sin is paid and their hard-heartedness is all burned up, they will finally be able to turn to Him and bow the knee. This should be an encouragement to all who have already bowed the knee. We will not spend eternity in regret and despair for all those in torment. We will join in His intercession until every lost, thirsty soul responds to the call of the Spirit and the Bride, "Come, everyone who is thirsty, take the waters of life without cost." (Rev 22)

"In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (This is 'epiphaneia', meaning manifestation, unveiling, revealing – 2 Tim 4:8). It goes beyond His coming in the hearts of the saints at Pentecost. It points to the end of the age, when every eye will see Jesus appear in power and glory. "... Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead according to His appearing and His Kingdom." (2 Tim 4:1) *Do you love His appearing and His Kingdom?* Then you will purify yourself as He is pure (1 Jn 3:3), so you can stand with joy and not shrink back in shame in His awesome presence. (Heb 10:38)

"For the grace of God has appeared [by the Holy Spirit], bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the **blessed hope** and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a unique people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." (Tit 2:11-14) 'Looking for' is from the Greek 'prosdeomai', meaning to look for, wait, and hope for, eagerly expecting to receive. *This is future*. We who are saints by faith are waiting for something, hoping with eager expectation for something.

What is it? "For the anxious [fervent] longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing [the manifestation] of the sons of God." (Rom 8:19) "... we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the [Holy] Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." (v23) "... awaiting eagerly the revelation [appearing] of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 1:7) "We, through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness." (Gal 5:5) "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the presence [appearing] of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and latter rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the presence [appearing] of the Lord is at hand." (James 5:7-8)

"... we speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well, *when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire*, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of the destruction of the ages [away] from the face of the Lord and [away] from the glory of His power, *when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day*, and to be marveled at in all who have believed..." (2 Thess 1:4-10)

That's it! The suffering of this present age will have its final conclusion one day, at the revealing (appearing) of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire. This is a fascinating passage, covering the full scope of the tribulation, the rapture, and the Second Appearing of Christ, calling it all "on that day." But what fascinates me is that tantalizing phrase, "*when He comes to be glorified in His saints...*" Jesus has chosen to be glorified in us. Yes, we will marvel at Him. But there is more.

I believe this is speaking of the fullness of the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus is not just coming back to snatch us all to heaven. He will indeed open the heavens for us during that week of celebrating the marriage feast of the Lamb, as He pours out His bowls of wrath in retribution for those who afflicted us. But what about those poor wretches? They will see Him too! "He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him..." (Rev 1:7) I believe that on the evening after the Last Great Day of the Feast Jesus will return with His Bride and will display her to the earth as kings and priests, through whom He will rule the earth with a rod of iron as a prime example of the grace, love, and power of God. He will be glorified in His many-membered body, the church. We saints will become an object lesson to all who have not yet believed. As we marvel at Him, they will begin to fear Him!

Jesus was glorified when He returned to the Father so He could send the Holy Spirit. (Jn 7:38) But that was just the firstfruits, limited fulfillment, visible only with eyes of faith. A far greater fulfillment awaits, when Jesus shall be glorified in and through the **church triumphant**. Why? “Therefore also God highly exalted Him [Jesus], and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, on earth, or under the earth [hell], and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:9-11)

That passage is too familiar. Let’s stop and analyze it. Traditional Catholic theology imposes upon it such horrid thoughts as “of course the wicked bow to confess His Lordship; Jesus will force them to bow, or just break their knees.” No, my friend. That is Satan’s way, for he is the god of forces (Dan 11:38), but it is not God’s way. What glory would the Father receive if Jesus were to break the knees of the wicked and force a confession out of them? No, the wicked have already seen God’s power. They hardened their hearts, shook their fists in His face, and blasphemed His precious name. (ref. Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11, 21) But God is one! His judgment, power, and wrath against sin is always in perfect harmony with His mercy, compassion, and love. There is no judgment sent out that is devoid of God’s love and His earnest desire that man repent and receive Him. But He will not force them! If He were to force one person to bow and acknowledge His Lordship, then Satan will have won the Great Controversy. From then on all the universe would question whether God’s ways of force were any better than Satan’s ways of force.

God doesn’t have to use force to win believers; “... the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Phil 3:21) is the power of His love! It is God’s kindness that leads to repentance. (Rom 2:4) All He needs to do is unveil the beauty of His nature and character at just the right time in each person’s life and he or she will be drawn to Him. Yes, those who are stubborn, hard-hearted, and self-centered may not be ready to receive Him until their self-will is burned up in the fires of hell. But most people are not willfully rebellious; they are just ignorant, blind, and unable to see past their own needs or desires. They are like foolish, irresponsible children, in need of a good spanking. Will God destroy them all in hell? Will Satan win vast multitudes, while God only wins His Bride?

Not according to Scripture. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” (Rom 10:9) That is a promise from God. All those who “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father” (Phil 2:11) are being saved! It may take many ages, but we have the firm promise of Scripture that ultimately every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess Jesus Christ as Lord, *and thus every person will receive His great salvation*. That is how Jesus is glorified in His saints!

Tabernacles always has been a harvest feast. It both celebrates a bountiful harvest just past and looks forward to the early rains which will prepare the soil for the next harvest. “YHWH of Hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all the peoples on this mountain... and on this mountain *He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations [Gentiles, pagans, heathen]*. He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord YHWH will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For YHWH has spoken. And it will be said in that day, Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is YHWH for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.” (Isa 25:6-9)

“Gather yourselves and come. *Draw near, you fugitives of the nations [Gentiles]*. They have no knowledge [they’re ignorant], who carry about their wooden idol and pray to a god who cannot save. Declare and set forth your case; indeed let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, YHWH? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and Savior; There is none except Me. *Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth*. For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the Word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. They [even all those who were ignorant] will [finally] say of Me, ‘Only in YHWH are righteousness and strength.’ Men will come to Him. All who were angry at Him shall be put to shame. In YHWH all the offspring of Israel will be justified, and will glory.” (Isa 45:20-25)

This is not a declaration of force from God’s power. It is an appeal of love in God’s mercy! Yes, there are those who reject God’s love, who choose hell and the consequences of their sin rather than God’s mercy and forgiveness. God will graciously grant them their freedom of choice and its natural result according to the Law. But I believe that after their punishment is paid and their rebellious self-nature is destroyed, they will gain a new perspective. They’ll finally be able to see the beauty, justice, wisdom, and yes, glory of Christ in unity with His Bride, and thus be drawn into repentance by God’s kindness and receive His mercy which triumphs over judgment. I believe that, because Christ “ever lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb 7:25) His intercession sends His Spirit to open the eyes of their hearts, drawing them to Himself as He promised. (Jn 12:32) Then the Feast of Tabernacles will fulfill its name: the **Feast of Ingathering**. (Ex 34:22; Lev 23:39)

Other traditional names of this Feast also fit here. It is well known as the “Season of our Joy” and as the “Festival of Lights”; it is less well known as the “Feast of the Nations [Gentiles].” During this Feast, a total of seventy bullocks were sacrificed at the temple, one for each of the seventy nations of the world (thirteen the first day, reducing by one each day down to seven on the seventh day).

One way we know that Jesus was actually born during this Feast is the angels' announcement, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the peoples [the nations]." (Lk 2:10) In one breath this ties together two of the great themes of the Feast, the Season of our Joy, and the Feast of the Nations. *All this by the Light of the World during the Festival of Lights.* But that was just the beginning, just a dim picture of the incredible joy, the overwhelming glory we shall find when the Light of the World returns with His Bride to gather in the great harvest of the nations at the end of the age!

From then on, the Feast of Tabernacles will be kept as the greatest (only?) Feast; all nations will go annually to Jerusalem to celebrate and to worship the King. (Ref. Zech 14:16) Jesus will reign in and through His Bride, and will display to the nations (heathen) the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:7)

The Bride is only the firstfruits. "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, so that we might be as it were the firstfruits among His creatures." (James 1:18) But when the Bride is perfected and receives the fullness, what happens? *The divine nature replaces our fallen nature.* "Seeing His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (1 Pet 1:3-4)

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, *and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*" (Eph 1:17-23)

I know. It boggles the human mind to think of actually partaking of the divine nature and becoming the fullness of almighty God who fills all in all. But I am not making this up. This is the message of Scripture, and it is the clear picture presented us in the Feast of Tabernacles. He came down so low, to lift us up so high! We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 Jn 3:3)

So what does the church do when she has a divine nature and becomes the fullness of Him who fills all in all? Exactly what God did. "God... reconciled us to Himself... and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." (1 Cor 5:18) *She works to reconcile others to God.*

Pentecost offerings included two loaves baked with leaven, to represent the mixture of Truth and paganism in Jews and in Gentiles. How beautifully descriptive of the state of the modern church! There are churches who preach only salvation from sin. They accept the doctrine of the Feast of Passover, and have camped there, thinking they had the full counsel of God. Then there are churches who preach a second work of grace, the filling of the Holy Spirit. They call themselves 'Full Gospel' to differentiate them from the salvation-from-sin-only churches. They now have two Feasts, Passover and Pentecost. But is that really the 'Full Gospel'? *Then why are so many weak and sickly among them, and a number sleep?* (1 Cor 11:30 ff) Why do we still see the mixture of the precious with the profane, the holy with the vile? Because they still don't have the full gospel; they stopped to camp at Pentecost.

What is the 'Full Gospel'? What is the full plan of redemption? **All three Feasts!** I tell you, it really bothers the Passover folks when you tell them that there is more of God available than salvation and freedom from the guilt of sin; when you say that they can experience Pentecost, be baptized in the fire of the Spirit, and be given the power to walk in newness of life like the apostles in the book of Acts. That really bothers them.

But then, it really bothers Pentecostals when you tell them that they have not the fullness either, but merely the 'firstfruits' of the Spirit, the 'earnest' of their inheritance in Christ. That bothers them horribly! Their doctrine of baptisms (in water and in the Holy Ghost) is called just an elementary teaching, milk for babies. (see Heb 5:13-6:2) There is indeed something more. It is called "the word of righteousness." in verse 13, "solid food" in verse 14, and "press on to maturity" in the first verse of chapter 6.

This 'something more' is a very popular theme in the Scriptures. It is repeated many times in many ways. It is also called "saved to the uttermost" (Heb 7:25), "Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19), "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col 1:27), "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13), "of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16), "that we may present every man complete [perfect] in Christ" (Col 1:28), "in Him you have been made complete [perfect]" (Col 2:10), "that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19), "walk by the Spirit," "be led by the Spirit," and "live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16, 18, 25), "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh [nature] with its passions and lusts" (Gal 5:24), "an inheritance imperishable and undefiled that will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:4-5), "conformed to the image of His Son" and "these He also glorified" (Rom 8:29-30), and many others, some in the past tense, some in the present, and some in the future.

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God... The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, *if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.* For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God... in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption [bondage to the sin nature] into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails together until now... Also we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body [deliverance from the sin nature].” (Rom 8:16-23)

What is this passage saying? It tells me that those who already have the “firstfruits of the Spirit” are not content to rest on their laurels. Rather they “groan” with “anxious longing,” “waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons.” These saints know that the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles is for some future date, but they refuse to sit back and tolerate their imperfection until the rapture; rather they eagerly pursue the perfection of Christ, even through His purifying discipline, longing to hurry up the date of the wedding. “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Cor 7:1) “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him [Jesus] purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 Jn 3:3)

There are a lot of Scriptures like this. I am not preaching some strange doctrine only implied from a single obscure phrase back in the Old Testament. The Feast of Tabernacles teaches us exactly what many New Testament passages teach: *that God’s plan of redemption extends even beyond Pentecost, beyond the filling of the Holy Spirit.* It reaches into the fullness, the perfection, and the Sabbath Rest. It is future, from our time-based perspective. But we are still to pursue it wholeheartedly, as if we could actually achieve it in our own life right now. In a sense, from the eternity perspective of the great I AM, we can! At least on a limited basis being led by the Spirit into the perfection of holiness is possible right now, even though Satan and the downward pull of our flesh nature are still right there to drag us down the minute we take our eyes off Jesus.

In this limited sense, every Christian since Adam and Eve had this opportunity to meet the Lord at Tabernacles, yes, even before Christ was manifested in the flesh. The Old Testament saints were even more limited than we, yet at least some of them by faith walked in the fullness of God’s redemption; Hebrews 11 assures us of that! If they could, can we not also look at the three Feasts, see God’s finished, perfect story of redemption, and just believe it? After all, this whole Christian life is only a walk by faith.

I don’t criticize those who camp at Pentecost, and I certainly don’t put down the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit. It is humanly very logical to omit the third Feast; to place it firmly into the future and ignore it. But do you see what happens then? *By ignoring the Feast of Tabernacles, they give up the very means God designed to get them there!* They sit back, content to wallow in shallowness and lack of spiritual power, trusting in the rapture to zap them up to heaven and into the instant fullness of God. I beg to differ! If the rapture was to occur today, nearly every Christian in America would miss it. We are not ready.

We are “... heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ *if indeed we suffer with Him* in order that we may also be glorified with Him.” (Rom 8:17) So, how much suffering with Christ have we faced lately? In neglecting the Feast of Tabernacles we also skip the ten Days of Awe and the Day of Atonement, which symbolize the judgment of the saints. “It is time for judgment to begin from the household of God; and if it begins from us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, let those who *suffer according to the will of God* also entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” (1 Pet 4:17-19)

THE PURPOSE OF PAIN – HOW CAN A GOOD GOD ALLOW THE INNOCENT TO SUFFER?

One of the favorite exercises of those who hate God and are ignorant of His ways is to try to trap Him by this logical contradiction: “The Bible says that God is good. It also says that He is all-powerful. So why then doesn’t He get rid of all the pain and suffering in the world? Look at the babies! Surely they don’t deserve to suffer and die! God must be too weak to end it, or He must be sadistic and cruel. Otherwise He surely would fix it so no one would have to suffer.”

I freely admit that if you accept the Catholic dogma of eternal torment in hell, they do have a valid point. That certainly would be cruel and sadistic of God, and it does imply a god too weak to fix it – too weak to save the vast majority of His creatures from Satan’s clutches. But the purpose of my book is to correct such erroneous dogma.

So allow me to point out a few logical errors in such thinking. First, there is a pretty obvious alternative to the conclusion they have drawn. Here is a better conclusion: “God is good. God is also all-powerful. Pain exists in the world, even among the innocent. Therefore God must have a good purpose in the pain. He’ll take care of the pain problem after His purpose for it is satisfied.”

They don’t like to hear that, because they can’t understand why a baby should have to suffer. But face it, God’s ways are higher than our ways. (See Isa 55:8-9.)

But that's really a cop-out, too. When I was a kid I used to hate it when older people talked to me like that. "Don't question the Almighty! He's God! You're too little to understand it. Just believe it." Nuts.

So here is an even better conclusion, though it is not quite so obvious: "God is good. God is also all-powerful. He sees the big picture, from Creation to the end of time. He uses every bit of pain, in this life, the ages to come, and even all the torments of hell, to accomplish His eternal purpose: to form a Bride worthy of Himself, and through her, to save everyone else as well." So ultimately, "... God will wipe tears away from all faces..." (Isa 25:8) "And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, crying, or pain. The first things have passed away." (Rev 21:4) Finally, faced with the wondrous glory of eternal life, everyone, even those who suffered most in hell, will agree that it was all worth it. "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension." (2 Cor 4:17)

I know. Those with no faith will be quick to point out that my solution to the problem of pain requires faith in the hereafter and faith in God's promises. True, though they use a big dose of circular reasoning. ("A good, all-powerful, *eternal* God must not exist because He doesn't eliminate pain *in this brief life*?") So for those with no faith, here is a third conclusion showing the importance and essential goodness of pain, even in this life.

First, an example may be in order. My little 11 month old granddaughter fell and broke her collarbone. It couldn't be casted, so its rapid healing depended upon her own choices to keep it immobilized. Without any pain medication, she learned in one day how to get along just fine. By the second and third days she was playing happily using both hands, even crawling (on three limbs) but still not putting any pressure on her broken collarbone. How did she figure out how to do that? The pain. You see, pain is our friend. More clearly than anything else, it tells us where something is wrong and demands that we 'fix it', now. We'd never see a dentist (indeed some of us would never brush our teeth) if a toothache didn't hurt so much. We'd live on junk food if a stomachache didn't hurt so much. Without our bodies' pain sensors, we might die before thinking about visiting a doctor. Can you imagine the risks reckless teenagers might take, if not for the pain?

So here is my third alternative conclusion: "God allowed pain in this life for our good, so that we will learn wisdom and work to minimize the pain in us and others, thus living better, more fulfilling, even more godly lives."

Yes, He could have prevented my granddaughter from falling. But He didn't. Now my daughter, the babysitter, and all of us are a lot more careful! She will heal, and we have all learned wisdom, as well as more compassion and understanding toward others whose babies are hurting.

So let's extend that principle to a whole culture filled with pain and suffering. The Muslim culture is an obvious example. It is so dysfunctional as to abuse and enslave their women, send their children to be suicide bombers, execute one of their own for simply choosing a different faith, and constantly fight and kill each other as well as those around them. Yes, they cause a lot of pain, and yes, God could just reach down and put an end to it by snuffing them all out. But then who would learn wisdom? Who would ever know that the Judaeo-Christian culture is vastly superior to the Muslim culture, if they didn't exist? God allows an evil culture in order to demonstrate to the world the natural consequences of evil, and then sends a godly culture alongside to help, and both cultures learn wisdom. Any reasonable person watching Muslims all over the world hate and kill Christians and Jews, then watching Christians and Jews reach out in love even to their enemies, can hardly help but be impressed. The result is as God intended. People see the contrast, and learn to seek what is best. I swear to you, many Muslims will be saved from the wrath to come because they felt the love, saw the goodness, and wanted what they saw in the Jews and Christians in comparison to their own culture.

Yes, the pain will still be there. But it is not pointless torment. It is **discipline**, filled with grace and mercy, teaching us to hate what is evil and destructive and to love and long for all that is godly.

Nobody likes to hear about suffering and discipline. It is much more comfortable to remain ignorant of anything that might shake us out of our complacency. Well, again, this is not some obscure doctrine based on a brief Scripture phrase way back in 2nd Hezekiah. There are many major passages including whole chapters in both the Old and New Testaments, dealing with this subject. Hebrews 12, for example. Allow me to excerpt from it:

"... lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame... You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, in your striving against sin... whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives... *He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.* All discipline seems for the moment not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness... Pursue after peace with all men, and after sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord... See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking... Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven... denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken [the uncreated things, things of Spirit, things of God's eternal nature and character which is being developed in us] may remain.

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; *for our God is a consuming fire.*”

An Old Testament example is Malachi 3. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi [priests], and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to YHWH offerings in righteousness... Then I will draw near to you for judgment... For I, YHWH, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed... Then those who feared YHWH spoke to one another, and YHWH gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear YHWH and who esteem [reverence] His name. They will be Mine, says YHWH of Hosts, on the day I prepare My own possession [special treasure], and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him. For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says YHWH of Hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing on His wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. And you will [be raptured out of it all before the wicked are judged? no! You will] tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the souls of your feet on the day which I am preparing, says YHWH of Hosts.”

Please note the sequence. It is consistent throughout Scripture. It is always, “that I may know Him [Passover], and the power of His resurrection [Pentecost], and the fellowship of His sufferings [Trumpets, wake-up call to the ten Days of Awe], being conformed to His death [the Day of Atonement]; in order that I may [then] attain to the resurrection from the dead [Tabernacles].” (Phil 3:10)

Suffering always comes before glory. “If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we endure [persevere under the discipline], we shall also reign with Him.” (2 Tim 2:11-12) “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.” (1 Pet 4:12) “Therefore, since Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” (1 Pet 4:1-2) Judgment must begin with the saints before it flows through the saints. (1 Pet 4:17)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof [testing, trial] of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, *even though tested by fire*, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 1:3-7) That’s it! Pain purifies, just like fire purifies gold.

“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds...” (Rom 2:4-6) This passage is fascinating. On the surface it seems to apply only to the unrepentant sinner, not the saint. The saints are not under God’s wrath, though they may be under His discipline. However, the book of Romans was written to the saints. (Rom 1:7)

I believe that God’s wrath will fall upon all those who love their sins so much that they deliberately chose their own ways over God and His ways of righteousness. That is iniquity. So, what about me? Is there any of that iniquity hiding within my own heart? I have made the deliberate choice to love God and His wisdom and ways, and to submit myself to Him. But what about my vanity, pride, and love of the praise of men...? The Holy Spirit has been dealing with me on that for years, and though sometimes I seem to accept His discipline, at other times I make excuses for myself and push aside His dealings. Or perhaps it is my lack of love and compassion, my envy, my greed, my partiality, my laziness, my gluttony, my selfishness – whatever I hide in my heart and refuse to let the Holy Spirit deal with. Perhaps the voice of the Holy Spirit has grown quiet over the years as I have hardened my conscience. *I am being double-minded*. In a sense, am I not also “storing up wrath for myself in the day of wrath?”

God’s wrath is not against me – oh no! It is against all the things within me that hurt me, and all the things that keep me from Himself, because He loves me. On that great Day of Atonement, His wrath will indeed fall upon all those things that I stored up, those things that I refused to deal with now, until all is atoned for. On that great day, God will “render to every man according to his deeds.” Many faithful saints will receive their rewards, but I must not presume that I will be among them! I must always remember righteous Lot, who was saved, but only through the fire. All his works were burned up.

The wrath of God will never fall upon me. I know that with all my heart and soul. He loves me! But I must learn to welcome the wrath of God upon all within me that keeps me from Himself, so that I may celebrate the Feast with joy and gratefulness!

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let the endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

That, my friend, is the Feast of Tabernacles. When you have suddenly been struck down in some great illness, injury, or trial and your very first heart-felt response is one of worship, joy that your life and times are in God’s hand, and faith that He will work it all out for your good and His glory, and even eagerness to see what new ministry He has prepared for you through the suffering, then I assure you, you have met the Lord at the Feast of Tabernacles. Or if you have some grave deformity or handicap, some chronic injury or long-term pain, but instead of getting bitter or growing desperate for healing you have thanked the Lord for His purifying fire and His marks of ownership upon you, and have determined to rejoice in His testing of you and to allow Him to do whatever He wills to perfect His ministry through you, then again I assure you, you have met the Lord at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Your faith is not just a hopeful ‘pie in the sky’ kind of faith, but a tested and purified faith, refined in the fires of adversity, that chooses to believe in the love and goodness of God in spite of the pain you feel. You have elevated faith above feelings, and have made the freewill choice to love and trust the sovereign God in whatever He sends your way. You do not have the fullness yet, because you are still awaiting the redemption of your physical body, and that cannot happen until it is time for the wedding feast. But at least for this moment in time you are at perfect peace and rest in the arms of the great I AM, from His eternity perspective. By faith you know you will continue to walk with Him and be led by His Holy Spirit through whatever tribulations He allows to purify you, for He is “able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy.” (Jude 24) That is the purpose of pain. It is simply one tool that God uses to bring each of His precious children to the joy and perfection of the Feast of Tabernacles.

I’d like to close this section with a quote from a tract called *Messiah for the Stepped-On and the Burned-Out* by Glen Penton, a Messianic Jew.

“Telling why we need the Messiah and how we can recognize Him, Isaiah prophesied, “A damaged reed He won’t break, and a smoldering flax wick He won’t extinguish.” (Isa 42:3) Since damaged reeds and smoking flax wicks are not an important part of our Western culture, it may help us to explore their usage here.

“Near-eastern shepherds, in Isaiah’s time and now, learn to be good musicians. The shepherd’s music calms the sheep, relieves the shepherd’s boredom, and warns any would-be predators that a shepherd is present with the sheep. So a shepherd often picks a likely-looking piece of reed-grass and makes it into a simple flute.

“But reed-grass is fragile. Around shepherd children and flocks of sheep, it does not take long for that kind of flute to be crushed, nibbled-on, stepped-on, sat-on, used for a toy sword, used for playing keep-away, pierced, bruised, or bent.

“So what does a shepherd-kid do with a ruined flute? Normally, he or she will say a bad word, break the thing, throw it away, pick a new reed, and make a new flute. Why bother fixing the old one? It’s easier to start over with a fresh one.

“Likewise, the ancient lamp was not much more than a bowl of olive oil with a little flax floating in it for a wick. As long as the lamp had enough oil, the wick would soak up the oil and serve as the catalyst for turning it into light. But when the oil was gone, the flax would begin to burn. Now, burning flax doesn’t give much light. It mostly stinks up the room and fills it with smoke. The simple solution is to extinguish and throw out the smoking flax and start over with fresh oil and a fresh wick. It takes too much patience to make a smoldering wick burn brightly again.

“In the same way, we as individuals, as well as all Israel and all humanity, are fragile and weak. Because of the faults of those around us, our lives get bent out of shape, played-with, bruised, crushed, stepped-on, and sat-on. No minor messiah can meliorate such a mangled mess. Because of our own faults, our best efforts to give light produce only dark smoke. Each attempt to do right becomes a stench both to God and to people. It takes an almighty Messiah to do whatever is necessary to restore us and make us a blessing to God, to other people, and to ourselves.

“Almost any messiah can make use of the happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise. But God told Isaiah that you can recognize the true Messiah by His healing those who have been damaged, and who appear to be useless. If you meet that qualification, don’t waste your sorrows on stinky self-help schemes or on people who will break and discard you. Trust and obey Israel’s Messiah. Let Him demonstrate what He can do in you and for you, so that others around you will follow Him, too.

“Although He is holy and we are sinful, He has never rejected the Jewish people or thrown us away. And He will never reject you or throw you away, either, if you trust and follow Him. Why not take time to have a talk with Him about it now?”

Amen! Three cheers for Yashua, Israel’s true Messiah, and His great love for even the least of us!

FEAST OF TABERNACLES – O.T. STORIES

The most magnificent Old Testament story of the Feast of Tabernacles is in 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 5-7. King Solomon had been faithful to build the temple and furnish it as his father King David had charged him. When all the men of Israel assembled as commanded on the 15th of Tishri for the Feast, the Levites brought the Ark of the Covenant and other holy furnishings from the tabernacle and installed them in their proper places in the temple. They then sacrificed an uncountable number of animals. The priests sanctified themselves. The Levitical singers put on their best fine linen, and joined in harmony with a multitude of musicians with cymbals, harps, and lyres, plus 120 priests blowing trumpets, singing praises to YHWH, “He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting, and His truth endures forever.”

With that, the glory of YHWH fell upon the temple, like a thick cloud, “so that the priests could no longer even stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of YHWH filled the house of God.” King Solomon, standing in awe, commented: “YHWH has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud. I have built Thee a lofty house, a place for Thy dwelling forever.” (1 Kings 8:12) He turned to face the people and blessed them, reminded them of why he had built the temple, and prayed a prayer that has got to be one of the greatest prayers in all of Scripture.

“O YHWH, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart... But will God indeed dwell with mankind on the earth? Behold, even the highest heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built. Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant... that Your eyes may be open toward this house day and night, toward the place of which You have said that You would put Your name there, to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place... If a man sins against his neighbor... and he comes before Your altar in this house, then hear from heaven and act and judge Your servants... forgive the sin of Your servants and Your people Israel. Indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk... render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men, that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You have given to our fathers... When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and... are taken away captive... if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, and pray toward their land which You have given to their fathers, and the city which You have chosen, *and toward the house which I have built for Your name*, then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, their prayers and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You.

“Now, O my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open, and Your ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. Now therefore arise, O Lord YHWH, to Your resting place, You and the Ark of Your might; let Your holy priests, O Lord YHWH, be clothed with salvation, and let Your godly ones rejoice in what is good...” (2 Chron 6:14-41, excerpts)

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the Shekina Glory of YHWH filled the house so that the priests could not even enter it. All the sons of Israel fell on their faces to the ground before YHWH, worshiping and saying, “Truly He is good; truly His lovingkindness is everlasting.” Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, and finished dedicating the temple. All the people were so joyful (and had so much food) they celebrated the Feast for fourteen days instead of seven! On the 15th day (Tishri 29) Solomon sent them all home, rejoicing, full, satisfied, and thankful.

That night, YHWH appeared to Solomon and said, “... I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens so there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house, that My name may be there forever. My eyes and My heart will be there for all time.” (2 Chron 7: 12-16)

Thus the Feast of Tabernacles (Hebrew: Sukkot) is known as the Festival of Lights, the Feast of the Dedication of the temple, and the Season of our Joy in addition to ‘The Feast’ and “The Feast of YHWH.” (Lev 23:39) These titles are all hinted at during King Solomon’s dedication of the temple. The fire of God that fell upon the sacrifices, and the Shekina Glory cloud, are from the ‘Father of Lights’ who in our realm is Yashua, the ‘Light of the World’.

Note that Hanukkah is also called the Festival of Lights and the Feast of Dedication. John 10:22 almost certainly refers to Hanukkah, since it is in winter after Tabernacles in John 7. Hanukkah celebrates the time when the temple was purified and re-dedicated in 165 BC, after Judas Maccabeas reconquered Jerusalem from their Syrio-Greek oppressors. Tabernacles had not been celebrated for three years due to the harsh Syrian occupation, so when they recovered the temple, they held a ‘late’ Tabernacles.

One other notable celebration of Tabernacles in the Old Testament is in Nehemiah 8. The exiles returning from Babylon, though they had rebuilt the temple, had neither been reading the Torah nor keeping the Feasts. They had finished rebuilding the wall, and by the seventh month had gone to live in their own houses and towns.

A big turning point in their lives came when they assembled for the Fall Feasts. Ezra the scribe read from the Torah, and they realized they had not been following it. They began to mourn, but Nehemiah their governor stopped them, saying, “This day is holy to YHWH your God; do not mourn or weep. Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to the one who has nothing prepared. Do not be grieved, for the joy of YHWH is your strength.” So they made booths and dwelt in them for seven days, and they celebrated the Feast with all their hearts. There was great rejoicing. Ezra read from the Torah every day, and the people all drank it in.

After the Feast was over, the people wouldn’t go home. They wanted to hear more! They assembled again, this time putting sackcloth and dirt on themselves, and stood for a fourth of the day while the Torah was read, confessed their sins and repented another fourth of the day, and then praised and worshiped YHWH. Then the Levites led them in an incredible confession of sin and cleansing of their ways, including putting away the heathen wives they had illegally married. I believe this led to God’s blessing upon them and upon the land of Israel, possibly even lasting from Nehemiah’s time all the way to the time of Christ.

The only other major reference to a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament is in Zechariah 14, speaking of the millennial Kingdom after the battle of Armageddon. God proclaims that “... any who are left of all the nations that went [to battle] against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, YHWH of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Sukkot [Booths]. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, YHWH of Hosts, there will be no rain on them.” (Zech 16-17) This again ties the Feast to the promise of rain, and assures us that of all the Feasts, at least Tabernacles will be celebrated after Christ returns for His Bride, becoming their wedding anniversary. It also shows us that this Feast of Ingathering is the Feast of the Nations, hinting at the bountiful harvest of people for the Kingdom which it typifies.

THE LAST GREAT DAY OF THE FEAST – N.T.

We have talked about this day several times, but, as it is possibly the most significant day of the most significant week in the history of the universe, I feel it deserves further study. Of the (rather few) New Testament stories on the Feast of Tabernacles, the one in John 7 is the most famous. It revolves around the Last Great Day of the Feast. (v 37)

I believe that Yashua was born on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. If true, then according to the law He must be circumcised on the eighth day of the Feast, which is the High Sabbath of Shemini Atzeret, concluding the Feast. What, then (if any), is the prophetic significance of the seventh day, the Last Great Day of the Feast?

To tell the story of the seventh day is to tell the story of the entire Feast, for it all reaches its climax on that day. Bear in mind that Jewish time is reckoned from evening to evening. Yashua’s birth on the first day of the Feast was almost certainly in the evening, when the temple was dark and the weary travelers were bedded down in their new Sukkim. There was no *Simchat Bet haSho’ayva* (Festival of Lights, literally, the Rejoicing of the House of [water] Drawing) celebration on that first night, as that was a two part celebration which by tradition had to start with the Water Libation Ceremony the next morning.

The Water Drawing Ceremony celebrated the drawing of water from the rock at Horeb after Moses struck the rock at the command of YHWH. Early on the morning of the first full day of the Feast and every day thereafter, a priest carried a large golden pitcher from the temple mount down to the ‘living’ Pool of Siloam. Surrounded by jubilant worshipers, he drew water from the spring and returned to the temple, walking in through the Water Gate which led to the inner court. An eagerly cheering crowd awaited him near the altar. Priests blew three blasts on the ceremonial silver trumpets, and other priests majestically chanted the words of Isaiah 12: “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid. For the Lord YHWH is my strength and song, and *He has become my Yashua [my salvation]*. Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation. And in that day you will say, ‘Give thanks to YHWH; call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples. Make them remember that His name is exalted. Praise YHWH in song, for He has done excellent things. Let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O you inhabitants of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.’”

The high priest proceeded to the big stone altar in the inner court of the temple and ascended the right side of the ramp in full view of the people. At the top, he turned to his left, facing two silver basins which drained to the base of the altar. The eastern one was used for the regular drink offerings of wine, and the western one was reserved for the water libations during this Feast.

Isaiah 12 was finished, and there was a dramatic pause. As the high priest raised the golden pitcher to pour out the water offering, all the people shouted, “Raise your hand!” The priest in response raised the pitcher higher so that all could clearly see him pouring the water into the basin.

That stems from the tale of Alexander Jannaeus, the king-priest grandson of legendary hero Simon Maccabee. The Maccabees were a family of priests who, led by their father Mattathias, were instrumental in overthrowing the hated Greco-Syrian rule over Israel in 165 BC. But their descendants wrongly merged the offices of king and priest – kings were supposed to be from the tribe of Judah and priests from the tribe of Levi – so that as a king-priest, Alexander was hated by many of his brethren.

Alexander Jannaeus, despising the tradition of the water ceremony, poured the sacred water out onto the ground. The people rioted, pelting him with citron fruits from their branches, trying to kill him. In awful rage, he called on his bodyguard of foreign mercenary troops, resulting in six thousand deaths (mostly Pharisees) and a horn broken from the holy altar. Some say he deliberately incited the riot because he wanted to kill the Pharisees. Thereafter, the water pouring was closely monitored.

As he poured the water, another priest simultaneously poured out the drink offering of wine into the other basin. Again the three blasts on the silver trumpets sounded, signaling the start of the temple music. A choir of Levites sang the Hallel (the Praise Psalms 113 through 118), while the priests marched around the altar and the people waved their palm branches, shouting Hallelujah. Then at the proper time they joined in singing the Hosanna (Save Now) from Psalm 118:25-29. The priests, marching one time around the altar while waving palm branches, led them: "Save now, O YHWH, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity! *Blessed is the One who comes in the name of YHWH! We have blessed you from the house of YHWH. YHWH is Light, and He has given us the Light. Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I give thanks to Thee. Thou art my God, and I extol Thee. Oh! Give thanks to YHWH, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting.*"

All this was repeated each of the seven days of the Feast, climaxing on the seventh, the 'Last Great Day' of the Feast. On that day, the ceremony was called 'Hoshanna Rabbah' (Great Hosanna). The priest blew three sets of seven blasts on the silver trumpets and circled the altar not once but seven times. All Israel understood this ceremony to prophesy of Messiah's coming. They firmly believed that when He came, He would appear to them during this celebration, even on this very day! Some claimed that Messiah would appear at the moment of the final blast of the seventh trumpet on this seventh day. Further, after the long dry summer, anticipation of rain was at its annual high. Jewish tradition held that it was on this day that the King of the universe declared whether or not the rains would fall for the coming year's crops. Thus, this water pouring ritual took on tremendous significance for them, both spiritual and physical. It was carried out by all the people with great joy and Messianic fervor.

So when Yashua interrupted this ceremony on the Last Great Day to proclaim: "*If anyone thirst, 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!*" (Jn 7:37) they thought Him neither crazy nor unclear. They all knew precisely what He was saying. Not a one could misunderstand His claim to be their Messiah. At that point there arose a big division among the people, between those ready to welcome Him as their Messiah, and those terrified of Him, wanting to preserve their own little kingdoms.

That all happened on the morning of the seventh day, the Last Great Day of the Feast. But it was not all over yet. For you see, the Water Drawing Ceremony is a two part celebration. Each morning of the Feast was the first part, the Water Libation Ceremony. Then each evening (which was technically the next day in the Jewish mind), was the second part, the celebration of the Festival of Lights. These two were inseparably tied together and called **Simchat Bet haSho'ayva** (literally, 'Rejoicing of the House of [water] Drawing'). In the Jewish mind, the first part was just the ceremony, and the second part was the corresponding celebration, the rejoicing or 'joy' part.

So the afternoon of the seventh day, after a satisfying climax to their festival week, all the people packed up their sukkim and moved into the homes or hotels of Jerusalem, ready to head for home after resting on the High Sabbath of the eighth day. But that evening, which technically began the eighth day (called Shemini Atzeret), was the climactic conclusion of Simchat Bet haSho'ayva, the Festival of Lights. All week had been leading up to this. The people crowded joyously into the vast outer court of the temple (known as the court of women), with the men and women separated by a barrier raised only for this purpose.

Once again the sixteen young priests climbed the long ladders to each of the four oil lamps on each of the four giant menorahs in the center of the court. (Four is the number of the world – from its four 'corners' north, east, west, south – symbolizing that Yashua is the light of the entire world.) They each carried a large pitcher holding about seven gallons of pure olive oil, which they poured into the lamps. The harvest moon was at its full and the autumn sky was clear; the surrounding Judean hills were clearly visible in the moonlight.

Then again, for the seventh and final time, the wicks (made of fine linen garments of the priests) were kindled. The light from the flames was so intense that the Mishnah says there was no courtyard in all Jerusalem that was not lit up. It was truly breathtaking. How fitting that Tabernacles should also be named 'the Season of our Joy'.

The ancient rabbis (in Sukkah 5:1) swore that, "He that hath not beheld the joy of the drawing of water hath never seen joy in his life." It was clearly reminiscent of the descent of the Shekina Glory on the temple in Solomon's day. All those at the Feast in Jesus' day understood that it was prophetic of the coming of Messiah, as in Ezekiel 43:2, and they looked forward with eager anticipation to the return of the Shekina Glory to light up the temple.

Then the Festival of Lights celebration began, with singing, dancing, clapping, and fervent shouts of joy. The people had brought the prescribed leafy branches of palm, willow, and myrtle (lulav, arava, and hadas, collectively called the lulav), and branches of citron with live fruits on them (the aethrog). They waved them overhead and shook them joyously throughout the celebration.

Every worshiper old enough to wave it carried the lulav in his right hand, and the aethrog in his left. The lulav was intended to remind them of the various stages in their journey from Egypt: the palm recalling the valleys and plains, the myrtle the bushes on the mountain heights, and the willows those brooks from which God had given His people to drink. The aethrog was to remind them of the plentiful fruits of the good land which He had given them, another theme of the Harvest Festival.

The elders of the Sanhedrin (the Hassidim) and the 'Men of Deed' danced before the people with flaming torches in their hands, and sang before them hymns and songs of praise. A big group of Levites moved out from the court of the Israelites through the Nicanor Gate to the fifteen stairs leading down to the court of the women. The temple musicians went with them, playing joyously, while the Levites sang the 15 Psalms of Ascents (Ps 120-134), moving down one step after each Psalm. The celebration was glorious! On that eighth night partying continued through the night by longstanding tradition.

Before dawn, two priests with silver trumpets stood at the upper gate (Nicanor). At cock crowing, they blew a threefold blast on their trumpets and began their march, going down the 15 stairs, through the middle of the court of women, and up to 'the Beautiful Gate' (which faces east) stopping to again blow a threefold blast on their trumpets about every 10 steps. But as they reached the gate, instead of gazing out at the rising sun, they deliberately turned their backs on the sun to face west, toward the temple and the holy place, saying, "Our fathers who were in this place – they turned their back upon the sanctuary of YHWH, put their faces toward the east, and worshiped toward the rising sun. But as for us, our eyes are toward YHWH."

A fragment of one of the hymns sung that night has been preserved. It was sung responsively between the honored elders and those who were doing penance in their old age for the sins of their youth.

The "Hassidim" and "Men of Deed:"

Oh joy, that our youth, devoted, sage,
Doth bring no shame upon our old age!

The Penitents:

O joy, we can in our old age
Repair the sins of youth not sage!

Both in unison:

Yes, happy he on whom no early guilt doth rest,
And he who having sinned is now with pardon blest.

Yashua, born in somber obscurity in Beit Lechem (Bethlehem) on the first night of the Feast, was no doubt circumcised at the temple on the 8th day according to the law, possibly during this final Festival of Lights (as I tell the story in Vol. Five). Circumcision symbolizes rolling away (cutting off) the flesh nature. Though Yashua was born with no sin nature, He did suffer the rolling away of the flesh in the physical sense, in fulfillment of the law.

So in that sense, *Baby Yashua first came to the temple at precisely the time that the Jews were expecting Messiah to come*, during the final lighting ceremony of Simchat Bet haSho'ayva, immediately after the Last Great Day of the Feast. I believe that at least one of the priests there at the temple recognized Him and believed in Him, though Scripture doesn't say. They sure had plenty of Scripture to prepare them to recognize Him when He came! So when I tell the story, I create a fictitious priest to fill this role. I believe that everywhere He went, even at birth, there was at least a remnant who recognized Him and believed.

At His Second Appearing as our High Priest, Yashua will fulfill each of the Fall Feasts precisely at the prescribed day and hour. There will first be the **spiritual fulfillment**, as the saints meet their Savior and Lord in each of the Feasts. They are purifying themselves for their wedding to be ready to "meet the Lord in the air" at the rapture, thus fulfilling the symbology of the Feasts. This is the 'birth' of the many-membered body of Christ, the "man-child" of Revelation 12:5. Then will come the **physical fulfillment**. Scripture assures us that at the end of the age the remnant of Israel will also keep the Feasts, at Jerusalem. The veil will be removed from their eyes. They will hear Messiah's call on the dark day of Tishri 1 at the Feast of Trumpets and will re-evaluate their priorities during the ten Days of Awe. On Tishri 10, the Day of Atonement, Yashua will come to the Mt. of Olives to be their judge. (Zech 14:4 ff) Thus they too will be invited to come to the wedding feast on Tishri 15-21 at the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. This will probably be a year or two after the rapture and the wedding, so it will be a 'wedding anniversary' celebration.

During these final 21 days, the wrath of God is poured out on the earth. Mankind angrily gathers at Jerusalem to fight against YHWH. (Rev 14:19-15:1; 16) On the eighth day of the Feast, the man-child (the 'Second Adam', the holy ones of Zech 14:5, the many-membered body of Christ) returns to Israel for 'circumcision' to fulfill the law – but not because of our sin nature. Circumcision is the cutting off of the unclean part of the human male. In the same way the unclean of mankind, all who came against Israel at the battle of Armageddon, are 'cut off'. Thus the Millennium will commence with a worldwide cleansing process in preparation for Messiah's thousand year rule of peace and righteousness. Christ and His Bride will rule in the church from the heavenlies, while under them the restored remnant of Israel will rule from Jerusalem.

I list again that brief summary of events surrounding the Second Appearing of Christ to remind us why we must "not forsake our own assembling together [at the Feasts], as is the habit of... [most American Christians], but encourage one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Heb 10:25) If we don't understand the Feasts, we are in danger of being unprepared for Yashua when He returns, and possibly mistaking the anti-messiah (antichrist) for the Messiah!

When Messiah returns, He will come fulfilling all the prophecies throughout Scripture regarding Himself, including the prophecies woven into the Feasts of Israel, just as He did at His First Appearing. Those who know the Feasts will understand the signs of the times, and will be prepared to meet Him. But when anti-Messiah comes, he will come as men expect Messiah to come, fulfilling all the religious traditions and expectations of men, which the devil has perverted over the last six thousand years.

It wouldn't surprise me a bit, for example, if the anti-Messiah revealed himself on Christmas, or Easter, or the first day of the millennium on Pope Gregory's calendar. That would look great to the modern religious leaders but have no significance on God's calendar. Scripture makes it clear that the anti-Messiah will deceive, if possible, even the Elect. (Matt 24:24) Satan has been doing his level best to prepare for anti-Messiah's coming by perverting the calendar, causing people to despise Torah and hate God's chosen family, and replacing YHWH's Feasts with pagan festivals. How many good all-American church-goers will take the mark of the beast (Rev 13:18) simply because they have been taught to expect all the wrong things when "Jesus comes to take me home." ("This mark I need to be able to buy and sell in the New World Order can't be the mark of the beast – we haven't been raptured yet!")

The deliberate overlap between the seventh and eighth days is a profound prophecy in itself. Eight is the number of new beginnings. Simchat Bet haSho'ayva, which was begun for the seventh time on the morning of the seventh day with the climax of the Water-Libation Ceremony, is concluded that evening, which begins the eighth day, with the final Festival of Lights. It symbolizes the end of the age, the final Sabbath Rest of the millennial Kingdom of Yashua. *But more than that, it symbolizes a change in time itself.* The perfect number seven is intentionally stretched out by the celebration into the eighth day, the day of new beginnings. This is prophetic of the end of the age, at which the final Sabbath day will be stretched out into a thousand years of peace and joy under the righteous rule of Yashua and His Bride. Then beyond that... the final celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles; God dwelling with His people in the new heavens and new earth in the ages to come, as prophesied in Revelation 21 and 22.

On the following morning, which is still the eighth day, is a High Sabbath celebration called **Simchat Torah**. Jewish tradition divides up the Torah into weekly Sabbath portions, so that it is entirely read through each year. On the eighth day of the Feast, they read the last verses of the Torah in Deuteronomy, immediately followed by the first verses in Genesis, to symbolize that the study of Torah should never end. The Torah scrolls are taken from the ark and lifted high over the heads of the priests, then marched around the altar to symbolize their lifelong submission to the Word of God. Thus the eighth day ties the lighting ceremony with Torah, the 'light of our understanding'.

On the 8th day, the morning after that final lighting ceremony, 32 years from the day He had first come to the temple to be circumcised, Yashua stood among the crowd gathered for Simchat Torah to proclaim: "I am the Light of the World; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life." (Jn 8:12) Later that day, He healed the man who had been born blind, affirming, "Neither this man sinned nor his parents, but in order that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; the night is coming, when no man can work. While I am in the world, *I am the Light of the World.*" (Jn 9:3-5)

Again there was a big division among the people. (9:16 and 10:19) They knew what He was saying! The Water Drawing Ceremony had just been concluded with the final Festival of Lights. They knew full well that it proclaimed Messiah's coming as their 'Light!' Yashua's claim to be their Messiah was perfectly clear to them, confirmed by both His words and His deeds. By saying, "I am the Living Water" and "I am the Light of the World" and by healing the blind man, He was affirming, "I am the total fulfillment of the Feasts of Tabernacles. Everything that you have been doing here for a thousand years points to Me. I am the reality of which all this is just a symbol. I am God dwelling (tabernacling) with men. I am the reason for the Season of Your Joy. I am your Source of Living Water, which you depend upon spiritually as well as physically. I am your Light, enlightening Torah to your understanding and lighting up your paths. I am your bountiful harvest: your Tree of Life, with fruits for your abundant feast and leaves for your healing. I am the Feast of the Nations, extending My Life and Light to all the world." What He said and when He said it – He could not have made it more clear.

The Feast of Tabernacles, the climax of all the feasts, points us directly to the 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb'. (Rev 19:7) But even that is not its final fulfillment. The last biblical reference to the Feast of Tabernacles is after the Millennium and the Great White Throne judgment, and after death and hell are thrown into the lake of fire, when the Bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, returns to Earth:

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, *'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be among them. He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain. The first things have passed away... Behold, I Am making all things new... I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the Water of Life without cost. He who overcomes shall inherit all things. I will be His God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving, the abominable, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. Come here.*

I shall show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And he... showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God... and I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple, and the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. *And the nations shall walk by its light*, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it... and he showed me the river of the Water of Life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of the street. And on either side of the river was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations..." (Rev 21:3 – 22:2, excerpts)

Note here all the grand themes of Tabernacles, God dwelling (tabernacling) with us and we with Him, the Ingathering of the Harvest, the Festival of the Nations, the Festival of Lights, the Water of Life, Christ the Light of the World, the Season of our Joy, the leafy branches and fruits – they are all here. *This is the best chapter of the greatest story ever told*, the fulfillment of all the Feasts of Israel. So, what is this story that is finally finished with the Feast of Tabernacles? **The story of redemption!** The great victory of divine love reaching down so low to lift us up so high, transforming us from sons of Adam to Sons of God, able to fulfill our created purpose, to have dominion over (rule) the earth. (Gen 1:26)

"Behold, I am coming quickly! My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to [eat of] the Tree of Life and may enter by the gates into the [holy] city. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and immoral persons and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practices lying... And *[to them!]* the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' Let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come! Let everyone who wishes take the Water of Life without cost... Yes, I am coming quickly. Amen. Come Lord Jesus." (Rev 22:12-17, excerpts)

THE TABERNACLE (OR TEMPLE) IN THREES

Remembering our study on the ashes of the red heifer and the cleansing of the conscience, there are several aspects of the tabernacle (or the temple) which may add insight here. First there is the outer court, the **court of the Gentiles** (nations, heathen), which is not actually part of the tabernacle and not one of the 'threes' of which I speak. Once in the tabernacle, there are three main sections. The largest section by far, and the one through which everyone must come, is the **court of Israel**. Israel is God's chosen people, through whom He determined to save the world. (Jn 4:22) This court represents everyone born or adopted into God's chosen family of Israel.

What must you do to get saved? You face the altar of burnt offering and the big bronze laver. These represent personally accepting by faith the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, and being baptized in water for the sanctification of the flesh. A lot of Christians are happy to camp right there. They are saved and they know they are going to heaven; what more could they need?

Well, there is one aspect of this first court that most people don't even consider. It is outside the tabernacle. All light (except for the glowing coals on the altar) is natural light, from the sun. This is the state of those who are first saved: almost all their light, their spiritual perception, is natural light, the same light available to the Gentiles in the outer court. That doesn't mean that you can't see God or the things of God in it. He has created even the natural lights to reveal His glory! Gentiles can see God through the things He created, the natural realm, so that they are without excuse. (Rom 1:20) However, a new believer's spiritual perception is by the awakened but uncleansed conscience. They can see that sacrifice on the altar, *but their response can only be 'dead works'*. Their whole focus is 'self'. They cannot possibly see things as God sees them or want what He wants, because all they can understand is what protects, pleases, or pampers self. If you'll be honest with yourself for a moment, when you got saved did you really do so out of any great desire to please and obey God? Or was it just a desire to obtain for your 'self' the freedom from guilt, solutions to your problems, and the assurance of escaping hell and making it to heaven? No, salvation is but the first baby step toward the Kingdom of God. It is far from actually walking in that Kingdom in intimacy with King Yashua by the power of His Spirit.

So is there any benefit to being in the court of Israel vs the court of the Gentiles? Of course there is! Only within the court of Israel do you have the laver to wash in and the Lamb to feast on! He is the Living Water and the Word of God. As you partake of Him, He begins to cleanse your conscience. In time, you start to see as He sees, and want what pleases Him. Your eyes are drawn to the coals on the altar. You catch a glimpse of the Light of the World there, just enough to desire something more.

About then, He turns your focus to the curtain of the tabernacle itself. There is indeed something more, *and it is hidden behind that curtain*. Only the priests can enter in, but we are all called to be priests to God. (Rev 1:6) At this point our sins are all atoned for; we are free of guilt. But the cleansing of our conscience has just begun. We are still very double-minded, wanting both the things of God and the things of the world. Our spiritual perception is still mostly by natural light, according to our own mind and experience. We are still eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and we still live our lives in iniquity, with self on the throne making our life-choices by our own human logic. But now the work of sanctification begins, transforming our nature to want what God wants.

Note that the Passover Feasts are in the “first month,” Nisan. In fact, God deliberately changed Israel’s calendar to make it the first month. “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.” (Ex 12:2) It is symbolized by the first day of creation, when God said, “Let there be light.” That depicts salvation, when for the first time a person’s eyes are opened to the light. Before, his eyes were blind (meaning his spiritual discernment was dead), but at salvation, he can for the first time see the glory of God in the natural light around him. He can read God’s book of nature.

Later comes a time when we experience the Feast of Pentecost, and enter the second section of the tabernacle. This is the **holy place**. Things are very, very different here. Walls keep us from seeing outside and prevent outsiders from seeing in. *No one who has not been here can understand it, and no one who has been here can understand why anyone would settle for any less.* Also, everything is pretty simple in here. We look around to see the gold menorah, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense. That is all. All the sights and sounds, activities and programs, glories and shames of the world are pretty well shut out. We can drop the burden of all our ‘stuff’. Here the cleansing of our conscience from all the pollution, the “corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Pet 1:4), can proceed more rapidly.

The light here is primarily from the menorah, which represents the seven Spirits of God, though some natural sunlight does filter in through the veil. Here is where we really begin to see things as God sees them. Also, here we have available to us a constant supply of fresh Bread, that “Bread that came down from heaven,” who is Jesus, “the Bread of Life.” (Jn 6:31-35) We also have the altar of incense, from which our prayers now can reach right across the veil to the throne of God.

This does bring up a bit of a controversy. Did I just imply that prayers offered to God outside the holy place do not reach the throne of God? Would you accept a qualified sorta’ on that? God hears everything, and He is certainly able to respond to the prayers of anyone, whether they know Him or not. For sure He hears and appreciates the prayers of true repentance from the sinners out there.

Yet in another very real sense, God does not accept prayer unless it is according to the Father’s will, as led by the Holy Spirit. (1 Jn 3:22-24; 5:14-15) In that sense, only when we pray for the Father’s will by the illumination of the seven Spirits of God does our prayer truly become a sweet-smelling incense offering to Him.

Note that Pentecost occurs in the third month, Sivan. This corresponds to the third day of creation, when God commanded the earth to bring forth bountifully of her produce, “... plants yielding seed, and trees bearing fruit...” So with Pentecost; now we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring forth the firstfruits harvest of souls unto the Kingdom.

Again, our human temptation is to just camp here and delight in the glory of the holy place. But in God’s design it is always three in one, one in three. When the cleansing of our conscience is complete, YHWH invites us as His “holy priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5) to enter into the third section of the tabernacle: the **most holy place**. This is the most awesome place of all, and there are a lot of significant differences from the holy place. *All natural light is gone.* The heavy veil allows none of it to penetrate. There is nothing here except the Ark of the Covenant, but it is one in three, three in one.

At the time of Jesus, the room was empty – no Ark, no nothing. As long as people are committed to wickedness YHWH cannot dwell among them, as when the Philistines captured the Ark in the time of old Eli. (1 Sam 4:22 ff). But in the heart of the Christian with the cleansed conscience, there is the Ark itself, the Mercy Seat (propitiatory cover or lid of atonement, held by the two adoring angels, forming the throne of YHWH), and the Shekina Glory of YHWH Himself as King on the throne. There is nothing else. There would be no light at all without the Shekina Glory of YHWH. But with Him, the room is blazing with light. Now our spiritual perception is totally by the illumination from above. Our focus is totally upon His Lordship.

Inside the most holy place we no longer have external food to eat. Now the Bread that came down from heaven, the manna, is hidden within the Ark. The Word of God, the Law of God, is within as well, being written upon our hearts. And the Resurrection Life of God, represented by Aaron’s rod that budded, is also within, symbolizing the miracle provision, resurrection power, and supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. Note that the three items inside the Ark each represent a form of life: body life (the manna), mind and soul life (the revelatory Law of God), and spiritual life (Aaron’s rod). It all comes from within, “... in him a well of water springing up to eternal Life.” (Jn 4:14) This is a unique set of threes unlike anything else in Scripture. One item (the Ark) in three parts (acacia wood box plated with gold, solid gold Mercy Seat, and God’s Shekina Glory), containing three items (the manna, the tablets of the law, and Aaron’s rod) all representing one thing (Life) in three aspects (body, soul, and spirit).

The Shekina Glory of YHWH is an integral part of the Ark of the Covenant; at least that is God’s intent and desire. For the non-Christian, self is firmly on the throne of his heart, and the glory of God is gone. But for the Christian, we have God’s promise to “never leave us nor forsake us.” (Heb 13:5) Thus the Ark filled with His glory represents the normal Christian life. During this age of sin, our heart is first covered by the lid of atonement, further protected by the cherubim, and finally, ruled by the Spirit of God on His throne, filling our lives with light and glory. But one day, after the rapture and wedding feast, we will no longer need to be under that lid of atonement. Instead, we will be seated up on that throne with Christ in glory (Eph 2:6), ruling with Him over all creation as He always intended.

So the Ark of the Covenant is a beautiful picture of mankind as God created us to be: our spirit in oneness with God's Holy Spirit on the throne of our lives, ruling over our soul, which in turn rules over our body, with the threefold Life of Yashua our source of inexhaustible Life within, and nothing else in the room at all. No fleshly input or worldly sources of life. We see nothing by the perspective of the 'independent self'. We see by and are led by the Holy Spirit in everything. Thus the Ark of the Covenant, just like the threefold Feast of Tabernacles, symbolizes the eternal Sabbath Rest we have in Christ. He 'tabernacles' with us. As He dwells in us and we abide in Him, we are in perfect peace and rest within the most holy place.

Note that the room would be totally dark without the Shekina Glory, as it was in Caiaphas Cohen's day. Even at the time of Solomon in the glory of the first temple, there was no manna or resurrection rod in the Ark. (1 Kings 8:9) There were only the tablets of the law, and they ministered death, not life. As wondrous as Solomon's temple was, his heart was not transformed and his conscience was never cleansed. In the end he turned back to idolatry (11:1-9), and the Shekina Glory was lost. *Without the Shekina Glory of YHWH covering our heart, our souls are totally darkened, and we put ourselves right back under the law.* Coming into the presence of YHWH without the atoning blood of Yashua and the cleansing of our conscience, results in the judgment of the law. It is death, darkness, and emptiness, rather than life, light, and fullness. We must learn of the reverential fear of YHWH, lest we attempt to saunter lightly or selfishly into His presence!

Note that the threefold Feast of Tabernacles comes in the seventh month, Tishri. It is symbolized by the seventh day of Creation, the Sabbath, in which God "... rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work..." (Gen 2:2-3) However, there is something else extra special about this seventh month. It is the first month of the agricultural / civil year. The seventh month is thus both the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. The harvest had all been gathered in before the Feast of Tabernacles, but one primary focus of the Feast was a prayer to God for the early (winter) rains to help prepare the ground for the next year's crops in anticipation of an abundant harvest.

This is far more significant than appears on the surface. Though the church has now come near to the end of the age and is about to enter her Sabbath Rest, the real harvest of the nations is yet ahead, in the ages to come. It will be the most abundant harvest of all, when "the Spirit and the Bride [together, in perfect marital unity] say, 'Come!'" On a personal level, it is the same. It is only when the child of God is at rest in Christ that he reaches his full fruitfulness for the Kingdom of God. It is always, out of the old is the beginning of the new. That is why we must study the old, so we won't miss what God is doing in the new.

I've been speaking so long of threes, but don't forget that the tabernacle has four areas. Four is the number of the earth. The four areas tell us of four **types of ministry** as illustrated by Yashua's earthly ministry.

The first is Yashua's ministry to the multitudes, which is represented by the outer **court of the Gentiles**. Yashua taught in parables, and often wouldn't even explain them publicly, so that, "... seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." (Lk 8:10) Yashua deliberately offended the multitudes (He told them they had to eat His flesh and drink His blood, which is a horrible thing to say to Orthodox Jews – John 6:52 ff) and He even cursed their religious leaders. (Matt 23:13) He was not trying to save the nations then – He was focused on choosing out of the world a 'firstfruits' people for Himself, a spiritual Israel.

The second area of the tabernacle is the inner **court of Israel**. It represents Yashua's ministry to this spiritual Israel, His many disciples (bondservants). He explained to them the parables, shared intimately with them, taught them the mysteries of the Kingdom, and sent them out in power to really experience the anointing of the Holy Spirit. "To you it is granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God..." (Lk 8:10 a)

The third area is the **holy place**, representing Yashua's ministry to the twelve disciples, or the three on the Mount of Transfiguration. These were the apostles, His spiritual 'brothers'. They left all behind to follow Him wherever He went; they beheld His glory and acknowledged Him to be Messiah Son of God; they bowed in worship and served Him, like priests ministering to YHWH in the holy place.

The fourth area is the **most holy place**, the **Holy of Holies**. This area is not often recognized in the ministry of Yashua, because it was in secret: *His intimate communion in prayer just between Him and the Father*. The disciples were rarely invited to share this ministry; it was only the high priest who could enter the most holy place, and then only on the Day of Atonement. It was here in ministry with the Father that Yashua received power to minister to His disciples so they could minister to the people. This points to the ministry of Christ and His Bride.

Now notice the progression. In each increasing area of ministry there is greatly increased spiritual light available, and greatly increased sanctification required. Those in the court of the Gentiles are in total spiritual darkness, and live in total bondage to sin. Those in the court of Israel have only the light from the altar of burnt offering. They have been delivered from their guilt and bondage to sin, but have not yet been sanctified to walk by the Holy Spirit. Those in the holy place have the light of the seven Spirits of God and have been sanctified to walk by the Spirit, but have not yet been glorified. Only the sanctified, glorified, Son of God (Yashua our High Priest as head of His many-membered Bride) can stand in the most holy place, in the secret place of the Most High, blazing with Shekina Glory.

This progression is for our own protection. If one living in darkness is suddenly exposed to a great light, he will not be enlightened, he will be blinded! We must be discerning before inviting new believers into the deeper things of God. Meat will not nourish babies – it will choke them! That is why many things in Scripture are deliberately unclear or even confusing on the surface. The babes are not granted to understand. Only in digging deeper and deeper as for hidden treasures are those saints who are being sanctified allowed to search out the unfathomable riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

Technically the year of Jubilee is not a part of the Feasts of Israel, but the symbolism here is so beautiful, I can't resist chasing another bunny tail. Right after God tells us about the Sabbath Rest for the land (on the 7th year), He says, "You are also to count off 7 sabbaths of years for yourself, 7 times 7 years, so that you have the time of 7 sabbaths of years, 49 years. You shall then sound the ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the 7th month; on the Day of Atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you. Thus each of you shall return [be restored] to his own property, and each of you shall return to his own family." (Lev 25:8-10) He then goes on to describe three key features of this year of Jubilee.

First, any of their Jewish brethren who had been sold into servitude due to poverty were to be set free. Israelites were permitted to make slaves of the Gentiles (heathen nations), but not each other!

Second, any real estate which had been sold, had to be returned to the original owner's family. The land was each family's heritage from God (it actually belongs to God), and was not permitted to be sold, only 'rented' for its crops. "Corresponding to the number of years after the Jubilee, you shall buy [land] from your friend; he is to sell to you according to the number of years of crops." (v15)

Third, the Jubilee was a Sabbath of Sabbaths for the land; the land was not to be tilled, sown, or harvested. Only what grew by itself in the fields could be eaten.

Isaiah 61 tells of a prophetic fulfillment of the Jubilee. "The Spirit of Adonai YHWH is upon me because YHWH has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of YHWH and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of YHWH, that He may be glorified.

"Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will raise up the former devastations, and they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations..." (v 1-4) I believe this is pointing to the final Jubilee, the 70th Jubilee. Assuming the Jubilee countdown began in 1451 BC at the Exodus, the 70th Jubilee will be in 2050 AD.

Yashua claimed this passage as His own 'life verse'. (Luke 4:18) He fulfilled it in a limited way during His earthly ministry, and implied that He would fulfill it in an even greater way when He returns to Jerusalem on "the day of vengeance of our God."

Though the parallels between the year of Jubilee and the millennial Sabbath Rest are pretty obvious, there are several points I don't want anyone to miss. First, notice the timing. The year of Jubilee starts on the Day of Atonement, on the tenth day of the seventh month. The seventh millennium does not start on January 1, 2001, as our calendar might indicate. God's calendar is different from ours, and His seventh millennium starts on Tishri 10 of the seventh month, at the end of the harvest year.

Why does it start on the Day of Atonement? Because without the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we cannot be set free from our bondage to sin. Until then, we are still in the Feast of Trumpets, the call to battle against God's enemies in our hearts.

Daniel describes it like this: "And I kept looking, and that horn [the antichrist power] was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the Kingdom... And he [the antichrist] will speak out against the Most High, and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law [he will try to pervert God's calendar and His laws], and they [the saints] will be given into his hand for a time, and times, and half a time [possibly 3 1/2 or 1260 years]. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him." (7:21, 22, 27)

That is the beginning of the year of Jubilee, and it starts on the Day of Atonement. It is the time when the afflicted of the earth receive their "good news," the brokenhearted are "bound up," all the captives are set at liberty, and the prisoners are freed. This is both the "favorable year of YHWH" and "the day of vengeance of our God." "For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and [at the same time] My year of redemption has come." (Isa 63:4) Finally, the land shall receive its Sabbaths, and Jerusalem, which has known more war than any other city, will finally be known as the City of Peace, capital city of the Prince of Peace.

Then at the Feast of Tabernacles comes the greatest wedding celebration in history. After that, Yashua and His Bride, now called “the armies which are in heaven” (Rev 19:14) will cleanse the earth of all the wicked, cast the beast of antichrist and all who worshiped him “alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone” (v 20), and rule the nations “with a rod of iron.” Now the real harvest of the nations begins, for they all must go up to Jerusalem “from year to year to worship the King, YHWH of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.” (Zech 14:16) *Please notice here those three provisions of the year of Jubilee as I previously discussed.*

First, the Jews (including us Gentiles who are adopted into the family of Israel) are all set free, but they are allowed to have Gentile slaves. They will “rule the nations with a rod of iron.” “Let the godly ones [the saints] exult in glory; let them sing for joy upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their throat, and a two edged sword in their hand, to execute [God’s] vengeance on the nations, and punishment upon the peoples; to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the judgment written. This is an honor for all His godly ones.” (Ps 149:5-9)

Second, each person is then restored to the land of his family heritage. There is a lot of unnecessary argument over this land thing, especially in the Middle East. What belongs to the ‘Palestinians’ and what to the Jews? Well, it is actually pretty simple. *It all belongs to God*, and He will give it to whomever He chooses. In the year of Jubilee, it will be restored to its rightful owners. We are not talking about heaven here! This whole thing makes no sense at all if you try to spiritualize it all away. All through Scripture God makes it clear that the land of Israel is important to Him. He will restore it by tribes, clans, and families to His own chosen people.

“On that day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt [the Nile] as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.’” (Gen 15:18) Moses told Israel, “Turn, and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country, the lowland, and the Negev, and by the sea-coast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have placed the land before you; *go in and possess the land which YHWH swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.*” (Deut 1:7-8) “Every place on which the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours; your border shall be from the wilderness [of Sinai] to Lebanon, and from the River Euphrates as far as the Western Sea” (the Mediterranean – Deut 11:24). “I will make your border from the Red Sea [Sea of Edom – the Gulf of Aqaba] to the sea of the Philistines [Mediterranean], and from the wilderness [of Sinai] to the great river [Euphrates].” (Ex 23:31)

I am quite aware that the Israelis violated YHWH’s covenant and forfeited their legal right to the land. But God was not content to leave it so. In dozens of Scriptures He promises to restore them to the land anyway. Here is one: “For behold, days are coming, declares YHWH, when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah. YHWH says, I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it... I am with you, declares YHWH, to save you; for I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished... In the latter days you will understand this. At that time, declares YHWH, I will be the God of all the families of Israel [including us adopted ones], and they shall be My people... Behold, I am bringing them out from the north country, and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth... a great company... and they shall return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, declares YHWH! Your children shall return to their own territory.” (Jer 30:3, 11, 24; 31:1, 8, 16-17) *This is the year of Jubilee, and the Israelites shall be restored to their land.*

Third, the land shall finally have its Sabbaths. It will no longer have to be tilled, sown, watered, pruned, harvested, brought into barns, and prepared for winter, but instead the Israelis will simply go out into the fields whenever they get hungry and eat that which grows naturally. This is an incredible prophecy, which few understand.

We have all been conditioned to think of our ‘eternal Sabbath Rest’ as spending all of eternity sitting on a cloud singing and plucking a harp. That is not and never has been God’s idea of rest! His idea of rest is found in Isaiah 58: “... to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke and let the oppressed go free, to divide your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into the house, and cover the naked, to cease the judging and speaking wickedness, to give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted – to turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from doing your own thing, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own words, and take delight in YHWH, to do His good pleasure. Then He will make you to ride on the heights of the earth and will give you your inheritance [*the land*] as He promised Jacob [Israel] your father, for the mouth of YHWH has spoken it.” (Isa 58:6-14 paraphrased) That is heaven in God’s mind, called “the heights of the earth.”

You see, the curse which God put on the ground in Genesis 3:17 will finally be broken. *Once again the earth will start yielding up of its full strength to us.* We won’t have to labor to till the soil by the sweat of our brow. The land will produce bountifully, each kind of fruit in its season, all year around, so that we can just go out to the field and eat what grows naturally. This clearly speaks of a restored earth, back to the pre-sin state of the Garden of Eden.

The spiritual part of this remarkable prophecy is that the harvest of lost souls for the Kingdom of God will not be a labor, as has the last two millennia of slow, painful, missionary work. *The land will yield its full strength.* The devil will be bound with a great chain and cast into the Abyss "... so he shall not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years are completed..." (Rev 20:1-3) We won't have to labor in the harvest fields. *The nations will want to come. They will stream to Jerusalem, bringing both their gold and their glory into it.* (Isa 60:5; Rev 21:24)

They will be eager to "know the Lord." (Heb 8:11) We won't have to plead with them. They will come; the poor, naked, hungry, afflicted, or oppressed, the prisoner, the slave to sin. They have gone through a famine for God's Word; they will be thirsty for the knowledge of God. *It will be a Sabbath of joy and delight as the Spirit and the Bride introduce them to the Savior.* "The Spirit and the Bride call, 'Come!' Let everyone who hears repeat the call, 'Come!' Let everyone who is thirsty come! Anyone who wants may freely drink from the Waters of Life." (Rev 22:17) That is the Jubilee – the millennial Sabbath Rest – when "... the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay into the freedom of the glory of God's children." (Rom 8:21)

We talked about the nature of God as one who enjoys a good party and who loves to feast with His people. There are other aspects of human nature that reflect the divine nature in whose image we are made. Like any earthly father, God loves to surprise His children with wonderful gifts. Imagine Adam's surprise when he awoke to find the perfect woman God had made just for him! The Red Sea crossing was a delightful surprise for the Israelites, as was the manna from heaven, the water out of the rock, the quail, even the way the walls of Jericho fell down flat at their shout and sound of the trumpet. During the time of Christ on earth, look at all the fun surprises: changing water to new wine at Cana, healings, raising the dead, feeding the crowds, all culminated by that incredible triple surprise: His death when they thought He would take over, His resurrection when they had given up hope, and His ascension to the heavens in full view of His saints.

I believe that the end times will be kinda like that. YHWH has some awesome surprises up His sleeve, and we will be no more prepared for them than His disciples were prepared for His death and resurrection. I'd like to think that I know the Scriptures and that I'm ready for what God is planning for these end times. Well, Yashua specifically told His disciples what was coming in His final days, and still they were caught napping. He has likewise told us what is coming in these end times, but I doubt that a single one of us will be prepared. Why? Because what God is doing now is so altogether glorious and unprecedented, so different from our creeds and doctrines, so spectacularly, breathtakingly new, and so startling, revolutionary, and miraculous, that it will be "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think or even imagine." (Eph 3:20)

Any earthly father rejoices when his children do well; when they succeed they bring him honor; when they excel in nobility and accomplishment he is proud and delighted. *A father is not diminished by the success of his children, but enriched and glorified.* How much more the Father of all when His children step forth to receive their inheritance as sons! We have not the foggiest comprehension of the glory of that day, when the sons of God finally receive their full redemption, the restoration of their bodies to perfection, and are manifest to creation as the **finished work of God.**

I would love to describe it for you, but I cannot, for it is far beyond me. All I can do is caution that the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of being taken up to mansions in the sky where the streets are made of gold, to spend all of eternity lazing indolently on a cloud plucking on a harp, bowing, and singing worship songs, is a false picture.

Those sons of God have a job to do. All of creation is groaning under the bondage of futility and corruption, waiting eagerly for the sons of God to come do their job. (Rom 8:19-23) Their job is described as the "ministry of reconciliation" or the "word of reconciliation," and we who are called to do it are called "ambassadors for Christ." (2 Cor 5:18-20)

Do you understand what 'reconciliation' means? In accounting terms, it means going through the books to find any errors in the entries of receipts and expenditures and correct them, so the accounts are properly balanced; the totals on the books now correctly reflect the actual money in the bank. In terms of the job that the saints have been given, it is similar. We are called to find the 'errors' in all of creation – everything that is not right, that has gotten perverted, corrupted by sin – and 'correct' them; reconcile them back to God and His righteousness, His perfection.

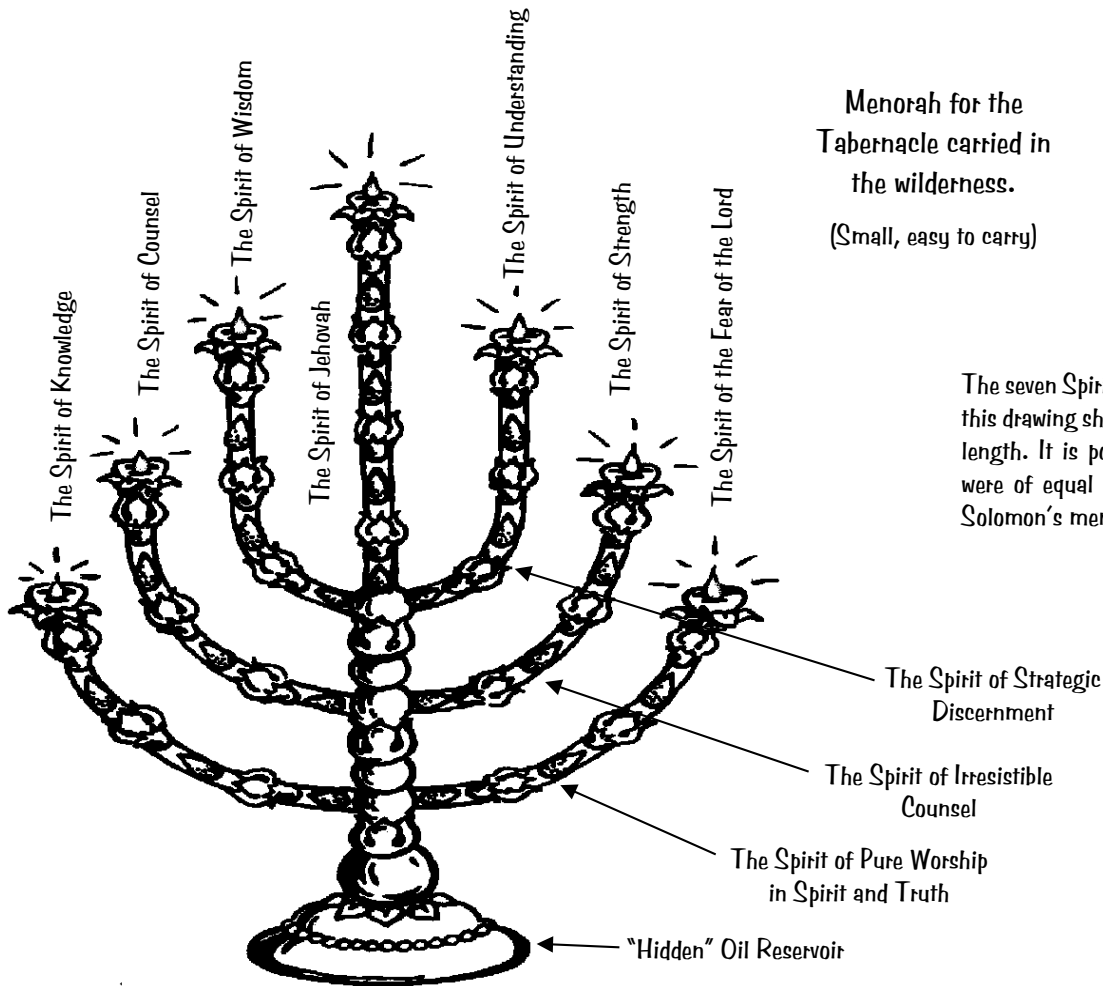
The saints have been working at this job ever since the day of Pentecost (or before) but it has been very slow work. Why? Well frankly, it is because we ourselves are not fully reconciled yet. Our own sin nature keeps getting in the way, blocking the power of the Holy Spirit from working through us. As much as we like to proclaim our freedom in Christ, in actual fact we are still held captive to that old sin nature; able at times to rise above it by faith in Christ Jesus yet always straining against its downward pull.

But at that Day of Atonement when the final year of Jubilee begins, all that will change. The captives will be released. The saints will finally be free of that sin nature, and will receive our eagerly awaited "adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." (Rom 8:23) From that day on – glory! Glory beyond even our wildest imaginings. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For... *creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*" (v18-21)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
The Seven Steps of Redemption	Salvation	Baptism	Communion	Baptized by the Holy Spirit and fire	Know His voice and follow Him (True Prayer) (the Rapture)	Redemption of our Bodies (sinless)	Eternal Life Sabbath Rest	Bear Christ's yoke of love, intercession for others
The Seven Days of Creation	God created light; divided the light from the darkness.	God made air to divide the waters above from the waters below	God made sea and dry land, and vegetation (first life)	God made 'luminaries' in the sky, for signs, days, and seasons	God made the fish and the birds, (higher life-forms)	God made land animals and finally man (in His own image)	God rested and sanctified the seventh day as holy	A new week begins!
Israel's Journey to Promised Land	10 Plagues judged Egyptian gods but set Israel free to serve God	Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land	No food or water! They got manna, water from the Rock	Mt. Sinai, God gave the Law	Organized into fighting around the Tabernacle	Crossed the River Jordan and attacked the wicked Canaanites	Rest, Peace, & Prosperity dwelling in the Promised Land	Oops! one more time around the mountain...
The Seven Furnishings of the Tabernacle	Bronze Altar of Burnt Offering ↓ The Court of Israel	Bronze Laver made from mirrors	Table of Showbread	Golden Lampstand	Altar of Incense	Ark of the Covenant	Shekina Glory of YHWH ↑ The Most Holy Place	The outer court (the court of the Gentiles)
Seven Themes of God's Word	Reveals a sinless Person, Jesus Christ, the Messiah	Reveals our own sinfulness in the light of His perfection	We must eat the Bread of Life: receive Jesus inside our hearts	God's Law, illuminated by Holy Spirit, guides us to abundant life	God is love; He desires an intimate personal, 2-way relationship.	Jesus is the Word of God, the only way to the Father.	Result of all sin dealt with is perfect peace and rest within	We become kings and priests in Christ
Heroes of Faith (Heb 11)	Abel	Enoch	Noah	Abraham and Sarah	Isaac	Jacob	Joseph	Moses
The Seven Feasts of YHWH	Passover 1 / 14 ↓ Passover Combined; the 1st veil	Firstfruits 1 / 16 to 21 (after Sabbath)	Unleavened Bread 1/15 - 21 ↓ The Spirit of Understanding	Pentecost 50 days after Firstfruits ↓ The Spirit of Counsel <i>Irresistible Counsel!</i>	Trumpets 7 / 1 ↓ The Spirit of Strength <i>Pure Worship in Spirit and Truth</i>	Day of Atonement 7 / 10 ↓ The Spirit of Knowledge	Tabernacles 7 / 15 - 21 ↓ The Spirit of the Fear of YHWH	The Eighth Day (Shemini Atzeret) 7 / 22 ↓ The Spirit of YHWH <i>Inexhaustible Life</i>
The Seven Spirits of God	The Spirit of YHWH ↓ <i>Strategic Discernment</i>	The Spirit of Wisdom ↓ <i>Strategic Discernment</i>	The Spirit of Understanding	The Spirit of Counsel <i>Irresistible Counsel!</i>	The Spirit of Strength <i>Pure Worship in Spirit and Truth</i>	The Spirit of Knowledge	The Spirit of the Fear of YHWH	The Spirit of YHWH <i>Inexhaustible Life</i>
Development of the human fetus	Mature ovum released to the fallopian tube	Ovum is fertilized by father's sperm	Fertilized egg is implanted in mother's womb	Growth - recognizable as a human child	The baby's hearing is perfected	The baby's blood can get oxygen from the air	The baby's lungs fully developed (life possible out of womb)	The baby is finally born (sees his father for the first time)
Month / Day	1 / 14	1 / 15	1 / 16 to 21	50 days (var)	7 / 1	7 / 10	7 / 15 - 21	9/25 - 10/2

The Seven Steps of Redemption

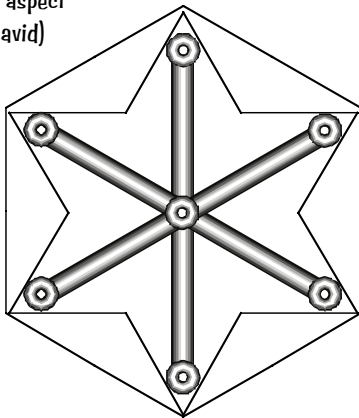
Seven Spirits of God (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; Isa 11:2; Prov 8:12-14; 9:1)



Menorah for the Tabernacle carried in the wilderness.
(Small, easy to carry)

The seven Spirits are equally God. So this drawing shows the lamps of equal length. It is possible that the lamps were of equal height, instead, as in Solomon's menorah, below.

Top View showing three dimensional aspect (Star of David)



(All lamps are the same height.)

Menorah for King Solomon's Temple
(Much larger and heavier, huge oil reservoir)

Hebrew Menorah (7 branched olive oil lamp)

I'll close this section with parts of Psalm 72. This is a Messianic Kingdom prophecy written by Solomon. It is a plea for God to rule justly through him. King Solomon here is a type of Messiah and His rule of righteousness through His Bride in the millennial Jubilee. Notice here all the great themes of the year of Jubilee. We can personalize this Psalm. *You and I are called to rule with Christ as kings and priests and this Psalm could one day be said of us.*

“Give the king [and each of us!] Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness to the king's son. May he judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thine afflicted with justice. Let the mountains bring peace to the people, and the hills in righteousness. May he vindicate the afflicted of the people, save the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor. Let them fear Thee while the sun endures... throughout all generations. May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish in abundance of peace... May he also rule from sea to sea, from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth. Let the nomads of the desert [Arabs?] bow before him, and his enemies lick the dust. Let the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands bring gifts; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer tribute. Let all kings bow down before him; all nations serve him.

“For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help... He will have compassion on the poor and needy; the lives of the needy he will save. He will rescue their life from oppression and violence; their blood will be precious in his sight... Let them pray for him continually, and let them bless him all day long... May his name endure forever; may his name increase as long as the sun shines. Let men bless themselves by him; let all nations call him blessed. Blessed be YHWH Elohim, God of Israel, who alone works wonders. Blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen.”

THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION IN SEVENS

We've been focused on the 'threes' of God's plan of redemption. Now consider God's perfect number seven. There are at least seven symbols in Scripture relating seven to the plan of redemption. The first five I got from Robert Thompson's book *The Feasts of the Lord* and Marvin Byers' book *Six Days and a Day*. These illustrations of God's plan of redemption are: the seven days of creation; the seven aspects of the Israelite's journey from Egypt to Canaan; the seven furnishings of the tabernacle; the seven Feasts, and the seven heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11. I then add *The Seven Spirits of God*, from brother J. Preston Eby's book by that name, and seven central themes of the Word of God. I will conclude with a discussion of an unrelated eighth parallel, the development of the human fetus, from Zola Levitt's book, *The Seven Feasts of Israel*. There may be other parallels as well. Perhaps the Lord will reveal them to the world through you, dear Reader.

On the **first day of Creation** God saw that the cosmos was formless, empty, dark, chaos. He said “Let there be light,” expressing Himself as Christ the Light of the World into His universe. His Light is ‘very good!’ He established His Law, contrasting the goodness and beauty of His Light with the darkness, ugliness, and chaos of evil.

The **Israelites' journey** began with ten plagues in Egypt, in which God expressed Himself through Moses to both the Israelites and to Egypt. When Pharaoh wouldn't hear Him, He sent darkness upon the Egyptians, but the Israelites had light in their dwellings; this made a division between His people and the world.

Ultimately, through these plagues He freed His people from the darkness of Egypt. But the same plagues which set the Israelites free to follow Him, judged and made a mockery of the Egyptian's gods, destroying Egypt from being a mighty first-world power to a third-rate nation.

The **first item of the tabernacle** is the bronze altar of burnt offering, upon which the Passover Lamb is offered up to God to atone for the sins of men. This symbolizes the Lamb of God, Jesus, offered up on the cross to pay the price for our sins. The judgment of God fell like the ten plagues of Egypt *upon Jesus* as He bore the guilt of the sins of the whole world. Yet God's judgment was not directed at Jesus! In marvelous symbolism, the gods of this world were all judged and condemned at the cross, and Jesus, the innocent victim, was set free. Even so at the cross all the wickedness in us and all our false gods are judged and we are set free by the righteousness of Christ.

The bronze altar totally dominated the view from outside the tabernacle. It was huge – the first thing seen as you enter the gate. All the activities, sights, and smells, centered around it. In the same way, the cross of Christ dominates the outward activities of the Kingdom of God. It is both the most visible aspect of redemption, and the primary thing causing offense to those who reject God's salvation. But we who receive it glory in the cross, as our first step out of Egypt toward the Promised Land.

The **first and most important theme of the Word of God** is that it reveals a Person: the Lord Jesus Christ, Adonai Yashua haMashiach, as the full expression of the eternal Father God YHWH, to us in our time-based realm. In Christ we see the fullness and perfection of the one true God, the Light of the World, and the many-splendored beauty of His nature and character. When contrasted with the darkness of our own sinful nature, this glimpse of perfection is both a warning and an upward call. It is a challenge to hate the darkness and to love the Light.

The first **Hero of Faith** from Hebrews 11 is Abel, who “offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain.” Because his sacrifice was ‘righteous’ (as God had required) it exposed the ‘darkness’ of Cain's sacrifice for what it was: sin.

The **first of the Feasts**, the Feast of Passover, was first celebrated at the tenth plague, and has been observed annually by the Israelites ever since. It is a three in one, one in three Feast (Passover, Firstfruits, Unleavened Bread). Combined, it symbolizes the **first aspect of redemption**, which is salvation. That is one experience in three parts (salvation, baptism, and communion). In the Passover we identify personally with the Lamb of God as the Light of our world. We reckon ourselves crucified with Jesus, buried with Him, and risen up with Him in newness of life (baptism). We eat His flesh and drink His blood in the Passover supper (which we call communion or the Lord's Supper). This is foolishness (darkness) to the unbeliever, but to the believer it is the power of God unto salvation. Thus light is divided from darkness; life from death.

The **first of the seven Spirits of God** (from Isaiah 11:2) is the Spirit of YHWH, represented by the central vertical branch on the seven-branched lampstand in the holy place. It is the Root. All the branches are supported on it. The oil for all the lamps flows through it. It is the Spirit of YHWH who breaks through our darkness with the light of the gospel to reveal Jesus as our Savior from sin. Jesus is the I AM, the Source of Inexhaustible Life, the Well of Living Water springing up within. He is the Light of the World that dispels sin's darkness. He is the unconditional love that transforms sin's death to life, ashes to beauty, despair to joy. In Him we see the eternal Father, for He is the fullest possible manifestation of YHWH in our time-based realm. Redemption begins and ends with the Spirit of YHWH.

Please bear in mind that although this must be the first step in the plan of redemption, in another sense **there are no steps or grades**. This is just one aspect, like a facet of a diamond, which we look at and admire many times. Each time we come to it, it is more beautiful than before. God is one; His plan of redemption is one, and to divide it up into steps is dangerous, lest we lose sight of its oneness. We must divide it into three or seven aspects (facets) to understand it, but we must also keep every aspect continually before us, viewing them from God's eternity perspective in our lives. It is like a lengthy journey; to the one who has completed it, the journey is one; he has arrived at the destination. But to those of us in the middle, each stop along the way is a whole new and exciting experience, even though we do still focus on the final destination.

– THE SECOND ASPECT OF REDEMPTION

On the **second day of Creation** God created earth's atmosphere, the first heaven, and separated the waters above the atmosphere from the waters below. The waters above formed a vapor canopy around the earth to protect it, while still giving us air to breathe. This vapor canopy was destroyed at the Noahic Flood, creating the oceans, but it will be restored for the "new heavens and the new earth" (Rev 21:1) on which there is no sea.

At the end of the day, the waters below were swirling with minerals, but the waters above were perfectly pure. Now Earth is ready for life to appear!

This corresponds to the **Israelites crossing the Red Sea**. God separated the waters for them, so they could cross through them yet still breathe. In addition, their crossing separated them from Egypt, freeing them from slavery. It separated them from their old life under the evil Pharaoh into their new life under holy King Jesus. They were committed! The Red Sea blocked their return. It also destroyed their former persecutors in its depths.

The **second item of the tabernacle** is the big bronze laver. It was used for ceremonial washing by the priests, sanctifying them for their duties. No matter how clean he was, the priest could not start his official duties as priest until he had ceremonially washed in the laver. Before he washed, he was in God's eyes no better than a heathen; after he washed, he was a priest able to atone for the sins of the people. The water separated him for service.

The laver was made from the bronze mirrors which the women had brought from Egypt. It was highly polished, and so designed that you could see yourself in it when you washed. The **second theme of the Word of God** is that it reveals ourselves. It shows us our true condition, in all its ugliness, but not without hope! When we see Christ in all His beauty, and then see ourselves in all our sinfulness, we just come to the waters of the laver and wash. "... just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word." (Eph 5:25-26) This ties in tightly with the third theme of Scripture...

The **second Hero of Faith** in Hebrews 11 is Enoch, whose name means to train, to direct into the way of truth, or to consecrate. Enoch walked with God. His life was directed in the way of truth. He was trained to walk in God's footsteps, pleasing to God. As the rest of the world got more wicked, Enoch only got more righteous. Finally the *Resurrection Life* (whom we know as Jesus) within Enoch became so powerful that he bypassed death and translated directly up into the heavenlies, separated from the turbulent, muddy waters below into the perfectly pure waters above. Thus Enoch is the *firstfruits* of the end-time saints who will be still living when Jesus returns for His Bride and changes her into His nature of Resurrection Life.

The **second Feast** and third Feast overlap, for reasons we will discuss later. But some time during the week of Unleavened Bread comes the **Feast of Firstfruits**. It is on "the day after the Sabbath," which we now call Sunday. We will call it the second Feast, since it usually comes before the last day of Unleavened Bread. Surprisingly enough, Sunday is when most baptisms have occurred for the last 2000 years. The symbolism of Firstfruits is "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; *but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" (Jn 12:24)

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... so also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” (1 Cor 15:42-45) Jesus is the last Adam, the firstfruits from the dead. He died to give us life. The Feast of Firstfruits symbolizes His resurrection in the power of the Spirit after dying at Passover. Thus it presents us with the promise of Resurrection Life as well.

The **second aspect of redemption**, symbolized for us by water baptism, is our passing through the waters which are separated for us, and rising up to newness of life on the other side of the Red Sea. Our old slave master is dead. We put our allegiance in our new master, Jesus. Only when the waters are separated for us can we have life-giving air. Death lies behind us, life ahead of us, and we cannot return from whence we came. Our only hope is to press forward and obtain life. Our sin nature is washed into the depths of the Red Sea. We are now sanctified and enabled to serve as priests unto God. We are ceremonially clean, and able to bring forth fruit for the Kingdom of God. We reckon ourselves dead and buried with Christ that we might serve Him in newness of life. His life is now born in us.

Note that Pharaoh and his army died in the depths of the Red Sea after the Israelites came up on the other side. Similarly, Satan and all the hosts of wickedness died when Jesus rose again, breaking the power of sin and obtaining the keys of death and hell. To us they may not appear so, but it is a lie. From God’s eternity perspective it is done; they are defeated and rendered powerless; their ultimate doom is certain. What little power they have in this time-based realm is only what people give them through their evil choices and lack of faith in the finished work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The first aspect of redemption does nothing for us without the second. The first is only death to the old; the second is new life within. Only after the second can we be considered ‘born again’. That is why we have the cryptic statement that, “... baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” (1 Pet 3:21) Thus the first two aspects of redemption are inseparably linked together... and to the third...

The **second of the seven Spirits of God** from Isaiah 11:2 is also inseparably linked with the third (and both to the first): the Spirits of Wisdom and Understanding, represented by the twofold branch on either side of the central branch of the golden lampstand. You cannot have one without the other. The Spirit of Wisdom from above washes us just like baptism, cleansing us from worldly wisdom so that we can finally see things from God’s holy perspective and receive His Spirit of Understanding as...

On the **third day of Creation** God completed a whole sequence of wonderful things. He gathered the waters into seas, dried and leveled the land, prepared the topsoil, and commanded it to sprout abundantly with vegetation of all kinds, all bearing seed and able to reproduce after its kind. This is the beginning of the miracle of life!

The **Israelites now stand on dry land**, the shore of a wilderness. It is pretty barren, but for them it is a new life, free from the slavery of Egypt. However, right away there are problems – getting their customary food and water supplies, not to mention all the comforts and luxuries that Egypt provided. We will have to learn how to live all over again, except this time it will be a miracle provision. The miracle of new life! Water from the rock, manna in the desert, quail that come begging to be eaten, sandals that don’t wear out, miracle guidance and protection, light by night and shade by day... It is all new and wonderful if we will only look up to the King rather than looking down to our fears, lusts, and fleshly desires. All along the way, “Man did eat the bread of angels... in abundance” (Ps 78:25), which is prepared for us new every morning.

The **third item of the tabernacle** is the table of the showbread, better translated ‘Bread of the Face’ or ‘Bread of the Presence’, and in one place “the Continual Bread.” (Num 4:7) It is replaced freshly baked every ‘Preparation Day’ just before the Sabbath, by the incoming course of priests for the next week as their first official duty. There are twelve cakes made each week. They are made from the finest wheat flour, passed through eleven sieves, and from a special ‘sanctified’ leaven kept separate and pure from all other leaven and used for this purpose only. It is made to resemble in outline the Ark of the Covenant, and is anointed with oil in the shape of an X or a cross. It is placed on the table, with salt and incense between the loaves. The old is not removed until the precise instant that the new is replaced, to observe God’s command “You shall set the Bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.” (Ex 25:30) The old is eaten by the priests on the Sabbath after it is removed from the table.

The **third theme of the Word of God** is that it is the Bread from heaven, which we eat continually in order to have (spiritual) life within. As we eat, we are transformed from glory to glory from the corrupt image that we saw in the mirror of the laver, into that glorious image of God’s perfection as revealed in the Word of God. Note that the first three aspects of the Word of God are one: what we call salvation. I cannot behold His glory without recognizing my own sinfulness. Salvation is then the deliberate choice to love His beauty and hate my own ugliness; to wash in the laver and be cleansed by the power of the sacrificial blood of Jesus; to feed on His life from above and reckon that self-nature within dead and buried with Him. Three steps in one, one experience in three.

We had fellowship over dinner last night with an old pastor friend, Phil Celver. He shared that it had been his habit to picture himself coming to the laver, seeing himself as he really was, in need of washing in the pure water of the Word of God. Then one day (whether in a dream or vision, he did not remember), he felt compelled to wash longer, longer than ever before; to immerse himself and soak in the Word of God. Then he looked into the mirror, and saw not himself but Christ! I believe this is a true picture of the Word of God, in showing us Christ, showing us ourselves, and then actually transforming us into His image.

The **third Hero of Faith** in Hebrews 11 is Noah, who perfectly portrays the first three aspects of the redemption story. As at Passover, he was called out of a totally wicked generation and given the light of the gospel and the grace to hear and follow. He went through the baptism of the flood – total death to the old – and received new life when he came up out of the waters as at Firstfruits. As the waters receded and the land dried, he offered sacrifices to YHWH and received the rainbow promise, that YHWH would never again destroy the world by water. As at Unleavened Bread, YHWH made with Noah an everlasting covenant of communion and protection. This perfectly represents the entire salvation experience. When Noah first came out of the ark, the earth had been scrubbed clean and food was scarce; so God gave him new food (animals and fish) which man had not eaten before, symbolizing our eating the flesh of Christ at communion.

The **third Feast is Unleavened Bread**, which, as we said, overlaps Firstfruits. In a perfect sense, Firstfruits is within Unleavened Bread. None of the impurities of Egypt remain in the unleavened Bread, symbolizing our leaving worldliness and wickedness behind as we start out on our journey toward life. But even as we leave the old behind, we find the new life within. It is not from ourselves or our worldly surroundings; it is life from above. It is Christ, the firstfruits, who becomes new ‘sanctified’ leaven to us. The unleavened bread seems pretty dry and barren at first, because the life within is spirit, and we haven’t learned to recognize it yet for the abundant life that it is. We are tempted to grumble, complain, and lust after the onions and garlics of Egypt. Yet the new life of this heavenly leaven grows silently within us, until all three measures (body, soul, and spirit) are leavened. (Matt 13:33)

The Unleavened bread, sometimes called the ‘Bread of Affliction’ or the ‘Bread of Privation’, is symbolic of at least three things. The first is that it contains all we need to sustain life, our ‘minimum daily requirement’ to give us the strength to flee Egypt. The second is that it is hard to leave the comforts and pleasures of Egypt. Even knowing that they are a bondage, they were all we knew, and we must often be disciplined, afflicted, before we are willing to leave. As we flee Egypt our bread is dry and tasteless, but after we come up out of the Red Sea our new Master will give us sweet manna, “the bread of angels.”

A third symbol which we sometimes miss is that the Unleavened Bread was pure, unstained by the wickedness of Egypt, from even before we left Egypt (where it was first made). God’s demand is always for absolute holiness. He levies that demand upon sinner and saint alike. We could not meet that demand while we were in Egypt. Not until we are baptized in the Red Sea and raised up as firstfruits to God could we even begin to meet it. But the *requirement* was there all along.

Thus the **third aspect of redemption**, symbolized for us by holy communion, is partaking of the new miracle life within and learning to walk in it. Our customary food and water supplies were left behind in Egypt. We must learn to live solely on the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our miracle provision for this new abundant life. We are tempted to complain, as it seems so bleak and sparse; everything we have ever known is dead and dry. It is truly a desert, with none of the comforts or luxuries of Egypt. The body and blood of Jesus is strange food, even repulsive to the old nature. But it is all we have; everything else is irretrievably left behind. So we learn to like it, and in time we find Him to be sufficient, and even abundant. Thus divine life, like holy leaven, grows silently within us.

Note that Unleavened Bread must have Firstfruits within; thus it also is inseparably linked with the first two aspects of redemption. Three in one, one in three. Together, they are the new birth: death to the old, new life within, and our daily choice to eat this new life, gain strength from it, and walk by that strength to the Promised Land. The ‘Bread of the Presence’ becomes our guide, our protection, our miracle provision, our very life. We eat it new every morning as we feast on the Bread of Life who is Christ, the very Word of God. This same bread also becomes the ‘Bread of Affliction’ whenever we need to be tested, or disciplined for looking back to the spiced meats and the leeks and garlics of Egypt. “For whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives.” We even learn to love the discipline, when we see it as God’s means to set us free from sin’s bondage.

The Feasts of Passover, Firstfruits, and Unleavened Bread are thus combined into one, called Passover. This is a perfect picture of salvation: the death / judgment of the old nature and the Resurrection Life of the new nature. Yet, all that we now see in the combined Feast, did we not also see in each of the three Feasts? Stop and think about it. Salvation is beautifully portrayed in Passover, and again in Firstfruits, and again in Unleavened Bread, just as much as it is portrayed in the three Feasts combined. Similarly, baptism, represented by Firstfruits, is a complete picture of salvation. The communion table, represented by the Unleavened Bread, is another perfect picture of salvation. Each of them portrays death to the old nature, acceptance of the new nature, and transformation by life from above. Pictures within pictures in an unbroken tapestry of the story of redemption, so even a child can see it and enter in.

Third of the seven Spirits of God is the Spirit of Understanding. It is the Bread of Life renewing us by the Spirit of Wisdom, together revealing the Spirit of YHWH. Again, three in one, one in three; inseparable, received at the combined Feast of Passover representing the initial salvation experience. This is not human understanding. In the human realm we must first see it and understand it, then we learn wisdom and become believers. In the Spirit realm that reverses. First we must believe in the Spirit of YHWH, then be renewed, washed clean of our perverted thinking by His Spirit of Wisdom, and finally we receive His Spirit of Understanding to see from His perspective. This trio is the Spirit of **Strategic Discernment**, seeing life with eyes of spirit by faith. After His baptism, Jesus walked in it all during His ministry. He expects us to follow in His footsteps, using not our depraved human wisdom and understanding, but “the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor 2:16)

– THE FOURTH ASPECT OF REDEMPTION

On the **fourth day of Creation** God spread out the expanse of the universe and put all the ‘luminaries’ (‘light bearers’) in their proper places in the sky. He arranged the times of day and night and the seasons of planting and harvest. He did one more thing, which most people miss; He positioned the lights in the heavens to be for signs. (Gen 1:14) He named the stars and constellations, and arranged them like a great storybook in the sky, to tell His story of redemption even for those who could not read. This is another whole book, which I will not get into here, except to say that we think we are so smart, yet most of us today cannot even read God’s storybook in the heavens. But the ancient Magi could – it told them when and where Messiah would be born! So who is so advanced?

Without the life-giving sun in the sky and the structure of the day/night and the seasons of the year, the new life created in day three would soon have died. So on day four God established universal laws governing creation which are so necessary for life. This was more than just the cycles of life; it included biology, physics, chemistry, celestial mechanics, and all the other laws we now call ‘science’.

Also notice that this completely shoots down that abominable ‘day-age’ theory that attempts to compromise Christianity with evolution by saying that each day of creation was actually an entire age of evolution, guided by God’s hand, but allowed to progress in some naturalistic evolutionary sequence. If day three were an entire age, all life would have quickly died, since the sun was not created until day four. If you believe the Bible is true, you cannot believe in evolution. Even the most basic evolutionary premise of ‘survival of the fittest’ is in direct contradiction with the biblical story of God creating a perfect world in which there was no sin and thus no death. The ‘scientific’ theory of evolution is actually an irrational religious cult. It is man’s attempt to quench the call of God on his life.

Ancient Hebrew tradition (from at least 1500 years before Christ) claimed that, just as our sun was created at the end of the fourth day, Messiah would come at the end of the fourth millennium. One of Messiah’s titles was “Sun of Righteousness” from Malachi 4:2. “For you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteous will arise with healing in His tsetse.” (‘Kanaph’ – flaps or tassels of the rabbi’s robe, wrongly translated ‘wings’ in some versions.) The woman with the flow of blood who touched Yashua’s garment and was healed, understood this. (Matt 9:20) Most Jews at that time thought it was about year 4000 (see endnote), the end of the fourth day after the Fall. She was eagerly expecting Messiah! So when she saw Yashua, she recognized Him.

The **fourth stage of the Israelites’ journey** was Mount Sinai, and the giving of the law on the two tables of stone. This included the moral law, the ceremonial law, the civil laws, and the dietary laws, as well as instructions for building the tabernacle. As with day four of creation, God gave “the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.” (Gen 1:16) He established the legal structure to govern the ‘universe’ of our new life; without it we would simply wander aimlessly in the desert and soon die.

The **fourth item of the tabernacle** is the golden lampstand. It is the only source of light in the holy place. It has been called a candlestick, but that is incorrect. Candles consume themselves as they burn; a lamp has a source of energy outside of itself. This symbolizes the Holy Spirit, who comes from above to fill and energize us. The seven lamps in the lampstand all drew their oil from a central reservoir – as long as that oil was replenished daily their light would never go out. To be sure, the lampstand, or Menorah, was filled with oil and the wicks were trimmed twice a day, at the morning and the evening sacrifices. If a lamp did go out, it could be re-lit from the large central lamp representing the Spirit of YHWH; but if that lamp went out, it could only be re-lit from the fire from the altar itself. This trimming of the lamps was timed to coincide with sprinkling the blood of the lamb on the altar.

The four huge menorahs just outside the temple (in the court of women – used in the Festival of Lights at the Feast of Tabernacles) each had four branches. Four is the number of the world. Also lit from the fire on the altar, they shed light to all of Jerusalem, representing Christ, the Light of the World. But the single golden menorah inside both the temple and the original tabernacle had seven branches, representing the seven Spirits of God. Walking by the light of this menorah represents being led by the Holy Spirit. An alternate symbolism is that the straight central branch of this menorah represents God in Christ Jesus, while the six other branches (three on each side, coming out from the central branch) represent the entire body of Christ, grafted into Him and drawing their life from Him (six is the number of man). The oil filling the central reservoir and feeding all seven lamps represents the Holy Spirit; one Spirit, in seven manifestations.

Solomon's temple also had ten golden lampstands, five on the right and five on the left, in front of (just outside) the 'inner sanctuary' (the holy place – 1 Kin 7:49). These ten were trimmed at the time of the evening offering, their reservoirs filled only with enough oil to last until morning, so that they would go out as the first rays of the dawning sun shone through the eastern entrance upon the entrance to the holy place.

These did not symbolize the seven Spirits of God, but rather the saints, shining with the light of the gospel and illuminating the way to the Father during the darkness of this age of sin. When the "Sun of Righteousness" arises (Mal 4:2), and the "full day" comes (Prov 4:18), then the light of the saints will no longer be needed, for the lamp will be the Lamb. (Rev 21:23)

The **fourth theme of the Word of God** is that it details God's Law of Life: "I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, *by which, if a man observes them, he will live.*" (Ezek 20:11) The Word of God is not a dead book of good teachings, nor is it a list of do's and don'ts and punishments when you screw up. Not at all. The Word of God is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, revealed in the pages of the Holy Scriptures by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He is more than alive; He is Life itself. This is foolishness to the natural man unaided by the Spirit, but it is the power of God for salvation to any who believe, because and only because of the work of the Holy Spirit within. "It is the Spirit who gives Life; the flesh profits nothing. The Words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and are Life." (Jn 6:63) "... a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives Life." (2 Cor 3:6) The words of the Bible give Life only when illuminated to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Law of Life in Christ Jesus is written on our hearts, becoming a lovely, precious, pure, and holy thing to us, leading us to abundant Life. "All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." (Rom 8 14)

The **fourth Hero of Faith** from Hebrews 11 is Abraham (and his wife, Sarah). God called them out of their pagan culture. Because Abraham, not knowing where they were going, believed and obeyed God, leaving Ur and traveling to the Promised Land, he is called in Scripture the father of all who believe (Rom 4:11), the father of us all (v 16), and the father of many nations (v 17). He never fully received God's promises; the land of Canaan promised to him has never been fully claimed by his descendants, and he never saw the "many nations" he would father. Yet although his body was "as good as dead" (v 12) Abraham did receive the firstfruits by faith: Isaac, the son of the promise. Abraham symbolizes the sanctification process of a new believer, who is totally dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit in this 'Promised Land' which still looks so pagan. The children of God, who were born in Adam, were 'reborn' in Abraham, symbolizing the birthday of the church by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The **fourth Feast is Pentecost**, at which Jesus, the Light of the World, gave us His Spirit to dwell in us as our light. Without Him, our new life in Christ makes no sense, and we would just die wandering in the desert. He comes upon us as tongues of fire, a shining light upon our path, dispelling the darkness of wickedness and ignorance. He provides the organizational structure to our new life, with His Laws written on our heart, and His guidance directing our every step. Without Him, our light would soon go out, and would need to be re-lit from the central lamp which is the Spirit of YHWH. During Pentecost, two loaves of bread, made with fine flour mixed with leaven, were waved before the Lord. These represent the church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, male and female, bond and free, though all one in Christ. This bread is leavened; we are not yet free of our sin nature. It is eaten by the priests; representing the life within.

Pentecost stands alone, the fourth between two groups of three. It represents the 'high point' in the redemption journey. It is Mount Sinai, and for most of us it is a rugged climb. It represents a major turning point in our Christian life. It is a struggle to get up there, but once we reach the mountaintop it is all downhill, on into the vast level plane of the Sabbath Rest. Before Pentecost all was dark and dry; we had life, but could not understand it, and it is easy to grumble and complain in the wilderness. But at Pentecost the 'luminaries' are placed in our sky, for signs, seasons, days, and years. Now we can see where we are going, and our course is firmly charted toward the Kingdom. Finally we receive the structure of our new life: laws, wisdom, guidance, light to our path, and Holy Spirit illumination to understand it. Now we can "Serve YHWH with gladness, and come into His presence with singing." (Ps 100:2)

Pentecost cannot happen before the three Feasts of the Passover, for the simple reason that light has no fellowship with darkness. If He comes at all, He comes to dispel the darkness, for He cannot coexist with it. The Feasts of the Passover prepare the way for the light to shine. Only after Passover is the lamp trimmed and ready to be filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit, so it can shine forth the many-splendored beauty of the holy Law of God.

The **fourth aspect of redemption** is the rule of the Holy Spirit within. He takes over as Lord and Master of our life, giving us structure, direction, purpose, and a sense of vision and destiny. "Where there is no vision [revelation, guiding prophetic word] the people perish [are lawless, unrestrained, wander aimlessly, run amok]." (Prov 29:18) But with the Holy Spirit as our revelation, He in us shines like the sun, keeping us moving irresistibly toward the Kingdom with discipline, encouragement, and challenge. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." (Rom 8:1-2) We are now His children. "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." (v 14)

The lamps could go out. The reservoir could run dry. *We still can fail the Holy Spirit and fall back into sin.* One day even the sun will go out, and the stars will fall from the sky. The solution is to go to the source of Light, the One who dwells in the most holy place, refill the reservoir and reignite the fire from the Light of the World, Jesus Christ the Lord. But Pentecost is not the fullness. Pentecost is not Tabernacles. It is only one more step along the way, the “firstfruits of our inheritance in Christ,” just like Isaac was the firstfruits of God’s promises to Abraham.

The **fourth of the seven Spirits of God** according to Isaiah 11:2 is the Spirit of Counsel. The Holy Spirit is our Counselor, our Paraclete (One called alongside to help), our Advocate, our Comforter, our constant Companion and Friend. It is He who leads us into all Truth, and it is only by His leading that we are called the sons of God. He gives us purpose and guidance, the structure for our lives. He keeps us from wandering in the desert and directs us into the freedom and fulfillment of the Promised Land.

– THE FIFTH ASPECT OF REDEMPTION

On the **fifth day of Creation** God made the fish and birds, each reproducing after its kind. These are new kinds of life, the beginning of the animal kingdom, which is very different from the passive life of the plant kingdom. This is active, aggressive life – volitional, mobile, strong, fiercely self-preservational, and multi-talented. It is adaptive, sensitive, and intensely alert to any sights and sounds that may threaten it. It is the first kind of life to intimate the pinnacle of creation: man in the image of God. This kind of life makes life and death choices, and will even go to war to provide for and defend itself or its young.

The fish in their teeming multitudes symbolize the vast harvest for the Kingdom that results once the Holy Spirit is loosed among the people. The birds symbolize the freedom of the spirit to soar in heavenly realms, free from the bondage of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Fish are often organized into schools and birds into flocks, who move as one with no visible leader. So also is the Spirit-filled body of Christ, moving as one without any earthly leader, only by the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The **fifth stage in the Israelites’ journey** was their organization into an army. Before Mt. Sinai, they were just a mob of disorganized, undisciplined, complaining, scared slaves fleeing across the desert. At Mt. Sinai they received the law, purpose, vision, a destination, and hope, and they were ready to go to war for what they hoped for. After they built the tabernacle according to the plan given on Mt. Sinai, Moses organized the twelve tribes into their fighting formation around the Ark of the Covenant. From then on, they came and went at the sound of the trumpet, which became a means of communication to which the people could instantly respond.

The **fifth item of the tabernacle** is the golden altar of incense. It sits just before the holy veil, directly in line with the Ark of the Covenant beyond the veil. It is called “the altar before YHWH” (Lev 16:12) and “the golden altar which was before the throne.” (Rev 8:3) 368 pounds a year of very special incense was mixed, which could be used nowhere else in the world (Ex 30:34); a half-pound was used at each morning and evening sacrifice. The smoke and fragrance from the burning incense rose from the altar day and night without ceasing.

The smoke from the incense represents a new kind of ‘life’. Like birds, it breaks free of the bonds of earth and reaches the heavenlies. It floats over the veil right into the most holy place! As such, it symbolizes the prayers of the saints, which reach into the throne room of the Most High. It represents the communication between God and man, heart to heart, spirit to spirit, a sweet-smelling fragrance. YHWH is a communicating God who wants us to “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thess 5:17)

“And the smoke of the incense, [symbolic] for the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.” (Rev 8:4-6) Before the final trumpets began to sound, God is waiting for the prayers of His saints!

The **fifth theme of the Word of God** is that it is God’s Word, God’s communication, to us. YHWH loves to have fellowship, to communicate. He is not a stone idol, which can neither hear nor speak. In His Word He communicates Himself to us: His nature and character, His Wisdom, Counsel, Understanding, and Might, His plans, purposes, and desires, and His love, joy, and peace to our hearts.

But true communication is a two-way conversation. The Word of God also teaches us to pray, to seek His face, to call upon Him while He may be found, to wait on Him, to communicate our love back to Him in a two-way love relationship, and to bow before Him in worship. Thus He draws us into the intimate fellowship that He has always desired. As we do this, we hear the clarion trumpet call to “Come up higher, ever higher! Further up and further in!” Whatever we have known of YHWH in the past, He is yet bigger than that. *God is always bigger than that.*

The **fifth Hero of Faith** is Isaac, who was God’s response to Abraham’s faith, the son of the promise, the answer to his prayers. Conceived in his parent’s old age, his birth was a miracle. Isaac was sacrificed by his father as a type of Christ, yet at the last moment God provided a substitute, the ram, again typifying Christ our substitute. Isaac believed God’s promise given to his father Abraham, and passed this faith on to Jacob, teaching him to treasure the promise and communicating God’s blessing to him.

The **fifth Feast is Trumpets**, symbolizing the call of Jesus to His church, “Come up here!” It is a continual call to holiness, to purify ourselves, to follow His leading, and to go to war against God’s enemies in our hearts. It is a call to stand firm in faith when Satan’s fiery darts assail us, knowing he is a defeated foe. It is a call to walk with God, into the intimacy of His presence for sweet fellowship and communion. It is a call to reap the harvest – to feed the nations like the fish. It is a call up into the heavenlies, like the birds. It is a call to leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey.

The Feast of Trumpets symbolizes the call to prepare for the rapture. It is sounding right now for the saints. But like Passover, it is only a beginning; it points inexorably toward the next two Feasts. Just as the Passover achieves nothing without Firstfruits and Unleavened Bread, so Trumpets achieves nothing without the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. The last three Feasts are tied tightly together, just like the first three. There are seven trumpets of the end times; only at the last trump are we ready to be translated into His holy presence. Only when we have met the Lord in all seven Feasts are we ready for the rapture. *Answering the trumpet call is your commitment to finish the job!* The three Spring Feasts only got you out of Egypt; Trumpets is the call to enter the Promised Land, but it takes all three Fall Feasts to actually get you there.

The **fifth aspect of redemption** is prayer, communion and communication in the spirit realm, oneness with the Holy Spirit in purpose and desire. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire at Pentecost was just the beginning. Now we learn to know the voice of the good Shepherd, and tune our hearts to follow Him. We learn to respond instantly to the trumpet call. We also learn to recognize the enemy, and organize for war. But most of all we place ourselves under the guidance of our Commander-in-Chief. Prayer is not ordering Him around. It is waiting on Him, seeking His face, delighting ourselves in Him, loving Him enough to purify ourselves to become more like Him, learning to know His will for us and giving Him the worship of instant obedience. Now we are ready to cross the Jordan.

The **fifth of the seven Spirits of God** is the Spirit of Strength, also translated Power or Might. It is beautifully paired with the Spirit of Counsel, as one double-branched lampstand just outside of the Spirits of Wisdom and Understanding. The fullness of the Holy Spirit of Counsel is inseparably linked with the Power of the Spirit, sending us out to do battle with the enemies of YHWH. I call this pair the Spirit of **Irresistible Counsel**, as no one can resist His Counsel when coupled with His Spirit of Strength and Power! If we are truly filled with His Spirit of Counsel, His power will flow through us. But don’t forget – we wrestle not against flesh and blood. (Eph 6:12) The fullness of the Spirit of Counsel and Might leads us to do battle on our knees in prayer. It conquers the enemies of God in our own hearts and lives, preparing us to enter the Promised Land.

On the **sixth day of Creation**, God created the living creatures on the earth: beasts, cattle, and creeping things (reptiles), each reproducing after its kind. Then He made Adam, and gave him the mandate to rule over the animals and over the birds and fish created on day five. Note the progressive dominance of each order of life. The lowest order is that first created, plants. The birds and fish are higher orders; animals higher yet. Man, the last created, is the highest order of all in God’s creation, made in the very image of God. *He is intended to rule over all creation.*

The **sixth stage in the Israelite’s journey** was crossing the River Jordan to attack the inhabitants of Canaan. Moses could not bring them across; He had to die on Mt. Pisgah / Nebo, having seen the Promised Land from afar, yet unable to enter in. *There is nothing wrong with the Old Covenant; it just is not able to get you into the Promised Land.* So a new man was raised up to lead us over the Jordan: Joshua (a type of Christ). At this stage in Israel’s journey many significant things happened (See Joshua 1 – 7):

God renewed His covenant with Joshua, promising him victory if only he will be strong, courageous, and never let the book of the law depart from his mouth, but meditate on it day and night. Joshua sent the two spies across the Jordan on the first of the month; the rest of the Israelites on the tenth. But this was Nisan, the beginning of the religious year, not Tishri, the month of Tabernacles. YHWH exalted Joshua before the multitude, stopping the Jordan River during flood stage, while all the people crossed. (Note that it stopped at the city of Adam [3:16], signifying that our sin is removed clear back to Adam.) The Israelites were required to consecrate themselves at Gilgal, symbolized by circumcision. Gilgal means ‘a wheel, rolling away’. “YHWH said to Joshua, ‘Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.’” (5:9) They celebrated the **Passover** on Nisan 14 at Gilgal. They ate the firstfruits of the land the next day, probably a Sunday on the Feast of Firstfruits. The manna ceased the day after they had eaten of the fruit of the land. The Captain of the host of YHWH met Joshua and took charge of the armies of Israel. The primary weapons of the first battle were the Ark of the Covenant, trumpets, and “a great shout,” which caused the walls of Jericho to fall flat.

Once they crossed the Jordan, not the slightest sin is permitted; the smallest sin brings terrible judgment, as in the case of Achan, for whose theft more than forty people died. (Joshua 7:10-12)

This sequence of events portrays the triple Feast of Tabernacles, including the Feast of Trumpets and Day of Atonement. But it was the wrong month for Tabernacles! It was six months off. They should have been celebrating Tabernacles and all it signifies, but they were not. Instead, they were back in the beginning, celebrating Passover. Prophetically, this is significant. I’ll talk about it later.

The **sixth item of the tabernacle** is the Ark of the Covenant, which is directly opposite the altar of incense but beyond the veil, in the middle of the most holy place. However, let's pause a bit before we pass through this veil (i.e. cross the River Jordan). It is three-colored (blue, purple, and scarlet) and three layered, and also the third in a series of three veils. All three veils represent a division between death and life; there is a death required to pass through each veil, and new life beyond each veil.

Remember as we discuss the three veils that it is Jesus Himself who tells us, "I am the door [portal, entrance] of the sheep. If anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture [nourishment]." (Jn 10:9) In every case the veil speaks of an entrance into new life, which can only be obtained in Jesus Christ. There is no other way, for He is the Life. If someone tries to enter any other way, by his own righteousness, or by faith in anyone else or in any created thing, he could be slain, just as the priest who enters the most holy place unworthily is slain and has to be dragged out by the rope on his ankle.

The **first veil** is the curtain around the outside of the tabernacle; a worshiper must pass through it at the gate to stand before the sacrificial altar and bronze laver. This veil represents death to Egypt and the old way of life, passing through the Red Sea, and beginning the new life of total dependence on God in the wilderness, as represented by the Spring Feasts. Those who pass through this veil are 'born again' by the shed blood of the Lamb of God, and given water baptism in the bronze laver. They have died to the guilt and condemnation of their sin, and have received life by faith in Jesus as their Savior. They have been given a new nature, which is able to hear and obey God and follow Him in the desert (though admittedly the old nature may complain, longing to return to the leeks and garlics of Egypt). All Christians have passed through this first veil.

The **second veil** is at the door of the tabernacle itself, which leads into the holy place where the Bread of the Presence, the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense reside. Only priests could enter there. This veil portrays our death to the ruling power of the sin nature over us, which is iniquity and lawlessness, and our submission to the Law of Life in Christ Jesus, written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Those who pass through this veil have received Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives. They are filled with and being led by His Holy Spirit. They have become willing bondservants of the King, who rules over them by His Spirit in His Kingdom of love. They feast on the Bread of the Presence of God in His holy Word. Their lives are characterized by a continual sweet-smelling incense of prayers. They shine like a lamp with the seven Spirits of God. Many Christians have passed through this veil and received YHWH's power and grace to minister as a holy priest unto Him. Many others are at the veil, peeking in. *Praise God! Entreat them to come in! Welcome them in the name above all names: Adonai Yashua haMashiach!*

The **third veil** is the one before the most holy place, separating us from the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. This is the threefold veil, three in one, one of three. To pass through this veil requires the deepest death of all. No impurities or uncleanness of any kind can exist beyond this veil. This requires removal not only of the guilt and condemnation of sin, and not only of the power and rule of sin over our lives, but also of the sin nature and every taint of sin. The slightest sin within the most holy place results in death, as with Nadab and Abihu (who entered drunk) and as with Achan beyond the Jordan. However, crossing the Jordan does not give you instant possession of the land – there are still battles to be fought, enemies to drive out. But beyond the Jordan lies the beautiful, fruitful Promised Land, the land of abundant life, freedom, peace, and rest!

The third veil is three colors in three layers. Crossing the Jordan was a three-step process: the actual crossing, the circumcision at Gilgal, followed by the celebration of the Passover. Each of these is also in three. *The crossing*: consecrating themselves in preparation, the crossing of the people, and the separate crossing of the priests with the Ark who started first and ended last. *The circumcision*: the submission to the circumcision knife, the actual cutting away, and the process of healing which starts first (in the spirit) and ends last. *The celebration*: Passover, Firstfruits, and Unleavened Bread which starts first and ends last. These symbolize the entirety of our death to the sin nature, body, soul (mind, will and emotions), and spirit. Three in one, one in three. There can be no part of us in which the old sin nature still exists.

So the first veil, entering the tabernacle, symbolizes salvation at **Passover**. The second veil, the entrance to the holy place, symbolizes the filling of the Holy Spirit at **Pentecost**. The third veil, the entrance to the most holy place, symbolizes coming into oneness with YHWH and entering into His eternal Rest at the **Feast of Tabernacles**.

But wait. There seems to be a discrepancy here. The second veil is at the door to the holy place. That contains three things: the table of showbread (which belongs with Passover, as the communion bread); the golden lampstand (which does belong with Pentecost); and the altar of incense (which belongs with Tabernacles, speaking of the Feast of Trumpets). This reveals a profound truth: Jesus Christ is the door (or in this analogy, the veil). Those who enter through Him "shall go in and out and find pasture." (Jn 10:9) These veils are not solid doors which shut and lock behind you; oh no! These are curtains which flutter in the breeze, allowing easy passage. They are intentionally impossible to lock. The veils do not keep anyone out. It is only the sinner's hatred of God that keeps him out. Any true believer in Jesus Christ can go in and out through all the Feasts. In fact, we are invited to come boldly before the throne, for it is only through our continual rehearsal of all the Feasts that the Saint is perfected to stand without shame in the presence of The Holy.

So once the saint is invited (authorized) by Christ to enter he is free to go in and out – all three veils. Christ is one! *The three veils are one, as well, called redemption.* Of course the veils overlap the Feasts as they flutter in the breeze. The brand new saint who just entered Passover is immediately invited to enter Pentecost, and Tabernacles too, all the way to abundant life, peace, and that blessed Sabbath Rest. Sure, he can only experience them in limited measure – there is still a lot of junk in his life which must be addressed. But even the new saint can come boldly to the altar, be washed in the laver, eat the Bread of Life, be illumined by the lamp of the Spirit, offer sweet-smelling prayers, and enter the most holy place of the peace and rest of God's presence. As I said at the beginning of this section, there are no steps or grades. The plan of redemption is one; one creation; one journey; one tabernacle; one Word of God; one Feast; one Spirit; one human baby maturing into the body of Christ; and one Father of us all. (Eph 4:4-6)

God did not make a mistake in allowing the veils to overlap the Feasts. He wants us to realize that His atoning sacrifice is sufficient to cover for all our unworthiness. Salvation immediately gives a limited measure of access to the holy place where we are filled, in limited measure, with the Holy Spirit, which gives us limited access to the most holy place and the Sabbath Rest of faith. Ever changing as we change, ever expanding as we grow and mature, yet ever the same, as God is unchangeable from eternity.

Another profound truth is revealed in the phrase “in and out.” *We are not called to come in to stay.* We are called to go “in and out and find pasture.” Even entry into the most holy place, where we dwell continually in the very presence of the Most High, does not automatically give us possession of the Promised Land. When the Israelites entered Canaan they still had to fight the giants of the land. They had to conquer the land before they could enjoy their Sabbath Rest! So it is with us. We go in and out and find pasture (sustenance, nourishment). Our food is to do the will of Him who sent us. (Jn 4:34) The sheep of His pasture don't feed in the sheepfold; they sleep there. They go out to feed on the mountains and in the valleys.

The true Sabbath Rest of faith, the peace and joy of dwelling in the secret place of His presence, is found when we are busy fulfilling His commission to us – to take dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beast of the field, and every living thing that moves on the face of the earth – to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. (Ps 149; Rev 12:6) The ‘world’ cannot come to the Feasts! They are blind, deaf, and dumb, dead to the things of God. We must go out to them. They must see Christ in us. It is Christ in us that must invite them to come in by the door so that the redemption we have can begin anew in them. That is our food. The holy Ark of the Covenant, hidden away in the most holy place where it was seen only by the high priest, was then sent out by God to cross the Jordan before Israel and to go before the Israelites in battle at Jericho.

But always remember, just as a human child cannot be conceived without the bride's physical intimacy with the child's father, so the miracle of the new birth in the Spirit cannot be conceived without the Bride's spiritual intimacy with the Heavenly Father in the Holy of Holies, the secret place of His presence, the ‘King's chambers’. (S of S 1:4) *Do not think that you can go out on the mountains and in the valleys and win souls for God when you are not sharing the delights of spiritual intimacy with the Lover of your soul.* You cannot talk anyone into true salvation. Only the holy sperm of the eternal Father, His own Spirit within you, can reach out to that ‘impotent egg’, fertilize it, and conceive the always-new miracle of Life within.

The **Ark of the Covenant** as a whole represents the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, in which He dwells in intimate fellowship with His people as head of His body, the church. He is YHWH of Hosts, strong and mighty in battle, Captain of the armies of the saints. But the Ark is also symbolic of the human heart, the living stones being built up into the holy temple, the earthly dwelling place of the Most High God. (1 Pet 2:5; 1 Cor 3:16) Only the presence of God as Judge and King covering our hearts will suffice to keep what's inside holy, and what's not holy, out. Safe within the Ark three things were kept: a bowl of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the two tablets of the law. They were never again intended to be taken out for public inspection. *The source of life for the saint is always within:* the ‘bread of angels’ which is the Word of God; the miracle provision, resurrection power, and supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit; and the Law of God written on our hearts.

Acacia wood is twisted, gnarly, knotty, and hard to work with. It is symbolic of the human nature. All three areas of the tabernacle had furniture made of acacia wood. The acacia wood furnishings in the outer court are just bare wood, exposed to the natural light of the sun. This symbolizes our natural state when we first come to God – twisted, gnarly, naughty, hard to work with, and led mostly by our own natural, human senses. Our sin nature is exposed to the light when we come to the tabernacle.

Inside the holy place, all the acacia wood was covered. The structure of the holy place was made with acacia wood overlaid with gold. The table of showbread is also acacia wood overlaid with gold. The altar of incense is acacia wood overlaid with bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) to symbolize the sanctification process. The saint still has that dual nature and is in need of constant prayer. But gold, being incorruptible, is symbolic of the divine nature. The gold overlay of the table of showbread symbolizes the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, covering our sin nature and enabling us to come into His holy presence. In the holy place, very little natural light comes through the curtain. Most of the light is from the seven-branched lampstand. It is made of pure gold, symbolizing the seven Spirits of God in incomparable purity lighting our way.

Moving into the most holy place, we study the Ark of the Covenant. Surprisingly, the Ark is still made of acacia wood. Even purified and walking with God we still have our created human identity. But the acacia wood of the Ark is both covered with pure gold and further covered by the Mercy Seat, which is entirely pure gold including the angels on either side. The closer we get to the Shekina Glory of God the more gold there is. In the most holy place there is no natural light; the only illumination is from the Shekina Glory. We cannot function there by our natural senses. We are totally dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. Had the acacia wood of the Ark not been covered by the gold, it would have been consumed by the blazing fire of God's glory. Our God is a consuming fire! Sanctification is required to draw close to God.

The Ark of the Covenant also represents the combined (three in one) Feast of Tabernacles. The box containing the manna, the rod, and God's Law represent the **Feast of Trumpets**, the warning call to purify ourselves and get ourselves ready to meet the King. The three elements are guarded and hidden inside the Ark by the Propitiatory Cover, or Lid of Atonement. Surrounding that cover are the adoring cherubim. The cover forms the seat and the angels' wings form the back and sides of the King's throne. This is solid gold and is called the Mercy Seat, signifying the presence of God as Judge and King. It represents the **Day of Atonement**, the judgment of the saints, the double edged scalpel of Hebrews 4:12, carefully separating the precious from the profane. Those purified saints who answer the trumpet call to purify themselves will receive no condemnation in the Day of Atonement, but rather commendation and rewards. The third aspect of the Ark of the Covenant is the Shekina Glory resting on the Mercy Seat, symbolized by the **Feast of Tabernacles** itself. We'll get into this in the next section, as it is not only the third aspect of the Ark of the Covenant, but also the seventh item in the tabernacle, symbolizing the ultimate peace, joy, and Sabbath Rest of the believer after the rapture.

From the saint's perspective, the Ark of the Covenant symbolizes the entire new man, body, soul, and spirit. The box is the body, our physical 'house'. The cover on the box is the soul, which is made to cover and rule over our body. The angels represent our spirit, symbolizing God's intent that our spirit rule over our soul and body, and directing us up toward wisdom and worship. Then on top of all that is the Holy Spirit, in the Shekina Glory of YHWH, sitting on the throne of our lives, ruling over and dwelling with our spirit in intimate oneness so that He sees only "one Spirit." (Eph 4:4). That is the normal Christian life.

The Ark of the Covenant is kept in the most holy place, separated from worldliness by the three veils. The only time it was to leave the most holy place was when God sent it out before the Israelites into battle against His enemies. Even so we dwell in the secret place of His presence and go out among the ungodly only at His command.

God gave Adam the mandate to rule over the birds, the fish, the beasts, the cattle, and creeping things. During the Millennium the saints in Christ are given the mandate to "rule them with a rod of iron." (Rev 2:27; 3:21; 19:15 ff) But who ruled whom at the time the Israelites crossed the Jordan? Well, they were supposed to purge the land of all the Lord's enemies, purify it, and rule it in a 'theocracy' (with YHWH ruling through them). But that never really happened. They still weren't ready, even after forty years' wandering in the wilderness. So YHWH of Hosts had to take over as commander and rule them instead. Later on He even had to give them an earthly king. That is why He had to send them back to the beginning when they crossed the Jordan, back to the Passover Feasts in Nisan. They weren't ready for Tabernacles in Tishri!

They physically crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, but they failed at the Day of Atonement, because they still had sin hidden in their hearts, as revealed by the Achan affair. Thus the rest of their time in the Promised Land was characterized by grumbling, stubbornness, faithlessness, idolatry, immorality, selfishness, lusting after the things of the world, and direct disobedience.

The **sixth theme of the Word of God** (who is the Lord Jesus Christ, Adonai Yashua haMashiach) is that He is the only way to the holy Father, YHWH. He and He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the fullest possible revelation of the eternal Father to us, and the Standard (Banner, Exemplar) against which all other things are measured. Mankind is judged by this standard – either condemned for falling short, or commended for walking in faith in His perfection. The Banner stands before us, high and holy; we who are saints follow that Banner, laboring to do battle with all His enemies, to take possession of the Promised Land, and to enter into His Rest. There is no other way to the Father but to follow that Banner. As we determine to follow, He transforms us into a higher order of life – His own life-form: eternal life. He is "... able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless, with great joy," (Jude 24) because He is the Word of God, "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb 4:12) This double-edged sword cuts away the sin nature, slays His enemies within us, and transforms us into sons of God, to rule with Him over all creation.

The **sixth Hero of Faith** is Jacob, meaning supplanter. His nature was cunning and deceitful, but he is honored in God's Word for his earnest desire for all of God's promises, though he used trickery to obtain them. His duplicity backfired. Laban cheated him on his wages and deceived him when he wanted to marry Rachel, giving him Leah instead. Ultimately he repented of cheating his brother and learned integrity. As his character defects were being ironed out, Jacob wrestled and prevailed with God for His blessing, showing how he valued God's promises.

God was pleased with Jacob's faith. He changed his name to Israel, meaning Prince of God. God gave him 12 sons, the first fulfillment of His promise that Abraham would become the father of many nations. Eight sons were from the despised Leah, including Judah from whom came Messiah, and Levi from whom came Aaron and the entire priesthood, showing that God overruled Laban's deceit to make Leah Jacob's true wife. But Jacob wasn't listening. He still wanted Rachel. From her came Joseph, who saved the world from the famine, showing that God can make even our mistakes and failures a part of His plan. As his father Isaac had done, Israel blessed his sons (and grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh) before his death to impart to them the higher order of life he had been given: to walk by faith to believe God's promises and to pursue them wholeheartedly – the pure worship of trusting God.

The **sixth Feast is the Day of Atonement**, the most awesome and solemn of all the Feasts. It is the only day that anyone is permitted to go beyond the veil into the most holy place, and then only the high priest, and then only after the most careful fasts, ceremonial washings, fresh clothes, confessions, sacrifices, and sprinklings of blood. This represents the **judgment of the saints**, and to my knowledge, none of us has done any better than the Israelites did when they crossed the Jordan. We'd sure like to think that we are better than they, but I'm afraid that it is back to Passover for us, too. And back to Pentecost, for another trip around the mountain. Or back to Trumpets, a squalid army wandering for forty years in the desert while following the trumpet of God. The Day of Atonement is a threefold cleansing of each of the three aspects of our nature: body, soul, and spirit. But we are not ready for that yet; there is still too much of the love of the world in us, as with Achan, coveting the treasures of Jericho.

The **sixth aspect of redemption** is the final cutting away of the sin nature from our new nature in Christ, by the double edged sword that proceeds from His mouth. (Rev 1:16) It is the final judgment of the saints at the Day of Atonement, in which we are separated forever from our sin nature, cleansed, and made holy, fully redeemed in body, soul, and spirit. It is the creation of a new man in the image of God on the sixth day, a higher order of creature than the animals, given authority to rule over all the lower orders of creatures. It is prophetic, for a time that is yet in the future. It points to the perfection required to enter God's Rest.

No one can achieve this pinnacle of perfection himself. But in the fullness of time the many-membered body of Christ will achieve it, for we have the firm promise of Him who is able to present us faultless before the throne of His presence with great joy. (Jude 24) Yes, this immediately follows the rapture of the Bride, when the last trumpet calls us up to stand before the Father for judgment, *except this time the Bride will be ready!* The Father will take our hand and place it in the hand of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and then call for the wedding feast to begin.

“There remains a Sabbath Rest for the people of God... Let us therefore be diligent to enter that Rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience [as the Israelites]. For the Word of God is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.” (Heb 4:9-13) Please note that this sword is double-edged. It is indeed a war sword which YHWH, mighty in battle, Commander of the armies of heaven, uses against the enemy of our souls. But its other edge is like a tiny scalpel, which YHWH, the heavenly Surgeon, uses to carefully cut away anything within us that would destroy us, down to the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

No one yet (but Jesus) has reached this point. No one yet has fully entered His Rest (short of physical death). We are still in the sixth day, the day of man. But I believe the six thousand years since Adam are now finished, and it is time for the seventh day, the millennial Sabbath Rest. So what must we do these final few minutes of the sixth day? Yes, we must go to war, following YHWH of Hosts, the Supreme Commander of the Armies of God, with the Ark of the New Covenant at the head of the formation, with the Living Bread of His Presence, the Word of God, the Law of Life in Christ Jesus written on our hearts, protected by the full armor of God, to slay all His enemies out of the Land of Promise, purify the land, and set creation free from futility into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. This 'rest' is not idleness; it is entering into the finished work of Christ!

What is this Promised Land full of wicked giants against whom we fight? Why, it is the very temple of God, the most holy place, which has been trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, the pagans, for all these years. The Ark of the Covenant is missing, the peace of Jerusalem is a sham, and the antichrist has built his own throne in Zion, right on the Holy Mountain where God's temple belongs. *Quickly! Put on your armor, grab your weapons, and join me in the battle!* We must slay His enemies and rebuild and cleanse the temple of God, again setting the Ark of the New Covenant in the most holy place – our own human heart.

The **sixth of the seven Spirits of God** is the Spirit of Knowledge. Again, this is not human knowledge about God, but rather that personal, intimate knowing of God Himself that results from walking by His Spirit of Counsel and Power. This is not just a mental thing. This is His own Spirit in unity with our Spirit in intimate fellowship: a love relationship. The Day of Atonement, Judgment Day, is not a day of condemnation for this new man, the saint. To the sinner the King will indeed say, “Depart from Me, for I never knew you.” But to the saint, the King will exclaim, *“I know you! Welcome, beloved! You have been My faithful, profitable servant. Enter now My brother (son of My Father) into the joy, peace, and rest of intimate fellowship with Me.”*

– THE SEVENTH ASPECT OF REDEMPTION

On the **seventh day of Creation**, God rested. He looked at all His creation and said, “Behold, it is VERY GOOD!” (Can you even imagine how good that must be?) He also permanently sanctified the seventh day Sabbath as an everlasting memorial to all His creative works which were completed in the first six days. He tied the Sabbath up with a lovely ribbon and gave it to mankind as a present to celebrate the birthday of the universe (the only birthday we are commanded in Scripture to celebrate). And what a wondrous present! Our perpetual reminder of perfection; our connection back to The Holy! *An incredible treasure.*

The **seventh stage of the Israelites journey** is perfect peace and rest in the Promised Land, with the enemies of YHWH all destroyed. But it never actually happened. “... They were not able to enter because of unbelief... There remains therefore a Sabbath Rest for the people of God...” (Heb 3:19; 4:9) The fulfillment of this final aspect of redemption is still in the future.

After King Solomon finished the temple, “... the cloud filled the temple of YHWH, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of YHWH filled the temple.” (1 Kin 8:5-11) The **seventh item of the tabernacle** is the very presence of almighty God, YHWH Himself, visible in the pillar of cloud and fire. When all is complete, cleansed and atoned for, sanctified in obedience to His law, He descends upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark and His Shekina Glory fills the temple.

The **seventh theme of the Word of God** is that it brings peace. Peace to the troubled soul. Peace to the sin-sick heart. Peace to the weary and heavy-laden – a peace that passes understanding. Truly it is said that the human heart contains a “God-shaped hole,” an emptiness that only God can fill. He fills that emptiness by His eternal Living Word. He heals all our restlessness when we find our rest in Him. This is not a peace of compromise. Not a strained, tenuous pact with the devil. Not a fearful, anxious hiatus from war. No! This is an enduring peace of total victory! Total defeat of every enemy in our hearts and lives, with Adonai Yashua haMashiach ruling as our Savior, Lord, and King!

This peace does not depend on circumstances. “In Me [Jesus] you have [right now] peace. In the world you [still] have tribulation, but take courage; I have [already] overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33) By faith we can have a blessed fulfillment of the final Sabbath Rest right now, though it be limited and still in the middle of the wars and tribulations of our lives. This incredible peace starts as we relinquish control to the King. He delivers us from worry and fear – He has already won the victory! We place our total trust in His sovereign authority, almighty power, and infinite love. Though this world is still filled with devils raging against us and trying to shake our faith; they have no power as long as our focus remains on the author, giver, and finisher of our faith, for He is our Peace.

The **seventh Hero of Faith** of Hebrews 11 is Joseph, who is a beautiful picture of Christ. Joseph went from imprisonment (a type of death) to a ruler in Egypt (a type of resurrection) in 3 days. After forgiving his brothers, he saved his family (God’s chosen family) from the famine. Incidentally, Joseph’s rule also saved the entire civilized world, bringing worldwide prosperity and establishing Egypt as the premier world power for 226 years (until the Exodus). Joseph trusted God’s promise, and knew that his descendants would return to the Land of Promise.

The **seventh Feast is Tabernacles**, called ‘The Feast’, to which all the other Feasts point. It represents YHWH’s Sabbath Rest. Here we tabernacle with God Himself, and He with us, in perfect peace and rest with great joy. The Feast lasts seven days, the completion or perfection of time. On the seventh day, the ‘Last Great Day’ of the Feast, it reaches its climax in the living water-drawing ceremony. Living water symbolizes eternal life, drawn from above, which is the **seventh and final aspect of redemption.**

Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day, begins that evening with the seventh and final celebration of the Festival of Lights. This pictures the eternal nature of Yashua, the Light of the World. His eternal nature is beyond time and cannot be symbolized by a length of time. One evening is sufficient to illustrate it. They left their temporary booths and returned to their permanent dwellings by the light of four great menorahs. The next morning they celebrated Simchat Torah, finishing the last chapter of the Torah followed immediately by the first chapter of Genesis. Eight is the number of new beginnings, symbolizing here an ultimate fulfillment in the Sabbath Rest that never ends, not in temporary booths but permanent dwellings. The fact that the celebration of Tabernacles spilled over into the eighth day, in which the Torah readings began again, symbolizes that God’s Word will always be our spiritual food, for the Living Word, Yashua, will always be with us.

The **seventh of the seven Spirits of God** is the Spirit of the Reverential Fear of YHWH. This is the expected result of intimacy with Him. He is God Almighty; the more we come to know Him, the more we fall in awe and reverence at His feet. This is inseparable from the Spirit of Power and Knowledge. In His power we come to know Him, and in knowing Him we come to fear Him aright. The trumpet call of the Spirit of Might leads to the Spirit of Knowledge (the Day of Atonement) which ushers us into the peace and joy of the Reverential Fear of YHWH (Tabernacles). However, the seven Spirits of God are inseparable. There is only one Spirit. *The Spirit of the Reverential Fear of YHWH leads us back to the Spirit of YHWH, the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Might, and the Spirit of Knowledge and the Fear of YHWH*, like a ring, with no beginning or end, and like a lampstand with seven branches but only one reservoir of oil. When we are filled with the seven Spirits of God, then and only then are we truly at peace, for that is how we are created to live.

The seven Spirits of God may be grouped into three, just like the Feasts are grouped into Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Inexhaustible Life of the Spirit of YHWH comes to us as Spirit of Wisdom, awakening the mind of Christ in us as His Spirit of Understanding. I call this combination the *Spirit of Strategic Discernment*. It lets us see things from His perspective, as we begin to do at Salvation. This sets us free from the darkness, blindness, and bondage of Egypt, but puts us out in the desert.

We can't do much in this new realm until we receive the Holy Spirit of Counsel, the Wonderful Counselor, who rearranges our lives according to His Law of the New Covenant written on our hearts. Being led by the Spirit of Counsel represents the middle Feast of Pentecost. Joined with the Spirit of Might, this is the *Spirit of Irresistible Counsel*, the energizing power of our new life in Christ.

Finally we are ready to step out in this new realm to do battle with the enemies of YHWH. The Spirit of Might introduces us into the Spirit of the Intimate Knowledge of the Holy One, resulting in the Spirit of the Reverential Fear of YHWH. This last combination of three I call the *Spirit of Pure Worship in Spirit and Truth*.

I cannot worship whom I do not know. I cannot know Him if I have never actually experienced the incredible power and glory of His Inexhaustible Life actively working in my own life. But when His Spirit of Power and Might flows through me, then and only then do "... I count all things but loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but dung in order that I may gain Christ... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..." (Phil 3:8-10) Only in this intimate knowing can we bow and worship before Him in deepest reverential awe and fear.

Not fright, for His perfect love casts out that kind of fear. (1 Jn 4:18) We are set free from the fear of men and the fear of judgment by our love relationship with Jesus. Thus the *Spirit of Pure Worship in Spirit and Truth* grows within us, as we receive His infinite love and are changed into His nature to love Him in return. This love / worship relationship with God is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, in wondrous peace, joy, and Sabbath Rest.

The seventh aspect of redemption is therefore that glorious day when the saint is totally at peace with God and has fully entered the Sabbath Rest of His eternal Life. The enemies are all destroyed, and YHWH Himself reigns as King and Judge on the Mercy Seat of our own heart, which is cleansed, perfectly pure, and full of the Bread of Heaven, the Resurrection Spirit, and the Law of Life. *This will be perfectly fulfilled one day. Redemption does not go on and on with no hope of ever being complete.* One day sin will be totally cleansed from the universe, death and hell itself will be cast into the lake of fire, and the sons of God will be manifest in all the perfection of Jesus Christ their head.

Adam and Eve were sinless, but immature. On that awesome day the new Adam, Christ in a many-membered body, will be sinless and mature, full of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of YHWH – the fullness of the seven Spirits of YHWH. We will still have a freewill choice, giving the possibility of falling into sin. Jesus had that too, in His first incarnation. But now that the lies of sin are fully exposed, this new Adam will never fall to temptation. Instead, He will rule the universe in perfect righteousness and truth, under the authority of his Head, the Righteous One who is Truth.

However, that is in the future. It will happen; we have His promise. We hang on to our Blessed Hope. But even seeing it from God's eternity perspective, it is tough for us to claim much of it for now. No better than the Israelites, we too have crossed the Jordan, but were unable to get rid of the giants in the land, unable to cleanse the temple, unable to enter fully into Tabernacles. So we too have been sent back to the beginning, to Passover at Gilgal. We too have coveted the riches of Jericho, made covenants with the Gibeonites before consulting YHWH (Josh 9), and made compromises with the Amalekites, sparing the king and the best of the animals. (1 Sam 15) We too have set up Micah's household idol in our lives and hired a priest to lead us in a form of worship while denying the power thereof. (Judges 17-18) We too have turned aside with Samson to harlotry, even while claiming to be filled with the Spirit. (Judges 16 ff) We like to think we are better than they, but it just isn't so, for we were born with the same sin nature. I only have to look honestly into my own life to see the truth of my own utterly depraved nature.

Every generation since Adam's Fall has been the same. In every generation there has been a clear beacon of light as a witness to the truth of the gospel. In every generation there have been some who have eagerly journeyed toward the light, as opposed to others who have hated the light. Those who have loved the light are not yet perfect; they have journeyed toward it, but all have fallen short. "And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith... He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness..." (Heb 11:39-12:2; 12:10)

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body [the church] in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions." (Col 1:24) Amazing verse. Do you understand it? So tell me, what is lacking in Christ's afflictions? Did He blow it? Was His sacrifice for sin incomplete or inadequate? Do we have to help Him become the Savior of the World?

Absolutely not! This is not talking about Christ the head, it is talking about His many-membered body on earth, the church. There are still a few more saints to add to His body, still a little more maturing and discipline, a bit more suffering and purifying, and still a few more babes that need to grow up. But one of these days the second Adam will be ready for that last trumpet call, that final crossing of the Jordan, that final Day of Atonement, the last great battle of Armageddon, and the thousand year rest, the true Feast of Tabernacles in the true Promised Land, of which Canaan was only a dim, flawed picture.

In the meantime, and I'm truly sorry to have to say this, "... we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away... For now we see through a glass dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also am fully known." (1 Cor 13:9-12) As long as the defeated usurper still grasps his forfeited title of 'god of this world' there will still be giants left in the land, God's enemies left to battle. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh received their inheritance on the far side of the Jordan, but they still had to cross and join the rest of the Israelites in battle, *for no one could receive his inheritance until they all conquered the land.* (Josh 1:10-18) That is still true.

Let's review the timing. The two spies crossed the Jordan on the 1st of Nisan, the beginning of the religious year. If this had been the 1st of Tishri, the beginning of the civil year, it would have been the Feast of Trumpets! The rest of the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan and were circumcised on the 10th of Nisan, when the waters were rolled back all the way up river to the city of Adam. That would have been the 10th of Tishri, the Day of Atonement, when all sin will be rolled back (cleansed) to Adam! They then celebrated the Passover on the evening of the 14th, and began the Feast of Unleavened Bread from the 15th through the 21st of Nisan by eating the firstfruits of the land. That would have been the 15th- 21st of Tishri, the Feast of Tabernacles! That whole thing would have been their final entry into the Promised Land, receiving all the promises of God, to symbolize our eternal Sabbath Rest.

But it wasn't. They never really made it to Tabernacles. Though they entered the Promised Land physically, they never entered in their hearts – they never fully believed God. "... the word they heard did not profit them, *because it was not united by faith in those who heard...* There remains a Sabbath Rest for the people of God... Let us therefore be diligent to enter that Rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience." (Rom 4:1-11) They failed, and got sent back to Passover. That fall they got up to Tabernacles again, and then back to Passover again, year after year. They never did get it right. Ultimately Israel forsook the Feasts, forsook YHWH, joined with the idolaters of the nations, got exiled to Assyria and to Babylon. Again, have we done any better? How does 'Christian' America measure up here?

You see, they are an example, a picture, of the church. (1 Cor 10:6-11) The Israelites were still weak in faith, self-centered, self-serving, unwilling (unable) to let go and let God be their sovereign Lord. We the church are the same. The almighty King of the universe certainly could have led Israel into the Promised Land at Tabernacles, but He did not. Looking at my own fallen nature, that gives me hope for the future. We are no better than they, but no worse, either. They failed Him, a zillion times, but He remained faithful and true. After all their failures He still loves them. He restored them after the Exile. He brought them back from the Diaspora. He keeps His promises. Will He do any less for us when we cry out to Him with a sincere heart?

"Since, brethren, we now have confidence to enter into the most holy place by the blood of Jesus (the High Priest over the temple of God), by a new and living way through the veil, that is by identifying with His death, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with the pure water of the Word. Let us faithfully hold fast the confession of our hope, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, *not forsaking the festal assemblies, as is the habit of most American Christians*, but encouraging each other as we celebrate them in spirit, all the more as we see the day of Christ's return approaching." (Heb 10:19-25 paraphrased)

Yes, collectively as the body of Christ I guess we are not quite ready. But individually, just between each saint and Jesus... Remember how I started of this section? *Although this seventh and last step in the plan of redemption is yet for the future, in another sense there are no steps or grades. This is just one aspect, like a facet of a diamond, which we look at and admire many times. Each time we come to it, it is more beautiful than before. God's plan of redemption is one, and to divide it up into steps is dangerous, lest we lose sight of its oneness. It has to be divided up to understand it, but we must also keep every aspect before us continually, viewing them from God's eternity perspective in our lives.*

In one sense God's plan of redemption was complete from before the foundation of the world. *In another sense it proceeds throughout time and will not be complete until every created thing enters His eternity and God is all and in all.* A sinner is fully redeemed the moment he repents and receives Jesus into his heart. *Yet in another sense each believer is continually being saved throughout his entire life.* Each of the Feasts portrays one part of the intricate plan of redemption. *Yet in another sense each of the Feasts reveals the entire plan of redemption.* Like an incredible painting or a tapestry of the master artisan, or like a classic literary work by a master storyteller, God's plan of redemption is complex and many-layered, with extended sub-plots and intricate details, all woven together into one grand theme. A child can see it in a minute, but the greatest of us cannot exhaust its beauty though we study it for a lifetime.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN FETUS

God has given us other pictures of redemption, such as the stories told in His book of Nature and in the names of the stars and constellations (told in *The Heavens Declare*, by J. Preston Eby). I think the Feasts of Israel present the clearest picture, which is why I wrote a book on them. But one more picture is the development of the human fetus. Its parallels with the Feasts seem too good to pass up.

The **first** aspect of the development of a human fetus is the unfertilized ovum, or egg. It begins in the mother's ovaries on day one. When fully formed, it moves into her fallopian tubes on the 14th day of the first month, the date of Passover. The egg will soon die if it is not fertilized and set free from the fallopian tubes. An unsaved person will likewise die without life from above. The Passover meal saved no one. It was just the first step in fleeing Egypt.

The **second** aspect is fertilization of the ovum by the sperm from the father, which must occur within 24 hours (i.e. the 15th day, which is the first day of Unleavened Bread). This is conception. The fetus is now a fully human baby, with its physical features all determined, though only a single cell. Similarly, a newly awakened person must accept and receive into himself the 'divine Sperm', the Bread of Life, the Word of God, from the heavenly Father, to be born from above (symbolized by the Lord's Supper). But again, eating unleavened bread saved no one either; it only sustained them while fleeing Egypt.

The **third** aspect is release of the now-fertilized egg from the fallopian tube and implantation into the wall of the mother's womb. This may take anywhere from two to six days after fertilization. Thus the Feast of Firstfruits is a variable Feast, the day after the Sabbath, occurring anywhere from the 16th to the 21st day of the month. In the same way, the person must leave Egypt (the fallopian tube), renounce his allegiance to the world, and place his trust and allegiance in Yashua haMashiach (the mother's womb). This is symbolized by baptism. Now the fertilized egg is safely 'home' and can begin to grow. The 'three in one' Feast of Passover is complete, the children of Israel are out of Egypt and safely across the Red Sea. The child of God is saved and ready to start growing in the faith.

The **fourth** aspect of the development of the human child is obvious if you look at the pictures of its growth. At first it is just identical multiplying cells. Then, in a miracle change that evolutionary so-called 'science' cannot even begin to explain, the multiplying cells begin to specialize, to form actual body parts. (How do they know how and when to do this? God tells them!) At first the body parts look more like a tadpole, or a fish. But by the fiftieth day, the fetus is definitely, visibly human in form. The infant child of God is at first barely recognizable from the animal kingdom until he matures enough to begin changing his behavior to match what he is reading in God's Word; at that point he is recognizable as a true child of God.

The Word of God is deep enough to drown the greatest theologian, yet shallow enough for the little child to wade safely through. Prophecies of Scripture will often have an obvious, straightforward fulfillment, and then a few more fulfillments that lie hidden. An example is the prophecy that Elijah would return before the great and terrible day of YHWH (Mal 4:5), clearly talking about the end times, yet Jesus also applied it to John the Baptist. (Matt 17:11) In these 300 pages we have discussed most of the obvious prophecies of the Feasts of Israel. But I assure you there are even more glorious fulfillments yet to be revealed.

Individually, by the faith and the commitment given to us through God's grace, we can meet the Lord Jesus Christ right now in each one of the Feasts. Whenever, however, He meets with us it is enough; it is complete; it is perfect. At **Passover** we bow gratefully, overwhelmed at His awesome salvation from the guilt and power of sin. We drink deeply and are satisfied with the Water of Life. We eat the perfect Bread that came down from heaven and are filled. Then at **Pentecost** we tune our lives into harmony with the perfect law of liberty and abundant life in Christ Jesus, written there by His Holy Spirit. And at **Tabernacles** we hear the trumpet call, prepare our hearts for battle against the Lord's enemies in our heart, and allow Him to defeat them in us on the Day of Atonement by the double edged sword from His mouth. Thus we enter fully into His Rest, in faith that He who has promised is fully able to perform it unto the day of Christ. At each step, we are at peace with God.

Not a hopeful, feigned peace; not an outward, tenuous, superficial cessation of hostility; but a true, honest-to-God Holy-Spirit borne fruit of peace deep within by His grace. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful... These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, for I have overcome the world." (Jn 14:27; 16:33) All this right now, and again tomorrow, and more day by day as we grow in Christ.

"Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself... In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to His riches of grace which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will... looking toward the administration of the fullness of the times, that is, *the summing up of all things in Christ*, things in heaven and things upon the earth." (Eph 1:3-10) Every spiritual blessing? Holy and blameless before Him? Adoption as sons? Yes! according to the riches of His grace. This is our heritage as all things are summed up in Christ. This is God's plan of redemption as portrayed in the Feasts.

General growth continues, with nothing momentous happening until the first day of the seventh month (Feast of Trumpets) when the **fifth** aspect, the baby's hearing, is finally perfected. (Note that the ear cannot function until it is fully formed – another nail in the coffin of evolution.) The child of God is now able to hear the trumpet call to cross the Jordan and do battle with the Lord's enemies.

The **sixth** aspect occurs ten days later, on the Day of Atonement. It involves a change in the baby's blood to make it capable of carrying the breath of life; before that time the baby could get its oxygen only from its mother's blood (the oxygen passes through her placenta). The child of God has now been purified by the blood of Yashua. His sins are fully atoned for, and he is judged as righteous.

The **seventh** aspect occurs on the 15th to the 21st day of the 7th month, the Feast of Tabernacles. On those days the lungs are fully developed and the baby is now capable of surviving a premature birth. (Before this, a 'preemie' would almost certainly die.) The baby child of God is for the first time able to actually fellowship with a holy God, to breathe in the Spirit realm. However, this is only 200 days of the normal 280 day gestation period of a human baby. We may want to think of ourselves as mature sons of God, but at this point in reality we are yet unborn.

There is an **eighth** aspect to the development of the human child – actual birth. He sees his father for the first time. It generally occurs between the 25th day of the 9th month (remember that these are 29-30 day lunar months) to the 2nd day of the 10th month. This is the period during which the Jews observe Hanukkah. It corresponds to a gestation of 276 to 282 days from Passover (conception), perfect for a human baby. Hanukkah celebrates cleansing and dedicating the temple by the Maccabees in 165 BC. Though not commanded in Scripture, it is a fitting feast to commemorate the birth of the baby into the Kingdom as a living stone in God's temple. He is just a baby, learning to walk and talk with his Father. But now he is a son of God!

– THE EIGHTH ASPECT OF REDEMPTION?

There is no eighth aspect of redemption. Redemption is complete in the seven Feasts. It cannot be improved upon. Yet note the eighth aspect to the development of the baby: birth! The Last Great Day of the Feast of Tabernacles was extended to the eighth day. And there are at least eight heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. (Or more, if you count Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.) What is going on here?

We can get a clue by noting that the **eighth Hero of Faith** is Moses. He did everything right! He chose to suffer with the children of God rather than to enjoy the riches and glories of Egypt. He obeyed God, and talked with Him as one does with a close friend. He led the Children of Israel right up to the Promised Land. Then what?

A flaw was found in him and he was disqualified from entering the Promised Land. One 'little' flaw! He struck the rock once at God's command, but the next time when God told him to just speak to it, he got miffed at their grumbling and struck it again. That was wrong. It screwed up the symbolism of Christ being smitten for our sins once for all. But gimme a break! After all his faithful obedience, one little fit of pique did him in?! What hope have we?

Now this is a key point, so listen carefully. The law (symbolized by Moses, the lawgiver) does not get you into the Promised Land. The tiniest flaw and you are toast. Moses was a great hero of faith; possibly the greatest of all. I wish we all could be as good as he. But being good does not get you into the Kingdom.

That is why the sacrifices of the Feasts had to be offered over and over, year by year. That is why the Sabbath must be celebrated every week. On the eighth day we start over, hopefully a little closer to the Kingdom but still needing to go through the redemptive process again. Some people believe that once you are saved that's it; you just move on. Once you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit that's it; you can never backslide again. And a few even believe that once you enter into the Sabbath Rest you're perfect and sin no more on this earth. I wish. But Scripture teaches us that we are 'being saved'. "For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor 1:18) It teaches us that we are being justified. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." (Rom 3:23 & 24) Scripture also assures us that ultimately we will be saved completely. "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, [who is] ever living to intercede for them." (Heb 7:25 MKJV)

I believe the **eighth aspect of redemption** is the birth of the many-membered man-child (Rev 12:5) who in Christ will rule the nations with a rod of iron. (Psalm 149) It is the revealing of the sons of God for whom Creation is anxiously longing. (Romans 8:19) It is that "saved to the uttermost," when "... we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:13)

Perhaps that will humble us a bit, when we start to feel uppity about how mature and spiritual we are. From God's perspective, we are so immature that we haven't even yet come to the birth as sons!

One more question intrigues me. How does Yashua's **ascension** on the fortieth day after His resurrection fit into all this? Maybe it doesn't. There is no parallel for it in the Feasts. But the number 40 is significant in Scripture, and Christ's ascension certainly is significant. Yashua said that He couldn't send the Holy Spirit unless He went away. Could God be trying to tell us something here?

At the ascension, Yashua returned to the throne at the right hand of the Father on high and received back the glory that He had given up when He came to earth – glory multiplied by His triumph over sin and death, I might add. It is tempting to think of this as a picture of the saints being born into the Kingdom of God, receiving their adoption as sons, the redemption of their bodies, and being glorified with Him. But I can't get it to fit, and I am learning that if it doesn't fit, don't try to force it. God doesn't need me to be twisting His eternal inerrant Word to fit my theories. The problem is the timing. Yashua ascended to heaven 40 days after His resurrection and 10 days before Pentecost. That doesn't match anything in the Feasts. Everything else in the Feasts beautifully matches the story of redemption. If Yashua's ascension before Pentecost were to symbolize our glorification and adoption as sons, He left 240 days too soon. He should have stuck around until Hanukkah.

No, I think there is something else going on here. Yashua is qualitatively and quantitatively different from us. He is always the only begotten Son of God; we are only adopted into sonship with Him. He is the uncreated head; we are created to be part of His body. All glory and honor is His; we are invited to participate in His finished works to thus be glorified with Him. He is God; we are created beings lifted by divine love into intimate fellowship with Him. Whatever His ascension to glory may symbolize, it is not our glorification and adoption as sons of God.

Let's look at the number 40. 40 days wandering in the wilderness; rain 40 days and nights during the Flood; Moses fasted on Mt. Sinai 40 days and nights receiving the law; Jonah prophesied, "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!"; Yashua fasted 40 days and nights in the desert being tempted by the devil. Perhaps the number 40 has to do with the completion of testing, trial, or judgment? The fires of judgment have a purifying, 'proving' effect; gold is recognizable only after it has been through the fire. In the same way, perhaps Yashua had to go through a time of proving so His disciples would really recognize Him after His resurrection. It takes three days in the grave to prove to the Israeli mind that a person is dead. So perhaps it took 40 days after the resurrection to prove that He was risen.

Why did Yashua go away? He went to prepare a place for us in the body of Christ. (Jn 14:2) He went away to send the Holy Spirit to live within us as our Helper, Comforter, and Guide. (v 16 ff) He went to intercede for us. (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34) Here is the picture that I get. Yashua went back to the Father on the 40th day to tell us, "It is a done deal, and you can count on it. God's Word is faithful and true though every man be a liar. You saw Me die; now you've seen Me alive. I not only won the victory over death and the grave, but for 40 days I also proved to you beyond any reasonable doubt that I have the power of eternal life in My hand, and it is available to anyone who chooses to believe. God keeps His promises, every one. He fulfills His Word; not one of the Father's goals for you shall ever fail.

"I paid the full price for your redemption. I personally will guarantee it by sitting at the right hand of the Father, in the position of ultimate power and authority, interceding for you until every enemy is submitted under My feet and every one who believes is safely within My Father's temple."

What is intercession? Is it prayer? Why should Yashua have to intercede for us? Is He up there twisting the Father's arm to persuade Him to have mercy instead of just zapping us as His holiness demands? That is what some Roman Catholics want you to believe. In fact, Christ is too holy to pray to directly, so 'Mother Mary' has to twist His arm on our behalf. But even she is too holy, so the saints had better twist her arm on our behalf. And even the saints are too holy, so your priest had better twist their arms on your behalf, which he will do as long as you faithfully attend Mass and bring your tithes for 'the work of the lord'. So you don't even need to pray. In fact, it is better if you don't actually pray. You are not good enough to pray! You just tell your rosary beads, mindlessly repeat your 'Hail Mary's' and 'Our Father's', and let the priest, the pope, and the saints do all the real praying for you, for theirs is the true intercession that will save your sinful soul from those terrible fires of eternal hell and damnation.

That entire line of thinking is an abomination to God and a horrible (and dangerous) perversion of the truth. We Protestants have pretty successfully protested that, but do we have a correct understanding of prayer and intercession to replace it? At least we are not afraid to pray directly to the Father in Jesus' name, but often our prayer is back to trying to twist His arm – either that or a fatalistic, "Thy will be done, and please give us strength to bear it."

The subject of **prayer and intercession** is another whole book – probably a more important book than this study on the Feasts, I might add. But hey, if I can briefly summarize it and show how it relates to the Feasts, it might make a good conclusion to my book.

First to define the terms. Prayer is a generic word which we usually use to mean communicating with (or to) divinity. Intercession is more interesting. It specifically means prayer on behalf of someone else, or in place of someone who may be unable (or unwilling) to pray.

But why pray at all? God is infinite, all-knowing and all-powerful, and present everywhere all the time – surely He can do whatever He wants without our having to get involved. If He is truly love, as we believe, then whatever He decides to do is best for us, anyway, so why pray?

The answer often given is, we pray because God tells us to pray. Well, I don't buy that. That is like the mother who tells her two-year-old, "Stay out of the street." But why? "Because I told you so!"

No young mother. There's a reason for your child to stay out of the street; it has to do with staying alive! Just so with prayer. Prayer has to do with life.

When God created Adam and Eve, He breathed into them “the Breath of Life.” They didn’t need to ‘pray’, as they had constant communion with God. They walked and talked with Him in the ‘Ruach’ (wind, breeze, spirit) of the day in the Garden of Eden. But with the first sin, that communion was broken; Adam and Eve ‘died’ to God, and were driven out of the Garden. Their first son murdered their second. Finally after their third son, Seth, and his son Enosh, men again “began to call on the name of YHWH.” (Gen 4:26) Yes, they had to learn to pray.

Those who believe that prayer is merely trying to get God to do something that He is reluctant to do, would have a valid, logical point in thinking that it is a waste of time to pray – God knows best, and if He is reluctant, it is better to not twist His arm. But Seth and Enosh found that there was something missing in their lives. They began to call on the name of YHWH. They had discovered that life is more than just making a living. There is a spiritual aspect to life that is essential. Those who don’t have it are dead while they live. Prayer is that link to the spirit realm. Praying regularly is to spiritual life as breathing regularly is to physical life.

Do you think Yashua ever tried to twist His Father’s arm to get His own way? Well, maybe once, in the Garden of Gethsemane as He was sweating great drops of blood over His imminent torture and execution (but even there He deliberately chose to submit to the Father’s will). Yet the entirety of His life was characterized by prayer; even whole nights of prayer before days of ministry. As a result, His life was characterized by great power in both the spirit and physical realms; power over kings and rulers, angels and demons; power to do the Father’s will, to complete all for which the Father sent Him here. That wasn’t because He was divine – He had laid aside His divinity. But He was connected back to divinity in His prayers, exactly like He expects of us. (Jn 14:12 – 15:7) He showed us the way! Prayer is obviously more than trying to talk God into (or out of) something. In fact, the apostle Paul’s command to, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17) implies that it is much more than telling God how we’d like our eggs fried.

We were created as triune beings in the image of God. We have a physical aspect, which needs physical food to have life. We also have a spiritual aspect, which requires spiritual food to have life. Then we have a soul connecting the two, being fed both from the physical (through the five senses) and from the spirit (through the living Word of God). Only if we have a balance between the two can we be a “... man of God... perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” (2 Tim 3:17) If our soul is constantly being fed from the five senses but rarely tastes of God’s Spirit, we will be soulish, worldly, earthly minded, blind in the spirit realm and unable to accomplish much for the Kingdom. Alternately, if our soul is constantly being fed from the living Word of God but is unable or unwilling to receive any input from the five senses, we could become, “So heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.”

Prayer is the balance! It keeps our soul healthy in both spirit and physical realms. It goes both ways. Prayer applies spiritual life to our physical problems. Prayer directs physical actions to meet spiritual needs. It is prayer that makes our physical life on earth spiritual, and our spirituality practical. God made us for a purpose: to work with Him in ruling His universe. (Gen 1:28) We were not created just to go through a lifetime of pain and testing, then after passing the test to be snatched up to heaven to worship Him forever. No, no, no! That is an old Roman Catholic fable which was designed to enslave the people and keep them from knowing their calling in Christ. We have a job to do. Prayer is not an option; prayer is the means God has given us to do the job He created us to do.

Yes, God knows what spiritual wimps we are. He understands our frailty. “He knows our frame, and He is mindful that we are but dust.” (Ps 103:14) So guess what He does for us? Remember our definition of **intercession**? “Prayer on behalf of someone else, *or in place of someone else who may be unable or unwilling to pray.*” That is what Yashua is doing at the Father’s right hand. His prayer is providing for us the means, the spiritual energy, the power, to do what He made us to do. It has nothing whatever to do with twisting the Father’s arm for anything. It is focused upon us, His beloved, and it is His intercession that gives us the grace and the power to become all that He called us to be, and do all that He called us to do.

So do we just receive God’s grace and sit back to watch it all happen? Do you think He wants us to remain “unable or unwilling to pray” just because He’s covering for us? Not at all! He has called us to “grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.” (Eph 4:15) He wants us to “put on the full armor of God... with all prayer and petition, praying at all times in the Spirit, with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” (Eph 6:18) Yes, He is covering for our weakness, but it is time we grow up and learn to pray ourselves – not because He is tired of doing all our praying for us, but because He desires for us to participate in all that He is doing in the earth. He wants us to live in the power of prayer like He did during His earthly ministry.

What does all that have to do with the Feasts of Israel? It is prayer that applies the lessons of the Feasts to our hearts, so that we can receive His full redemption. It is prayer that opens up our understanding of His Word, and applies this redemption to our lives, so that we become able and useful servants of the King. If Yashua were not sitting at the right hand of power on the Father’s heavenly throne interceding for us, not one of us could ever be saved, not one of us could ever accept the perfect plan of redemption that is so clearly portrayed in the seven Feasts. If Yashua were not interceding for us, none of us would have the grace to grow up in the Kingdom, able ministers of the gospel, speaking the word of reconciliation as His Ambassadors. (2 Cor 5:19-20)

So yes, the Ascension of Yashua is not portrayed in any of the seven Feasts, nor is it one of the seven aspects of redemption. Instead, it is the spiritual life that makes it all work, first for us, as He intercedes for us at the Father's right hand of power, and then for others, as we take on the task of intercession for one another. The ascension (and its related intercession) is not an aspect of the seven Feasts because it is a work of the power of the Kingdom of God. Only one who has already been redeemed can carry on the great work of intercession!

No one can be saved without someone interceding for him or her. Not even the first step of redemption, waking up to see our need to come out of Egypt (the world), is possible without the quickening of the Holy Spirit. That is conveyed to us through someone else's intercession.

At each step of the way, leaving Egypt, eating the bread of affliction (the Unleavened Living Bread), the baptism in the Red Sea as firstfruits to God, the second baptism, this time with fire by the Holy Spirit, the trumpet calling us into the Promised Land, the atoning judgment of saints, and the Sabbath Rest, prayer is the precious oil of the Spirit to keep us moving. Then when we have entered in, we take His yoke upon us and learn from Him... for His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. (Matt 11:29-30) *His yoke is His infinite love for His people. His burden is the burden of intercession for them*, "... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the full measure of the stature of Christ." (Eph 4:13)

This is a little poem on prayer that I wrote many years ago. Perhaps it is a good way to close this volume on the story of redemption.

PRAYER IS NOT

Squealing to God when I'm in trouble,
like a pig caught in a fence.
Trying to twist God's arm to do what I want done.
Telling God how I think He ought to run His earth.

PRAYER IS

The attitude and expression of reverential awe
and joyous praise of our glorious God.
Constant communion with the heavenly Father in
the secret place of His Presence.
Tuning my mind to be aware of the Holy Spirit's
communication with my spirit.
Seeking to know the Father's will,
and actively conforming my will to His.
Actively, intensely, waiting on God,
until the Father's perfect will becomes clear.
Proclaiming the will of the Father, that it be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Believing that His will is accomplished as we pray,
and giving Him heartfelt thanks.
Doing whatever the Holy Spirit shows me is right,
at the time and in the way He leads.

THE END OF VOLUME ONE

This teaching has presented a rather revolutionary view of the Old Testament and the Feasts of Israel, with extensive biblical references and theological, archaeological, and historical notes to back it up. The Feasts of Israel present the story of redemption, but so does the rest of the Bible! With this new understanding of the Feasts, the entire Bible story comes alive in a whole new way. I have attempted to retell this epic story of the Bible in the following volumes of *God's Plan of the Ages*.

Volume Two – Beginning of Time through Moses

Volume Three – Joshua through King Jotham

Volume Four – King Ahaz to Messiah

Volume Five – Messiah through the End of Time

Endnote (from pages 70, 84, 118, and 295)

Regarding the chronology of the world, the Talmud, in the tractate Avodah Zarah, page 9A, states that this world as we know it will only exist for six thousand years.

“... the Tanna Debe Eliyahu taught: the world is to exist six thousand years; the first two thousand are to be ‘void’ [of Torah], the next two thousand are the period of the Torah [from Abraham until completion of the Mishnah, the first part of the Talmud], and the following [last] two thousand are the period of the Messiah [i.e. the Messianic Age could commence during this time]; through our [the Jews’] sins a number of these [times for Messiah’s coming] have already passed [and the Messiah has not come yet].”

The year 2000 equals 5760 years since Creation (or since the Fall, according to some) on the present Jewish calendar. By this calculation, the end of the age will occur in the year 2240. According to Jewish tradition, the end of the age will see:

1. the ingathering of all the scattered Jewish exiles to geographic Israel (which is partly fulfilled),
2. the defeat of all of Israel’s enemies,
3. the building of the third Jewish temple on its proper spot in Jerusalem and the resumption of the sacrificial offerings and temple service,
4. the Revival of the Dead (*techiat hameitim*), which we know as the Resurrection,
5. and, at some point, the Jewish Messiah, who will become the anointed King of Israel. He will divide the Jews in Israel into their original tribal portions in the land. During this time Gog, king of Magog, will attack Israel. Magog will fight a great battle, in which many will die on both sides, but God will intervene and save the Jews. This is the battle referred to as Armageddon. God, having vanquished this final enemy once and for all, will accordingly banish all evil from human existence. After the year 6000 (in the Jewish calendar), the seventh millennium will be an era of holiness, tranquility, spiritual life, and worldwide peace, called the *Olam Haba* (‘Future World / Age’), where all people will know God directly. (The above is taken from *Jewish Eschatology* in Wikipedia.org.)

Cute theory. I like it. But I no longer believe that all of ancient history can fit into the last 6000 years. I calculate that we are now (in AD 2000) at least 7106 years from Creation. It is rather likely that many generations are skipped from the Genesis record, such that we may be as much as 12,000 years from Creation. At one time I tried very hard to fit it all into 6000 years as Rabbi Eliyahu taught and many others believe, but it doesn’t fit. For some reason, perhaps just due to His mercy, God seems to have postponed that eagerly awaited seventh millennium. God does not want us to know the day or the hour. He just wants us to always be prepared for His soon returning.

Allow me to give you a taste of the difficulty of trying to fit all of human history into 6000 years. Let’s presume that is true, and that the world was created about 4000 BC. The Bible gives us a minimum of 1656 years from Creation to the Flood. That pins the Flood to 2344 BC at the earliest. After the Flood, Ham begat Cush, who begat Nimrod, who gathered a great civilization around him at Shinar and built his famous ‘Tower of Babel’ which God destroyed with the confusion of languages. I think that all took at least 270 years. Hebrew oral tradition claims it was 244 years. But if everyone had kids by the age of 25 it is barely possible to have a mighty civilization at Babel in 144 years. So 2200 BC is the absolute earliest possible date for it.

But, for example, the Old Kingdom of Egypt (with its powerful Pharaohs who built the pyramids) must be dated before 2400 BC. We have tons of real data supporting this. And the Early Kingdom began in Egypt more than 500 years before that, which pushes us back to 2900 BC. That does not fit our best case 2200 BC for the Tower of Babel catastrophe. It is an absolute minimum of 700 years off.

Don’t try to tell me that the pyramids were built before the Flood. They are barely above sea level – a worldwide flood would have caused massive water damage. Besides, they are built on top of the fossil-bearing strata that was laid down by the Flood. And their mortuary temples are covered with Egyptian hieroglyphics – certainly NOT the original language of Adam and all his descendants before the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel.

The Bible presents a picture of everyone on earth living in one place; “Let us build a city and a tower... let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” (Gen 11:4) That was the problem, they wouldn’t scatter abroad, when God wanted them to. He didn’t like their big, proud city! God confused their language so they’d move out and repopulate the earth. The only way to make sense of this story is for the Egyptian civilization, with all their great pyramids, their ancient language and hieroglyphs, and their plethora of gods and goddesses to begin after the Tower of Babel disaster.

But we know the beginning of the Egyptian civilization was 2900 BC at the very latest. (My guess is 3170 BC.) Therefore we cannot have the Flood in 2344 BC. I’m sorry, as I really wanted to do this. It is so neat, so symbolically rich, so ultra cool to have 6000 years of labor followed by the 7th millennium of Sabbath Rest. But it simply doesn’t fit known history. We are already long past the start of the 7th millennium. Do the math. Add our 2000 years to Egypt’s 3000 years BC, the biblical 1656 years to the Flood, and the 244 years to the Tower of Babel equals roughly 6900 years, or near the end of the 7th millennium. I don’t think anyone who believes the Bible will argue that the final Sabbath Rest started 900 years ago!

So I (sadly) put that cute theory to bed, and just let the chronological chips fall where they may.

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Be sure to see the Wyatt Archaeological Research Museum on line at www.wyattmuseum.com

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The Kingdom of God, a series of Kingdom Bible Studies published by J. Preston Eby

The Kingdom Bible Studies listed above are personally published by J. Preston Eby, PO Box 371240, El Paso, TX 79937-1240. I owe him the deepest debt of gratitude in the writing of this book, as his Kingdom Bible Studies have helped to encourage and solidify my own faith in many ways. He has freely given his permission to use in my books the insights God has given him. This I have done, extensively, throughout these five volumes. Since I do not know Greek or Hebrew myself, most of my analyses using the original languages have come from Pastor Eby's scholarly studies. May God reward him for his faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures and to their Author. Thank you brother Eby for providing the foundation for my work!

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Mike Evans has written many other books and video documentaries. He is (in my humble opinion) the leading American Christian supporting the State of Israel and the importance of blessing God's chosen people there.

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Finally, I must mention my beloved NASB (the New American Standard Bible). The edition I have was first published in 1960 by the Lockman Foundation, and printed in 1971 by Regal Books, a division of Gospel Light Publications, Glendale CA. During the writing of this book I spent as much time in my NASB as in everything else put together. I highly recommend the NASB for its accuracy and integrity to the original languages. Most of my Bible quotes are taken (or modified) from the NASB.

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Appendix – Principles of Orbital Resonance

In the chapter on catastrophism I talked about some basic principles of Orbital Resonance and how it stabilized our solar system from the Catastrophic era. But I realize many will question this, since this subject is generally ignored in government schools. So for those who want to pursue it, here is a brief primer on **Celestial Mechanics** including the **Principles of Orbital Resonance**. People tend to think of the movements of planetary bodies similar to the games we played as children, using a rubber ball connected to a long rubber band on a wooden paddle. By swinging it around, you could get the ball to circle your head like the earth circles the sun – the faster you spun, the more the rubber band stretched, the tighter it got, and the farther out was the ball. Unfortunately, this picture of celestial mechanics is mostly wrong. In reality, the farther a planet is from the sun, the slower it must go and the weaker are the forces attracting it to the sun.

I must start by defining resonance. In general, it is the interaction between cyclic phenomena at a frequency for which any interference adds to the effect. It is like pushing a child on a swing – to minimize your effort, time your push to the period of the swing's oscillation. It is also the frequency at which an object will vibrate when it is excited (such as by tapping). Pluck a violin string and it vibrates at its resonant frequency. As you shorten it with your finger, its resonant frequency gets higher. The violin is made to vibrate sympathetically with the vibrating strings, thus 'resonating' with the strings and producing a far richer sound than the strings alone. Theoretically, everything has its own inherent resonant frequency. Tap a glass with a fork – the ring you hear is its resonant frequency. If you could continue tapping at precisely that frequency, you would break the glass, since the energy of each tap would add to the intensity of the vibration. That is 'constructive interference'. When constructive interference reaches its maximum, the system is in resonance.

Now, back to the solar system. You all know about **gravity**, by which any massive body has an attraction for nearby objects which varies as the inverse square of the distance between the objects. This is a very weak force. It only becomes significant when at least one of the bodies is very massive. (Two people have very little gravitational attraction for each other, but each does have a significant attraction to the earth due to its huge mass.) The sun has an immense mass. Most people think that the planetary movements are ordered by the gravitational attraction of the sun. They think that there are no other forces involved, or if there are, they're insignificant. They conclude that a planetary orbit is stable because the gravitational force pulling toward the sun equals the centrifugal force away from the sun caused by the planet's speed. Thus they believe that for any given orbital speed and mass, there is a stable orbital distance. However, there are other forces besides gravity that complicate the issue.

Magnetic attraction is also a very weak force, unless two magnetic bodies come very close. Like gravity, it obeys the inverse square law. It can be ignored at typical solar system planetary distances and nominal magnetic fields. At Creation, Earth's strong magnetic field was maintained by interaction with the immense fields of our two suns. It protected us from galactic cosmic radiation, but we were too far from our suns for it to cause any orbital drag.

Electrostatic attraction (called coulomb interaction) is a very different story. Electrostatic forces can be much stronger than gravity. For example, the electrostatic force between the electron and proton in a hydrogen atom is 36 orders of magnitude stronger than the gravitational force! In the past, electrostatic forces had a most significant effect in the solar system. They were the primary forces God used to suspend Earth between the two suns at Creation. Back then there were no close passes of planets adding to the static, no static leakage (because there was no ether), and no 'generating effect' between Earth and the two suns (because Earth's magnetic field was only about 500 gauss). So Earth was amazingly stable with virtually no drag.

But during the Catastrophic Era, the close passes of the planets charged their magnetic and static electric fields to unthinkable high levels (by our standards). The magnetosphere of the sun, which extends out to Pluto and used to be much stronger, added to their static charge due to the generating effect as they crossed the sun's magnetic lines of force. As expected, this comes with a cost – it puts a drag on each planet. This drag became significant as planetary magnetic fields got so strong. It was a major factor causing orbital decay during the Catastrophic Era. With each close pass of Mars, Earth's magnetic field was recharged up to about 30,000 gauss at the equator (sometimes reversing polarity on the outbound flyby when the planets got too close). Thus even far away these coulomb interactions dramatically increased the planetary drag, causing non-resonant planetary orbits to decay rapidly. We don't see this today, as Earth's magnetic field is nearly gone. It has already decayed to about half a gauss.

Legends of many cultures record lightning bolts from the planets, especially Jupiter and Mars. Most folks have trouble with this, especially uniformitarian evolutionists. The planetary bodies are nearly electrically neutral today, as the static electricity has mostly discharged into the ether and there is little re-charging in our benign solar system. Except for local effects like lightning or static shocks (and its use in copy machines and electrostatic filters), we think nothing of it. Coulomb forces behave just like forces of gravity, varying by the inverse square of the distance. It isn't possible to determine a planet's mass unless you know its combined gravity and coulomb forces, but if we assume the coulomb forces to be zero, the calculated mass based on the observed gravitational attraction is nearly correct, so we let it go. Thus we laugh at the ancients and their fearful battles between the planets.

Ether, space plasma, is scattered unevenly throughout the solar system. This imposes a slight drag on planetary motion. It is conductive, draining away the electrostatic charges on planetary bodies, and allowing lightning bolts between planets if the charges get too high.

Another force involved is **solar wind**, which puts a small but constant force on every planet, directly away from the sun. It also imposes a slight drag on each planet, slowing it down. Space dust, debris, and meteorites hitting Earth also impose a slight drag on our orbit. Even the forces of gravity are slowly decaying, due to the sun's loss of mass as its fuel is burned and the loss of small amounts of Earth's air and water driven away by the solar wind.

Yes, you heard right. Everything is slowing down and wearing out just as the infamous Second Law of Thermodynamics promises. If God-hating 'scientists' actually understood and calculated the decay of all these forces, they'd know that the billions of years of planetary stability required for their evolutionary hypothesis are laughably impossible. Even at our current slow rates of decay, the solar system could not have been stable for more than a few tens of thousands of years, and even that is only due to two providential factors – the effects of orbital resonance (I'll discuss that after just a bit), and the amazing 'coincidence' that some of these decay effects cancel.

These various decay effects do not precisely cancel, but remarkably enough, for the past 3500 years they have come close – thankfully for our survival on earth. The slight slowing of our orbital speed has roughly matched decreases in gravitation, coulomb interaction, magnetic fields, and solar heat, thus keeping our earth at the precise distance from Sol necessary for life.

This is not a 'lucky chance'. If you were to compute the probabilities of the earth maintaining an orbit so precisely balanced for our comfort over all these years, it would prove many orders of magnitude beyond the realm of 'luck' or 'chance'. This is a 'God thing'. If our orbital decay had not been matched by those decreases in solar heat, magnetic fields, and gravitation/electrostatic attraction, we would have already fried and spiraled into the sun.

God did not create it this way. In the beginning it was all 'very good'. The strong coulomb interaction I mentioned was the primary force holding the system together. The solar winds were balanced between the blue-hot Nyx and the cooler but far more massive yellow-hot Sol, and thus cancelled. There was no space plasma and thus no leakage of the electrostatic charges between the two suns and the earth. Space was a perfect vacuum, a perfect insulator. There was no space dust or debris. Though Sol's magnetic field was much larger than today, Earth was much farther away and its magnetic field had never been charged up by a passing planet, so generating effects were nil. Thus there was no drag; no orbital decay. It was perfect, and could have remained stable for millions of years.

But at the Fall, roughly ten thousand years ago, Nyx went nova. The explosion filled 'inner space' with what we call space plasma, or ether, which is slightly conductive. It also filled it with space debris and many billions of small planetary bodies such as comets, meteoroids, asteroids, and moons. They were all on elliptical orbits, mostly unstable and many threatening Earth. This appendix is my attempt to explain how that catastrophic system has changed to the benign system we now enjoy.

First, consider any large body on a catastrophic orbit. As it passes any other large body, gravitational stresses can cause earthquakes and rearrange the landscape. This has significant heating effects. Electrostatic and magnetic charging effects add to the heating. Eventually these effects cause even a frozen planet to become molten or liquefy enough for gravity to form it into a smooth ball.

Second, consider the bands or spheres of influence of a large body. All three forces (gravitational, electrostatic, magnetic) can attract passing smaller bodies to become moons or into collision, effectually clearing out a swath of space on either side of a planetary orbit. The more massive the planet, the wider that clear swath will be. The four gas giants (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune) together have over 60 moons, and have cleared out the majority of the debris from the breakup of Nyx from our solar system.

Water vapor was a major component released from Nyx. When it cooled in deep space, it formed ice moons. During the gravitational stresses of a close planetary pass, the ice shatters, resulting in rings around the planets. All the larger planets have numerous ice rings, which form discrete bands, sometimes with intricate woven or radial banded structure. These beautiful rings are good examples of orbital resonance. They cannot re-form into ice moons because they have no magnetic or gravitational attraction. The slight static charge on each crystal causes it to repel every other crystal.

Third, consider any body outside of the plane of the ecliptic. It is inherently unstable. Whenever it is above the plane of the ecliptic, all the planets below it will exert a continual downward pull. Whenever it is below, they will exert a continual upward pull. The net result will be that all planetary bodies will slowly move toward the plane of the ecliptic.

It is theoretically possible for a single body to explode so evenly that there is no imbalance, thus no ecliptic plane to begin with. But our system started with at least three bodies, the Earth and two suns ('luminaries' in Scripture). When one exploded, the other two formed the beginning of an ecliptic plane, to which all fragments of the exploded body must eventually conform. The fact that we now have several major planets (as well as numerous asteroids and comets) still well outside our ecliptic plane (Venus – 3.4°; Mercury – 7°; Saturn – 2.5°; Pluto – 17°) says that our present system cannot be billions of years old.

Distant Pluto's orbit is so slow (248 years) it simply hasn't yet had time to conform to the ecliptic plane. And Mercury hasn't either, since it was pulled away from Venus into a very excentric solar orbit in 701 BC.

Fourth, consider a planetary body in an elliptical orbit. Both the push of the solar wind and the drag of plasma, space dust, and debris tend to equalize its velocity and thus circularize its orbit, as with all planets today except Mercury and Pluto.

Fifth, consider the principle of **orbital resonance**. It is best understood by example. One example is the discrete banding of the electrons orbiting the nucleus of an atom. Electron orbits, called shells, only exist in certain places, giving a specific element for each electron configuration. Another example is my illustration of tapping the glass to find its resonant frequency. Sing that frequency. If you are Mario Lanza, you can break the glass just by singing. Well, everything in the universe is also in vibration, like a song! Another illustration is the quartz crystal watch. It keeps time because the crystal vibrates precisely at its resonant frequency, which for quartz is very stable. It is easy to see (or hear) resonance at work for high frequencies. But what about the ultra-low frequencies of planetary orbits?

One famous example of low frequency resonance is 'Galloping Gertie', the old suspension bridge across the Tacoma Narrows in Washington State. It was well known for its distressing tendency to undulate at its resonant frequency of 2 seconds when a breeze blew across it, like a big violin string. A 42 mph wind took it down in 1940.

But a planet's orbital frequency is on the order of years. Can it resonate? That is difficult to see now, because the coulomb interaction is so weak (the static has dissipated), the magnetic fields are so weak (nothing is recharging them, either), and the gravity forces between planets are simply too slight to excite much resonance. Currently, the only planets still in resonance are Neptune and Pluto (at 3:2). Also, Jupiter and Saturn's huge gravitational fields hold some large moons (and even a group of asteroids) in resonance. But during the Catastrophic Era planetary resonance was the norm rather than the exception, since the major planets regularly interacted, recharging their magnetic and electrostatic fields to unimaginable heights.

To begin with, the breakup of Nyx threw out planetary bodies at random. None were in resonant orbits; all were in unstable, decaying orbits. But as they decayed, they interacted with the only planet in a stable orbit, Earth, and tended to resonate with it. I believe Mars was the first to establish itself into a resonant orbit with Earth, in a precise three-to-one year frequency, crossing Earth's orbit in two places. That eventually changed to a two-to-one resonance after the Flood, when Earth gained a precise 360 day year. By then the orbits of all the outer planets had decayed to the point where they had also locked into resonance with each other in elliptical orbits.

Their orbital periods (in 25-hour Earth days) were then: Earth, 360; Mars, 720 (1:2); Jupiter, 4320 (1:12); Saturn, 10,800 (1:30); and Uranus, 30,240 (1:84). Also, Neptune may have resonated with Earth at 60,480 days (1:168), but Pluto did not, though it did resonate with Neptune. Around 1451 BC the Venus / Mercury binary also settled into resonance with Earth on a period of 225 days (8:5). This made the planetary flybys and related catastrophes very predictable, even down to the minute.

This accomplished several other things, too. First, the interaction between the planets was powerful enough to lock them all together in their orbits. None could decay until the total drag on the system exceeded the combined resonant forces of all the planets (or until a non-resonant body interfered). This system was thus perpetuated until 701 BC, when Venus / Mercury battled Mars during its flyby over Earth, and the resonant system unraveled.

The second thing the regular planetary flybys did was to perpetuate their catastrophic orbits. It was the close pass between planets that recharged their magnetic and electrostatic fields, keeping them tightly linked. Mars, for example, remained in close coupling with Earth in extremely precise orbits for about 4400 years.

The third thing it did, believe it or not, was to work to prevent collisions! Each close pass would tighten up their orbital ellipses, overcoming the various forces working to circularize their orbits. There is a rather intricate but very specific 'path of least resistance' which defines a resonant orbit for interacting bodies. Each planetary flyby involved huge stresses, including not only gravitational and heating effects but also electrostatic and magnetic attraction and repulsion effects which complicate that path.

First, look at the two extremes, using Mars and Earth as our examples. If Mars is too far from Earth (as it is now) all those forces are not strong enough to excite resonance. Earth's effect on Mars is small, and each is left to find its own decaying orbit around Sol. But in the other extreme, if Mars passes too close (assuming it survives as a planet) its orbit will be bent so badly that it will have to find a whole new orbit around Sol, perhaps to try again. In either case, its first pass on that particular orbit is its last.

Somewhere in between those two extremes there is one specific orbit where the 'pushes and pulls' of all those monumental forces balance each other. It is a harmonic relationship, in which the planets are 'in tune' with each other. Once that orbit is found, nominal orbital distortions (such as those from other planets or from ordinary orbital decay) are corrected with each close pass, which basically 'kicks' the passing planet back onto that precise 'path of least resistance'. Then after the first such orbit, unless there is interference from outside the system, there is no chance of actual collision. Thus I hope you can see how orbital resonance actually helped save our solar system from an early demise.

Patten's estimate of the Mars pass on Joshua's long day is given in his book *Catastrophism and the Old Testament* (pg 134). He shows Mars approaching Earth's night side at 8:00 AM, 37,000 miles away. By 9:00 AM Mars is nearing Earth's orbit, 28,000 miles behind Earth. By 10:00 AM Mars is on the sunward side of Earth, 27,000 miles away, its closest approach. At 11:00 it is 48,000 miles away. Mars catches up with Earth by noon but is 64,000 miles to its sunward side. That is just a guess. (My own guess sets the closest approaches nearer to noon and midnight.)

On its 2 year catastrophic orbit, Mars averaged 13.1 mps (miles per second), far slower than Earth's 19.2 mps. But remember, its orbit was highly elliptical, accelerating as it neared the sun. It sped up even more as it approached Earth, drawn by the huge coulomb forces. As it passed Earth it reached its maximum velocity of 21.7 mps, just faster than Earth. But passing Earth slowed it back down and bent its orbit into a tighter ellipse, precisely shaped to aim it toward its subsequent March encounter. Mars then averaged 17.8 mps while it was inside Earth's orbit, but it traveled a shorter distance, so it could remain in resonance only if it arrived at Earth's orbit after Earth passed, and left before Earth arrived.

Mars was not the only planet to resonate with Earth. Saturn is actually the best historical example of resonance. It was known to the ancients as *Chronos, the Timekeeper*. From 2715 to 701 BC Saturn was on a precise 30 year cycle of close approaches, which could be timed to the minute with each pass. Jupiter never came as close (thank God), but was close enough to hurl powerful lightning bolts on its 12 year cycle. Though there remained a lot of space debris and meteoroids cluttering the system, it was still remarkably stable for a long time. But please note that my 'long time' is in thousands of years, not the billions of years of benign planetary stability which is demanded by the bogus evolutionary hypothesis.

The most recent and most well-known resonance came at the time of the Exodus. The Venus/Mercury binary was resonant for many years, in a precise 50 year 'Jubilee' cycle. Venus/Mercury was in a lopsided elliptical orbit inside Earth's orbit, where it had a barely stable 8:5 relationship with Earth. It came within 4 to 10 million miles for 4 or 5 months every 5 years, slowing to the same speed as Earth when farthest from the sun. It came even closer (within a million miles) each Jubilee. This was a complex orbit, wobbling back and forth (under the influence of the other planets) in a 150 year pattern. So its 50 year Jubilee close flybys occurred at different times of the year. The pattern began with the **first Jubilee** pass (at the Exodus, 1451 BC), just before the Mars encounter in March. The **third Jubilee** pass came 100 years later in October of the prior year, 2 years before the October flyby of Mars on its 30 year cycle. The **second Jubilee** was right between the two, with Venus coming moderately close from October through March. This sequence repeated until 701 BC.

The reason this becomes significant is that we know these Jubilee cycles affected the regular Mars catastrophes. On the first Jubilee, Mars was pulled away a little, so its March pass rarely caused much damage other than high tides. Venus never came near Mars on the second Jubilee, but it did round out Earth's next few orbits. Then on that famous third Jubilee, Mars was pulled away a lot, so much that the normally disastrous pass of Mars (2 years later) became joyfully benign. So the Jubilee cycles became known more for their deliverance from Mars catastrophes than for 'setting the captives free' as God intended.

My hypothesis is that Venus, on its 50 year cycle of close passes, was pulled by Earth very close to the ecliptic plane by about 752 BC. As both Venus and Mars were then regularly coming near Earth, they were bound to interact with each other. Their first big battle came on October 30, 752 BC. Eris, the third moon of Mars, was nearly pulled away. It collided with Earth at Italy at the next close pass of Mars on October 21, 750 BC. From then on, Venus began interacting with Mars every ten years, each threatening to tear the other out of resonance.

Then on March 1, 701 BC when Venus was near Earth (a 'first Jubilee'), Mars and the Venus/Mercury binary had another close encounter. It was the closest ever, and the most famous in classical literature. Venus and Mercury bent the orbit of Mars back the wrong way. Instead of crossing Earth's orbit well before Earth got there, Mars actually crossed just after Earth had passed. This threw all four planets into more-circular orbits, ultimately ending the entire resonant system.

Earth slowed down. Mercury was yanked away from Venus and tossed into a wildly eccentric solar orbit. Venus ended up a bit further from the ecliptic plane. Mars and Venus both speeded up. They all dropped out of resonance and never crossed Earth's orbit again. The entire resonant system unraveled as the other planets were also released to form more-circular orbits. Saturn stopped 'keeping time' and Jupiter stopped threatening Earth. Within ten years they had stabilized in orbits similar to what they are today.

With the planets no longer making close passes, their magnetic and static forces diminished to the point where resonant forces could no longer overcome solar wind and other drag forces. Gravity alone is an insufficient force to maintain resonance. All the planets today are out of sync with Earth, and we are slowly spiraling into the sun.

I admit this is an unproven and possibly improvable hypothesis. But it does seem to fit all the known facts, the Scriptures, and many of the legends of ancient cultures. It is a 'satisfying' explanation of the fearful worship of the planets in which all ancient cultures indulged. It explains the Roman Saturnalia, the Greek battles between the gods, the basis for astrology, and the naming of things according to the names of the planets. With this hypothesis, many things fit into place which otherwise were total mysteries.

However, I know God-haters will rant and rave, call me vile names, and tell everyone how ignorant and stupid I am. (I'm OK with that. I just consider the true source and chuckle quietly to myself.) But the one thing they will never do, is to look carefully at my hypothesis, tell me where it is wrong, and come up with a better analysis. That is because they don't want a better analysis. At all costs they must keep these issues out of the public eye. They cannot deal with these issues on a rational, scientific level, because actually confronting them will take away their ability to fool you into believing in the multi-billion years of a stable and benign solar system that is required to give any chance for their irrational, un-scientific spontaneous generation and propagation of life from chaos.

Politicians are interesting creatures. They seem unable to differentiate between a million, a billion, or a trillion dollars when they are spending other people's money. Evolutionists are the same with time, flinging millions and billions of years around as if they really knew.

But real people can see how quickly things decay if left out in the sun and rain. It seems like only a few years before 'nature' takes over, bringing our finest works down to the dust. That Second Law of Thermodynamics is at work, slowly but inexorably bringing decay, destruction, and chaos. Even a thousand years is a long time! Not much that man has made can last that long. We have almost no evidence of the advanced cultures from before the Flood. That Second Law is validated constantly before our eyes. Yet in the evolutionist's mind it was suspended, even reversed, for billions of years while the universe organized itself from a 'Big Bang' and all its resulting chaos into the beautiful, intricately designed, and marvelously well-balanced 'cosmos' we see around us. And this is science?

No, it isn't. It is religion. It is faith. It is blinding hatred of God and His Laws – a desperate attempt to explain Him away. I submit to you that it takes a whole lot more faith to believe in those billions of years of benign stability to our solar system while the miracle of life evolved itself out of nothing, than it does to just believe in the God who exists outside our space-time realm and who carefully, lovingly designed and created us and all the beauty that we see.

This is the true scientific method. Look at the evidence – all the evidence – of both physical and spirit realms. (Most modern 'scientists' ignore the vast body of evidence for the spirit realm.) Find a hypothesis that best fits it, as I have done. Then work with it. If my hypothesis breaks down, come up with a better one, that fits all the evidence, as truth always will. You will discover that God and true science, honest science, aren't incompatible at all.

The evolutionist claims to have science in his favor, but that is a lie. True science is observable and repeatable. If you can't test it and verify it by actual confirming evidence, then it isn't science, it is faith. Here are four true, proven scientific principles which the evolutionist cannot accept:

1. The Law of Biogenesis, which affirms that life can never originate from non-life. That is becoming more and more obvious as we learn the awesome complexity of life. But evolutionists must deny it.

2. The First Law of Thermodynamics, which is the conservation of matter/energy. With no God to start it off, scientists have no way to explain where the matter/energy came from to start their 'Big Bang'. Or has the 'Big Bang' become their god, creating something out of nothing?!

3. The Second Law of Thermodynamics, which says that entropy (disorder, randomness, trending toward chaos) is always increasing. The evolutionist must reverse this law and insist upon chaos moving toward greater and greater order and complexity due to 'natural selection'. So tell me, how does 'natural selection' add any useful new information into the genetic code? Anyone knows that a good program requires a good programmer.

4. The Law of Truth Logic, which insists that for anything to be true, it must harmonize known facts. Until all the known facts are duly harmonized scientists call it a hypothesis, open to discussion. The theory of evolution is still such a hypothesis, as there are many basic facts which conflict with it, and more are being brought up every day. Yet the evolutionist rejects this and claims dogmatically that the subject is closed and evolution has been proven.

This all may sound like I despise the evolutionist but that is not true. I love evolutionists, and I will happily debate them – after all, I have more facts on my side! I firmly believe that God loves them too, and that one day they also will bow before Him to acknowledge that His ways are righteous and true altogether, to the glory of the eternal Father. But I find it sad that these well-educated, brilliant 'scientists' are depriving themselves of lives with meaning and hope as well as leading others astray, and are destined to be servants in God's kingdom rather than the leaders He would like them to be.

No one can prove God, though He certainly can prove Himself to you if you ask Him. If the evolutionist would open his eyes to the vastness of Creation and acknowledge that it is much bigger than the tiny realm of observational physical phenomena he works with, maybe he could stop fighting God. If his faith starts by denying the existence of God, of course his conclusions will be biased. But if your faith accepts the possibility that 'God created', everything begins to fit together. Just don't try to tell me you don't have any faith! This book was written to encourage the faith of those with open minds and hearts hungry for truth.

Thus concludes my theological treatise on the Old Testament and the Feasts of Israel.

For you dear Readers who have stuck with me thus far, you now have all the background necessary to enjoy and really understand my fiction story of *God's Plan of the Ages*, which I have moved to Volumes Two through Five.

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