

The End Of The Beginning

The Complete Guide to Future Events as Revealed in the Bible

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Every Yet-To-Be Fulfilled Prophecy Explored

Volume I
The Things That Are

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Foreword

This book has one simple goal: to analyze every yet-to-be fulfilled prophecy in the entire Bible—determining the order in which they’ll be fulfilled, as far as possible. This information is of critical importance to everyone alive today, for the culmination of all things is on our very doorstep—and I can prove it.

Although the goal is simple, the task was not. Exploring Scripture’s description of coming events is like working a 10,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Every piece must be put into its proper place if we want the overall picture to make any sense; and we can’t repaint the pieces or trim them to fit our own preconceived plan if we want to comprehend God’s picture. Yahweh told us about our future for two reasons. First, prophecy demonstrates His deity, since only One who exists outside of time can know the future. And second, He loves us He wants us to know what He has planned for us, both the good (if we trust His love) and the bad (if we reject it).

A great deal of the Bible was prophetic when it was written, whether overtly or between the lines—the sweeping symbols that define our destiny. Some has been literally fulfilled already, some has only partially come to pass, and some has not seen the light of day—yet. This book is concerned with these latter categories—prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. Previously completed Biblical prophecy is still important, however. It will guide us in determining what God meant to communicate when He told us about our future. And He told us *a lot*—the what, the who, the where, the why, and even the *when* of events that will change our world forever, not just “someday,” but within the natural lifespan of most everyone reading these words. It’s time to wake up, world!

Biblical prophecy needn’t be a mystery, and you don’t need to be a scholar—or a genius—to understand and appreciate what Yahweh is about to accomplish. All that’s required is a willingness to take God at His Word. The truth isn’t hidden, but the sheer volume of prophetic scripture can be daunting. And because we’re so close to the end, the many geopolitical and technological realities that shed light on the end of days are becoming easier to identify as well. Taken as a whole, God’s Word is crystal clear about what He has planned for our future. As Psalm 102:18 says, **“This will be written for the last generation, that a people yet to be created may praise Yahweh.”** That’s exciting: the psalmist was talking about *us!*

Ken Power

Volume 1: Introduction

The Things That Are

When the risen Messiah appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos, He told him, **“Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.”** (Revelation 1:17-19)

The subject of “prophecy” for us usually evokes visions of “the things which will take place after this,” to the exclusion of things past and present. But as Christ’s words indicate, there’s more to it than merely focusing on what God *will* do. He is not only “the Last,” He is also “the First”—He’s the Alpha as well as the Omega. The fact is, what He has told us about His plan in the past is just as essential to our understanding of the unfolding of future events as the prophecies themselves. What we see before us in the present is the foundation of the coming kingdom of God. If we don’t comprehend where we’ve been or where we are, we won’t understand our destination. In more specific terms, there are several scriptural subjects that we need to grasp if we hope to understand the prophetic components of God’s word.

First, since so much of scripture was prophetic when it was written, and since a fair amount of it has already been fulfilled (much of it in the first-century advent of Yahshua the Messiah—Jesus Christ) we are in a good position to analyze the process of prophecy itself. How does Yahweh use it? How does He deliver it? The controversy invariably surrounding the subject should make it obvious that it’s a less than straightforward pursuit. Although the prophecies are invariably literal (on some level), they are also couched in language that allows those who don’t trust Yahweh to explain them away, to reinterpret (or misinterpret) them, to deny the supernatural aspects that they imply (beginning with the phenomenon of foreknowledge itself—something possessed by no mere man).

Why does God do this? Because He is not willing to abridge the primary privilege He has bestowed upon mankind—that of choice, of free will. Yahweh’s nature is love, but love requires freedom—it can’t be forced, or it ceases to be love at all. So as strange as it sounds, our freedom depends upon our God-given ability to *reject* Him as well as receiving Him, to *doubt* Him as well as believing Him, to *hate* Him as well as loving Him. Thus God provides “wiggle room” in many of His prophecies, so we can *wimp out* if we want to. One example: He tells us plainly concerning the Messiah’s birth, “A virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” And we read in the Gospel accounts just how mind-bendingly accurate this prophecy turned out to be. And yet, the Hebrew word translated “virgin” *can*

simply mean “young woman.” It’s hardly a miraculous sign for a “young woman” to conceive and bear a son, you understand, but we are allowed to suck the life out of God’s prophecy if we want to—it’s our choice.

At any rate, we’ll study previously fulfilled prophecies with an eye toward discovering the “prophecy principles” by which God delivers His message. We’ll learn that Yahweh uses redundancy, split fulfillments, and metaphors and symbols to communicate with us. He doesn’t give us the whole story in one big chunk, but delivers it in bite-sized pieces. (How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.) He says related things through different prophets living in different times and places, seeing things from different viewpoints—yet He never contradicts Himself. All of this begs us to be comprehensive in our approach, not just taking the prophecies we like (or understand), but considering *all of them*. (Hey, I didn’t say this would be easy.)

Second, it is essential that we grasp the broad sweep of man’s history—especially as it relates to Yahweh’s plan of redemption. Salvation is not only *for* man, it is also brought to us *through* man—that is, the Good News of our reconciliation with God was not proclaimed by angels, or by God Himself (except through His human manifestation, Yahshua), but was entrusted to fallen human beings to transmit and communicate to future generations. (Again, this is somewhat counterintuitive, but it is an artifact of Yahweh’s nature, love, which in turn requires that we humans be given free will, the privilege of choice.)

Two “congregations” have been used throughout the ages of man to transmit His message and deliver His redeemer to the world—Israel and the church. Shakespeare once said, “All the world’s a stage.” I find it useful to envision humanity as people experiencing a Broadway play—one called “The Human Condition.” The cast is Israel, whom Yahweh set apart from the world’s other nations to be the people through whom the Messiah would be delivered (literally and physically) to the earth. This Messiah is the play’s “leading Man.” (It means Anointed One—the word transliterated “Christ” carries the same meaning in the Greek scriptures.) The Playwright, Producer, and Director (and the owner of the theater, by the way) is Yahweh Himself—the Living God, the Creator of the universe. The “script” is His Torah—a symbol-rich work designed to reveal Yahweh’s plan for fallen humanity’s reconciliation with Him. That would make Moses the “stage manager,” and the prophets of Israel the production’s “backstage crew.”

The audience, those out “in front” of the curtain, are gentiles—nations other than Israel. They come to the theater (life) needing to see a flawless performance from the cast, so they can understand what the Great Playwright meant for them to know. Some in the audience (the church—the called out assembly of Christ) are here because they want to be, because they’re interested and excited about the

play and what it means. Others are here only because they have to be: they were born into human race, born with free will and choices to make, whether they like it or not. There are drama critics here with an axe to grind, proud and pedantic. And more “informal” critics find themselves here as well—hecklers and mockers who merely want to disrupt the performance for their own amusement.

There are also those in the theater whose job it is to *help* the audience—to see to it that the “play” is edifying and comprehensible: the ushers who will help us find our seats in the theater of life; the lighting and sound technicians who’s job is to ensure that we can see and hear what the cast is saying, and so forth. These have been called to the task by the Leading Man Himself. These helpers are the church’s “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.”

In one capacity or another, *everybody* is here in the theater of life. If the cast and crew do their jobs, the play will be a huge success: the Playwright will be loved, honored, and revered; the cast and crew will be applauded (and get paid); the Leading Man will become a “superstar;” and the audience will learn, grow, appreciate the message, respond to it, and yes, even enjoy themselves.

Well, that’s how it was supposed to work—how it *could have* worked. What really happened (as revealed in history and scripture) was that the cast (Israel) refused to rehearse the script. Then they turned the performance into a night at the Improv—making up lines that *sounded* sort of like a play, but had nothing to do with what the Great Playwright had actually written. Some of the ushers left their posts and went out trying to scalp tickets. The lighting crew shined their spotlights on anything they could to distract the audience from the play that *wasn’t* going on. Then the cast tied up the backstage crew and set fire to the props, while anarchists and terrorists rioted in the lobby. Finally, they lynched the Leading Man, the Playwright’s only son.

The Playwright, of course, had no choice but to dismiss the cast. In fact, it was only His unfathomable love that prevented Him from closing the theater and burning it to the ground in righteous anger. But instead, because the play was so important (and because He loved us so much), He made sure the script would be available to anyone who sought it—even though they wouldn’t get to see it acted out on stage. (No, that’s not quite true: although the cast—Israel—had rebelled against the Playwright, the *play itself* was about that very rebellion, and His plan to save them in spite of it—if they wanted to be saved. The Leading Man was *supposed to* get murdered at the end of Act II—only to rise from the dead at the beginning of Act III, after the intermission. If Israel had read the script, they might have known that.) Remarkably, even though Yahweh had fired the rebellious cast, He made it clear that that their grandchildren would someday be welcomed back to center stage.

Pardon the extended metaphor, but that's kind of how I see the history of mankind's relationship with God—our failures, and His restraint in dealing with them. More to the point, it reflects the different roles the church and Israel were supposed to play in bringing the Good News of Yahweh's redemption to the world. If we don't understand that Israel and the church are *not* the same thing, that we have separate jobs to do, and that we will function quite differently in the Kingdom of God, then we will be totally lost when it comes to prophetic revelation. Understanding the relationship between Israel and the church is foundational. (It bears mention, however, that our *citizenship* in the kingdom is achieved exactly the same way—through the blood of Christ, shed because of our sins. No one was *ever* saved by their flawless performance, that is, keeping the precepts of the Torah.)

Another foundational issue we'll cover is the relationship between Israel and the Land of Promise—*eretz* Israel. God's promises to Israel—going all the way back to their ancestor Abraham—make it clear that the Land itself will play a startling and central role in the unfolding of prophetic scripture. No matter how much trouble the children of Israel have gotten themselves into over the centuries, the fact remains that Yahweh's unilateral promises concerning their national existence and their homeland *must* come to pass, or God is a liar. His prophetic promises concerning Israel's eventual restoration, repatriation, and redemption—as a nation in their own Promised Land—are *by far* the most oft-repeated prophetic theme in the entire Bible.

And finally, we need to familiarize ourselves with the fact that Yahweh is on a timeline, a self-imposed schedule that began with the fall of Adam into sin, and will end with the transition of all of redeemed humanity into the eternal, immortal state. This timetable (though certain elements of it are hidden for our own good) is revealed through Biblical prophecy, much of it in the Book of Daniel. The structure of God's schedule is important for us to know if we hope to make sense of the myriad of timing clues scattered throughout prophetic scripture. And to my mind, the very fact that we can perceive it now, when our godly forebears could not, is evidence that we are very, very close to the end of the age.

So while they contain little in the way of yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy, these first seven chapters of *The End of the Beginning* are an essential foundation upon which our understanding of Yahweh's prophetic scriptures must be built.

Chapter 1

Why Bother, Brother?

Oh boy! Just what the world needs—another book on prophecy. There must be a thousand of them already, exploring every theory and nuance of Biblical eschatology. Surely everything that can be said *has* been said.

Perhaps, but with all that's been written, there's a surprisingly broad range of opinion about what it all means. And it isn't terribly hard to see why. The very way the predictions have come down to us invites controversy. Many of them don't seem to make any sense, right up to the moment of their fulfillment, at which point we all nod knowingly and say, "Ah, of course. The prophet described this very thing!"

In some places, the Bible speaks of things yet to come in language that sounds as strange to us as the visions and revelations must have seemed to the Prophets who wrote them down. There were no words in Hebrew or Greek for much of what they saw; they simply did their best to describe it. So we get phrases like "The heaven rolled up like a scroll," or "The moon turned to blood." What does that mean?

In other places, God chooses to present the prophet with a symbol of some future reality, making it obvious from the outset that something else—something more significant—is meant. So Joseph sees sheaves of grain bending over and skinny cows eating fat ones, and he knows God is telling him something important is going to happen. Daniel sees a big statue, and he knows God is revealing truth, not critiquing sculpture. Sometimes the prophet is told to write things down that he couldn't possibly comprehend. In Psalm 22 for example, King David describes the horrors of a method of execution—crucifixion—that wouldn't even be invented for another five hundred years. Did he know what he was talking about? Not likely. But God did.

Throughout the Bible, God uses predictive prophecy to reveal Himself. He says, **"I am Yahweh; that is My name. My glory I give to no other, nor My praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare. Before they spring forth I tell you of them."** (Isaiah 42:8-9) Many events He prophesied have already come to pass, giving us confidence in His grasp of our future. And the rest (the subject of this book) increasingly appear to be poised on the precipice of literal fulfillment. The ability to do this with perfect accuracy is what separates the men from the boys, so to speak. Yahweh challenges his imaginary rivals—the false gods being worshipped by so many in Israel—to "put up or shut up," that is, "Tell us all what's going to happen tomorrow."

He knows they can't do it. **"Set forth your case, says Yahweh. Bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome."** For that matter, false gods can't even tell you what *did* happen—never mind why. **"Or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified."** So Yahweh draws the proper conclusion: if you can't predict the future, explain the past, or change things in the world, then you don't exist. So don't call yourself a "god." **"Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination."** (Isaiah 41:21-24) It's no shame to be "nothing," of course, but you're worse than an idiot—you're a wicked, loathsome, repulsive person (Hebrew: *towebah*)—if you choose to worship and work on behalf of a false god. Yahweh is not intimidated by "nothings" like Ba'al, Molech, Mithras, Mammon, or Allah. But He is *repulsed* by those who choose to promote their supposed agendas—the religions of man.

Of course, predictive prophecy is not a parlor trick to Yahweh: there's a point to it, beyond merely impressing us. **"And Yahweh answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time. it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come; it will not delay.'" (Habakkuk 2:2-3)** Two things are clear. First, we are to make use of the content of the prophecies; we are to employ them to shape our reactions to what we see happening in the world around us. God has done everything possible to warn us of the dangers that lurk around every corner of our world. He expects us to use the information provided by His prophets to avoid the spiritual pitfalls that could ensnare us. Second, these prophecies "await their appointed times." In other words, Yahweh is on a schedule—His own self-appointed timetable. He knows when these future events will take place, and in many cases, He has transmitted that knowledge to us, if only we're astute enough to take Him at His word. But whether or not we comprehend Yahweh's schedule, we should not be unaware that He has one.

If you think about it, foretelling the future is one of the few things the true and living God can do to *prove* his deity. Sure, He demonstrates His power, His love, His mercy all day, every day, in a thousand different ways. But men, fools that we are, have developed an amazing talent for explaining away the obvious handiwork of our Creator. When He tells us what will come to pass, however, He's putting His reputation on the line. He is saying in effect, "Only God, who transcends time, could know what will happen in your future. Because I love you I'm going to tell you what to expect. When it happens exactly as I said it would, it proves you can trust Me with your soul, too. Then you'll *know* that I am God." When no less a personality than John the Baptist began having doubts about the credentials

of Yahshua (Jesus), He proved He was the Messiah by pointing out the *prophecies* he had fulfilled.

You don't see other religions' gods stating the future as if it were a fact because, frankly, it's really embarrassing when their predictions don't come true. Whether God promises to make the prophesied event happen Himself, or is merely predicting it, only the true deity can flawlessly predict the future, because only the true deity exists beyond the bounds of time.

But wait, you say. Other religions besides Judeo-Christianity have "prophets." One in particular, Islam, boasts a billion and a half adherents. We'll talk more of Islam later, because it plays a big part in the Bible's revelation of the end of the world as we know it. But let's clear up this little misconception at the outset. Though all of Islam's "prophets" save one (Muhammad) were "borrowed" from the Judeo-Christian scriptures, none of them count, since the Muslim writings flatly contradict everything these prophets—Adam, Noah, Lot, Abraham, Joseph, and even Jesus (if you believe the translations)—had to say. As for its final—in truth, its *only* "prophet," Muhammad never uttered a single prophecy that came to pass. Not one. He did make one or two prognostications, however. He said that women would outnumber men a hundred to one—wishful thinking, I suppose. And then there was that little prediction about the end of the world, judgment day, coming half an Islamic "prophetic day" (or 500 years) after the calling of its last prophet (himself), putting the date at 1110 A.D. I'd say he missed that one by just a tad.

It's really easy to tell people what your god is like and what he wants you to do if you're making him up as you go along, as Muhammad did. For example, when Islam's god ostensibly gave this "prophet" a new revelation permitting him a plethora of wives—when everybody else was limited to a paltry four apiece—Muhammad's child-wife Aisha wryly noted, "Your Lord certainly seems anxious to gratify your desires." Yes indeed, it's one thing to come up with convenient "prophecies" that bestow upon the "prophet" his heart's every desire—sex, money, power, revenge—all of which were bestowed upon Muhammad through timely revelations from his "Lord." It's something else entirely for a prophet to prove his God's deity by relating His flawless grasp of, and control over, future events.

And prophecy is important, especially today. Miracles can be faked. If you don't believe me, show up at your local cinema some Saturday afternoon and watch a blockbuster action movie. I guarantee you'll see things being done that are *impossible*. What you won't see, though, is the miracle of prophecy, someone seriously predicting things like, "Mean old Mrs. Jones is going to get eaten by wild dogs on the front steps of the county courthouse in Pratfall, Kansas, and they won't leave enough corpse to bother burying," only to see it all come true a few

months later. It's not that it's too gory to get a PG-13 rating, you understand, only too hard to predict. After all, mean old Mrs. Jones might get hit by a bus instead, or get eaten by wild dogs outside the K-Mart in Wichita. Or live happily ever after, for that matter.

You want reality? God, through His prophet Elijah, predicted that something very similar would happen to mean old Mrs. Ahab, a.k.a. Israel's Queen Jezebel, and the prophecy came about precisely as he'd foretold it, in all its bloody detail. (see II Kings 9:10, 30-37) And that was an easy one. Some of the Bible's prophecies—already fulfilled, mind you—are so complex and unlikely they'll make your head swim.

As a matter of fact, at least a quarter of the Bible was prophetic when it was written. That's a chunk of text roughly the size of the New Testament, all speaking of things that hadn't happened yet, *future history*, so to speak. Over five hundred specific prophecies have already come to pass. That leaves an ever-shrinking list yet to be fulfilled. Many of them must have seemed like the ravings of mystic lunatics when they were handed down; yet as the years pass they're beginning to sound more like the observations of calm and objective reporters writing articles for today's—or maybe tomorrow's—newspapers. (Okay, reporters are seldom "calm and objective," never mind "observant" anymore, but you know what I mean.) Where it used to take faith in large doses to believe in God's prophecies, now it only takes an open mind and a decent grasp of current events.

But like I said, there must be a thousand books on end-time prophecy already. What possible reason could there be for writing another one?

I can't say I've read everything there is on the subject, but the scores of books I have read invariably fall into one of three camps. First are the surface treatments, those thin volumes intended for Christians new to the subject or new to the faith. Because they're meant to be introductions or overviews, they rarely do more than help the reader get his feet wet, and by their very nature ask him to swallow their message whole—to take it or leave it, the inevitable speculation and interpretation along with the concrete Biblical fact.

The second category is comprised of those weighty and erudite tomes that dig deep and explain everything in excruciating detail. I must confess I love this stuff, dense as it is. Written by respected and dedicated scholars with legendary names like Walvoord, Pentecost, and Ryrie, these tend to examine the trees under a

microscope, leaving the forest more or less incomprehensible to us mortals. I thank God that these men understand the Bible so well. Now if I could only understand *them*...

And then there are the special-agenda books and articles, those with an axe to grind or an issue to explore. You've seen them. They defend to the death their position on a pre-tribulation vs. post-tribulation rapture, or vice versa, or their stance on pre-millennialism vs. post-millennialism vs. a-millennialism. Or perhaps the author wants to explore numerology—hidden Biblical codes—the Mid-East oil situation, Islamic terrorism, or his current theory on who the Antichrist might be. These have gotten quite popular of late.

All of these approaches can be valuable in their own way, but what I keep hearing from my friends and family is “Yes, but I still don't get it. What happens? Why? When? There are too many theories and not enough concrete fact, too much data and not enough usable information.” I'm convinced that the “usable information” is available between the covers of the Bible, if only we're willing to dig for it, and the answers that aren't there are either beside the point or hidden for our own good.

God has told us far more than most of us realize. What will happen to the Church in the Last Days? What's on the horizon for Israel, America, Europe, and the Orient? How does the scourge of Islam figure into all of this? Why will World War III start, and how will it end? Who will fight World War IV, when, and why? All of this is explained—not only the bare facts but also the reasons these events will occur. Many people today are familiar with the buzzwords of prophecy: terms like Rapture, Tribulation, Antichrist, Armageddon, Millennium, and Judgment Day. But few realize the depth of detail with which God has predicted the coming events. Christians tend to glance at Jesus' declaration that “**of that day and hour no one knows**” (Matthew 24:36) and shrug their shoulders, concluding that the timing must all be a big mystery. Almost no one realizes that God has told us precisely—to the day—when He would begin His Millennial reign, when the Antichrist would take over the earth, when the Great Tribulation would begin, and a plethora of similar Last Days milestones. The only thing we're *not* told is the date of the rapture (the event to which Jesus was referring), and even then, we *are* told the day on which it will fall, just not the year. We've also been given a scriptural thermometer so we can tell when we're getting warm. It was no pointless fluke that God revealed these events to His apostles and prophets, who wrote them down for our edification. He *wants* us to know what will happen, just as He wants us to know what happened in the past. Judeo-Christianity is the only faith on earth that has a foothold in history, both past and future.

As for me, I find that strangely comforting. Strangely, because what's coming is terrifying, almost too horrible to contemplate. It will make the killing fields of

the twentieth century seem trivial by comparison. Billions will die. We will come within an inch of witnessing the destruction of all life on this fragile planet. But I *am* comforted, because I know how it all ends. Christ's victorious return saves the day....

Okay, I'll come clean. I'm comforted because I don't expect to be here when all the nastiness happens—I'll be raptured, if I don't die first. Considering my age, I give rapture a 50/50 chance. That's a guess, of course, but one I've been led to by a truckload of scriptural evidence, evidence that dovetails nicely when you lay it all out in front of you.

There's an obscure old James Taylor song whose lyrics have haunted me for years. One of the verses says, "We've got the Holy Scriptures here that prove us to be right in believing out loud what we wish to be true...." A very astute observation, James. Christians have made a contact sport of taking Bible passages out of context and using them as a club with which to beat our heathen neighbors—as well as our less-enlightened brothers and sisters—over the head. Our arrogance can truly be a thing of wonder sometimes. On the other hand, we are told to "search the scriptures," to "test the spirits," to guard against false teaching and heresy. Is there a contradiction here? Not really. Digging out the truth and standing upon it isn't at all the same thing as ferreting out isolated texts to prove what "we wish to be true." There are two keys to this conundrum, besides Paul's "speaking-the-truth-in-love" admonition. The first is paying attention to context: who is speaking to whom, when, where, and why. The second is taking "the whole counsel of God."

That's the tough one when you're exploring prophecy. Like I said, a significant chunk of the Bible was prophetic when it was written, and there's still quite a lot that has yet to be fulfilled. What's a writer to do? Copy down and explore every shred of scripture that seems to have a bearing on future events? That would take *forever*, and you'd end up with a book so big, no fiscally responsible publisher would touch with a ten-cubit pole. It's the 21st century, already. Anything over three hundred pages is *death!*

Actually, that's precisely what I've set out to do here. Oops.

Most everybody knows about Revelation—*Apocalypse Then*. I can say without hesitation that Chapters 4 through 22 of John's remarkable vision form the core of yet-to-be-fulfilled prophetic scripture. And as John himself writes at the very beginning of this remarkable book, "**Blessed is he who reads and those who**

hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.” (Revelation 1:3) Christians and Jews are often conversant with the book of Daniel as well, written in the 6th Century B.C. during the Babylonian captivity. It too contains keys to prophetic interpretation that we cannot do without. The third most well-known passage is the Olivet Discourse (so called because it was delivered upon Jerusalem’s Mount of Olives). Recorded in all three synoptic Gospels, this conversation between Yahshua and four of his disciples gives us valuable information that’s stated nowhere else in scripture.

But the story of what is about to happen to our world is spread throughout the entire Bible. There are references—some subtle, some blatant—to the events yet to come in all but four books of the Old Testament, Ezra, Esther, Song of Solomon, and Jonah. But Esther is all about the preservation of the Jewish race and nation, a central pillar of Biblical eschatology, Jonah is a poignant and pointed treatise on how God tempers judgment with mercy (not to mention being a clear prophetic metaphor of Yahshua’s first-century advent), and the Song of Solomon might well turn out to be far more prophetically significant than it looks on the surface. All but two books in the New Testament (Philemon and III John) contain last-days prophecy as well. Some of these are out-and-out predictions, some are types—pictures or precursors of future realities—and some are historical or theological tidbits that help explain what the prophecies predict. But it is abundantly clear that if we restrict our knowledge of God’s future plan to a few well-known passages, we will not only misinterpret the big picture, but also miss the details that bring it all into focus. God told us this stuff for a reason. We cheat ourselves if we’re too lazy to look at *all* of what He has to say.

The subject is like a big jigsaw puzzle. There are thousands of pieces, and many of them look quite similar. To make a complete picture, we need to have all the pieces, fitting them together one by one. As every jigsaw puzzle worker knows, you can’t trim the pieces to make them fit your own plan, you can’t substitute one piece for another, you can’t repaint the pieces, and you can’t leave any of them out if you want to have a complete, comprehensible picture when you’re finished. There is only one correct position for each piece. If it’s not where it’s supposed to be, it only adds to the confusion.

I have become convinced that we *can* discern what God wants us to know about the future. The jigsaw puzzle before us, however, is like one of those hazy Monet jobs—you know: even when it’s all put together correctly, it’s still a bit fuzzy in places. We won’t see everything in detail; sometimes we’ll just get an impression. Maybe we’ll see a fellow in a rowboat on a pond, but we won’t know his name, or Social Security number, or hat size. But we don’t have to in order to appreciate the artistry—or the significance—of the scene. We’re seeing all the Artist intended for us to see. It is enough. We must look at the finished picture

through the eyes of faith, accepting the fact that He has shown us exactly what we need to know—no more, no less—if only we’re willing to use our eyes. But since **“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,”** (Hebrews 11:1) we can and should adjust our lives based on what He has revealed in the prophetic picture. Just because it hasn’t happened yet, we shouldn’t assume it’s not real.

I’ll confess, though, we’ve got another problem. The pieces to our puzzle have not been put away neatly. No, they’re in the same big box with half a dozen other puzzles. And worse (or better, as the case may be) they’re all pictures by the same Artist, and employ the same brushstroke technique, the same color palette, the same *style*. But because I know you really want to work this puzzle, I’ve gone through the whole big box—the Bible—and picked out all of the pieces that seem to fit this picture. I may have missed one or two (or three), but I’m sure I got most of them. If you see any holes when you’re finished, go back to the box and search for the missing pieces yourself. Trust me; it’s a rewarding experience.

Before we begin, we need to discuss the ground rules. There are a few baseline assumptions I’ve made in this study that have a direct bearing on the conclusions I’ve come to. I won’t apologize for them, but I need to explain them.

First, I intend to take as a “given” that there is a Creator-Deity, and His self-revealed name is Yahweh. He has revealed His plan to us in His scriptures. I am of the opinion that the Bible was without error as its inspired writers—some forty of them—put quill to parchment. But as time passed, changes in language and customs conspired to rob us of the nuances of meaning that originally permeated the sacred texts. And the problem was multiplied when they were translated into other languages. Therefore, although I firmly believe that **“the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever,”** (Isaiah 40:8) and although we undoubtedly have more than the solid gist of God’s intended communication to us, we no longer possess the complete and unabridged oracles of Yahweh. We don’t have fresh-squeezed revelation any more; we’ll have to make do with frozen concentrate—just add water, or Spirit as the case may be. And that’s okay. It’s still mighty tasty. Much of what we’ve lost in transmission has been compensated for in redundancy: God invariably tells us the really important stuff dozens of times, in dozens of different ways.

Second, the plain meaning of the words of Scripture will be our primary guide as we explore this pile of puzzle pieces—our *primary* guide, but not our only one. If a word or phrase begs for elucidation, we’ll dig deeper.

At the risk of alienating half of you at the outset, I would characterize this approach as “literalist,” though not “hyper-literalist.” We need to come to grips with the fact that the Biblical writers often used metaphors, symbols, and hyperbole, just as we do today. But through translation and cultural shifts, these turns of phrase often lose their impact, leaving us with nothing but the “literal” meaning, which is not what the Author meant to say at all.

Because it’s important, I’d like to give you an example, an obscure but telling glimpse at how a hyper-literal approach can cloud our understanding. In Ezekiel 38, the prophet is describing the build-up of a major end-times battle. He says, **“Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, ‘Have you come to take plunder...?’”**

Who are these people? We know *where* they were. Sheba and Dedan were on the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula, and Tarshish was located near Gibraltar, in Southern Spain. (Remember Jonah’s little encounter with the big fish? He was headed for Tarshish, which was about as far west as you could go in his day.) So the Ezekiel passage obviously means that Saudi Arabia and Spain will be making diplomatic protestations, right? Not exactly. Factor in II Chronicles 20:35-37: **“After this, Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who acted very wickedly. And he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion Geber. But Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, ‘Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, Yahweh has destroyed your works.’ Then the ships were wrecked, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish.”**

So what? Jehoshaphat doesn’t get to cruise the Med. Big deal. No, look closer. Ezion Geber was where Eliat is today, at the Southern tip of Israel, where it meets the Gulf of Aqaba. You can’t *get* to Spain, or anywhere in the Mediterranean, from there in a boat without circumnavigating the continent of Africa, and that’s something nobody even attempted for another 2,000 years.

A mistake? No, a metaphor. Tarshish, a real, literal, place, had become a metaphor for “commerce,” or “business.” We use a similar term today. When we say “Wall Street,” we don’t necessarily mean a road in Manhattan, though there is such a road, but rather a system of commerce, or even the greed that drives it. So Ezekiel seems to be saying that the world’s financial interests and those who control the world’s biggest oil reserves will get *real* nervous when Gog (the “you” in the passage quoted above) and his allies make their move. That’s the nature of metaphor within a literalist interpretation.

Some say there may be a deeper, mystical meaning to many of the passages we’ll explore, perhaps some esoteric message latent in Gematria number codes or ELS—Equidistant Letter Sequences. I only know five things for sure. First, no matter what’s buried beneath the surface, the plain meaning of the words is

primarily what God intended for us to have and understand. Second, any hidden meanings that Yahweh meant to put there will support, not contradict, the actual text. Third, if you're clever, you can demonstrate almost anything you want with hidden Biblical codes. Fourth, these obscure formulas may be of some value in confirming the truth of scripture but they're worthless as tools for predicting future events. And fifth, even if those hidden meanings are there, I'm not smart enough to figure them out. You're on your own in that department.

The third ground rule is my use of Biblical quotations. I am not a Hebrew or Greek scholar, and chances are you aren't either. So we're stuck with English, a moving target at best; an imprecise and misleading cauldron of linguistic bouillabaisse at worst. The fact is, there is no such thing as a "perfect" English Bible translation. My primary choice of translation is by necessity a compromise between word-for-word literalism and thought-for-thought interpolation, and it admittedly falls short of the mark in places: except where noted, I have used the New King James Version, which—the scholars insist—is as faithful to the actual text as any popular English translation, without subjecting the reader to a relic of the English language that no longer exists outside of church buildings and Shakespearian repertory theater. That being said, I promise to keep my trusty Hebrew and Greek dictionaries handy. We're going to need them.

You'll note that I've provided the text of each passage. You may be wondering why I've gone to all the trouble, when I could have just given you the reference. Two reasons. First, I want to ensure that the actual words are available. Far too often, false doctrines are promulgated upon a misreading of a passage (e.g., "Money is the root of all evil" is *not* what was said). Second, I *know* you won't look 'em up. How do I know? Because I don't usually look 'em up either—not at that very moment, anyway, and that's what counts. When I provide only a Scripture reference, either it's a side issue, it's something we've covered previously, or the verse is directly parallel to a passage just quoted—the same thought recorded, for example, in both Kings and Chronicles or Matthew and Luke.

I have made a few formatting changes from the New King James text, none of which change the meaning one bit. I have put the "poetic" passages into straight text, to save space if nothing else. Rhyme and meter are not the essence of Hebrew poetry anyway. I have eliminated individual verse numbers within a passage. I find them distracting. But I have, of course, provided an overall reference for each quote. Also, the New King James retains the KJV practice of putting supplied words (those whose presence is implied but not actually there in the original) in italics. I have put everything in straight text. If you feel the need to know which words were supplied for clarity, or where one verse ends and another begins, I encourage you to check your own Bible. Bear in mind that the original

texts had neither capitals, italics, nor punctuation. (The Hebrew texts didn't even have *vowels* in any sense we'd recognize.) Nor did they have verse numbering or chapter breaks.

I have also made one significant global translation correction: Most English versions, including The New King James, substitute the proper name of God with a title, rendering it "The LORD." But the original Hebrew text reads "YHWH" (יהוה) reading from right to left: Y=yod; H=he; W=waw; H=he), which is His own self-revealed name, meaning "I Am," i.e., the One who is self-existent. (The name of the Canaanite god Ba'al meant "The LORD," for cryin' out loud!) In the interests of coming to know this deity who desired to have a personal relationship with us so much that he used His own personal name 7,000 times in scripture (of which only 6,868 survived the tampering of the Masorete scribes), I have undone what I consider to be a grievous error on the part of the translators, spelling God's name with the supplied vowels, "Yahweh," to make it possible to pronounce. (Actually, the correct pronunciation is probably more like "Yah-oo-way" or "Yah-oo-wah.")

You may think I'm being overly picky here. What's so wrong about referring to God with an exalted title such as "The LORD?" Nothing much, except for the little fact that Yahweh hates it. He *wants us* to use His name: **"How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal."** (Jeremiah 23:26-27) Do you see what He's saying here? How did we forget God's name? We replaced it with a title, The LORD. What does "Baal" mean? The LORD. So I, for one, have repented from calling Yahweh "the LORD," although I most certainly *want* Him to be my lord, my master, in the sense of being my exalted Father whom I endeavor to revere and obey. I am confident that I have not offended my God in doing so; I am convinced, rather, that having people refuse to use His name out of willful ignorance or feigned obeisance is far more offensive to Him. On the other hand, in His human manifestation—the risen Christ—Yahweh *is* described as "Lord" in functional terms: **"Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'"** (Matthew 28:18) So since the risen, glorified Messiah is the only form of Yahweh we'll ever see this side of the eternal state, calling Him "Lord" and heeding His word is perfectly proper—all of which tends to reduce the issue to the realm of technicality.

Also, even though the whole western world and every popular English Bible translation calls the Messiah "Jesus," I have taken the liberty of using His *real* name, the name his mother called Him: Yahshua. This is a rather common name in Hebrew; there are no fewer than ten men who shared this name mentioned in the Tanach, among them, of course, Moses' protégé, commonly referred to as

Joshua. As you might imagine, rendering Hebrew names into English is often as much art as it is science, and as if to prove my point, there are innumerable variants of this proper name in the lexicons, Bible versions, and common usage. Depending on who you consult, the name in question is alternatively rendered Yahowsha', Yahuwshuwa', Yahushua, Yəhowsu'a, Yáhowshuwa', Yâhowshu`a, Y^ohowshu'a, Yehoshua, Yĕhōšūā', Yeshua, Yahoshua, Yeshuwa', Y'shua, or Yahshua. (I have settled on "Yahshua" not because it is the one correct and definitive variant—which it is not—but rather because it sounds like the familiar "Joshua" but uses the more proper "Y" sound.) Considering the range of variation among the scholars, it's not particularly surprising that the name has invariably been transliterated in English into something that can actually be pronounced by someone who doesn't speak Hebrew—as Joshua or Jesus. But the "J" didn't appear in the English language until the 17th century. The English word "Jesus" is not really a translation; it is a transliteration of a transliteration, and it has lost every shred of its original meaning. Yahshua (however you spell it) means "Yahweh is salvation."

How did we get from point A (Yahshua) to point C (Jesus)? The standard reference books will tell you that there are several forms of the word translated "Jesus" in the Greek New Testament, and they're all singular, masculine nouns. (There's an important glitch in the textual evidence that throws the Greek words into question, but let's ignore it for just a moment.) In Greek, as in most languages, nouns (including names) must agree in case, number, and gender with the adjectives that modify them. The word we know as "Jesus" is found in five different cases in the New Testament, three of which share the same form; the remaining two have different endings.

Ἰησοῦ (pronounced E-áy-sū) is in the genitive case, which denotes description, possession, or relationship.

Ἰησοῦ (E-áy-sū). The second case (which looks like the genitive) is dative, used when its nouns or pronouns have the function of an indirect object. The vocative case (the case of address) also takes this same Greek form.

Ἰησοῦν (E-áy-soon). The accusative case sounds a little different. There are six distinct types, but basically, they function as the direct object of the verb.

The last form is Ἰησοῦς (E-áy-soos), the nominative case (used where the subject is producing the action). There are five separate nominative types.

As complicated as all this may look, the reality is far worse. Greek grammar is extremely complicated, and is therefore capable of transmitting quite subtle nuances of meaning. Unlike English, however, Greek nouns, pronouns, and adjectives—including names—don't stay put. As we have seen, they change to fit the case, gender, and number of the sentence. But the lexical form of a noun or

adjective—i.e., the form found in a lexicon or Greek dictionary—is *always* the nominative singular form, in this instance Ἰησοῦς (E-ay-soos). Hence the alternate forms Ἰησοῦ (E-ay-sū) and Ἰησοῦν (E-ay-soon), as well as other possible forms, would never show up in standard reference works like Strong’s or Thayer’s.

Note therefore: (1) The genitive, dative, and vocative case of the Greek word rendered “Jesus” in our English texts, Ἰησοῦ (Iesou, pronounced E-ay-sū), is about as good a transliteration of the short form of Yahshua, “Yahsu,” as you can get in Greek, and makes for a passable transliteration in Latin as well: “Iesu.” In Greek, the final “ah” syllable of “Yahshua” would never appear because the case designation would be lost. Note also that there is no “Y” sound in Koine Greek, nor is there a “sh” sound. (2) The nominative form Ἰησοῦς (Iesous, pronounced E-ay-soos) is the obvious origin of the transliteration that eventually emerged in English, “Jesus.” The Latin “I” transformed over time into a “hard I” and only later into the new letter “J”. As a matter of fact, the Authorized version of the English Bible (a.k.a. the King James Version) used the name “Iesus” from 1611 through 1628; “Jesus” did not appear until the 1629 edition, and we’re not positive how *that* was pronounced. Considering the drift of pronunciation modes of European languages, especially the ambivalent use of “J” versus “Y” sounds in Germanic and Scandinavian tongues, it could have been pronounced Yesus as easily as Jesus. The transformation therefore seems natural and logical: Yahshua...to Ἰησοῦς (E-ay-soos)...to Iesu/Jesu (Latin)...to Iesus... to Jesus.

But as I warned you, there’s a rub, a textual convention that was employed to render the Savior’s name and other key words in all of the earliest Greek parchments. As arcane as what follows may seem, you should be aware of it, for it affects the very heart of our standard Christian vocabulary.

We now possess some seventy manuscripts of portions of the Greek New Testament that date before the time of Constantine—pre-fourth century. And *not a single one* of them spells out Yahshua’s name—the Ἰησοῦ, Ἰησοῦν or Ἰησοῦς we find in later texts. Instead, the Name is *always* represented by a placeholder known as a *nominum sacrum*: two Greek capital letters with a line scribed over the top (indicating that these are not regular words), and apparently keyed to the case. So what would eventually be written Ἰησοῦς was indicated as ΙΣ (Iota-Sigma), Ἰησοῦν was penned as ΙΝ (Iota-Nu) and Ἰησοῦ was written ΙΥ (Iota-Upsilon), each with a horizontal line above it, and each (in its own case) meaning Yahshua—Jesus.

Actually, there are seven key words in the New Covenant scriptures that were consistently handled the same way—with *nomina sacra* in place of spelled-out words—in all of the pre-Constantine Greek manuscripts—translated Jesus, Christ, Spirit, Holy, God, Lord, Father, and Son. All of them seem to be a code or abbreviation for the Greek word they replace, words that would be spelled out in

post-Constantine manuscripts (for example, ΚΣ for *Kurios* was translated “Lord,” although Greek quotations of Hebrew texts render “Yahweh” as ΚΣ). I’m not absolutely sure why this was done. “Yahweh” or “Yahshua” couldn’t be correctly pronounced in Greek, and if spoken in certain circles it could get you stoned out of a misplaced sense of religious fervor. But others of these words suffered no such handicaps to communication. The verbal ideas they represent, however, are invariably critical to our understanding of Yahweh and His plan of redemption. Perhaps we would be safer using the Hebrew words for these fundamental concepts (e.g. *Ruach* in place of *Pneuma* for Spirit) than their rough Greek equivalents. At the very least, we should ponder why the original Greek New Covenant texts universally employed these *nomina sacra*, and contemplate why the code was replaced by the pagan-compromised Church of Rome under Constantine and his successors.

Some sources perceive a conspiratorial pagan undercurrent in our use of the word “Jesus.” Lew White, author of *Fossilized Customs*, says, “To try to make it mean something in Greek, the ending ‘*sus*’ definitely refers to Zeus, as it does in many other Greek names such as *Tarsus*, *Pegasus*, *Dionysus*, and *Parnassus*. So, in Greek, the Name ‘Jesus’ can mean ‘hail Zeus,’ or ‘son of Zeus.’” I’m having trouble swallowing this argument whole (although Mr. White is correct about many other things). In Greek, the name Zeus would be spelled using the diphthong epsilon-epsilon (Ζεϋς), not omicron-epsilon (οϋ). And as we’ve seen, the ending of names in Greek change form, depending on the case. Thus the similarity in sound is purely incidental, and the pagan connection is non-existent (I hope).

I’m not discounting the obvious fact that Satan would like to cloud our understanding of who Yahshua is and what His name means. Or failing that, slip in a ringer: some have noticed a phonetic similarity between “Jesus” and the name of the obscure and ancient Druid/Teutonic god “Gesus,” the “horned one.” To my mind, this merely shows that there’s nothing holy that Satan can’t attempt to corrupt or counterfeit. For all I know, our use of the name “Jesus” *is* part of a nefarious satanic plot designed to trick us into worshipping a false Norse god, though Yahweh knows where our hearts are. It seems more likely to me that it is the inevitable—and innocent—result of transliterating the name of our Messiah from Aramaic into Greek, and transliterating *that* into English (via Latin). Unlike words like “Easter” with clearly pagan roots (Astarte...Ishtar...Easter), or perfectly good English words like “gay” that have been pressed into service in Satan’s cause, changing their meaning completely, “Jesus” is a word I do not intend to strike from my vocabulary. However, I still prefer the more direct and meaningful “Yahshua,” and intend to use it in conversation whenever my audience might be expected to understand Who I mean—and more to the point, I

will be using it throughout this book: the One we're used to calling Jesus is "Yahshua."

Enough said. Let's move on. Ground rule number four: since this a book about eschatology—the study of Last Things—we need to establish rules of prophetic interpretation. Fortunately, the Bible and secular history have pretty much done this for us. So much prophecy has already been fulfilled—literally, I might add—we have a built-in guide for figuring out that which hasn't yet come to pass. Still, when John says he saw stinging locusts that looked like horses, with golden crowns, hair like women's, and teeth like lions', we don't know precisely what he meant. What will those who encounter these critters actually see? Suffice it to say that those who are familiar with John's account will be able to say with all truthfulness, "Yes, I recognize that," though I suspect their actual responses will be somewhat more colorful. At any rate, I will devote a chapter to exploring how Biblical predictions can be expected to correlate to their realities—based on prophecies that have already been fulfilled.

Fifth, one of my pet peeves with books on this subject is the practice of stating theories as if they were settled fact. We are not in a position to be dogmatic about the interpretation of some things that are alluded to in Scripture, puzzle pieces that the Artist has painted with indistinct, impressionistic brushstrokes. Yet to ignore them for lack of clarity or concrete evidence is to ignore the very Word of God. Therefore, I would like to introduce a timely innovation, my very own speculation scale. If I see a solution to a sticky prophetic problem, one that is admittedly a guess on my part but plausible nevertheless, I will assign a Speculation Factor to it. This is a scale of one to ten, *one* meaning I'm practically certain about it, and *ten* meaning it's a wild—but possible—idea precipitated by pepperoni pizza and sleep deprivation. Thus, SF4 (Speculation Factor 4) means I think the idea may have merit, but it's by no means certain, and SF8 means my solution is just a theory—I only mention it to get you thinking outside the box. Speculative or not, however, I will endeavor not to propose any schemes that clearly contradict the facts as I see them presented in Scripture. And bear in mind that if we aren't given a clear picture about something, then whatever it is we're considering is probably not crucial to our eternal destiny or our daily walk with God.

Sixth, I have not attempted to deal with things that don't bear directly upon the unfolding of Biblical prophecy as we approach the end of the age. It isn't that these things are insignificant, only that they're beyond the scope of this book. Actually, I think the issues of salvation and Godly living are more important for us today. But tomorrow is approaching like a freight train. Since Yahweh went to all the trouble of predicting it, the least we can do is study what He had to say. (Actually, there are hundreds of points of contact between prophecy and the

doctrines of sanctification and justification anyway. The Bible is one big story—one Author, one plot, one agenda—and the ending is to die for.)

Seventh, and this is very important, please maintain a mental distinction between my words and God's. I have made that easy to do: the Biblical Scripture in this book is **printed in a different font, like this**. God's words (accurately translated, anyway) can be trusted; mine must be taken with a grain of salt. I do not purport to have all the answers, and I certainly can't pretend to be inerrant in my commentary. This book is intended to be a tool, a handy reference guide to all of the Bible's prophecies, in quasi-chronological order, that remain unfulfilled as we cruise into the new millennium. But I am not alone when I look around and come to the conclusion that we are very, very close to the end of the beginning—that fulcrum of destiny separating time from eternity.

Chapter 2

Future History

Sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it? *Future history*. Who can say with any assurance what is going to happen tomorrow? Popular psychics of recent years, of course, have tried, for there are big bucks to be made from a gullible public if you can hit some paltry percentage of your guesses. Tell 'em what musician will be sleeping with what movie star next month, and the TV talk shows will throw significant amounts of cash at you and promote your latest book. Street corner gypsies will read your palm if you'll grease theirs, telling you what they think you want to hear about your future. Or go uptown to the "young lions of the merchants of Tarshish," excuse me, the financial prognosticators of Wall Street, where fortunes aren't told, they're *made*, by predicting what will happen to other people's money—i.e., making educated guesses.

None of this is future history. There is no certainty that any of these predictions will come to pass, and their accuracy doesn't correlate to how much money you pay for them. The vaunted Nostradamus made a tidy little sum publishing his cryptic quatrains—considered great entertainment by the cognoscenti of his day—but no one acted on them; no one changed the course of their life because of what they said. How could they? They're vague to a fault, apparently the result of a great deal of effort to make them precisely that. The best you could do with them was to scan the events of the day trying to find something that sort of lined up. Occasionally, something did. Even a blind squirrel finds an acorn now and then.

But future history? No. Even if they're right sometimes, you can't trust Jeanne Dixon, Nostradamus, Madam Sabrina of 42nd Street, or even your broker at Morgan Stanley to be as accurate as next Wednesday's newspaper. (You can't trust the newspaper either, but let's not go there.) History, ideally, is a true account of events that took place in the past. You can trust it, learn from it, build your future upon it. Wise men study history so that they might avoid the mistakes of their forebears. They look at what they did right, and emulate them, and look at what they did wrong, and do something else. History is a stern schoolmaster. Those who ignore its lessons are doomed to repeat the class.

But if history teaches us anything, it's that we *do* ignore those lessons. We always have. Solomon nailed it: "**That which has been will be; that which is done will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.**" (Ecclesiastes 1:9) Oh, sure, we have technology the ancients couldn't have dreamed of, computers, frozen pizza, and flush toilets, but human nature hasn't changed one whit. Given the chance, we will chase after everything under heaven trying unsuccessfully to fill the void

within us that only God can fill, just like Solomon said. We can look at history and try to figure out where we went wrong. We can peer ahead, hoping to avoid the disaster we suspect is lurking there. Or we can choose to live blithely in the present, willingly ignorant of both the past and the future. But we will never know peace until we come to terms with the One who holds the past and the future in the palm of His hand and calls it all *now*.

God knows how we're built—after all, He built us. He's aware that we have needs, and that the highest of these is the need to know Him. It's just the way we're wired. Yahshua, quoting Moses, put it like this: **“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”** (Matthew 4:4) Perhaps that explains why the Word of God is replete with history—both past and future. God wants us to know Him, to have a relationship with Him, to understand who He is, what He's doing, and what He plans to do in our future. Because we live within the constraints of time, He—who does not—must meet us within the framework of historical reality if He is to meet us at all.

Our relationship to God, time-wise, is like watching the Rose Parade on New Year's Day. Not on TV, you understand, but freezing our toes off in person in Pasadena. We are on the ground; we can see the float right in front of us, and we have a clear memory of the marching band that just passed. If we listen very carefully, we can hear the klop klop of horses' hooves on Colorado Boulevard, telling us something about the immediate future: there's an equestrian unit coming. Beyond that, only our knowledge of Rose Parades of years past can give us a clue, and then only in the most general of terms, as to what's coming in the more distant future. That is, unless we have the official Tournament of Roses program. With the written schedule in hand, we'll know that after the horses and the float from that big insurance company, the Shriners in their funny hats and miniature automobiles will arrive. The program helps us appreciate the effort that went into putting on such a grand event, and, on a more practical level, will let us make sure we're not stuck standing in line at a hot-chocolate vendor's cart when the guys in the little cars show up.

But while we're down on the ground, watching life moment to moment, there is someone above us who sees the entire parade route from start to finish in one eye-gulp. This guy, from his lofty perch in the gondola of the Fuji blimp, witnesses every float, marching band, equestrian team, and even the fellows in the little cars—all at the same time. The entire parade is present tense to him.

All of this has a direct parallel in the parade of life—the march of human history. We live our lives one day at a time, trying to learn from the past and wondering what the future will hold. All the while, there is a God in heaven who sees the whole thing, end to end. This same God has given us His “parade program,” the Bible, so we'll remember what's past and have an idea what's

coming. Some of us have been watching the parade so long, we think it goes on forever, but the program states quite plainly that it does not. It had a beginning, and it will have an end. We can hear the music of the last marching band as it makes its way toward us. We can see the last float coming up the street. The end is almost here.

Look again at your program. See all those ads? Yes, I know. Most everybody ignores them. But they tell us something important: there is life outside the parade. The event happens on New Year's Day, but we still have the whole year ahead of us, 364 more days to work and play, to laugh and love, to walk hand in hand with our Father, wide-eyed in awe at his greatness. The parade we're watching is the whole of human history, but it's only the first day. When the last float passes, when the music fades, it will merely mark the end of the beginning. Eternity lies before us.

So two things are apparent. First, God alone is in a position to know the future, because He alone exists outside of the bounds of time. Even his self-revealed name, Yahweh, means "I Am," i.e., "the Self-Existent One." Second, He has chosen to reveal something of our future to us. (It's not *His* future, mind you—all time is present to God.)

As I hinted earlier, revealing what will happen is one of the few tools God has to prove his deity to us without forcing us to worship Him, and that is something He doesn't want to do. That may come as a surprise, but it makes perfect sense. What's the one thing the Creator lacks within himself? Companionship, fellowship. Let's face it—it would be really hard to take God to court and try Him by a jury of his peers. He *has* no peers. Who knows how many eternities God thought about this before he started, but at some point He decided to do something about it. He started out by creating angels. (That's a guess, of course; SF3.) These wonderful creatures were built to last forever, and they served God in the spirit realm. I believe that although they had the capacity for loyalty, they did not have the capacity for love, not really.

Eventually, one of their number, the most splendiferous angel of them all, became filled with pride, grew jealous of God, and rebelled, drawing away a third of the angelic host with him (see Revelation 12:4). Thus Ezekiel reports of Satan: **"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.... You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.... You became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the**

mountain of God... Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.” (Ezekiel 28:12,15,17)

Isaiah describes it like this: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’” (Isaiah 14:12-14) “I will be *like the Most High?*” God was looking for companionship, not competition. This wasn’t exactly what He had in mind. Then John describes how Satan got his following: “His [the Dragon’s] tail drew a third of the stars of heaven [a metaphor for angels] and threw them to the earth.” (Revelation 12:4)

I’m pretty sure none of this surprised God. It did, however, prove that angelic beings weren’t going to fill the bill as God’s companions. Instead, He would create an order of beings that, while lower than the angels, were made in His own “image and likeness”— beings with the capacity for love, not just loyalty. Their relationship with God would be different from the angels’ because their nature would be different.

But that would require some infrastructure. God converted some of His energy into matter—something that had never been done before (SF8)—and built a universe, complete with galaxies, solar systems, and planets, so His companions would have a nice place to live. Call me crazy, but I firmly believe that man is the end product of God’s creative process, the *only* reason He made the cosmos. This is not some arrogant religious-whacko theory akin to the “earth-is-the-center-of-the-universe” nonsense that almost got Galileo burned at the stake. But think about it. Does God need galaxies? What good do super-novae or quasars do Him? He lived quite nicely *forever* without them. We, on the other hand, need the heavier elements formed in stars for our very existence, for we are physical beings as well as spiritual, made quite literally of “the dust of the earth.” The wonders of creation are not so much an indicator of God’s greatness as they are a measure of his love.

And that, God’s love, is the key to companionship. The capacity to love is to some extent what gives us “the image and likeness” of God, for God *is* love. You see, love is the one thing that cannot be forced, even by an omnipotent deity, because if it is, it’s no longer love but something else. In that, it’s fundamentally different from obedience, loyalty, or even worship. It can’t be compelled, bought, stolen, held for ransom, or even manufactured; it can only be earned. It can’t be sold or bartered; it can only be given away. And here’s the rub: the capacity to love requires the capacity *not* to love. If the object of God’s affection cannot reject Him, then accepting Him is a meaningless concept.

That brings us back to God's little paradox. How can he have a loving relationship with us—His would-be companions—if he leaves us no choice but to accept and reciprocate his love? If we have no choice, our love is nothing more than obedience; but if we *do* have a choice, our obedience demonstrates our love.

So He gave us a choice, a very simple way to demonstrate our trust, our love for Him, in the Garden of Eden. He said, “Do anything you want, but *don't* eat fruit from this one tree, kids.” Then God left us alone for ten minutes—or ten thousand years; it doesn't really matter—and we rejected His love. We woofed down the forbidden fruit like Oliver Twist with a bowl full of Fruit Loops. That didn't surprise Him either, but I'm sure it saddened Him. Knowing what was going to happen, He already had a remedy ready, an antidote for the poison we had so eagerly consumed: He would divest Himself of His glory, enter our history as a mortal man, and offer Himself up as a sacrifice. And through this sacrifice, we could again become God's companions, readmitted to His fellowship, just like Adam was before he chose to walk out on God.

But the remedy—the redeemer—didn't just waltz into the Garden that afternoon and make everything swell again. It would be some time before He physically made his appearance. God wanted to reestablish a bond of trust with his companions first. So what was the first thing He did? He uttered *prophecies* to all the participants in the first sin:

“Yahweh said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel....’” By tempting the first humans to doubt Yahweh's word, Satan had made himself God's mortal enemy. So Yahweh informs him that a descendant of these same humans—and specifically of the woman—would ultimately be his undoing.

“To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you....’” Yahweh had created the man and the woman as equal partners. But the woman would, due to her key role in the first sin, henceforth be “ruled” by her husband, and women from that day forward would be frustrated in their desire to wield the authority that men held. “Women's rights activists” must blame Eve, not Adam—and certainly not Yahweh—for the injustice they find in the world.

But the man didn't get off Scot free. **“Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.’”**

(Genesis 3:14-20) The close, intimate fellowship that Adam had enjoyed with his Creator had been broken. His sin had separated him from his God, and as a result he had become mortal—his body would now grow old and die.

Three players, three predictions. *Prophecy Principle Number One*: pay attention to the object of the prophecy. God said something different to the serpent, to Adam, and to Eve. Determining who the prophecy is about will keep us from jumping to erroneous conclusions—sometimes. It's not always this easy to tell who the subject is. For example, in the passages about Satan quoted above, Isaiah had begun by speaking out against the King of Babylon; in Ezekiel's tirade, the prophet was hammering the prince of Tyre. In each case God shifted the subject in mid-prophecy. Earthly kings were used as metaphors for Satan. We need to stay on our toes.

Only God knows the future, because He alone exists independent of time. And He, from the very beginning, has shown a willingness to tell us what's coming. Why, then, don't most of us know what to expect? Why do we worry, fret, plan, and scheme? Why do we hedge our bets—compromise with a world system we know is flawed and corrupt? It's because we don't appreciate, deep down inside, that our Creator God actually *is* in control.

A few examples will serve to demonstrate that a solid faith backed with a knowledge of prophecy could give us a degree of peace most of us never experience. **"He took the twelve aside and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.' But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken."** (Luke 18:31-34) If we *knew* what God had planned, if we really understood where we stood in Yahweh's grand scheme, we wouldn't sweat the small stuff. We could cheerfully declare with Paul, **"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."** (Philippians 1:21)

On a practical level, correctly applying Biblical prophecies to our lives can save us from unnecessary pain. Yahshua warned Jerusalem, **"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."** (Luke 19:41-44) By the time Titus besieged the city in 70 A.D., thousands of Christians, familiar with this prophecy, had already left town. Those who stayed died or were enslaved.

As if to make my point for me, Paul writes, **"Now all these things [i.e., Israel's misfortunes in the wilderness] happened to them as examples, and they were written**

for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” (I Corinthians 10:11)
If we study to learn the mindset of God and familiarize ourselves with his prophetic plan, we will be in a position to live according to His will in a sinful world, avoiding the coming wrath: we too can get out of Jerusalem before the Romans show up—if we know what God has predicted.

The study of prophecies that have already been fulfilled can go a long way toward correcting the misconception that this world is out of God’s control. Beyond that, they will tell us a great deal about how Yahweh intends to bring about His prophecies that have not yet come to pass (which, after all, is the subject of this book). *Prophecy Principle Number Two*: Yahweh doesn’t change. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Thus if we can determine how His prophecies were fulfilled in the past, we will be in a better position to predict how they will be fulfilled in the future. Though “His ways are higher than our ways,” though His judgments are unsearchable and His methods “past finding out,” the fact remains that He went to a great deal of trouble to see to it that we had information, and lots of it, that described our future. It’s there for a reason. It’s there because He loves us. When He said we’re supposed to “comfort one another with these words,” what words was He talking about? They were words of prophecy!

I mentioned how psychics and prognosticators can achieve fame and fortune by guessing correctly some of the time. God’s prophets were held to a slightly stiffer standard: **“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’** And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it **presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”** (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) The flip side of this truth was stated by Jeremiah: **“When the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom Yahweh has truly sent.”** (Jeremiah 28:9)

In fact, Yahweh works both sides of the street, vindicating the words of His true prophets by bringing their prognostications to pass while confounding the false prophets who presume to speak their own mind in His name. **“Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: ‘I am Yahweh, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself, who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad, who turns wise**

men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness; who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers.” (Isaiah 44:24-26)

John put it like this: “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:18-19)

Okay, got it. (1) Don’t attribute false doctrine to Yahweh (which, by the way, is the *real* meaning of the Third Commandment), (2) don’t ascribe deity to false gods, (3) don’t add to or subtract from His revelation, and (4) don’t deny the truth of God’s Word—or you’re toast. Now you know why I’m so careful about putting the real thing in a bold font. My ramblings may help you understand what God meant, but don’t confuse them with Scripture.

Consider what else Moses said: **“The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”** (Deuteronomy 29:29) Moses realized that Yahweh didn’t tell us everything—our feeble minds couldn’t handle the strain. We’re on a “need to know” basis: what He *did* tell us, He told us for a reason. “All the words of this law” boils down to this, if I’m not mistaken: **“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one! You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength...You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Deuteronomy 6:4, Leviticus 19:18) Yahshua insisted that all of the Law and the Prophets hung upon these two interrelated concepts. Did you catch the connection? God reveals things to us so that we might love Him, or more to the point, return His love.

Being called as a prophet of God had its downside, besides the obvious problem of getting stoned—in the literal sense—if you announced something that God didn’t actually reveal. The sad fact was that God’s message was often unpopular, especially among the ruling elite. And since they often didn’t know the One who’d sent the bad news, they attacked the messenger instead. Some things never change. Yahshua Himself pointed this out to the scribes and Pharisees of His day in his own meek and gentle way: **“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”** (Matthew 23:33-36; see also Luke 11:49-51) He sure had a way with words. Murder had been a time-honored way of silencing the truth from the first generation onward: The Zechariah He speaks of

here is not the prophet, but the father of John the Baptist. Yahshua's prediction, by the way, *was* fulfilled within that generation—less than forty years later—when Titus tore Jerusalem apart, stone by stone.

Prophets as a class had it rough. Jeremiah preached for forty years. Nobody listened. They finally threw him into a cesspool. Isaiah had a long and illustrious career, capped, legend has it, by getting himself sawn in two. But occupational hazards notwithstanding, God's messengers felt compelled to tell the truth, regardless of the consequences. Amos put it like this: **"Surely Yahweh does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? Yahweh has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"** (Amos 3:7-8) Later, Peter and John, when told to shut up and go home, remarked, **"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you [religious leaders] more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."** (Acts 4:19-20)

For all their dedication and courage, the prophets' role was temporary, like our program for the Tournament of Roses Parade. Between every line they wrote was the understanding that the day would come when the light of reality would make their words seem pale by comparison, like a candle outdoors on a brilliant summer's day. That doesn't lessen the significance of their service, however, for without their words, many of us would not survive to see God's bright tomorrow. Paul said it best: **"Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."** (I Corinthians 13:8-13)

None of the spiritual gifts are designed to last beyond our mortal bodies. But love is. Prophecies will *fail*? Yes. They were meant to guide us in this life, not beyond. Besides, the shocking truth is, God doesn't always keep his word. Before you stone me, let me point out that there are several times in scripture where God clearly didn't do what he told His prophet He'd do, and the reason was always the same: mercy. *Prophecy Principle Number Three*: God's wrath is always tempered by his love; He typically postpones judgment till the last possible moment because He does not desire any of us to perish. He alone knows when our sin has reached the point of no return. Compare Genesis 15:15-16—"Now as for you [Abraham], you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."—to Numbers 21:23-24, some four hundred years later: **"So Sihon [king of the Amorites] gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the**

wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land.”

Because of his mercy, God didn’t wipe out a rebellious nation of Israel and start over with Moses, as He threatened to do. And He didn’t destroy Nineveh in forty days, as He proclaimed He would through Jonah. Instead, he showed mercy, patience, love—in the first case because the prophet interceded for the people, and in the second case because the people repented—buying their city another century of life.

We have no idea how deep the river of God’s mercy runs. But here’s another hint. Ever wonder why the oldest man in the Bible, Methuselah, lived so long? He was the grandfather of Noah, and he died (at the extremely ripe old age of 969) the same year as the flood. This kind of “coincidence” begs us to dig beneath the surface to figure out what God may have been up to. Clue number one: he was the son of Enoch, a godly man with an intriguing story of his own—the second man listed in the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. We’ll look at his story a little later. Could it be that Enoch named his baby boy something prophetically significant? At first glance, it seems not. Methuselah (Hebrew: *Methuwselach*) comes from two words, *math* meaning man, i.e., adult (it’s also possible that the first component of his name was *muth*—death), and *shelach* meaning dart or spear. If we look at the primitive roots for *those* two words, we discover something provocative. *Math* is from *mathay*, meaning “to extend,” as in, “an adult man’s years are extended beyond those of a child.” *Shelach*, “spear,” comes from *shalach*, “to send away or cast out, hence, to forsake.” Some Hebrew scholars suggest that his name could be rendered, “when he dies (that is, at the extension of his years), it shall be sent.” Was Enoch saying his son’s life would personify the extension of man’s time on earth before they were cast out? *Pretty thin*, you say. Perhaps, but the guy did live longer than anyone else, before or since. I’ve come to distrust coincidences. I’ll put my money on God’s mercy any day.

Alright, then. Let’s get down to cases. I’d like to examine several Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillments, with an eye toward comprehending the ones that are still ahead of us.

Luke records this story about Yahshua: **“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of Yahweh is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal**

the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh.’ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:16-21)

The quote was from the prophet Isaiah, but Yahshua had stopped and closed the book in mid-sentence. Isaiah had gone on to say: “...and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:2-3) Why didn’t Yahshua quote the whole thing? Because only the first part was being fulfilled there and then—during His first-century advent. By quoting this portion of the passage, He had claimed to be the promised Messiah (“**He has anointed Me...**”) but by cutting it short, He was saying, in effect, “I’m not going to do all these things at this time.” He was demonstrating *Prophecy Principle Number Four: peaks and valleys—the concept of split fulfillment.*

Where I live, the terrain is quite hilly. There are places where you can stand and see four or five ridges, one right after the other. But you can’t see what’s between them. The only way to tell how deep or wide the valleys are is to go down into them, to “live through them.” Prophecy is often like that. The seer is shown a series of mountaintops, but he can’t tell whether they’re all clumped together or whether there are deep valleys of time in between them. In this case, Isaiah saw two groups of events that would take place a couple of thousand years apart, but he didn’t know their fulfillment would be separate. He saw everything but the timing. When Christ came the first time—laying aside His glory—He brought us the good news of His salvation, healing and freeing us from the bonds of sin. But when He returns, He will have assumed His glory once again, wreaking righteous vengeance on those who have chosen to reject Him, and comforting those, especially among the Jews, who have accepted His gift of love.

The principle of peaks and valleys caused a great deal of confusion in Yahshua’s day. Even His disciples thought, at first, that He had come to overthrow Rome and set up His kingdom on earth. But it should not be a source of confusion for us today. With the benefit of hindsight, we can perceive what they did not: we need not assume that a prophetic passage will be fulfilled all at once. God, rather, will do things in His own sweet time, and in His own inimitable fashion.

To clarify the principle, let’s look at one more example, the prophecies concerning the downfall of Babylon. This was no mean city. About fifty miles south of present-day Baghdad, it was originally founded by Nimrod, the great-

grandson of Noah. It was the premier city of the post-deluvian world, rising and declining in successive waves, as great cities often do. In 626 B.C., Nabopolassar the Chaldean threw off the yoke of Assyria (there are a bunch of Biblical prophecies predicting that, too) and rebuilt the city. His son Nebuchadnezzar II became its greatest monarch, dispensing God's judgment upon an apostate and rebellious Judah in 586. Nebuchadnezzar's vision, interpreted by the Jewish captive Daniel, pinpointed Babylon as the first of four great gentile world powers.

But before Nebuchadnezzar had drawn his first breath, Babylon's fall had already been predicted by the prophets of Israel. Isaiah, writing over 150 years before the fall of Jerusalem, had said: **"Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it. Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, And their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there. The hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged."** (Isaiah 13:17-22)

He went on to say, **"For I will rise up against them,"** says Yahweh of hosts, **'and cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and offspring and posterity,'** says Yahweh. **'I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and marshes of muddy water; I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,'** says Yahweh of hosts." (Isaiah 14:22-23) Another prophet predicted: **"They shall not take from you [Babylon] a stone for a corner nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever,"** says Yahweh." (Jeremiah 51:26)

So between the two of them, God predicted that the city of Babylon—then approaching its glory days—would be destroyed as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah had been, never to be inhabited again, even by wandering Bedouins. It would be both a home for desert creatures and a swamp—seemingly a glaring contradiction.

The key, besides God's omniscience of course, is the principle of peaks and valleys, split fulfillment. This is how the history unfolded. Half a century after the fall of Judah, as the Persians under Cyrus pondered ways to breach the formidable walls of the city, a couple of Babylonian deserters wandered into their camp. They pointed out that one of the things that made the place siege-proof was that the Euphrates ran *under* the wall. Perhaps the Persians could too. Cyrus conferred with his counselor, Chrysanthes, who opined that if they could divert the river, they could waltz in and take the place without firing a shot, more or less. The course of the river had tended to shift from time to time anyway, wandering off and losing

itself in marshes to the west of the city. Why not divert the Euphrates with a huge trench? Cyrus did just that, and on October 13, 539 B.C., he took Babylon while its overconfident regent drank himself under the table, celebrating, no doubt, the fact that *nobody* would ever get over his wall—the strongest city wall on earth at the time. (*That* story is recorded in Daniel 5.) Interestingly, though the Persian commander, Cyrus (prophesied *by name* in Isaiah 44 and 45), was credited with conquering the city, Daniel says that his ally, Darius the Mede (a.k.a. the Gobryas mentioned in contemporary inscriptions as the man who defeated Babylon without a battle), took control of the kingdom, just as Isaiah had predicted.

But the prophecies were a long way from being fulfilled. Xerxes (a.k.a. Ahasuerus, the Persian king whose queen was Esther) sacked the place in 478 B.C. while quelling the rebellion of Bel-shimmani and Shamath-eriba. Alexander the Great took it from the Persians in 331 and planned to restore it to its former glory, but he died before he could do much, at the ripe old age of 33. Coincidence? If you say so.

The infighting among Alexander’s generals following his death eventually landed Babylon in the hands of the Seleucids, who took one look at the estimate for rebuilding the crumbling ruin and opted for a brand new capital city instead, Seleucia, forty miles north on the Tigris River—effectively doing for Babylon what Interstate 40 did for Route 66. Incredibly, they didn’t use any of its massive stones that had been quarried at such great expense; apparently the marsh that had inundated much of the city made them too hard to haul away. Babylonian *bricks* have been found elsewhere, but not its stones. Jeremiah was right.

Eventually, the ever-fickle Euphrates played its part again and changed course, leaving the city high and dry. By the time of Caesar Augustus it was virtually uninhabited; Strabo lamented, “The great city has become a desert.” It was used as a walled hunting preserve by the Persians, and a few die-hards struggled to keep the temple of Bel going until about A.D. 75. But even this wouldn’t last; the once mighty seat of Chaldean power was swallowed by the desert, awaiting the archeologist’s spade. Just like Sodom and Gomorrah.

These days, Babylon is of interest only to historians and megalomaniacs. Saddam Hussein, who would have died happy if he could have gone down in history as a modern-day Nebuchadnezzar, actually rebuilt a palace on its original Babylonian foundation between 1982 and 1989. But nobody *lives* there—nobody was even allowed in to see it for over a decade after the first Gulf War.

Bottom line? As unlikely as the prophecies sounded when Isaiah and Jeremiah (and Ezekiel, Habakkuk, etc.) penned them, they came to pass exactly as God had said they would. The “peaks” they saw were spread out over seven hundred years, but it all came to pass. “But what,” you may ask, “ever happened to **‘Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged’** ...? Seven centuries sure sounds like

‘prolonged’ to me.” Forget the infrastructure for a minute. If you consider that the *government* of Babylon under the Chaldeans lasted a mere forty-seven years after they destroyed Jerusalem, you’ll have to admit that its demise was rapid indeed.

All of this brings up another point. *Prophecy Principle Number Five: Backup.* God doesn’t put all his eggs in one basket, and, to scramble my metaphor, He always backs up his files.

The famous portrait of George Washington that hangs in the White House, the one that served as a prototype for the engraving on our one dollar bill, was painted by Gilbert Stuart. Most people don’t realize that Stuart painted three portraits of the first President from life, and he kept an unfinished one for himself to use as a model for future work—much to Martha’s chagrin. Whenever he needed money, he’d crank out another Gilbert Stuart “original” of Washington. He painted over sixty of ’em before he was through. Different backgrounds, different costumes, but always the same half-smiling tight-jawed face. Likewise, God has painted many portraits of things to come—different details, varying points of view, but all based on the same reality.

Peter said, **“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”** (II Peter 1:20-21) We can therefore expect any significant prophetic event to be examined in several different passages, often by several different prophets. God does not ask us to take any one man’s word for anything. Rather, his Holy Spirit instructs different men to reveal different things about the same future event. Only when we examine each facet of the diamond do we gain a full appreciation of its beauty. This redundancy—this system of back-ups—also goes a long way toward ensuring that God’s Word survives our sometimes woefully inadequate (and sometimes flat-out *wrong*) translations.

We’ve looked briefly at Babylon, which was taken to task by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Zechariah, and the Sons of Korah. Similar seven-lane highways could be followed to Nineveh, Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Phoenicia, Damascus, Ethiopia, Arabia, Elam, and yes, Israel—*especially* Israel. Daniel in the Old Testament and John in the New Testament apparently saw some of the same events, though with radically different imagery. This kind of redundancy is ubiquitous in scriptural prophecy.

In similar fashion, a prophet of God was often given the same information more than once. We see Joseph dreaming about his brothers’ sheaves bowing

down to his, and later the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. (Gee, I wonder what that could mean.) Joseph recognized the “Sesame Street Factor” at once when he heard about Pharaoh’s dreams: **“Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, ‘The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do....’ The dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.”** (Genesis 41:25, 32) In the same way, Daniel was given several very different visions, many years apart, describing the times of the gentiles. God clearly doesn’t mind repeating himself if it helps us understand what He’s trying to tell us. We can expect the same rule to apply when we look at prophecies as yet unfulfilled.

Related to this concept is *Prophecy Principle Number Six*: God often reveals different aspects of a future event separately. When the police interview the witnesses to a crime, they expect to hear slightly divergent descriptions of the scene. One witness says the bad guy was wearing blue jeans. Another says he had on a red shirt and a baseball cap. One says he saw the perp waving a gun; another says he saw the guy throw something black into the bushes. This kind of testimony is complementary, not contradictory. It has the ring of truth. As a matter of fact, if the accounts are *identical* they smell to investigators like collusion, an attempt to hide the real story. In the same way, Biblical prophets are merely telling us what they saw at the scene of the crime. They never claim to have told us everything; on the contrary, they themselves often seem unaware of the significance of what they’ve witnessed.

It’s like the old story of the four blind men and the elephant. The first one grabs the tail and says the pachyderm is like a rope with a frayed end. The second hugs a leg and concludes that the thing is some sort of tree. The third feels the trunk, and pronounces the animal to be a species of large snake. And the fourth feels his way down the elephant’s side and announces that the beast is a mighty wall. Though they seem to be in complete disagreement, they’re actually all correct, but nobody’s got the full picture. Prophecy is like that.

I suppose the best example of this principle is the body of prophecies concerning the Messiah. There are several hundred of them in the Old Testament. Where did the prophets say He would hail from? Micah said he would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah—David’s home town, a few miles south of Jerusalem. Hosea, on the other hand, predicted that he would be “called out of Egypt.” Isaiah, not to be outdone, referred to Him as a “shoot [*netzer*] out of the stem of Jesse”—the same word being the origin of the name of the Galilean town of Nazareth, where Yahshua grew up; thus Matthew points out that He was *expected* to be a Nazarene. The three prophecies are seemingly contradictory, yet they all fit the human history of Yahshua like a glove (and, by the way, nobody else that we know of).

How about Messiah's mission? Isaiah says, **"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken."** (Isaiah 53:3, 7-8) This is one of many predictions of a Messiah who would suffer and die. If words mean anything at all, there is no way to make these verses apply to the nation of Israel and the trials they've endured, though the Jews have been trying valiantly to do that very thing for the last two thousand years. But Isaiah's prophecy fits the life and death of Yahshua so well that to explain them away or ignore them is nothing short of intellectual suicide.

It's far easier for the Jews, of course, to take the "reigning Messiah" passages literally. The same prophet says, **"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will perform this."** (Isaiah 9:6-7) When Isaiah talks out of this side of his mouth, everybody responds, "Yea, verily! Bring it on!" But we're looking at two advents of the same Messiah, two sides of the same coin. You can't spend one side and keep the other. And so it is with as-yet-unfulfilled prophecy. We must be prepared to deal with seemingly contradictory evidence.

This leads us to *Prophecy Principle Number Seven*, the "That's Impossible" factor. God sometimes progressively narrows the field through successive revelations until literal fulfillment is virtually impossible; and only then does He bring it to pass. Yahweh delights in doing what can't be done: you know, raising the dead, parting the Red sea, making the sun stand still, stuff like that; you can almost hear Him chuckling, "If this were easy, any god could do it."

Figuring out these conundrums usually requires some digging, but the gems we can find are beautiful indeed. At issue here are faith and information. If we see an apparent contradiction in scripture, we need to have faith that God doesn't make stupid blunders; No, it's *us*—we just don't have enough information yet.

My favorite Scriptural "impossibility" is the lineage of the Messiah. It begins in the Garden of Eden. In the Genesis 3 passage quoted above, God began by intimating that sin would eventually be overcome via the human race, the "seed of the woman." That rules out orangutans and amoebas. After the flood, Noah narrowed it down to one of his three sons, Shem: **"And [Noah] said: "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem."** (Genesis 9:26-27) Later, God told Abraham, a

descendent of Shem, **“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (Genesis 12:3) The line passed through Abraham’s son Isaac (not his half-brother Ishmael): **“Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.”** (Genesis 17:19) Then *his* son Jacob, the second-born of twins, was given the nod: **“And Yahweh said to [Rebekah]: ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’”** (Genesis 25:23)

The patriarch Jacob, a.k.a. Israel, identified Judah—the fourth of his twelve sons—as bearer of the Messianic line: **“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [‘he to whom it—i.e., the scepter—belongs’] comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”** (Genesis 49:8-10)

Let’s pause and take a breath. So far, God has narrowed the field five times (not including the *de facto* cut at the flood) effectively eliminating millions of people from consideration as Messiah’s ancestor. Note that the prophecies are getting more specific and detailed as time progresses. Note also that not once did God choose the chronological firstborn son to carry the Messianic torch (though listed second, Japheth was Shem’s older brother—see Genesis 10:21), as would have been expected by the people involved, reminding us that manmade traditions don’t mean a whole lot to Yahweh.

Also, there’s an interesting prophetic twist about Judah’s scepter—the symbol of royal authority. Israel’s first king, Saul, was from the tribe of Benjamin, *not* Judah. But once David succeeded him, 640 years after the prophecy was spoken, the throne of promise was never occupied by a king from any Jewish tribe other than Judah. The wording of the prophecy was precise: he didn’t say that no other tribe would hold the scepter, only that it wouldn’t ever *depart* from Judah. (Herod’s clan, the first kings since the Babylonian captivity, don’t count. They were not, properly speaking, Jewish, but were Idumaeans—descendants of Esau—and were placed and maintained in power by a foreign gentile government.) Yahshua the Messiah was a Jew, of the tribe of Judah. He could trace his lineage all the way back. Technically, his claim to the throne of David is what ultimately got Him crucified. But within a generation of His death, the genealogical records of the Jews were up in smoke with the rest of Jerusalem. This means that after A.D. 70, and certainly after A.D. 135 when the Romans came back and finished the job, no Jew could prove—or even demonstrate—his

lineage. From that time on, it was impossible to present a legitimate, verifiable Messianic claim.

Okay, back to the prophecies. King David was the next to be pinpointed as someone in the Messianic line. Nathan the prophet came to him and said, **“Yahweh tells you [David] that He will make you a house [a royal dynasty]. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.”** Now here’s the kicker: **“If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”** (II Samuel 7:11-16)

Sufficiently confused? You should be. Is God referring to David’s son Solomon, or to the ultimate King, the Messiah? The answer is yes. *Prophecy Principle Number Eight*: there can be both near and far fulfillments for a single prophecy. It’s maddeningly hard to sort out sometimes, but God likes to put interrelated truths into the Biblical Blender and hit *frappe*. Let’s look at the details here. David’s physical son will reign in his stead: that’s obviously Solomon. God says He will establish *his*—Solomon’s—throne *forever*. That statement will soon get us into trouble, but let’s skip over it for now. The phrase “If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him...” makes no sense. Solomon *did* commit iniquity, but most certainly did *not* receive the “blows of the sons of men.” Rather, God’s mercy stayed with him, as the passage clearly predicts. So is the prophet talking about the Messiah? Christ committed no iniquity. What’s going on here?

The key is in the little word “If.” The Hebrew word *’asher* is a primitive and rarely used relative pronoun that can mean almost anything: when, who, which, what, if, how, because, in order that, etc. *Strong’s* notes that “As it is indeclinable, it is often accompanied by the personal pronoun expletively, used to *show the connection*.” Right. So the phrase really means, “If—or when—He *is associated with* iniquity...” The prophet is predicting the suffering of Christ as He bore our sins! Then he finishes up by saying David’s house, kingdom, and throne will be established forever.

Everything rolls along nicely until we get to the last few years of the kingdom of Judah. God has finally had enough, and allows Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to haul the flower of Judean society off into captivity. The king that broke the camel’s back, so to speak, was Jehoiachin, also known as Jeconiah, or simply Coniah. Jeremiah prophesied, **“As I live,” says Yahweh, “though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off; and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of those whose**

face you fear—the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of the Chaldeans. So I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born; and there you shall die. But to the land to which they desire to return, there they shall not return. Is this man Coniah a despised, broken idol—a vessel in which is no pleasure? Why are they cast out, he and his descendants, and cast into a land which they do not know? (Jeremiah 22:24-28) The prophet says that both Jeconiah *and his descendents* are cast out. The inference is that neither he nor anyone in his line will ever prosper on the throne of David—and certainly not in the land of Israel.

Nathan just got through telling us that Solomon’s throne will be established forever. But Solomon’s royal line ran right through Jeconiah, who is toast, prophetically speaking. *Oops*. Now the only way the Messiah can ever reign is if he legally occupies the throne of Solomon through the line of Jeconiah—all of whose descendents have been disqualified. And He *still* has to be a physical descendant of David—we aren’t allowed to “spiritualize” any of this away. This whole Messiah thing isn’t looking too promising. Has God blown it?

There are two genealogies of Yahshua in the New Testament. The first is in Matthew, and sure enough, there’s Jeconiah, ugly as sin, right between Josiah and Shealtiel. This lineage runs through Joseph, the legal father of Yahshua. But Yahshua was born of a virgin; the prophets predicted it, and the gospels reported it. Mary’s genealogy, recorded in Luke, proves that Yahshua was indeed a descendent of David, but not of Solomon. Mary’s line went through David’s son Nathan (named, no doubt, in honor of the prophet). Thus while it looked for a moment like the coming of Messiah was impossible, the careful examination of prophecy points to one man, to the exclusion of all others: Yahshua of Nazareth.

By the way, there are a few big American denominations who have officially rejected the doctrine of the virgin birth as *just too weird*. Sorry, folks: no virgin birth, no salvation. Don’t blame me. Blame Jeconiah.

Let’s recap, then. Making sense of Biblical prophecy requires us to determine the context and the subject of the passage in question. Applying Prophecy A to Subject B is known in theological circles as “stupid.” We need to be especially careful not to confuse Israel with the Church; they’re two different things— notwithstanding the confusion that inevitably arises when God uses Israel as a metaphor for all of His redeemed. Just as a carpenter uses a hammer *and* a saw to get the job done, Yahweh employs both Israel and the Church, but in different roles.

Yahweh Himself, though, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. More to the point, He is consistent in his methods and modes of revelation. So if we can figure out what He's done in the past, we can be confident about what He has told us concerning the future. And because God exists outside the bounds of time as we know it, He is not limited to simple, one-time solutions; He can—and does—split up the fulfillments of His prophecies over many years and many events. A partial fulfillment is like a down payment, demonstrating God's intention to make good on His promises when the time is right. God has also been known to fulfill prophecies more than once—a near fulfillment foreshadowing a more distant one.

Not only are the fulfillments often split up, but so are the prophecies themselves. They are almost never given as complete, independent proclamations, but are rather doled out one piece of the puzzle at a time. They're invariably repeated elsewhere in scripture, often in a different manner, from a different perspective, by a different prophet, with different imagery. Whether a later prophecy adds information to an earlier one, or a different metaphor is used to present the same truth, there is almost always some degree of redundancy in scripture. Truth is built up "line by line, precept upon precept." Prophecy, in this respect, is no different from any major doctrine.

The fascinating thing about it is that the body of revelation was brought to us by scores of writers over a span of at least fifteen hundred years, and yet there are no real contradictions in any of it. To me, that proves what Peter said, that the Holy Spirit is behind it all. God seems to delight in predicting the "impossible," only to create a solution so unlikely it's sublimely ridiculous. I must confess to having a degree of impatience with people who insist Christianity requires an unacceptable "leap of faith," as if you have to check your brain at the door in order to buy into it. I have found, rather, that it takes far more faith *not* to believe—to assume that the hundreds of prophecies that have already been fulfilled came about by accident, or luck, or blind coincidence—without the direct intervention of an omnipotent deity.

God knows exactly what He's doing. The prophet Isaiah threw down the gauntlet, challenging false prophets to predict what would happen, and why: **"Gather together and come, you fugitives from surrounding nations. What fools they are who carry around their wooden idols and pray to gods that cannot save! Consult together, argue your case, and state your proofs that idol worship pays. Who made these things known long ago? What idol ever told you they would happen? Was it not I, Yahweh? For there is no other God but Me—a just God and a Savior—no, not one!"** (Isaiah 45:20-21, New Living Translation) If we understand what Yahweh has told us through His prophets, coming to trust in Him does not require a "leap of faith," but merely one small step out of the shadows into the light.

Chapter 3

In a Manner of Speaking

Our little encounter with *'asher*, the primitive Hebrew pronoun in II Samuel 7, warns us of another potential roadblock to the understanding of Biblical prophecy: *language*. As I said, language itself can sometimes get in the way of our understanding. Our English translations don't supply the nuances and innuendoes of the original text, and the cultural baggage that the scriptures' first hearers carried with them is now on its way to Cleveland. What's more, languages shift and warp over time. And societal and technological changes accelerate the shift in a language's lexicon.

To my mind, it's just one more indication of God's provision for us that Hebrew was on its way out as a living language by the close of the Old Testament canon, about four hundred years before Christ—supplanted by Aramaic, a close cognate of Hebrew, and later by Greek. In the first century, *koine*, common or Hellenistic Greek—a dialect distinct from classical, or *Attic* Greek—was the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world. But it too was destined for the linguistic scrap heap, to be replaced in common use by Latin. Thus both original Biblical languages were functionally dead, or at least very quiet, shortly after the Scriptures that relied upon them were completed. The benefit for us, of course, is that the lexicons are no longer moving targets. Hebrew and *koine* Greek words no longer change meaning over time like English words do.

This is good news and bad news. On the one hand, we can be reasonably sure what the Biblical writers actually meant to say (which is not to say our translations accurately transmit this). But it also means that they didn't have the vocabulary needed to express some of the things they saw in their dreams and visions.

For example, if John had been shown a vision of the Hiroshima bombing at the end of World War II, he could not have used *koine* Greek to say, "On Monday, August 6, 1945, at 8:15 AM, America used a B-29 airplane to drop a 12.5 kiloton atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, destroying everything within one and a half miles and creating a huge, black mushroom cloud." John didn't have the right linguistic tools for the job. The Gregorian calendar wouldn't be invented for another six hundred years. No clock capable of pinning time down to the minute would come along for over a millennium. And the names of the nations involved would just have been odd sounding words that couldn't have been translated or understood. He not only had no word for "airplane," he couldn't even have conceived of manned flight. He had never seen an explosion of any kind, so the phrase "twelve and a half kilotons"—meaning to us that the bomb

produced an explosion equivalent to that much trinitrotoluene—would be gibberish to him. He *did* have a word for atom, though—Greek is where *we* got it. But the idea of making a bomb by *splitting* an atom? No way. An atom was something John, had he been a philosopher, would have known as a fundamental, indivisible particle of matter.

No, the best John could have done with this vision, with the vocabulary available to him, would have come out something like this: “About the second hour on the second day of the week in the fifth month of the reign of the thirty-second King of the West, a great silver eagle dropped a stone to the earth. It fell upon a city of the King of the East. And as I, John, watched, it grew as brilliant as the sun, so that no man could look upon it, and a mighty wind blew north, south, east, and west, from the place where the stone came to rest upon the earth. No man, nor beast, nor house, nor tree could stand against the wind and against the fire which proceeded from the stone for the space of thirteen stadia. And the heavens became as black as sackcloth, and the sky rolled up like a scroll....”

We’ve all seen atomic explosions (on film, anyway). And this is precisely how we might describe one if limited to a first-century vocabulary. So I think we can cut John and the other prophets a little slack. They weren’t trying to be coy or mysterious with their prognostications. They just didn’t have the words to express themselves.

The lesson for us today is *Prophecy Principle Number Nine*: we must try to see things through the eyes of the prophet. What was he shown? Is there a logical, visual explanation for what was recorded? Often there is, but I’ll give you fair warning: there are times when prophets describe things that have no more objective basis in our experience than in theirs. God is, so to speak, a master of “special effects.” If the prophet needs to see a dragon in order to understand the evil nature of Satan, then a dragon he shall see. Even if the devil *can* transform himself into an angel of light, God shows His prophets the unvarnished truth.

But speaking of Satan, there is another issue we need to be aware of. The devil may be evil, but he’s not stupid. *Prophecy Principle Number Ten*: the fraud factor. There are many times in history and scripture when Satan has engineered counterfeit fulfillments to God’s purposes and prophecies.

Perhaps the most striking example from history is the incredibly pervasive mother-and-child cult of Nimrod and his wife Semiramis. It took many forms over the centuries, but the basic ingredients were the exalted mother (often presented as a virgin) and the heroic son (or husband) who died and rose, in some form, from the dead—sound familiar? The scenario gave rise to a plethora of fertility cults, showing up throughout the ancient world long before the time of Christ. Their “worship” centered on ritual orgiastic sex—they were, after all, fertility cults—which manifested itself in male and female temple prostitution, the

antithesis of God’s plan for family-centered social stability, which in turn is a purposeful metaphorical reflection of the godhead. In some extreme permutations, such as the worship of Molech and Chemosh in the land of Canaan, the rituals went so far as to include human sacrifice—“passing children through the fire”—where infants were burned alive in the outstretched arms of a red-hot metal statue of the god. Satan must have loved the irony of that.

This sort of behavior explains why Yahweh insisted that the Canaanites be totally wiped out when the Jews entered the promised land. There could be no compromise—no peaceful coexistence—between light and darkness, between life and death. Those who accuse God of being overly harsh and judgmental are simply misinformed.

Isis and Osiris in Egypt, Astarte (or Ishtar, the origin of our word Easter) and Tammuz in Mesopotamia, Rhea and Kronos in Babylon, Parvati and Iswara in India, Diana and Apollo, Venus and Cupid, Fortuna and Jupiter, Athena and Bacchus among others in the Greco-Roman world—these and many more are simply variations on the theme. As a matter of fact, the lineages of most gods of antiquity lead directly back to Nimrod, and through him to his father Cush—the brother of Canaan, son of Ham, and grandson of Noah. You may know Cush as Bel, Hermes, Mercury, Janus, Chaos, Vulcan, Merodach, or somebody else. When you sort it all out, it’s amazing how few “gods” there really were—we find, rather, hundreds of different permutations of the same prototypical fraud. For a fascinating look at how it all ties together, see Alexander Hislop’s classic *The Two Babylons*. This treatise traces the false religion’s roots and drops its legacy squarely in the lap of the Roman Catholic Church, many of whose rites and traditions stem directly from the Babylonian mystery religion. Although Hislop’s methodology has come under fire in recent years, it’s still enough to make you give up Christmas.

Satan’s frauds will naturally play a major role in things to come, as well. Without getting too far ahead of ourselves, it can be said here that the man commonly referred to as the Antichrist will become the devil’s ultimate attempt to foist a counterfeit savior—a false Messiah—upon an unsuspecting world. But we must save the details on that bad boy for later.

Because of the limitations of language and the prevalence of impostors, Yahweh chose to be less than straightforward with his revelations at times. He could have just told us the straight scoop about a great many things—but not if He wanted us to appreciate the significance of what would happen. Somehow, saying

“Don’t trust this Antichrist fellow; he’s not a very nice man,” doesn’t seem sufficient, though it’s true enough. But calling him the “beast from the sea” might get our attention. *Prophecy Principle Number Eleven*, then, is that God uses symbols, types, and dress rehearsals, not just flat predictions.

When Jeremiah bought a clay jar from the potter, and then broke it to smithereens before the priests and elders, it was a symbol of what God was about to do to Judah—break *it* in pieces. When Ezekiel was told to take two sticks, write “Judah” on one and “Ephraim” on the other, and then join them together in his hand, it symbolized the future regathering of all Israel as one nation under one King, something that hadn’t been seen since Solomon’s day. Symbols like this are powerful pictures of what God intends to do.

Types are similar to symbols. These are things or people in history that foreshadow future events in some way. It is often said that Joseph was a “type” of Christ. One commentator counted forty-two different places in the story of Joseph that had a direct parallel in the ministry of Yahshua—well beyond coincidence. Melchizedek, the mysterious priest-king of Salem mentioned in Genesis 14, was clearly identified in Hebrews 7 as a type of Christ. The writer of Hebrews even quotes Psalm 110:4, where David said in the middle of a clearly Messianic passage, “...**You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.**” So we can learn something important about Christ by studying His “types,” Joseph, Melchizedek, and others. Likewise, we should be aware of types in our study of prophecy. Was Noah’s ark, for example, a type of something yet to come?

Another way God has chosen to deliver his prophecies is through what I’d call “dress rehearsals.” These are similar to types, but the future event is acted out, as though by characters in a play. Like other metaphors, you can’t stretch them too far without breaking them, but they can shed valuable insight into things yet to come. Yahshua Himself referred to the misadventures of the prophet Jonah as a sign, a dress rehearsal, for His generation. Jonah spent three days in the belly of the great fish, and through the ordeal made possible the salvation of a wicked and idolatrous city. Yahshua likewise spent three days in the belly of the earth (actually, “heart of the land”—Jerusalem), and through His ordeal made possible the salvation of the whole world—if only we would repent as the Ninevites did.

To my mind, the most striking dress rehearsal in the whole Bible is Abraham’s offering of Isaac on Mt. Moriah. The story, related in Genesis 22, is the very image of God’s offering up of his Son on the cross of Calvary. The father and the promised son go on a three-day journey. The mode of travel? A donkey. Their destination? The “region of Moriah”—not, I suspect, the knoll that would someday serve as the location of Solomon’s Temple, but a location nearer Moriah’s actual summit, a few hundred yards further north, the very spot where Christ would be executed on a rough wooden cross two thousand years later.

What does the obedient son carry upon his back? Wood, necessary for the sacrifice. And what did God provide? A ram—a male lamb, if you will—whose destiny was sealed with a thicket of thorns upon his head. And if all of this is still sounding like a coincidence to you, listen to verse 14: **“And Abraham called the name of the place Yahweh Will Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.’”**

God’s provision for our salvation, though, wouldn’t have done us much good if we had never heard about it. Oh, I won’t debate that people *can* be saved without ever hearing the name of Yahshua—a.k.a. Jesus—every Old Testament saint falls into that category, including quite a roster of gentile believers. It’s clear that the blood of the Messiah is what atones for the sins of all worshippers of the true and living God in all ages, whether they are familiar with the historical events surrounding His sacrifice or not. But there’s a reason Yahshua issued the Great Commission: truth is much more accessible if it’s taught, not just absorbed. Our salvation isn’t a game to God. He’s quite serious about it. He wants a personal relationship with us. That’s why He made us. Our salvation gives us a sinless standing before him. An honest seeker may come to a knowledge of God by observing creation (**“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.”**—Psalm 19:1) but the fact remains, he’s much more likely to discover God’s greatness and love if he’s *told* about it.

That, I suspect, is why Yahweh chose to reveal his plan to us, telling us in advance what he planned to do, and why. This plan is woven throughout scripture, made known and worked out, for the most part, through the life of the Nation of Israel. But it started before Moses, even before Abraham. Actually, the first indication we have of a master plan goes all the way back to the creation account.

Whatever you think of the scientific merits of the Genesis creation record (a subject *way* beyond the scope of this book), it is obvious that the primary reason God described it this way was to teach *spiritual* truths—not geology or physics. God says he worked for six “days” (Hebrew *yowm*, literally “hot periods”) creating the universe, and rested on the seventh. Then, when giving the Law to the people of Israel, He reiterated the pattern, actually writing it in stone with His own finger: **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of Yahweh your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days Yahweh made the**

heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” (Exodus 20:8-11)

All the word “Sabbath” means is “intermission.” It’s from a primitive root meaning “to repose, or to desist from exertion.” The people of Israel must have appreciated getting a day off, of course, but could it be there was more to the Fourth Commandment than merely making sure these ex-slaves didn’t work too hard? I mean, it’s the lengthiest commandment of the ten; it seems to me that it’s *got* to have a deeper meaning than “Kick back and relax now and then, folks. You look like you could use a break.” The commandment doesn’t even say anything about going to church (okay, *tabernacle*), just “Rest on the seventh day.”

It’s also pretty obvious that Yahweh didn’t *need* to rest after the sixth day of creation. The Islamic scriptures, confused as always, have great fun with that concept. After giving *scores* of silly and conflicting creation accounts, most of them loosely based on the creation week concept Muhammad borrowed from the Talmud, they berate the Jewish God for getting tired—poor, weak god that he is. Allah, they insist, *never* needs to sit down and catch his breath. I must agree: figments of the imagination like Allah seldom get weary. Snoopy and Charlie Brown never get tired either.

Since God didn’t need to rest after creating the universe, there must be some *other* reason He wanted the Sabbath rest memorialized. If we poke around a little, we find this pattern of seven (more specifically, six-plus-one) popping up all over the place, leading us to the universally held conclusion that seven is the scriptural number for perfection, or completion. The creation period was described as a week (or “seven”) of days. There was a week of weeks—forty-nine days—between the feast of Firstfruits and the feast of Pentecost. (We’ll look closer at these feasts in a moment.) A week of months comprised the Jewish religious calendar, the cycle of all seven Levitical feasts. Then there was the sabbatical year, when the *land* was to lie fallow and rest after six years of farming it: **“When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to Yahweh. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 25:2-4) There was even a week of weeks of years (*also* in Leviticus 25), called Jubilee, Hebrew for “free-for-all” (just kidding; it’s a transliteration of *yobel*, which is the blast of the trumpet that signaled the beginning of the festival). Jubilee was an additional year added to the seventh sabbatical year (i.e., the fiftieth) in which bondslaves received their freedom, “leased” land reverted to its original owners, and so forth.

And there’s more. The allotted typical span of a man’s life was pegged at seven decades (Psalm 90:10) by the world’s first actuary, Moses—who himself lived to the ripe old age of 120. John wrote to seven Asian churches with

messages that were apparently prophetic of the entire future history of the Church age. And finally, in one of the most intriguing prophecies in the Bible, Daniel was told that 490 years (seventy “sevens” or septades), would wrap up the history of his people, the Jews. (Don’t get all excited; there’s a gap of indeterminate length after the 489th week.) We’ll get to that one in detail later. It’s enough to make you a raving septophile.

It shouldn’t be too surprising, then, that even before the time of Christ, Jewish sages had come to the conclusion that humanity would run a seven-millennium course. The Torah never actually *says* it, you understand, but there are hints and indications galore. According to the Talmud, the first 2000 years would be a time of chaos; the next 2000 would mark the years of Torah, when the Law of Moses would reign; the third 2000-year period would be the Messianic age (and remember, these are *Jewish* writings, not Christian), followed by 1000 years of peace, after which Messiah would renew the world. Rabbi Benjamin Blech, Professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University, states, “God created the world in six days and then completed it with a Sabbath—a day dedicated to spirituality and the soul as opposed to the secular emphasis of the weekdays. Every thousand-year period corresponds to a day of creation. Six thousand years complete the cycle of the secular. According to tradition, the seventh millennium, the one coming in the year 2240, will introduce a new Sabbath-like kind of existence different than any other mankind has ever experienced. Life will be...attuned to the holy, the sacred, the good and the Godly.”

So the Jewish scholars have predicted a millennium of peace, starting in the year A.D. 2240 (i.e., the year 6000 on the Jewish calendar). Meanwhile, Christian chronology takes its traditional cues from an Irish bishop, James Ussher, who in the early 17th century pinned down the date of creation at 6:00 P.M. on Saturday, October 22, 4004 B.C. Nobody takes Ussher seriously today. He is held up as an object of ridicule. His ideas are considered preposterous and naive. But are they? After reading about his painstaking research and scholarship, I found myself admiring and respecting the good bishop. And I came to the conclusion that he may have been right after all, sort of. Could it be that he came close to the right date—for the *wrong thing*?

Today there is a plethora of solid scientific evidence that the universe is somewhere in the neighborhood of fourteen billion years old. Further, I am convinced that the Genesis record is not at odds with this evidence. (For an intriguing explanation, read MIT graduate Gerald L. Schroeder’s *The Science of God*, Broadway Books, 1997.) But the Bible has one central theme: Yahweh’s redemption of our sinful race. Humanity’s countdown, therefore, started not at the beginning of creation, but at the *fall of Adam*. If the Jewish sages are right about God’s 7000 year cycle, and if Ussher’s starting point is even remotely correct,

then the “Seventh Millennium” will start sometime in the next couple of hundred years. Between Ussher and the Rabbis, it appears that the world as we know it should go poof sometime between 1995 and 2240.

Some interesting things pop up when you look at the millennial milestones. They all represent high and/or low points of human history—watershed eras or turning points. Keep in mind that a detailed timeline was passed down to us in scripture for a reason—God wants us to know *when* these things happened. Why?

We begin with the fall of man and the expulsion from the garden, roughly 4000 B.C. by Ussher’s reckoning. By 3000 B.C. the human race, now millions strong, was pretty much a lost cause. But a gentleman named Noah appeared about this time, and God used him and his family to rekindle the human race after the flood. So the earth was repopulated, and sometime around 2000 B.C., Abram, a.k.a. Abraham, showed up. He was called by God to be the father of the Jews, His own chosen people, through whom He would bless the rest of us. Abe believed Him, and his faith went down in legend and history.

By 1000 B.C., Abraham’s descendents numbered in the tens of millions. One of them, David, became Israel’s greatest king, a “man after God’s own heart.” Spiritually, I’m afraid, the Jewish nation went pretty much downhill from there. But a thousand years after David, one of *his* descendants, as prophesied, turned out to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Yahshua of Nazareth, son of Yahweh, born of a virgin in the Jewish royal line, gave us a very good reason to start our calendar over from the date of his birth. (Naturally, we got it wrong by a year or two.)

I was puzzled by the seeming lack of milestone material at A.D. 1000. What man, what event, marked God’s plan at this time? While I looked at tree after insignificant tree, the forest loomed before me, dark and forbidding. Yahshua had told the Church at Thyatira, **“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants...”** (Revelation 2:19-20) This admonition would ring loud and true throughout the whole of Christendom in A.D. 1000, and indeed, from the time of Charlemagne until the Reformation. This time marked the ascendance of ecclesiastical power in Europe—a unified (until the final Catholic/Orthodox split in 1054) and militant church, pervasive in its influence and aggressive in its lust for power and wealth. But it was also an age of simple faith among those who showed a depth of devotion rarely seen in later times.

The Catholic Church had at this crucial time the means to spread the love of Christ far and wide. But instead, it was seduced by the false doctrine of “that woman Jezebel.” Who? “Jezebel” was not those within the Church whose “love, service, faith, and patience” were commended by Yahshua. She was not the

common laity, who were purposely kept in the dark about the love of God and their freedom in Christ. (Freedom is *so* untidy in the hands of the masses, isn't it?) No, she's the Kings, the Archbishops, and Popes who used their offices for their own selfish gain, for money, power, and prestige—not unlike the evil Queen Jezebel of old, who, you will recall, was destined to get eaten by dogs in the street. Then as now, a politicized clergy is only marginally better (if at all) than a government totally bereft of God's influence.

In the next chapter I will discuss—briefly—the entire course of Christian history as revealed in Revelation, for it leads us right up to tomorrow's doorstep. But for now let's skip ahead to the next, the last, general milestone: A.D. 2000. What happened? *Nothing*. Anybody remember the Y2K bug? But the harbingers of a major shift in the economy of God are all around us, like—to use Yahshua's metaphor—a fig tree sprouting buds when summer is approaching. For one thing, Israel is back in the Land as a national entity. Who saw that one coming? Half a dozen specifically predicted Last Days “signs” show up in our newspapers regularly. And look at the weapons of mass destruction we invented during the cold war. Never before in history has man had the technology to bring about the kind of destruction described in the Book of Revelation—though God has always had it. So although we didn't see “the second coming of Christ” at the stroke of midnight, January 1, 2000, the stage is set for His return.

At first glance, then, it appeared that none of these millennium markers were precise, set-your-clock-by-it sort of affairs. The milestones seemed, rather, to be indistinct wrinkles in the continuum of God's interaction with man. At none of these junctures did anyone even realize what was happening until it was all over (with the possible exception of Anna and Simeon—Luke 2:21-38).

But think about it: there is no reason God's milestones should be tied to round-numbered years like 1000 or 2000 on our admittedly contrived Gregorian calendar. But if we use another series of thousand-year-apart markers, this time counting from A.D. 33, the whole subject comes into focus. Why 33? Because that's the year Yahshua of Nazareth proved He was God's Messiah by fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel 9, followed a few days later by proving He was *God Himself* by rising from the dead under His own power. 33 was a very good year for Bible prophecy, witnessing the definitive fulfillments of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, The Feast of Firstfruits, and Weeks (a.k.a. Pentecost). 33 A.D. is thus arguably the most important year in the history of the human race: the year in which our sins were atoned.

Moving backward from there to the first thousand-year increment (967 B.C.), we come to Solomon. This was the very year he began construction of the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem—the legacy of his father David, the outward manifestation of the worshipful heart of Israel’s greatest king, a man after God’s own heart. More to the point, the temple was the architectural expression of the plan of God for the redemption of all mankind. Rendering the Torah’s tabernacle “in stone” was therefore an extremely significant event. The fact that it happened exactly one thousand years before the passion of Christ is no less significant.

The farther back we go, of course, the less dogmatic we can be about the accuracy of the dates we’re dealing with. The manuscripts and translations vary more in their transmission of numbers than any other subject. There is therefore no consensus among scholars for dates earlier than about 1000 B.C. A few sources pinpoint the next milestone back (1967 B.C.) as the year Abraham’s promised son, Isaac, was conceived. While that’s certainly significant, I’d like to suggest that this calendar reckoning is off by a decade or so. That far back, it’s certainly possible. My theory (for which I have no direct evidence—SF4) is that this millennial milestone marked the almost-sacrifice of Isaac, the child of promise (Genesis 22), on the same mountain where the Temple would be built by Solomon a thousand years later, and also where the ultimate Child of Promise, Yahshua the Messiah, would be sacrificed a thousand years after that. The poetry of this scenario is hard to beat (though it’s equally hard to verify).

Moving back another thousand years (to 2967 B.C.), we find ourselves within the lifetime of Noah, in whose days Yahweh demonstrated His willingness to judge the earth while saving the faithful within it. Although dates this far back are impossible to verify, the poetry (again) is hard to ignore—it’s the sort of thing Yahweh seems to love to leave for us: hints and clues that fairly scream that His word is all true, but at the same time are accessible only to those who diligently seek them out and have eyes to recognize their significance.

This would (in theory) place the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden in 3967 B.C.—within spitting distance of Ussher’s date for Adam’s birth/creation (4004 B.C.), as well as Johannes Kepler’s (3992). If you think about it, man’s fall into sin—*not* the creation of the universe and *not* the making of Adam or Eve—is when it makes sense for Yahweh to begin reckoning the passage of time in the context of our salvation. If God has man on a seven-thousand year program—six thousand years of exercising our privilege of free will, and another thousand of enjoying the consequences of our choices—then the only logical moment to “start the clock” would have been when we first came to need redemption. The first millennial milestone, the one that made all of the others necessary, was Adam’s decision to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree—the *only thing* God had told him not to do.

And what of the milestones after the passion of Christ, after A.D. 33? As I said, I found nothing but general malaise in the Church at A.D. 1000. Yes, it had finally achieved dominance throughout Europe and Asia Minor, with virtually every ethnic group and feudal monarchy espousing it—at least nominally. But this was a far cry from the Apostolic Church. It was driven by greed and tradition, bound by ignorance and superstition. Nobody, it seems, understood the unique relationship God wanted to share with His children. Grace was considered a commodity to be bought and sold—stuffing the already-bulging coffers of the rich and powerful Church of Rome.

The year 1033 represents what has to be the low water mark of Christendom. This was the first full year of the papal reign of Benedict IX. Placed on the throne as a mere youth (some say he was as young as twelve) by his father Alberic, the young Pope was arguably the worst in a long line of bad Popes. Nigel Cawthorne, in his book *Six Lives of the Popes*, said he was a bisexual who sodomized animals and ordered several murders. He practiced witchcraft, necromancy, and Satanism and “abandoned himself to excessive immorality and the most shameful debauchery.” Benedict was said to have lived in the Lateran palace like a Turkish sultan, running what critics called the best brothel in Rome. Meanwhile, his brothers ruled the city as if they owned it, precipitating a crime wave of robbery and murder. He sold the papacy for 500 kilograms of gold to his godfather Gracian (Gregory VI) in 1045 so he could marry his beautiful cousin, the daughter of Girard de Saxo, only to seize it back again two years later. In short, this sick puppy wasn’t exactly what Paul had in mind when he described the qualifications for a leader of the Church to young Timothy. A year before Benedict’s untimely death in 1055 the Church split forever into warring fragments. So much for **“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:35)

But there’s more to the year 1033 A.D. Numbers 5:11-31 delineates an obscure and odd-sounding procedure for determining the guilt or innocence of a woman suspected by her husband of infidelity. The jealous husband was to bring her before the priest with an “offering of remembrance” of barley meal, *without* the usual olive oil (metaphorical of the Holy Spirit) or frankincense (a symbol of purity through sacrifice). The priest was to take dust from the floor of the sanctuary, place it into “holy water” in an earthen vessel, and make the woman swear her innocence. She would then drink the water. If she was guilty, her “belly would swell and her thigh would rot,” but if she were innocent, she would be blessed with children. Once we leave Numbers 5, we never see or hear this precept being referred to or invoked in scripture. So why is it there?

In 1033, a great earthquake shook Jerusalem. Result? The Spring of Gihon (the sole source of water for the old city, located a stone’s throw from the temple mount) turned bitter—a condition that persisted for forty years. This was taken as

a bad sign by the Rabbis at the Jerusalem Academy, so they left town and set up shop in Damascus. The Islamic overlords then raised taxes for all non-Muslims, driving out the last remaining Jewish farmers. But there were also ramifications for Christendom. This year saw a great surge in Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, since exactly one millennium had passed since Yahshua's passion. And Catholic pilgrims, like the departing Jews, found the waters of Gihon (now literally mingled with the dust of the sanctuary) poisonous.

Yahweh has described Himself as "a jealous God" (Exodus 20:6). Through the events of 1033, He flatly stated that *both* Israel and the Church had been unfaithful to Him. The curse of Numbers 5 had come to pass. Not only did the Jews' "belly swell and thigh rot" (so to speak), but the prophecy concerning the Church of Thyatira had come about as well: **"Indeed, I will cast her [the false prophetess "Jezebel," who had seduced the Church into idolatry] into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds."** (Revelation 2:22) Thus the beginning of the sixth millennium of fallen man, 1033, was characterized by spiritual adultery on the part of both Yahweh's "wife" Israel and Yahshua's "bride," the Church.

So every single millennial milestone since the fall of man marked an event that demonstrated Yahweh's "work" among us, highlighting the fact of our sin, its inevitable consequences, or what God was doing to save us from it. If this line of reasoning has any merit at all (mind you, it wasn't *overtly* predicted) then the last millennial milestone will occur in the year 2033. If this is correct (and I am personally convinced that it is), then that is when Yahshua will return to earth in glory to reign upon the throne of David for the seventh and final millennium. But an awful lot of scripture must be fulfilled between now and then; I'm getting just slightly ahead of myself.

During their wilderness wanderings, the Nation of Israel was instructed to observe a series of seven annual festivals or appointments, spread out over a seven month period. There's that number again: think perfection, completion. A few of these had memorial links to previous events in the national life of Israel; they were days of remembrance of God's past deliverance and provision. But prophetically, they should all be of great interest to us today. You see, the first four of these feasts have proved to be something more. These have been brought to fruition in subsequent history: they turned out to be predictions of the Messiah's role in the grand plan of God, dress rehearsals for the death, burial, and resurrection of Yahshua the Messiah (along with everything those events achieved

on our behalf) and the permanent indwelling of the Church with the Holy Spirit. These seven festivals are often erroneously referred to as “The Feasts of Israel.” Although Israel alone was instructed to celebrate the holy convocations, Yahweh plainly states that these are *His* feasts. We can therefore expect them to have ramifications that go far beyond Israel’s national interests. These appointments with Yahweh reveal the seven most significant events defining His plan for the redemption of mankind.

After reiterating the law of the Sabbath, Moses writes: **“These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is Yahweh’s Passover.”** (Leviticus 23:4-5) No Jew in Moses’ time could have missed the significance of Passover. The terrifying memory of the tenth and final plague was still very fresh in their minds. God’s Destroyer had gone throughout the land of Egypt in a single night and slain the firstborn sons in every household not marked by the blood of the lamb in accordance with God’s specific instructions. The ultimate implication of these instructions, however, was certainly lost on the original participants, for they were, in fact, prophetic of another bloody event still many years in the future.

A perfect one-year-old male lamb was to be selected by each family on the 10th day of Nisan, a month in the spring. Note: the early Jews observed a lunar calendar of approximately 354 days—12 months of about 29½ days. The sliver of the new moon signaled the beginning of each month. Of course, they added an intercalary month every three or four years (seven years out of nineteen, to be precise) to keep things in line with the sun’s cycle. Thus Nisan could fall in either March or April according to our Gregorian-calendar reckoning—beginning at the new moon closest to the vernal equinox. At the time of the exodus, Yahweh designated Nisan the first month of the Jewish calendar (see Exodus 12:2).

The lamb was kept with the family until the 14th day of Nisan. During this time, it was inevitable that a bond, a personal relationship if you will, formed between the lamb and the family. It became almost like a pet. It was therefore a painful experience for everyone, sacrificee and sacrificor, when at twilight on the 14th (literally, “between the two evenings,” i.e., between dusk and total darkness, at the very end of the Passover “day”) the lamb was publicly killed before “the whole assembly.” God designed it so that there was more to this sacrifice than merely the cost of the animal. It wasn’t just business. It was personal.

At the first Passover, Yahweh told the Hebrew families to do something that must have seemed really odd: some of the lamb’s blood was to be painted onto the entrance of each of their dwellings, on the wooden uprights and the lintel, the horizontal piece at the top. **“And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the**

plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:7, 13) The Israelites did as they were instructed, no doubt scratching their heads. There was no way for them to know they were acting out an elaborate dress rehearsal for an event that would take place fifteen hundred years later. At that time the sacrifice would again bring those who trusted God out of bondage. The blood of the sacrifice would again be smeared on a horizontal wooden beam and the vertical post that supported it—this time a Roman cross. It was still a doorway, in a manner of speaking—one that provided access to God Himself. Again the sacrificial lamb, without spot or blemish, was slain before the whole assembly. Again the children would feel the pain along with the lamb as the father offered up the sacrifice—feeling the agony of knowing that He *must* do so in order that his children might live. This time, the lamb was the Lamb of God, and the father was *The Father*, Yahweh Himself.

When God saw the blood on the wooden beams, He “knew” two things. First, a sacrifice had been made: innocent blood had been shed—atonement had been made for sin. Second, the people in the house were trusting in that blood to keep death at bay. Did you notice what God had said? “The blood shall be a sign *for you...*” He was virtually screaming that the Passover feast was prophetic of things to come.

What was lost on everyone until after the fact was the exquisite detail of the prophecy’s fulfillment. Yahshua’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem coincided with the day the paschal lamb would have been brought into the household, on the tenth day of Nisan. For the next four days He lived and walked among the people. They got to know him well. At the end of the “examination period,” Pontius Pilate pronounced, “I find no fault in Him,” declaring in effect, that the Passover Lamb was indeed without spot or blemish. Since the Jews reckoned their “days” from sundown to sundown, Yahshua and His disciples partook of the “last supper” on the same “day” He was betrayed, crucified, and laid in a borrowed tomb—the fourteenth day of Nisan, A.D. 33. The prophecy of the first feast, Passover (also known as *Pesach*, the Feast of our Freedom), had been fulfilled, literally, down to the last detail.

The next feast started on the very next day: **“And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to Yahweh; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.”** (Leviticus 23:6-8)

The memorial aspect of this festival was, of course, the beginning of the exodus from Egypt. The Jews' departure was so sudden, they didn't even have time to let their bread dough rise: **"And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, 'We shall all be dead.' So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders.... Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of Yahweh went out from the land of Egypt."** (Exodus 12:33-34, 40-41)

This event in turn was the fulfillment of an earlier prophecy, one given to Abraham: **"Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.'"** (Genesis 15:13-14) In case you were wondering about that little 30-year discrepancy, remember, the Israelites were in favor with the Egyptian government for some time after their arrival in the Land of Goshen. The affliction started only after Joseph's Pharaoh died.

To understand the then-future significance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, you need to appreciate the symbolism of leaven, or yeast. It is used throughout scripture as a metaphor for sin. Made from bran, vetch, or barley, ground fine, mixed with water and allowed to rot, the fermentation process made leaven an apt picture of the corruption in our lives—a little bit of it permeates the whole loaf, or the whole *life* as the case may be, changing it from within. So when the Israelites were instructed to remove all the yeast from their homes for seven days, it was a picture of the removal—the *complete* removal—of sin from our lives. And how did that happen? Through God's perfect sacrifice. On the fifteenth of Nisan, A.D. 33, Yahshua's body lay cold and dead in the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea.

And His spirit? Remember the Passover lamb? It was to be completely consumed—what wasn't eaten by the family was to be burned. That's a picture of judgment. On the fifteenth of Nisan, Yahshua was enduring the wrath of God for our sins, so that they would be removed from us forever. And just as the smoke of the burnt sacrifice would rise heavenward as a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, Yahshua would himself rise from the hell he endured because of our transgressions. Is it any wonder that God designated this day a holy convocation—a special Sabbath? Note that in 33, the 15th of Nisan fell on a natural Sabbath, a Saturday, as implied by the requirements of the Law.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Chag Matzah*) was a week-long celebration, ending with another Sabbath. Although the Exodus record doesn't say so, my guess (SF4) is that the original seventh day marked the Jews' little adventure at the Red Sea. Their miraculous deliverance via the parting of the waters and the

drowning of Egypt's army was the defining moment: proof that their slavery was indeed a thing of the past. There was no going back. Not after that. And the later fulfillment? By the second Sabbath, Yahshua had revealed Himself in his resurrected body no fewer than six times—proving to those disciples who were willing to accept the fact of His resurrection that *our* slavery was a thing of the past. Thomas, as it transpired, had not witnessed the risen Messiah for himself at this point. Doubting, he demanded tangible, hands-on proof; and he received it. I dare say those in the world today who can't quite bring themselves to take the living Christ at face value will also, like Thomas, receive tangible, hands-on proof of their own—whether they want it or not. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

At any rate, by the second Sabbath, the Feast of Unleavened Bread had been fulfilled—literally and in detail. There's a pattern starting to emerge here.

The next feast was called "Firstfruits," or *Bikurim*. It was described in the Torah like this: **"The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of Yahweh your God.... And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: "When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings."'"** (Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:9-14)

This was to be a time of thanksgiving for God's provision when the children of Israel entered the promised land. It was first celebrated "for real" some thirty-eight years after the law was given, right after Joshua led the people across the Jordan River into Canaan: **"Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year."** (Joshua 5:10-12)

The timing was just as God had planned it. They celebrated the Passover on the appointed day, the fourteenth of Nisan, followed by the Feast of Unleavened

Bread on the fifteenth, in which they sampled the grain of Canaan for the first time. The manna—that miraculous substance that had sustained them for forty years during their wilderness wanderings—ceased on the very next day, the sixteenth. That, of course, tended to make them very thankful for the spring barley that was just then ready to be harvested on the plains of Jericho. So on the day following the High Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the appointed day for the Feast of Firstfruits—they were to take a sheaf of grain to the priest, who would wave it before Yahweh in thankful acknowledgement of his provision for them. They were not to partake themselves until they had given thanks to God in this way, with a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a drink offering—all symbolic of Messiah’s future sacrifice, God’s ultimate provision.

Just as the manna was a temporary measure, a harbinger of God’s future provision in the land of promise, the law itself was only meant to be a picture, a prediction, of God’s coming redemption. What form would it take? The feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread had seen literal day-for-day fulfillments in the life and death of Yahshua of Nazareth. What happened, then, on the sixteenth of Nisan, A.D. 33? Well, gee, it was a pretty average day, except for that one little incident in Jerusalem....

“Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they [i.e. the Galilean women], and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!’” (Luke 24:1-6)

You don’t have to be a brilliant Bible scholar to figure this out. That’s what we’ve got Paul for: **“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”** (I Corinthians 15:20-22) *Prophecy Principle Number Twelve*: When scripture interprets scripture, we can be pretty sure we’re on solid ground. The Feast of Firstfruits predicts Yahshua’s bodily resurrection.

And what about the wave offering? There is evidence that Yahshua Himself presented it before the throne of God. One possibility is latent in the passage, **“The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after [Greek: *meta*—in association with] His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”** (Matthew 27:51-53) Could these saints have been the “wave offering” Yahshua our High Priest presented before Yahweh? The Torah had specified that this was to be done

on the day after the Sabbath: that's Yahshua's resurrection day. However, because Yahshua is called "the firstborn of the dead" (cf. Acts 26:23, Colossians 1:18), these saints can't have received their immortal bodies (something we'll explore in Chapter 8) *before* Yahshua was raised in His. And because they were said to have "appeared to many" in Jerusalem *after* Christ's resurrection, they apparently didn't physically accompany Him to heaven to be presented there as the wave offering required by the Feast of Firstfruits. If they were indeed Yahshua's wave offering, did He offer them *from the earth* in resuscitated but still-mortal bodies like that of Lazarus? That's problematical, to say the least.

I find it far more likely that *He Himself* was the wave offering. Mary Magdalene encountered the newly risen Yahshua near the tomb on resurrection day. He told her, **"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"** (John 20:17) Yet later the same day, He was seen taking a leisurely stroll with two followers on the road to Emmaus, chatting with Peter, and then meeting with all of the disciples (except Thomas). He was apparently no longer in a hurry, no longer concerned about not yet having ascended to His Father. What changed? I believe (SF2) that immediately after seeing Mary in the garden, He *did* "ascend to His Father," presenting Himself as the required wave offering, and returning to earth afterward to spend forty days instructing His disciples. Either way, the Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled, literally and on schedule, in the resurrection of Yahshua from the dead. That's three for three. We're on a roll.

The first three feasts fell on three successive days, and in the minds of the celebrants were lumped into one, commonly called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or simply Passover. (Yahweh had specified three separate feasts, not one three-day event, because of their *individual* prophetic significance.) The fourth celebration was seven weeks later, and is thus known as the Feast of Weeks, or *Shavuot*. **"And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to Yahweh."** The timing is reminiscent of Jubilee, except that we're talking about days instead of years. **"You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to Yahweh. And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to Yahweh, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the**

first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before Yahweh, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to Yahweh for the priest. And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.” (Leviticus 23:15-21)

We are now into the third month of the Jewish calendar, Sivan, which falls in May or June. Fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits (hence the Greek name *Pentecost*), on the sixth of Sivan, the people were to observe a holy convocation, a special Sabbath, with wave (grain) offerings, burnt offerings, drink offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings—there was a lot going on. The “firstfruits” reference concerns the wheat harvest, as the previous feast marked the barley harvest. Indeed, this was presented as the primary rationale for the original festival: **“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to Yahweh your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as Yahweh your God blesses you. You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.”**

(Deuteronomy 16:9-12)

We should note a few interesting wrinkles in this festival. First, it’s described as a “freewill” offering, predicated upon past—not future—blessings of God. Also, it seems to be quite democratic in its character when compared to Passover. Everybody’s welcome, not only undefiled Jews, not only family members, but the servants, the Levites (who had no territorial inheritance of their own), even the outcasts and unfortunates of society—including the *gentiles* among them. Coming the day *after* the seventh sabbath past the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost is thereby *designed* to fall on Sunday (which it did in 33). This is the only feast of the seven where leavened bread is allowed, indicating a come-as-you-are state of mind: yes, there’s a peace offering; yes, there’s a sin offering, but there’s also openness, forgiveness, rejoicing, and worship.

Is all this ringing any bells? It should. It describes the Church—the *Ekklesia*—or at least what it’s supposed to be. Look around you. If you find Christianity a closed, judgmental, dour and introspective experience, something’s *wrong*. God didn’t design it that way. Perhaps the problem is that you have left “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” Perhaps the problem is that you have forgotten that you were once a slave.

I’m not extrapolating here; I’m just getting a little ahead of myself. The fulfillment of the prophecy of the Feast of Weeks is found in the Book of Acts,

where the feast's common name, Pentecost, is a dead giveaway: **"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.... Then those who gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."** (Acts 2:1-4, 41-47)

Luke here has just related the birth of the Church. Apparently, nobody saw it coming, and nobody figured it would continue for as long as it has—almost two thousand years now. Before the crucifixion *and* after the resurrection, the disciples all thought Yahshua would set up His earthly kingdom immediately—certainly within their own lifetimes. Peter, who had pointed out to Yahshua that he and the others had left everything to follow Him, expected to be *somebody* in the kingdom. But the Master gently popped his bubble, revealing to him exactly what kind of gruesome death he would suffer. The message, for Peter and the rest of us, was "Occupy till I come... Feed my sheep."

At first, it seems ironic that of the seven "Jewish" feasts, the middle one would foreshadow a long hiatus for God's involvement with the nation of Israel. On the other hand, "the Way," as it was called, was considered a *Jewish* sect for over a century. Christians today should thankfully recognize their Jewish legacy. God has not abandoned Israel in favor of the Church, as has been taught by some well-meaning but misinformed theologians. The Artist has merely set aside a half-finished painting for a while so He can work on a new canvas. He'll finish his masterpiece when He's good and ready. Or perhaps a better metaphor would be that of a Playwright who has relegated one of his main characters to the wings in act two, knowing that He intends to bring her back in and tie up all the loose ends in act three. The miraculous history of the Jewish people in the twentieth century is proof to anyone with his eyes open that God is still interested in them. The feast of Pentecost—and indeed, all four Levitical celebrations we have looked at so far—make it clear that Israel is the chosen vehicle for unveiling His grand plan. They are the apple of God's eye, but they aren't the only fruit in His basket.

That makes four out of four feasts (or *miqra'ey*, holy convocations) that are obviously prophetic of important events in the unfolding plan of Yahweh. Each of the four speaks poignantly of the Messiah's role in the salvation of mankind, with detail after detail pointing directly and unambiguously toward Yahshua the Anointed One. And each of them was fulfilled on *the very day* of its mandated celebration. (That fact alone makes the odds against their coincidental fulfillment over sixteen billion to one.) As interesting as that is, it becomes downright earth-shaking when you realize that there are still three more annual convocations yet to be fulfilled. These all took place in the autumn, in Tishri, the seventh (and final) month of the Jewish religious calendar, which falls in September or October. As with the first four, each of them predicts a momentous event in Yahweh's Grand Plan. And more to the point, they will complete the picture Yahweh is painting—they will be the cue that begins the final act of His play.

The fifth feast is called the feast of Trumpets, or *Yom Teruah*. It was celebrated on the first day of Tishri. It's often erroneously referred to as the "Jewish New Year," *Rosh Hashanah* ("Head of the Year") because that date has begun their civil calendar from the time of the Babylonian captivity, even though Yahweh placed the new year in the spring and never changed his mind. On the tenth of Tishri came *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement—seen as the most sacred day of the year. And five days later the Jewish religious calendar concluded with *Succoth*, the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths). We'll discuss what each of these days holds in store for our future when we reach the appropriate points in our chronological study. Based on the first four feasts, I expect critically significant events in the plan of God to occur on the very days specified in the Torah.

The spring feasts have all come to pass; the fall feasts are yet to come. It's easy to see that God has given us these signs to teach us something. What is it? So far, we have learned that the death, burial, and resurrection of his Messiah were to be followed by a parenthesis—the age of the Church. But the preponderance of prophecy leads us to the inescapable conclusion that Israel will once again be the focus of God's attention at the end of the age. They have waited in the wings for nineteen hundred years. The last half century has seen them walk back onto the stage, but they haven't yet spoken their lines. What does the Great Playwright have in store for them—and for us?

Chapter 4

The Great Parenthesis

I'm pretty sure God didn't provide Adam with a big ol' coffee table King James Bible on his way out of the Garden of Eden, saying, "Here, kid. Read this. I've put the good parts in red. There will be a quiz." The unfolding of His plan was a bit more leisurely: forty writers or so, over a period of fifteen hundred years, wrote as they were directed by Yahweh's Spirit, using as source material their own eyewitness experiences (including their dreams and visions), first-hand historical accounts, older written documents, and in Moses' case, maybe even oral traditions.

It follows that none of the Biblical writers knew *all* of what the Author wanted to say to us. Even John, the last of them, probably didn't have access to, or knowledge of, everything comprising our present Bible. And much of what we consider central doctrines of our faith were not tied up with a ribbon and delivered to us on a silver platter, but were rather "arrived at" over the years by godly men who found that a careful reading of God's Word allowed no other conclusion. The nature of Messiah, for example, was not clearly understood at the time of His first advent, though in retrospect the clues are abundant indeed. The manifestation of Yahweh as a human being, and then as a Spirit who dwelled *within* His believers, proved to be an equally hard concept for us to get a handle on. And eschatology was a closed book to post-Apostolic-age Christians until the subject started attracting renewed attention in the mid-nineteenth century. Luther himself was so puzzled by the book of Revelation, he is said to have expressed reservations about its very canonicity, remarking, "Even if it were a blessed thing to believe what is contained in it, no man knows what that is."

We need to realize that God doesn't have a problem with any of this. He is quite aware that none of us grasps more than a fraction of what He has for us. Like a father giving good things to his children, God knows that timing is everything. He won't give a T-bone steak to an infant or a high-powered sports car to a twelve year old. But He "makes all things beautiful in His time." Detailed knowledge of His plan for the end of the age may not have done Clement of Rome or Martin Luther much practical good. As the day approaches, however, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes—and our hearts—to the truths that have been there all along. God makes sure we'll see it when we need it—if we're looking for it.

This gradual unfolding of scriptural awareness is the essence of a doctrine that itself was recognized relatively recently. "Dispensationalism" is a six-dollar word describing an obvious state of affairs we find in scripture: God deals differently with people in different ages, or *dispensations*, according to the revelation He has

given them. (Salvation, however, is always attained in exactly the same way—by grace through faith in God’s provision.) Understanding these seven dispensations (there’s that number again) is essential to comprehending God’s plan for the future. It should be noted that this doctrine is widely accepted today in evangelical circles. Those who reject it also tend to reject a literal interpretation of prophecy, preferring a “spiritualized” or allegorical meaning that denies hundreds of clear and unambiguous promises to Israel. The Church, they insist, has become “spiritual Israel,” inheriting those promises. Of course, if they’ve inherited the promises, they must also have assumed the responsibilities, such as performing the letter and spirit of the Law of Moses, keeping the Sabbath and the seven Appointments, although they conveniently manage to forget that part.

I respectfully disagree with this harebrained theory. God, in my experience, knows exactly what He’s doing, comprehends the difference between Israel and the Church, and has made separate promises (and given separate missions) to each. And, as I noted earlier, He delights in doing the impossible. (It drives the intellectuals nuts.) Each dispensation grows out of, and builds upon, the one that precedes it. In a nutshell, the seven are as follows:

Innocence. In the Garden of Eden, man was given perfect freedom, being held responsible to demonstrate his trust of God by a single act of obedience.

Conscience. Having failed the test, man was held morally responsible to do what he knew to be right, according to the light God had planted within him.

Government. Man failed to heed his conscience, so God wiped the slate clean with the flood of Noah and started over. He then defined, in the simplest of terms, the relationships and responsibilities that were to exist between men from that time forward.

Promise. God next focused upon one man, Abraham, through whom He determined to bless all the nations of the earth. Abraham believed God’s unilateral promise and that belief—not what he *did*, but what he *believed*—was seen by God as righteousness.

Law. Man was now shown the futility of a system of doing good works as a basis for his salvation. Sacrifices and rituals were instituted, but not for their own sake. They were there to point the way to the coming Savior.

Grace. After the resurrection of Yahshua, man could look back to a risen Christ for salvation, and forward to a reigning Messiah for hope. We are presently almost two thousand years into this dispensation—the Church age.

Kingdom. Man will live under the direct rule of the Messiah for a thousand years in a perfect environment. Unlike previous dispensations, sin will be met with

direct and immediate judgment, for Yahshua will rule personally “with a rod [or scepter] of iron.”

The close of the Kingdom dispensation will mark the end of the beginning, ushering in a new heaven and new earth, an eternal state that, frankly, we haven’t been told much about in scripture. What little we do know will be discussed in due course. For now, we need to determine where (or *when*) we are in God’s plan, so we can heed the admonitions and instructions He has provided for us who are living at this specific point in time.

We are now approaching the end of the sixth dispensation—the age of Grace—the dispensation of the Church, or more properly, the *Ekklesia*, the called-out assembly of believers. I’ll tell you why I think so in a moment. (Again, understand that grace—Yahweh’s unmerited favor toward us—has been our only means of redemption since the fall in the Garden. But only in the present age has the *mechanism* of grace—the sacrifice of Yahshua—been revealed.) The Church as such was not blatantly predicted in the Old Testament; Paul called it a “mystery,” i.e., something not previously revealed. The offer of the Kingdom was made to Israel at Christ’s first advent, and had they accepted Him, there theoretically would have been no need for a separate body of believers to occupy the time between his ascension and his return. But God, being omniscient, knew that His Son would be rejected, and told us so through His prophets. They presented the suffering Savior and the reigning Messiah side by side. It must have been terribly confusing to students of scripture before Yahshua’s time.

There were hints about the Church, however. Isaiah saw that when God opened the door, we gentiles would stumble through it: **“I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by My name.”** (Isaiah 65:1) Likewise, Moses was given a glimpse of a people who would make the idolatrous Israelites green with envy. With no miraculous national identity like the Jews had, and even without the superior intelligence it would take to figure out this “God thing” on their own, these people—these upstarts—would claim the love and attention of *their* God! *Horrors!* **“They [Israel] have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; they have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation.”** (Deuteronomy 32:21) That’s us Christians, I’m afraid.

I think Yahshua was describing Israel’s jealous reaction to the Church in the parable of the prodigal son, which ends with these words: **“And [the servant] said to**

[the older brother, symbolic of Israel], **'Your brother [metaphorically, the Church] has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'** But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, **'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time [well, that wasn't completely true, was it?]; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'** And he said to him, **'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'**" (Luke 15:27-32) The Jews were well aware of their privileged ancestral and historical status. They were descendents of Abraham and custodians of the Law of Moses, recipients of the covenant promises of Yahweh, and they were proud of it. How could these people, these *sinner*s—repentant or not—presume to have a relationship with *their* God? No, the Church was a big surprise to Israel.

It didn't have to be. It wasn't as if the Jews hadn't been invited to the party. They had the promises; they had the prophecies. Yahshua predicted what they'd do in this parable: **"A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses... So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind [i.e., the repentant Jewish believers].' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them [i.e., the gentiles] to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'**" (Luke 14:16-24)

Those who had been invited—the Jewish nation—had rejected God's gracious invitation. But ten days after Yahshua ascended back to heaven, the Day of Pentecost brought with it a whole new paradigm: the Spirit of God permanently indwelling and empowering individual believers, making us "the body of Christ." Sure, there had been isolated and temporary instances of the Spirit's anointing in years past, but never had it happened to an entire class of people, and seldom for very long. David's anguished plea in Psalm 51, **"Take not your Holy Spirit from me,"** was a real concern; he had seen that very thing happen to King Saul, and it wasn't pretty. But now, on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit—the Comforter—had fallen upon all the disciples, just as Yahshua had predicted.

John recorded how Yahshua promised to send His Spirit to dwell within them as a guarantee of His second coming, just as His resurrection was a guarantee of our eternal life: **"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see**

Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.’ Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’” (John 14:19-23) Note that Yahshua is describing the Holy Spirit not as a third “person” of the trinity, as folks often mistakenly picture Him today, but as the manifestation of both the Father and the Son who will live within us. There are not three Gods—there is only One.

Pentecost, the first instance of God “making His home” with man, was a hint, a foretaste, of what the Prophet Joel had seen coming: **“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”** (Joel 2:28-29; cf. Acts 2:17-21)

Yahshua had already given His disciples their marching orders: **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:18-20) Now that His Holy Spirit had come upon them, there was nothing holding them back. Yahweh was no longer to be manifested as Yahshua living among them; now He was the Spirit living *within* them. From that moment on, He would *always* be within them.

From its very beginning, the Church knew it was temporary—that whatever it did was done in the expectation of Yahshua’s imminent return. As Paul said, **“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.... And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.... Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”** (Philippians 1:6, 9-10, 2:14-16) The “day of Christ” was always in view—the carrot at the end of our stick. It was what drove Paul to preach the good news with such enthusiasm: **“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”** (I Thessalonians 2:19-20)

And what would this dispensation be like? Yahshua had told them that as well. It wasn’t what you’d expect from the Prince of Peace, but that title would

apply to another age, another advent. As for now, He said, **“I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”** (Luke 12:49-53) Why is it like that? Because now, in the present dispensation, the defining mark of God’s people is not so much what you do, but why you do it; it’s not who you are, but *whose* you are.

The Church age has been going on so long, some have come to believe that this is *it*; there is no more—that God’s promises to Israel have been transferred to us. This view sees the Church marching triumphantly ever forward, gaining converts and civilizing nations until the whole world is under Christ’s (i.e., *our*) control. Granted, it was easier to hold this position in the nineteenth century, before we fought two world wars and scores of lesser skirmishes, before a hundred million souls were swallowed up in genocidal rage, before 55 million unborn children were murdered in the name of “choice” in a nation that fancies itself to be holding the world’s high moral ground. It was easier to take this position before man invented the means to destroy all life on this fragile planet, or before Israel rose from the ashes of two millennia of persecution and exile to be reborn as a sovereign nation. No, the triumphant Church is not so easy to believe in any more.

Besides, to take this position, nowadays called “replacement theology,” you have to ignore, deny, or explain away huge chunks of divine writ. It becomes necessary to build an elaborate system of substitute realities to deal with the obvious discrepancies. But the minute you do this, the minute you start trimming your jigsaw puzzle pieces to fit your own preconceptions, *nothing* fits anymore. And remember, this is a ten-thousand-piece puzzle. Call me lazy, but I find it far easier to try to place God’s pieces into the picture the way I found them, even if they don’t make much sense to me at first glance.

The Church is simply the Church, not Israel’s ambitious understudy. One of the primary passages leading me to this conclusion is in Revelation’s early chapters, where the risen Christ directs John to write open letters addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, in today’s western Turkey. These

messages can and should be applied in three different ways, one of which is of particular interest in our current study.

First, there is the obvious historical context. Seven actual churches, located within a relatively short distance of each other, displayed seven different spiritual profiles. Most of them received commendation as well as condemnation, a pat on the head followed by a swift kick in the derrière. But two were not rebuked at all, and one—the last—received no praise of any kind—only an impassioned plea to repent.

Second, there are important lessons here for every local assembly, and indeed every individual Christian throughout the church age, for these conditions can and do coexist side by side. We all need to examine our lives in the light of these letters, to assess whether *we* are being commended or chastised, and adjust our actions accordingly. Within these pages are mercy, encouragement, guidance, calls for repentance, and warnings of dire consequences if we ignore what God has to say. Each of these messages contains the admonition, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** That’s all of us. We dare not be dishonest with ourselves. There is too much at stake.

And third, there is a definite prophetic element to this passage. Each of these Asian churches represents a period of Church history. They are just general trends, of course. The eras overlap and coexist in places, but as time goes on the pattern becomes more and more obvious. And as we examine the history of Christianity in light of these letters, we begin to realize that we are very near the end of the age.

Geographically, the churches formed a rough oval a little over a hundred miles in length. Patmos, the island where John was exiled when he received the vision, was just off the coast near the first city on the list, Ephesus. John was told: **“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.’”** (Revelation 2:1-7)

The church at Ephesus represents the Apostolic age, that in which John himself lived. They are commended for their tireless works and for their discernment—their unwillingness to compromise with or tolerate evil. This is

emphasized by the mention of their hatred for the deeds of the Nicolaitans—followers of Nicolas of Antioch, who sought to work out a compromise between Christian morality and the licentious pagan lifestyle of the world they lived in. His philosophy was the antithesis of “Be holy, for I am holy.” Interestingly, the movement is also associated with the promotion of a clerical hierarchy, something that later proved to be the bane of Christendom.

The only problem in Ephesus was that they had “left their first love.” Not “lost” it, but “*left*” it. These folks had the right doctrine and the right work ethic, but they had forgotten why it mattered. Without the love of Christ, a program of good works is not only unsustainable, it’s pointless. What did Isaiah say? “All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.”

About thirty-five miles up the coast was Smyrna, known today as Izmir. **“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until 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.’”** (Revelation 2:8-11)

Smyrna represents the Church under persecution. Funny how a little persecution helps you keep your priorities straight: Yahshua has nothing but commendation and encouragement for these people. But there was nothing “little” about the deprivations these folks suffered. They had been reduced to utter beggary by a policy of systematic harassment, exclusion from the economic life of their community. No trade guild would endorse them; their businesses were boycotted, or worse, were looted and burned by mobs stirred to irrational hatred by the large local Jewish population. How ironic it is that today the only comparison example we can think of to adequately describe the sufferings these Christians endured is the European Jews under Hitler’s domination.

Yahshua was talking to the Church at Smyrna when he offered the following bit of encouragement to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. **“But before all these things [i.e., the signs of the end of the age], they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will**

answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls.” (Luke 21:12-19) You'd have to be either nuts or God Himself to say, “They'll kill you, but you're going to be just fine.” Only One who had power over death itself could deliver on such an outlandish claim. Five days later, Yahshua proved He did.

It's interesting that Yahshua says, “You are rich.” He apparently counts money the same way he reckons time, i.e., *not like we do*. In His economy, our wealth or lack of it is inconsequential, no matter how much, or how little, we have. Our Father owns the entire universe. Do Donald Trump's children worry about the rising cost of bus fare? Smyrna's real wealth had nothing to do with money, but was the abundance of God's Spirit—something they had in spades. It was wealth they could never lose.

He gave Smyrna no reprimand, but He did warn them of “ten days” of tribulation. In the end the early Church suffered precisely that—*ten* intense periods of persecution under Rome, beginning in the reign of Nero (A.D. 54-68) and lasting through that of Diocletian, 230 years later. Somehow, knowing it's coming, knowing there's an end to it, can help us cope with adversity. I think it's the same reason God has given us so much information about the coming events. It's called hope.

The church at Smyrna is still going strong. Between Islam and Communism, between secular humanism and the false religions of man, there's plenty of overt persecution to go around. But in this world, subtle hatred of God and his people is ubiquitous. As Paul said, **“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”** (II Timothy 3:12-13)

Forty-five miles due north of Smyrna is Pergamos, today the village of Bergama. Christ instructed John, **“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also**

have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” (Revelation 2:12-17)

The last great persecution, that of Diocletian, took place in 284, and it was almost as if Satan grumbled to himself, “This ain’t workin’.” Under pressure, the Church had *not* died out; it had only grown stronger. So, he figured, if the gates of hell couldn’t prevail against it, maybe the gates of *success* would. Less than thirty years later Constantine “converted” to Christianity, and, as Roman emperors were wont to do, he issued an edict that made all of the Roman world a “Christian” domain.

The Christians came out of hiding, but the celebration in the catacombs was short lived. There were a few strings attached, it transpired, and those strings were promptly used to bind and gag the true Church. Constantine, you see, had no intention of actually letting Yahshua rule *him*—he was the emperor of Rome, for cryin’ out loud. Besides, you couldn’t run a tidy empire if you kept upsetting all the apple carts. So paganism would have to be accommodated. *What would it hurt if we dressed up the old holidays in new, Christianized costumes? That old pagan winter solstice festival, Saturnalia? Let’s rename it Christmas! We’ll keep the tree, the yule log, and the mistletoe, of course; we’ll just throw in the bit about—what was the kid’s name again? And our Babylonian-derived fertility bash in the spring, Ishtar, coincides with Passover and the resurrection anyway; we’ll just blend it with the new state religion; we won’t even bother changing the name. All that Jewish stuff though—that’ll have to go. We’ll make it illegal to rest and worship God on the Sabbath. Sun-Day will be much more comfortable for all us former followers of Mithras.*

There was something to be said, of course, for not being the target of a mini-holocaust every couple of decades. But Satan had found Christianity’s Achilles heel. Pergamos had embraced the very thing Yahshua had commended the church at Ephesus for resisting: the Nicolaitan heresy, a.k.a. the doctrine of Balaam—compromise. After Constantine’s time, the Church swallowed it whole. By accommodating pagan rites into the liturgy of the Church, a *religion* was born—it was no longer simply a personal relationship with a loving God. The good works remained a priority, out of habit or momentum or plain old self-willed determination. But the rationale was on its way out. Love was being replaced with duty. Relationship was being replaced by religion.

And ecclesiastical organization? If you read Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, you’ll see simplicity of church order. Pastors and elders were to be men of integrity and piety, good husbands and fathers, sober minded, and service

oriented. Power, wealth, and prestige were not part of the formula. But the institution that grew out of Constantine's edict brought with it a top-heavy hierarchy of priests, bishops, cardinals and popes—a corrupt bureaucracy that was never God's intention for the Church. It all brings to mind one of the parables that Yahshua used to illustrate this dispensation: **"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."** (Matthew 13:31-32) Mustard plants aren't supposed to grow into trees. As long as the Church remained a humble shrub, the birds (a scriptural metaphor for the consequences of our choices—especially evil) had no interest in building nests there.

Still, growing a tree is a time-consuming process; these changes didn't take place all at once. The church (the laity at least) during this era could still be said to be holding fast to the name of Yahshua, not denying His faith. But how long could this last?

A few miles southeast of Pergamos is Thyatira, the next church on John's mailing list. He was told, **"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.'**" In the Greek, this is as much commiseration as it is commendation. As the prophetic fulfillment unfolded, the "works" were compelled, the "love" was enforced, and the "service" was in actuality servitude. Yahshua knows our condition—and our motives. **"Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—"He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels"— as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** (Revelation 2:18-29)

Once the leaven of compromise had been introduced, it was only a matter of time before the whole loaf of Christian religiosity grew too big for its baking pan. As Yahshua put it in His parable, **“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”** (Matthew 13:33) The “three measures” may ultimately represent the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant branches of Christendom. (Or perhaps they represent the church, Israel, and the Millennial mortals.) Any way you slice it, though, we are all tarred with the same brush: compromise with the world.

Thyatira represents the Church at the height of its political power. The picture is not a pretty one, and yet it’s not all negative. The Church at this stage of history was, at least among the laity (the part God is particularly interested in) relatively unified. Being one Church in the catholic (that is, universal) sense was a good thing, though the glue that held the Church together should have been unfeigned love, not political pressure. But God’s agenda is clear: **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion. For there Yahweh commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.”** (Psalm 133) The piety and devotion of the common worshippers had not yet been totally quenched by their leaders’ greed and arrogance, and the open squabbles of the Reformation had not yet split the Church into warring camps. (The Roman and Orthodox branches were divided, in the midst of this period, more upon geographical lines, liturgical nitpicking, and petty personality conflicts than on doctrinal issues. When the ambitious patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Caerularius, tried to force Greek rites on the Latin churches in the East, he ran afoul of the powerful Pope Leo IX. Leo’s legates excommunicated the patriarch on July 16, 1054, whereupon he revolted, permanently splitting the Church in two.)

Remarkably, even the Papacy’s purposeful repression of the scriptures and regurgitated paganism had not been able to completely snuff out the love of Christ among the laity. A little light was enough to keep them from falling. Here Yahshua recognizes and commends their “works, love, service, faith, and patience.” Though illustrious names from the Venerable Bede to John Milton and John Wycliffe dot the landscape of this period, most of the saints in this time are unknown and unsung. Yahshua, however, sees their good works and notes that they were actually growing, in spite of their problems.

Their problems, though, were formidable. Christ focused on this woman, “Jezebel,” whose influence promoted compromise with the world. In the local sense, the description seems to indicate she was a proponent of tolerance for Thyatira’s pagan community—sexual immorality was part and parcel of pagan worship, as was eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. In the long view,

sexual immorality was a symbol of unfaithfulness to God, i.e., idolatry. The whole ministry of the prophet Hosea speaks of this very thing, in his case in reference to Judah's spiritual adultery. Different object, same metaphor. Thyatira, then, pictured a church that was clearly ill, though not yet dead. Would it recover?

Sardis was in even worse shape. We aren't given too many details in this passage as to the specific nature of their problem, but as a church, they were about as far gone as you could get and still be called part of the body of Christ.

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Revelation 3:1-6)

It must have *killed* John to pen this indictment. He himself had planted the church at Sardis some years before, and they still had a reputation for good works and sound doctrine, but now they were pronounced "*dead*." What had happened? They didn't suffer from great persecution, like the church at Smyrna, nor were they plagued (that we know of, anyway) with internal heresy like their neighbors, Thyatira, Pergamos, and Ephesus.

Sardis was the capital of the province of Lydia. It was a wealthy city; it had been the home of King Croesus, whose name was synonymous with big bucks. (There are a score of Islamic hadiths that express Muhammad's covetous heart toward the wealth of the legendary Croesus, though he may have been referring to a rich Persian king with a similar name.) With wealth often comes pride—a haughty spirit—which, as Solomon reminds us, comes before destruction. And what is pride? In the end, it's nothing more or less than a lack of love.

Placing Sardis in the context of history points this out in some shocking and unexpected ways. Though some would disagree, I believe Sardis represents the state of the Church at the time of the Reformation. The Catholic monolith had succumbed to the weight of its own pride and idolatry by this time, but the same small, faithful remnant in its ranks that had always been there was still accounted

“worthy” to bear the name “Christian.” Also worthy were the handful of courageous reformers who did us all an invaluable service by digging Biblical truth out of the rubble of a thousand years of suppression and neglect. But Yahshua isn’t talking about Catholics and Protestants here. He’s not taking sides between them. He’s pleading with *His Church*—His called-out assembly of believers—to be watchful, to wake up.

If John had seen it all clearly, he would have surely cringed at what he saw unfolding. After all, it was he who had written: **“He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.... Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.... If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”** (I John 2:10-11, 4:7-8, 20-21) Love his *brother*? The Reformation brought with it centuries of fratricide. It did not precipitate unity and repentance, but pride, hatred and war.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting that we would have been better off without the Reformation. But the Church—the whole body of Christ—handled it badly from the very beginning. After Peter Waldo tried in 1170 to return to the simplicity of the Apostolic church and set aside the top-heavy liturgy of the Roman system, Pope Innocent III instituted (in 1209) a purge of the Waldensians, slaughtering millions of these and other “heretics.” When John Wycliffe translated the Bible into common English in 1383—the linguistic foundation of virtually every English translation to this very day—he so incensed the Roman hierarchy—whose lust for power had driven them to suppress it—that, though they couldn’t touch him during his lifetime, they dug up his bones and publicly desecrated them after his death. Girolamo Savonarola spoke out against the papal practice of selling indulgences, so they hanged him and burned his body. Killing him once was presumably not enough.

But when the Protestant Reformers gained a foothold in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, they did no better (well, maybe a little bit). Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and their followers were not above going to war—literally—to increase the scope of their influence. Some of the reformers (Luther, as a notable example) were rabidly anti-Semitic. Politics and Protestantism were strange but frequent bedfellows. The Church of England, for example, was founded not on doctrinal issues, but on the insatiable desire of King Henry VIII for a male heir—no matter how many wives he had to divorce or decapitate to get one. This was all a long, long way from **“...Love one another; as I [Yahshua] have loved you... also love**

one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

The fallout from the Reformation—*outside* the areas where the Catholic church still held sway—was not a huge, united group of believers, alive, Christ centered and Spirit filled. It was, rather, a splintered hodgepodge of fiercely independent religious organizations, each suspicious and resentful of the others, quick to call anyone a heretic who did not agree with them in every nuance of doctrine and practice. They rarely supported, sheltered, encouraged, or prayed for each other. They certainly did not love one another as Christ had loved them. Along with the Catholicism they had rightly abandoned, they were the church at Sardis: as good as dead.

The Reformation opened a door, however. The advent of the printing press and the will to use it to put the Word of God into the hands of the masses precipitated a revolution in spiritual awareness that’s still going on to this day. Out of Sardis, a dying fire with only a few live coals left smoldering among the ashes, would come the last two churches on John’s mailing list. One used the fresh air breathed upon it by the Reformation to rekindle the flame of Christianity; the other took the cold, dead coals of their religion and encrusted them with gold and jewels—impressive to look at perhaps, but of no practical use to anyone. These two churches both characterize the present era; today they live side by side, along with scattered remnants of previously addressed assemblies. This arrangement will continue until the end of the church age.

What does God see when he looks at us? Yahshua put it this way: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares [weeds that look like wheat] also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.”** (Matthew 13:24-30) There’s an eschatological element to this, and I’ll address it in due time. But for now, suffice it to say that the Church has both “wheat” and “weeds,” i.e., real Christians and look-alike forgeries, growing together within it.

The sixth church, Philadelphia, is apparently the “wheat.” It is one of only two in John’s list that received no condemnation at all from Yahshua: **“To the angel of**

the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not [because they do not worship Yahweh], but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Revelation 3:7-13)

I don't know about you, but the hair on the back of my neck stands up when I read those words. If any Christian could wish to be somewhere—spiritually, doctrinally, or prophetically—this is it. Yahshua has no words of rebuke for these folks, none at all. The only other church in the list with that distinction was Smyrna, and *they* were getting killed in the streets for their faith—like I said, there's nothing like persecution to help you sort out what you really believe. But Philadelphia had not been *driven* to this place of blessing; they had sought it out; they had come here through simple faith and obedience.

Yahshua says, "I know your works." That usually brings to mind things like feeding the poor, healing the sick, preaching the gospel to those in darkness, and basically living like civilized human beings. And yes, the church at Philadelphia was doing—and is still doing—all those things. But I don't think that's what He meant, not all of it, anyway. Yahshua was once asked to define "the work of God." The answer was surprising, especially for those who were looking for some kind of laundry list of do's and don'ts like the Ten Commandments. He said, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.**" (John 6:29) That is precisely what the Philadelphians were doing: trusting Yahshua. They had "kept His Word" (and shown their love for it by translating it into virtually every language on the face of the earth—and then printing billions of copies). They had "not denied his name." And they had "kept His commandment to persevere"—to patiently endure the testing of their faith in the face of both hostility and apathy.

There are two other remarkable things about this message to the church at Philadelphia, and I believe they're related. The first is the odd statement about the "synagogue of Satan," i.e., the Jews in unbelief (also referred to in the letter to Smyrna). At the risk of getting ahead of myself, it is clear from many scriptures that Israel will at some future point turn—as a people—in repentance to God,

recognizing Yahshua the Christ as their Messiah. Today, about half of the world's Jews live in Israel, a percentage that I have reason to believe will increase as the end approaches. Having been there recently, I can assure you of two things. As a people, they are hungry for the truth; they're curious, cautious, and confused, all at the same time. And they seem to intuitively recognize that Bible-believing Christians are their only real ally in the world. Remarkably, American Evangelicals are far more pro-Israel politically than American Jews are! Today, the world's Jews as a group comprise the "synagogue of Satan," regarding the Ekklesia to be a mere heretical spin off of Judaism. (Those few Jews who recognize Yahshua as their Messiah, of course, are actually part of the Church, just as they were in the Apostolic age.)

Hold that thought for a moment and consider verse 10: **"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."** The "hour of trial" is described elsewhere as "the Tribulation" or the "time of Jacob's trouble." We'll study it in detail when our chronological survey gets to it. But notice for now that the church of Philadelphia will be "kept from" (Greek *ek*, meaning "out of") this world-wide testing period. They won't have to endure this trial because they have *already* kept Christ's command to persevere.

Now, back to Israel. What will they do and think when their only earthly ally is suddenly removed from the scene (we'll get to how *that* works in Chapter 8), leaving them alone in the world, friendless? What have they always done in the past? Repent? Turn back to God? If Old Testament history is any indication, that's exactly what they'll do—but not until the situation has become hopeless, when they've exhausted every other recourse, when they've been driven to their knees.

But how will they know God? How will they recognize their true Messiah? Their own religious leaders—the rabbis of the "synagogue of Satan"—have been misleading them for the last two thousand years. It will be through the latent testimony of the Church of Philadelphia—who themselves will have been removed from the scene by that time, kept out of the hour of trial. The Jews will remember what we said, what we wrote, and what we did, and they will return to their own scriptures with opened eyes. Then, and only then, will they realize that our Messiah is their Messiah. They will finally know how much Yahshua loved us—*loves* us—and they will sit at our feet and worship Him.

If *we* were writing the story, the list would have ended there. It did not. There is one church left, that of Laodicea, located about sixty miles due east of Ephesus, the last in the chain of churches running southeast from Pergamos. Yahshua didn't have a single good thing to say to these folks. They are the parable's tares, the weeds, living among the wheat at the close of the church age, looking good to the uninformed world, but producing no grain at all.

In a way, it's sad to think that anything that Yahshua called part of the Church could be left on earth after Philadelphia is gone. If the "true" Church has been "kept from the hour of trial," what will become of the "false" Church that's left behind? There is only one possible answer: they will go through it—they will be tested like gold in a crucible. As individuals, some will be purified through the process of persecution, and some will be revealed for the worthless dross they are.

I need to make something clear here, at the outset, even though we're getting way ahead of our timeline. I'm not suggesting that some "worthy" Christians will escape the hour of trial, while other, "unworthy" Christians—carnal, backslidden, or misinformed—will be tested and purified in the fires of judgment. This idea, known as the "partial rapture theory" has no scriptural basis, and worse, places works on the same pedestal as grace as a means of salvation. That's wrong. As we shall see, the "church" at Laodicea will have no real believers within it when Philadelphia is "kept out of" the Tribulation (in an event known as the "rapture"). Because of God's longsuffering grace, Laodicea *will* experience the salvation of Yahshua—but too late to keep them out of the hour of trial.

When I was a kid, my family attended a Bible-believing local assembly of a major American denomination. I distinctly remember being taught that not only if you died without Christ but also if the Church was "called home," leaving you behind in unbelief, there was no hope for you. The bottom line: you'd better come forward and "get saved" before we got through singing all seven verses of "Just As I Am," or you were toast. They were on the right track, I suppose; but they couldn't remotely see how long the track was. Since then I've come to be more closely acquainted with the depth of God's mercy. I have personally come to know the God of second chances. And third, and fourth.... After studying what Yahshua said to the church at Laodicea, I am amazed at how longsuffering He really is.

The message to Laodicea teaches us just how deep the river of God's grace runs: **"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in**

the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:14-22)

As He had said to the church at Philadelphia, Yahshua repeats, “I know your works.” But this time it’s an indictment, for the works they are doing are done with a “lukewarm” spirit that Christ finds disgusting. There is none of the love, fire, passion, faith, or sense of urgency that animated their brothers to the northwest. It is tempting to conclude that Laodicean wealth was the problem; it was (and is) certainly a factor. But wealth isn’t sin, though it can foster an attitude of arrogant self-sufficiency (and *that is*). Yahshua isn’t asking them to feign enthusiasm here; He’s pleading with them to recognize Him as the source of true riches.

At this point it might be helpful to compare historical Laodicea and Philadelphia a bit more closely. Philadelphia was a blue-collar kind of place; it was not a wealthy community, though it wasn’t dirt poor like the believers at Smyrna either. But Laodicea was like Beverly Hills or Manhattan. The city was renowned for three things. It was the principal banking center for the region of Phrygia and was thus known for its wealth. It was a center of medical knowledge, famous for its “Phrygian powder,” an eye salve valued throughout the Roman world. And it produced a fine wool, coveted far and wide. The letter uses each of these examples to personally relate to their condition.

Both cities were located in a volcanically and seismically active area still known to trouble western Turkey. Philadelphia had no material resources to speak of. They had no choice but to rely on God’s protection, and they did just that. Since their “strength was made perfect in weakness,” their city was spared the ravages of geology far longer than any of the others. Laodicea, on the other hand, was self sufficient and proud of it. *Hey, God helps those who help themselves, right?* When a major earthquake in A.D. 62 leveled the city, they said “Thanks, but no thanks” to offers of help from the emperor, and proceeded to rebuild it themselves, bigger and better than ever. Their money had “In us do we trust” printed on it (just kidding).

So who is Laodicea today? Labels are clumsy tools, but generally speaking, the Christian world now stands roughly divided between “fundamental” and “liberal,” camps, i.e., those who are willing to believe what God’s word plainly says, and those who aren’t. There are Catholics and Protestants (or more correctly, non-Catholics) on both sides of this equation. Just as there are facets of

Catholic doctrine that don't square with scripture, there are major Protestant denominations that have gone out of their way to deny baseline truths that Catholics wholeheartedly embrace, doctrines such as the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ, and anything resembling a miracle: *The idea of the atoning blood of Jesus is just too gory and uncivilized for our modern sensibilities, and the concept of personal sin is upsetting and old fashioned, not to mention inconvenient. We're pretty sure Christ was a great moral teacher, but we can't quite get behind his outrageously narrow-minded claims to deity.*

Evangelicals and fundamentalists, on the other hand, are commonly referred to by them as “unbalanced, reactionary, right-wing religious whackos.” Whatever. Paul warns us that as the end draws near, old-fashioned Biblical truth will go out of style: **“The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”** (II Timothy 4:3-4)

The fascinating—and often overlooked—fact is that Yahshua still holds out hope for the Laodiceans. He points out that He's only rebuking and chastising them because He loves them. Then He pictures Himself as knocking at their door, asking them to invite Him in. Yes, He is not now among them—He's outside, looking in. And yes, while the Philadelphians have been promised to be kept safe from the coming unpleasantness, the Laodiceans haven't. The world is sinking. Yahshua has provided the lifeboat. But since the Laodiceans have refused to get in, they're going to get wet. Yahshua still pleads with them to “open the door” to Him, to repent and to overcome the world as He did. That's grace.

I'm sure you noticed (I *hope* you noticed) that I glossed over some sections of the seven letters. I wanted to handle some of this stuff topically. Each of the messages is structured the same way. It opens (as was customary at this time) by identifying and describing the Author. An observation as to the condition of the particular church comes next, followed by a warning or admonition. Each letter closes with a promise that begins with the formula, “To him who overcomes....” Since the Author is the same for all seven letters, and since the warnings, admonitions, and promises apply in some measure to all Christians, it makes sense to look at the forest instead of the individual trees.

John was not the author of these letters. He was merely the amanuensis. The descriptive phrases used were part of John's vision of the risen Messiah. This vision was the reason he wrote this letter to the seven Asian churches: **“John, to the**

seven churches which are in Asia: **Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth....**” Seven is the symbolic number of completion or perfection, so we’re being told here that the seven called-out assemblies represent the totality of Christendom. Everything that is characteristic of the church during this age is described within these seven letters—the good, the bad, and the ugly of it. If you think about it, this implies that some practices that *aren’t* addressed here may not be part of the profile of the ekklesia at all. If there are no good works, no faith in a risen Messiah, no reputation for holiness in the world, no assembling together, no opposition from the world or challenges to overcome, no perceived need to persevere, or no way to distinguish between you and any other conclave of philosophically likeminded souls, then although you may be a participant of a religion, you may not really be part of the *church*—the called-out assembly of Yahshua.

The Author of the letters is described before He’s named. First, He’s timeless, that is, eternal—He was, He is now, and He is to come, a description that equates Yahshua with Yahweh: they are the same person, though not appearing in the same form. The “seven Spirits” are seven attributes listed in Isaiah 11:2. Yahshua is then identified by name, and called the “faithful witness” (of things opaque to mortal man), the “firstborn from the dead” (recalling His demonstration of deity on the Feast of Firstfruits), and the King of kings, possessor of all earthly authority—something He revealed about Himself when delivering the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18).

John next offers appropriate homage to the One sending the message. **“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”** Lest there be any confusion as to precisely Who is in view, John then draws upon prophetic imagery from Zechariah, Amos, Solomon, Jeremiah, Daniel, Paul, and Christ Himself: **“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty....’”** There’s a subtle reference to a two-part “second coming” here: “coming with clouds” speaks of something hidden from the world, mysterious and concealed—the rapture of the church. But “every eye will see Him” says His coming will be obvious, glorious, and unmistakable. These concepts might seem contradictory, but prophetic scripture (as we shall see) clearly describes just such a one-two punch. In fact, the two “comings” of the risen Christ are commemorated by two separate “Feasts of Yahweh,” convocations that aren’t even contiguous on His Levitical calendar. Being “seen by those who pierced Him” is a reference to the holy convocation that lies

between the other two—the Day of Atonement, described in much the same language in Zechariah 12:10. The rest of the description stresses the eternal nature of the Messiah. He’s not merely a prophet or an anointed human messenger, but God Himself—not in form, but in identity.

“I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John, an apostle who was intimately associated with several of these assemblies, had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos under the persecution of Nero. The internal evidence will reveal that this was written after Nero’s death, during the reign of Vespasian (who ruled Rome from 69 to 79 A.D.), not, as is widely taught, under the persecution of the church under Domitian, whose reign lasted from 81 to 96—although John endured to see those days, a beloved elder who lived well into his nineties.

Having made his introduction, John now describes his vision. **“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,’ and, ‘What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea....”** What he heard and saw was dutifully recorded and sent to the seven churches, in the individual letters we reviewed above. It is widely claimed that “the Lord’s Day” was Sunday, but we have no good reason for assuming this. John was a Christian, but he was also Jewish: he would have known Yahweh’s Day—the day of the week set apart for rest and reflection upon the things of God—as the Sabbath, Saturday. Sunday wasn’t venerated (at the expense of the Sabbath) until the time of Constantine, early in the fourth century.

“Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band....” The speaker reminded John of “the Son of Man” (the title Yahshua invariably used of Himself), but this Person was no poor itinerant rabbi. His wardrobe and countenance betray a magnificence and air of authority unparalleled in the earth. The seven golden lampstands speak metaphorically of knowledge and illumination, complete and perfected (the significance of the number seven) and powered, symbolically, by the Spirit of God—the olive oil that fueled the light.

“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters.” This description is more than a little reminiscent of the “Ancient of Days” revealed in Daniel 7. White, of course, is symbolic of purity; fire and brass are metaphorical of judgment (which in Biblical parlance speaks more of the separation of good from evil than it does condemnation). **“He had in His right hand**

seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead....” Though already in an ecstatic state, John did what any of us would do: he fainted.

“But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.’” If there was any question as to the identity of the Speaker, it is now dispelled: He is the risen—now glorified—Christ. Having conquered death Himself, He wields the power to overcome the death of those who rely upon Him in faith. So He tells John, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this....” The revelation is parallel to the Messiah’s own nature: He was, He is, and He is yet to be. The story, in other words, was to reveal Yahshua as Yahweh Himself—the almighty and everlasting God.

Now some of the esoteric imagery is explained: “The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.” (Revelation 1:4-20) In light of the seven letters—and the unfolding history they represent—my reaction to this is, “You’re kidding, right?” The seven golden lampstands, as we noted, speak of complete and perfect illumination, fueled by the Holy Spirit. But the church (as prophesied in the letters and borne out in subsequent events over the past two millennia) has for the most part wallowed in darkness and self deception, relieved only by a few bright spots and a thin, barely traceable tradition of unshakable faith among the laity. But Yahshua’s point is this: the Holy Spirit, indwelling the true church, would be the only light available to the world during this age. If they didn’t see Yahweh’s truth in us, they wouldn’t see it at all. The light flickered and dimmed in Ephesus and Pergamos, and nearly went out altogether in Thyatira and Sardis, though it shone brightly in Smyrna and Philadelphia. But all seven churches—even the one that has nothing going for it (yet)—Laodicea—are characterized as “golden lampstands,” sources of God’s perfect light in the world. I’m glad Yahshua can see it. Sometimes I cannot.

In the letters that followed, Yahshua described Himself just as John had seen Him: “He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands... the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life... He who has the sharp two-edged sword... the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass... He who searches the minds and hearts... He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars... He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens... the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.” Together, these attributes define who the Messiah is—the protector and illuminator of the church, the conqueror of

death, the one who defines and accomplishes the holiness of Yahweh among us, the eternal omnipotent King of Israel—in short, God in human form.

John had known Yahshua for years as a mortal man. He had seen him on the Mount of Transfiguration, revealed in glory for a brief moment. And he had seen Him after His resurrection in a body that could do things no man had ever done before, dead *or* alive. John had also seen his fellow disciples martyred one by one because of their faith, and according to legend his own execution—by being boiled in oil—had not been successful; he had instead been exiled to this desolate Aegean island, an old man no doubt wondering why he alone had been spared. *Why?* If there were any man alive who was prepared to meet and describe the glorified Messiah, it was John. I mean, if *John* “fell at His feet as dead,” the encounter probably would have *killed* anybody else.

Significantly, Christ’s first self-description speaks of his association with, and care for, His Church. It’s clearly explained in verse 20, **“The seven stars are the angels [or messengers, i.e., pastors] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.”** He walks among us. He holds us in his right hand. We are His—and not just Smyrna and Philadelphia but all seven churches, even the one that, at the moment, He feels like vomiting out of His mouth!

“The First and the Last,” the “Alpha and Omega,” the “Beginning and the End, and the Beginning (Greek: *arche*) of the Creation of God,” speak of Christ’s eternity. *Arche* doesn’t merely indicate being first in time, as if Yahshua was the “first” among Yahweh’s many created beings. It means “chief” in various applications of order, place, or rank—including time. Yahshua therefore exercises preeminence over the Creation of God. He is once again equating Himself with the Father, Yahweh—“I Am.” Those who think Yahshua was something less than God need to deal with that. The fact that He was dead and came to life by His own power demonstrates His deity as well. “He who searches the minds and hearts” and “the sharp two-edged sword” speak of Christ as the Word of God, sharp enough to penetrate to our very souls. As John also wrote, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory....”** (John 1:1, 14)

The glorified Son of God even *looks* like what we’d expect God to look like (which, I presume, is why Satan transforms himself into an angel of light). The glowing skin and flaming eyes remind us of Yahshua’s appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, where it was said even His *clothes* shone like the sun. Actually, the closest parallel to this description is in Daniel 10, where an angel—not a theophany—is described as having feet of brass and eyes of flame. At the very least, this is the kind of thing you don’t see every day: a being whose very appearance is wonderful, terrifying, and awe-inspiring.

The “seven Spirits (or seven-fold Spirit) of God” refers to a passage from the prophet Isaiah predicting the coming of Messiah: **“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of [1] Yahweh shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of [2] wisdom and [3] understanding, the Spirit of [4] counsel and [5] might, the Spirit of [6] knowledge and of the [7] fear of Yahweh.”** (Isaiah 11:1-2) Thus Messiah “has the key of David,” and with it the power to open and close, to bind and loosen, including authority over Hades and death itself.

If there were any question before, there shouldn't be now: we are dealing with God Himself—the risen Christ manifested in the glory He had left behind when he entered history in the form of a man. This is the second of the “two” Messiahs who were predicted by the prophets of old. The first wasn't treated very well by the Jewish religious establishment. I wonder how they would have liked this one.

When you put the admonitions to the seven churches together, a few interesting truths emerge. The first is that the coming of Christ for His Church was imminent throughout the age of grace. It could have occurred at any time. References to the sudden appearance of Christ are sprinkled throughout the letters, from Ephesus to Philadelphia. But remarkably, Laodicea received no such admonition; they were not told to “watch.” The obvious reason is that by the time the prophetic letter to the church at Laodicea is ultimately fulfilled, Yahshua will have *already* returned and taken His church home.

The second truth that becomes immediately evident is that there are echoes of each of these churches in evidence simultaneously throughout the age, just as there were in John's day. We need to be mindful of what Yahshua said to all the churches, not just the one in whose age we think we are living: **Remember from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works [i.e., return to your first love], or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.... Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against [those who would compromise their faith] with the sword of My mouth.... And I will give to each one of you according to your works.... Hold fast what you have till I come.... Remember how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.... Behold, I am coming suddenly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.... I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.**

The recurring themes aren't hard to spot. Five of the churches were exhorted to repent—to turn around and go the other way. (The exceptions, of course, were Smyrna and Philadelphia, who were holding fast to their faith, and were encouraged to continue.) What were the five to repent from? Ephesus had left their first love. Pergamos and Thyatira had compromised with the world. Sardis had gone so far down this road they were as good as dead. And Laodicea had exchanged their relationship with the living God for the trappings of a dead religion. When you boil it down to its essentials, then, Yahshua is simply telling the Church what he'd always told us: don't concern yourself with "religion," but rather separate yourselves from the world; love God with your whole heart, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor the same way you love yourself.

Each letter also contains a promise to "him who overcomes." Overcomes what? The things they were told to repent from—leaving their first love, compromising their faith with the world's system (the doctrine of Balaam and Nicolas of Antioch), building a ponderous bureaucracy in the Church, tolerating sexual and spiritual immorality in the Church (i.e., idolatry), and, in the words of Paul, "having a form of Godliness, but denying its power." This is what Yahshua promises: **To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.... He shall not be hurt by the second death.... I will give [him] some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.... I will give [him who keeps my works until the end] power over the nations—"He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels"— as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.... [He] shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.... I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.... I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.**

The list begins with the biggie: eternal life. Remember the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden? Among all the trees, two were mentioned in particular: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. Adam and Eve were told not to eat the fruit of the first one, but when they did, they had to be expelled from the Garden so they wouldn't eat the fruit of the second one. Why? Because the tree of life would have enabled them to live forever. But their sin had already precipitated its punishment: **"And Yahweh, God, commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" (Genesis 2:16-17)** With that first mouthful of forbidden fruit, Adam's body became mortal. Not only had his spirit immediately died—being disconnected from that of Yahweh, the

physical aging process began as well; his biological clock began to tick. Nine hundred and thirty years later, the process that had started with a disobedient little nibble ended with a decaying corpse. Adam's soul had departed from his body.

Although we aren't told, my suspicion is that somewhere around year 600 Adam began to see the benefit of not living forever in a corruptible body. As we get older, we realize that eternal life in our present bodies would be more curse than blessing. But God has something else in mind for us—bodies that are built to live forever. We'll discuss the mechanics of eternal life more fully in a later chapter, but for now I merely want to point out that the promises to those “who overcome” can't really be fulfilled if we're still clothed in our mortal flesh. The “second death” we will avoid presupposes a *first* death—the death of the physical body—that all of us will endure one way or another. It is only those whose names are blotted out of the “Book of Life,” those who are truly lost, who will suffer this second death. The overcomers will not.

We can't receive the gifts God has for us until we receive our new incorruptible bodies. We'll finally eat from the tree of life that eluded Adam. Yahshua also mentions “hidden manna,” a symbol of His sufficiency. The “white stone” with a secret name on it is a picture of acquittal. Satan has been accusing us, but Yahshua our advocate has made sure that we are found guiltless. No, it's better than that: the “white garments” speak of innocence, purity, not just a dearth of damning evidence. That's why Christ can confess our names before the Father and His angels—He's already paid the penalty for our crimes. The next item is just as remarkable: “power over the nations.” This is tantamount to making us co-rulers with Christ. Paul alluded to this amazing fact as well when he asked, “**Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?**” (I Corinthians 6:2) We will actually share the throne of King Yahshua! I don't know about you, but the very thought makes me blush.

The last thought makes me smile. Did you ever get something you really wanted, something very valuable or meaningful to you? What did you do with it? Chances are, you wrote your name and address on it, just in case. Well, so did God: “**I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.**” (Revelation 3:12) Why would Yahshua do that? Because we're precious to Him—valuable, costly. It's *us* He was describing in His parable: “**The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.**” (Matthew 13:45-46)

So there it is. Yahweh has arranged human destiny and His plan of redemption to be revealed in sevens. Seven successive dispensations, or eras of His unfolding revelation, are indicated in scripture, five of which have passed, one of which we are living in, and the last of which is yet to come. In the present dispensation, the Church age, seven successive phases have been foretold. Five of them have seen their primary fulfillments in history. The sixth Church now eagerly anticipates the imminent return of Yahshua the Messiah. And the seventh has no idea who He is—yet. Also, seven great annual feasts or appointments have been ordained to prophetically mark the seven most significant events in our history—both past and future. Five have been fulfilled down to the smallest detail, though one of them—out of order in its fulfillment—must still be completed through an event yet future; three of these holy convocations remain before us.

If you're new to all this, you may be asking yourself, "Yahshua the Messiah—a.k.a. Jesus Christ—may have come once, died for our sins, and risen from the dead, but who ever said He was coming again?" Good question. The answer is, *He* did: **"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:1-6)**

Though Yahshua could have returned for His Church in any of the last two thousand years without breaking His promise, He did not. Trust me on this; we would have noticed. Therefore, His return is yet future. Considering the established, one-hundred-percent-perfect track record of fulfilled Biblical prophecy, there can be no question of *if*, only of *when*.

Here's the rub. It *can't* be very far in the future. Everything we've been told to expect has either already come to pass or is now poised on the brink of fulfillment. If the doctrine of God's seven-thousand-year-plan (six of man, one of Yahshua) is correct—if the Sabbath Law means what it seems to—then we're at the very doors. I'm convinced that it is. Although it's not explicitly spelled out anywhere in scripture, it's alluded to and hinted at dozens of times. At the very least, we're one day closer to Yahshua's second coming than we were yesterday.

Chapter 5

The People of Promise

Those who would have you believe that God's promises to Israel have been transferred to the Church have some explaining to do. These promises are rooted in historical context. They were made to real people—people who *believed* them. I have a hunch that if God had told Abram, "I'm making these promises to you and your descendants, but someday I might change my mind and make 'em apply to other people I like better," Abe may not have exercised quite the same degree of faith when told to offer up his promised son, Isaac, as a sacrifice.

Besides, it was Abram who met the conditions the promises had been predicated upon in the first place, not some nebulous future religious entity. How could the blessing be transferred to someone who had not met—someone who had not even been *asked* to meet—these conditions? **"Now Yahweh had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Genesis 12:1-3)** Abram took Yahweh at His word, and with his family, he left his ancestral homeland, Ur of the Chaldeans, and journeyed north to Haran. Abram took his sweet time about it, however. Only after his father died—when Abe was seventy-five years old—did he complete the instructions: "get out of your father's house." He had no children at this point, and that "great-nation" prediction meant he would have to have a son. At his age (think of a man fifty or fifty-five with today's life expectancies), God's promise was looking less likely every day. Nevertheless, he now traveled south and west to Canaan—the promised land.

Twenty-four years later, the situation had changed a bit. Abram had fathered a son, Ishmael, though not by his wife Sarai but by her handmaid, Hagar. This wasn't what God had in mind for the child of promise, so He upped the ante. **"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.' Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.'" (Genesis 17:1-7)**

Abram, “exalted father,” would now be Abraham, “father of many.” It was as if God was telling Abraham, “You’re going to keep doing this until you get it right.”

A year later, against all odds, Isaac was born to Sarai, now called Sarah (i.e., “Princess”). This was the son of promise—Abe’s *only* son, in God’s plan. How strange and terrifying it must have been, then, when God told Abraham a few years later to go up into the hills and sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. But Abraham had finally learned to trust God. He did as he was told. Yahweh didn’t let him go through with it, of course; He provided His own offering, a prophetic picture of the sacrificial death of Yahshua, *His* son—two thousand years later. Abraham had passed the test of faith. **“Then the Angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: ‘By Myself I have sworn, says Yahweh, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.’”** (Genesis 22:15-18)

That’s three times now (that we know of). God kept reiterating this promise to Abraham, expanding and clarifying it as the years went by. And He didn’t stop saying it when Abe died. Isaac received the promises as well: **“Dwell in this land [Philistia], and I will be with you and bless you; for to you [Isaac] and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.... And Yahweh appeared to [Isaac] the same night and said, ‘I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham’s sake.’”** (Genesis 26:3-5, 24)

Thus the first two generations of the chosen family received very similar promises from God. They did not stop there, but continued when Isaac gave the customary inheritance blessing to his son, Jacob (though he thought he was talking to his elder son, Esau): **“May God give you [Jacob] of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!... May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.”** (Genesis 27:28-29, 28:3-4)

Easy enough for Isaac to say, you might be thinking. True, but God Himself later backed him up: **“And behold, Yahweh stood above it [the stairway to heaven in**

Jacob's vision] and said: 'I am Yahweh, God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you [Jacob/Israel] and your descendants. Also, your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.' (Genesis 28:13-15)

Jacob related the encounter to his own sons on his deathbed. "Then Jacob said to Joseph: 'God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, "Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession."'" (Genesis 48:3-4)

Starting with Abraham then, God promised his descendants, the people who would become known as Jews, some startling things—many of which have never been completely fulfilled, even to this day, or at best were only enjoyed for a very brief period during the reigns of David and Solomon. First he would bless them materially and numerically. He would make Abraham's "name great" and the Jews (more properly known as "Israelites") would "possess the gate of their enemies"—that's political power. Beyond that, God said He would bless the people and nations who blessed the Jews, and curse those who cursed them. This covenant was to be "everlasting," not just during the lifetimes of the patriarchs, but throughout their progeny's generations. And though the Jews would spread over the whole earth, they would be given the land of Canaan as "an everlasting possession." It bears mention also that while the blessings are national, the cursings are individual: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you." (Genesis 12:3) Yahweh thus reserves the right to curse individual anti-Semitism within societies that generally support His chosen people. (Read the Book of Esther for one noteworthy example.)

Another remarkable promise was that "in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God repeated this promise to all three patriarchs, thus ruling out the non-Jewish branches like Ishmael and Esau. It's hard to imagine a scenario in which this prophecy could literally come to pass. *All* the families of the earth? What would one have to do to bless *everybody*? Discover fire? Invent the wheel? Not enough. In the end, the only act that qualifies is to provide a way for mankind to get back what we lost in the Garden of Eden: our innocence—the one thing that lets us have fellowship with our Creator. Yahshua of Nazareth opened this doorway back to God. He was the only man in history who even attempted it. A Jew, as it turns out, a son of Israel. What a coincidence.

There's something else worthy of mention. Though the promises to Abram/Abraham could be called conditional ("Leave your family and your

father's house; walk blamelessly before Me") there is no indication that the subsequent promises to Isaac and Jacob were anything but unilateral and unconditional. God simply purposed to do all this, and He didn't require anything from the recipients. Certain future blessings would later be made contingent upon good behavior on the part of the Jews—we'll get to those in a bit—but the basic promise, their place as God's chosen people, was given without strings attached.

The promises singling out the Jews for perpetual blessing were stated in plain words to the patriarchs. But the echoes reverberated throughout the Torah and beyond. God's instructions to Moses are full of little details that have eternal ramifications. For instance, **"In the tabernacle of meeting, outside the veil which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend [the lamp] from evening until morning before Yahweh. It shall be a statute forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel."** (Exodus 27:21) Or, **"Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever..."** (Exodus 31:16-17) Or how about, **"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for Yahweh your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you** (*ever*, is the implication)." (Deuteronomy 31:6) Words like "forever" and "perpetual" and "throughout their generations" speak of the mindset of God. He does not intend for his relationship with Israel to come to an end—it will be *everlasting*. Remember, Yahweh isn't restricted to a linear timeline as we are—He maneuvers within the dimension of time. Thus when He speaks of such concepts, He is not merely signaling His intent—He's teaching us a lesson in future history: the events are as good as done. He has seen them.

David saw the eternal relationship between Yahweh and His people like this: **"Who is like Your people Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people—to make for Yourself a name by great and awesome deeds, by driving out nations from before Your people whom You redeemed from Egypt? For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, Yahweh, have become their God."** That's an interesting turn of phrase: Yahweh was always God, but He only became *their* God when they chose to become His children—led to that choice (after half a millennium of vacillating) by David their king. **"And now, O Yahweh, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, let it be established forever, and do as You have said. So let it be established, that Your name may be magnified forever, saying, 'Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel's God.' And let the house of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O my God, have revealed to Your servant that You will build him a house. Therefore Your servant has found it**

in his heart to pray before You. And now, Yahweh, You are God, and have promised this goodness to Your servant. Now You have been pleased to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever; for You have blessed it, O Yahweh, and it shall be blessed forever.” (I Chronicles 17:21-27, cf. II Samuel 7:23-24) Note how many different things are described as being eternal: (1) Yahweh’s unique relationship with Israel; (2) the Messianic promise of the reign of David’s house; (3) Yahweh’s name being exalted; and (4) blessings upon David’s descendants.

David had a heart for the things of God. If everyone did, God would not have had to caution Solomon about following in his father’s footsteps: **“But if you [Solomon] turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them, then I will uproot them from My land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, ‘Why has Yahweh done thus to this land and this house?’ Then they will answer, ‘Because they forsook Yahweh, God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this calamity on them.”** (II Chronicles 7:19-22) Though these two passages seem to be contradictory, they aren’t. David had revealed his heart for the things of Yahweh, and God in turn had made eternal promises to him. Those promises could have been kept through Solomon, but that was contingent on Solomon’s behavior. David, however, also had other sons through whom the promises could be (and ultimately were) fulfilled. As for Solomon, in his later life he did exactly what he had been warned not to do (cf. I Kings 11:4-8) and his people suffered the predicted consequences.

The same sort of thing—Yahweh fulfilling His promises in unexpected ways in order to avoid rewarding idolatry—was seen as far back as the Exodus. Although the entire generation that had witnessed the miracles of the exodus had died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, Yahweh’s promises to the Jews had not been abrogated. As the Children of Israel were about to enter the promised land, Moses taught them of God’s purposes for them: **“For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?...”**

The answer, obviously, was no. They were unique, and they knew it. **“To you it was shown, that you might know that Yahweh Himself is God; there is none other besides**

Him. Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day.” Yahweh had bent over backwards to demonstrate His love for the Israelites and His power to deliver them. He had done everything He could (without making their choices for them) to form a personal relationship with them. **“Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that Yahweh Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you for all time.”** (Deuteronomy 4:32-39)

Notice that although the land was being given to Israel “for all time,” the prospects of everything “going well” were contingent upon their keeping God’s commandments. Moses told them why: **“For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because Yahweh loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, Yahweh has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”** (Deuteronomy 7:6-10)

Recapping Moses’ observations, we find that God doesn’t do this sort of thing every day of the week. Rather, His promises to the Jews are unique, given to them not because they were worthy or powerful or even good people, but simply because he chose to love them. (He chose to love me—and you—too, but this was different. We were chosen to receive salvation; *they* were to be the delivery vehicle for that salvation. Christ was the “package,” sent from God to man. The Jews were the FedEx guys.)

He purposely selected a nobody to start with—Abraham wasn’t even the head of his own household when God called him—to create of him a great nation. Like I said, God delights in doing what we would call impossible. Why? Read that last sentence again: **“Know that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”** He wants us to know Him, know who He is, what He’s like. He wants us to obey His commandments because it’s good for *us* when we do. In

short, He wants to have a personal relationship with us. This applies not only to the Jews but to anyone who knows Yahweh as God.

You may be thinking, “That’s all swell, but what does it have to do with unfulfilled prophecy?” Good question, which I’ll answer with another: how long is “a thousand generations?” 25,000 years? More? It’s an indefinite period of time, but I can assure you there haven’t been quite that many generations since Abraham. I once heard “eternity” described as “two people and a twenty-pound ham.” A thousand generations is even longer than *that*. The point is that God’s promises to the Jews are designed to go on, in His words, “forever.” And forever isn’t over yet, not by a long shot.

You’re still skeptical; I can tell. “Sure, the Jews are still around after all this time,” you say, “unlike the Babylonians, Assyrians, or Philistines. But except for a very brief period of time some three thousand years ago, they’ve been on the losing end of most every confrontation. Remember Nebuchadnezzar? Remember Antiochus IV? Titus Vespasian? Hadrian? *Hitler*? If they’re God’s chosen people, I’ll bet they’re wishing God would choose somebody else once in a while.”

The reason the Jews haven’t gone the way of the Hittites and the Amorites is God’s original promises, outlined above. But the reason they’ve fared so badly throughout their long and rebellious history is tied up in the admonitions God gave them through the prophet Moses shortly after they left Egypt. First he gave them the good news:

“If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.” In other words, they would be prosperous—even wealthy. **“I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you.”** Their obedience would result in complete freedom from fear. **“For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you. You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the new. I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.”** The best perk of all would be Yahweh’s presence among them. **“I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright.”** (Leviticus 26:1-13)

“Yeah! That’s exactly what we want,” they all said. And then they proceeded to ignore His statutes and disregard His commandments, starting with the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” By refusing to believe

God's promise of victory in Canaan, they were in effect worshipping false gods, saying, "the giants in the land—and *their gods*—are stronger than Yahweh. The generation that heard those words never entered the land of promise. They left their corpses rotting in the wilderness, all because they refused to "walk in Yahweh's statutes, keep His commandments, and perform them." One gets the feeling that genuine, heartfelt trust, resulting in an honest effort at Torah compliance—even if it weren't absolutely perfect—would have sufficed. The record shows that they *did* perform much of what they'd been commanded—especially as it concerns the "mechanical aspects" of the tabernacle and priesthood. But we also read time and again that the Israelites complained and rebelled every time they actually had to rely upon Yahweh to provide something they couldn't yet see. All He really wanted them to do was *trust* Him.

Moses repeated the good news to their sons and daughters at the end of their forty years in the desert, praying, no doubt, that this time the lesson wouldn't fall on deaf ears: **"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that Yahweh your God will set you high above all nations of the earth...."** The first thing He mentioned was political ascendancy: superpower status, the sort of thing coveted (if not quite achieved) by nations like the Egypt they'd left behind. That's a really big "If," of course.

"And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of Yahweh your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country." In both industry and agriculture, and throughout all levels of society, the blessings of Yahweh would be in evidence. **"Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. Yahweh will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways...."** In other words, He says they'll have prosperity in every area of their lives—if they'd diligently heed the word of their God.

Then, as if He hadn't made Himself clear, He repeated everything in more detail. **"Yahweh will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you. Yahweh will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in His ways."** Holiness, i.e., separation *from* the other nations and *to* Yahweh, was the center of the blessing their obedient walk would bring them. The point in remaining separate from the nations, it would transpire, was that Israel had been chosen to present to the world—first through symbol and metaphor, and eventually through their

bloodline—the means Yahweh had prepared to reconcile the whole fallen world to Himself. The blessings and success He wished to shower upon them as they became a living “advertisement” for the salvation of Yahweh would have made them (and their God) attractive to the surrounding peoples—as it was during the reign of David. **“Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of Yahweh, and they shall be afraid of you....”** People would “fear” Israel the same way Israel “feared” Yahweh—showing respect and reverence.

“And Yahweh will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers to give you. Yahweh will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.” (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) Again, prosperity in every guise would follow Israel’s faithfulness, if only they would carefully observe Yahweh’s commandments.

A quick survey of both addresses reveals that God’s plan for their happiness hadn’t changed much in forty years. If they would do right, both groups were promised material prosperity, numerous and healthy children, victory in battle (they were, after all, supposed to be exacting God’s judgment upon the wicked Canaanites, cleansing the land they had polluted with their idolatries), and best of all, close fellowship with Yahweh. Both were to enjoy a harmonious relationship with nature, whether positive (good weather, predictable rain), or negative (no lions and tigers and bears—oh my!—killing off their flocks). Interestingly, what was described as “peace in the land” to the first group took the form of political ascendancy over “*all* nations of the earth” to the second. Whatever blessings Israel has enjoyed thus far during its brief periods of obedience and fellowship with God, they’ve never yet come close to that one. Will they one day? I wouldn’t bet against it.

So much for the good news. All this would happen “If you will....” Yahweh, through Moses, also had something to say about “If you won’t...,” and it wasn’t pretty. To the first group, those just leaving Egypt, He had said: **“But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but**

break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you [forget about freedom from fear], wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart [forget about health]. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it [forget about prosperity]. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you [forget about victory in battle]. And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze [kiss the easy life goodbye]. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.... Rebellion would be met with what folks commonly characterize as “bad luck.” They wouldn’t see the *direct* hand of God upon them—lightning zapping them out of the blue and such like—but rather a series of things that are “unfortunate.” Yahweh is warning them right up front, however, that this is not coincidental, but is the direct result of their sin. Even at the very beginning of this chastisement, we see a pattern starting to emerge. The first phase will be bad enough, but continued disobedience will precipitate an escalation of the punishment. If they don’t repent, things will get worse—much worse—*seven times* worse.

“Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate.” We’re moving steadily from bad luck to tragedy. **“And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant [not only would they not win in battle—God would actually be fighting *against* them]; when you are gathered together within your cities I will send pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy [lack of success has become utter defeat]. When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread by weight [hunger has become famine], and you shall eat and not be satisfied....”** Tragedy is on its way toward becoming catastrophe. The last thing one should want is for God to “walk contrary” to them. The Israelites, having witnessed Yahweh’s power first hand, should have known that.

“And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.” It gets worse. Now Yahweh is not just contrary; He’s angry. And what happens when God is really ticked off? **“You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your high places [which were used exclusively for the worship of pagan idols], cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you. I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet**

aromas. I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste....” We’ve moved from catastrophe to annihilation, or so it would seem. At this point, the sins of Israel would have made God’s unconditional promises of national blessings practically impossible to keep. To bless a nation, there has to *be* a nation.

“Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbaths.” It’s interesting that Yahweh should come back to the observance of His mandated six-plus-one pattern as the bellwether of their hearts’ attitude. Again we must ask ourselves: is He really all that concerned that we kick back and take a break now and then, or is He rather teaching us His plan for the course of mankind? **“As long as it lies desolate it shall rest—for the time it did not rest on your sabbaths when you dwelt in it. And as for those of you who are left, I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; the sound of a shaken leaf shall cause them to flee; they shall flee as though fleeing from a sword, and they shall fall when no one pursues. They shall stumble over one another, as it were before a sword, when no one pursues; and you shall have no power to stand before your enemies. You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And those of you who are left shall waste away in their iniquity in your enemies’ lands; also in their fathers’ iniquities, which are with them, they shall waste away.”** (Leviticus 26:14-39) It will reach the point, Moses says, when you won’t need any real danger to make you afraid. A leaf trembling in the wind or a glimpse of your own shadow will be enough to make you fear for your pitiful life.

Why is it that the bad news is always longer than the good news? It’s probably because God didn’t want anyone to complain that they hadn’t been warned. But if you think the horrible details in Leviticus were bad, listen to what Moses said to the second group, those about to enter the promised land, those who had witnessed Yahweh’s judgment on the previous generation. It’s a long passage, but I’m going to deliver it pretty much like Moses did—one huge gagging spoonful of bad news: no commentary, no snappy patter, no attempt to make it palatable or politically correct. I have, however, included a few scripture references that record Biblical examples of fulfillments. Think of this as cod liver oil for the soul: hold your nose and take your medicine:

“It shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you, cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country (Baasha: cf. I Kings 16:4, 11) Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl (cf. Ruth 1:1). Cursed shall be the fruit of your body (Jeroboam: cf. I Kings 14:16-17, 15:29) and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and

cursed shall you be when you go out. Yahweh will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me. Yahweh will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess (cf. Amos 4:10). Yahweh will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever (Psalm 32:4), with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish. And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. Yahweh will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed (Ahab: cf. I Kings 17:1).

“Yahweh will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them (the battle of Ai: cf. Joshua 7:4-5); and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth (Jeremiah 19:7), and no one shall frighten them away. Yahweh will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors (see I Samuel 5 and 6), with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. Yahweh will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart (the paranoia of Saul: I Samuel 18:10-11, 22:8). And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness (II Kings 6:18); you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually (Judges 10:7-8), and no one shall save you.

“You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes. Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your donkey shall be violently taken away from before you, and shall not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you shall have no one to rescue them (Midianites and Amalekites: cf. Judges 6:1-6). Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all day long; and there shall be no strength in your hand. A nation whom you have not known shall eat the fruit of your land and the produce of your labor, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually (Babylon: cf. II Kings 25:1-5). So you shall be driven mad because of the sight which your eyes see. Yahweh will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.

“Yahweh will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where Yahweh will drive you (Assyria: cf. II Kings 18:9-12).

“You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and tend them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil; for your olives shall drop off.

You shall beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity. Locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land (cf. Joel 1:1-12). The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail (Luke 3:1-2).

“Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever.

“Because you did not serve Yahweh your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom Yahweh will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. Yahweh will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies (Babylon: cf. Lamentations 4:19), a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young. And they shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, or the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you.

“They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which Yahweh your God has given you (Sennacherib’s campaign: Isaiah 36). You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom Yahweh your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you (Ben-Hadad’s siege: II Kings 6:24-29). The sensitive and very refined man among you will be hostile toward his brother, toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind, so that he will not give any of them the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he has nothing left in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her daughter, her placenta which comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of everything in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates (Nebuchadnezzar’s siege: Lamentations 4:10).

“If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, Yahweh Your God, then Yahweh will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses (Peor: Joshua 22:17). Moreover He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to

you. Also every sickness and every plague, which is not written in this Book of the Law, will Yahweh bring upon you until you are destroyed. You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven in multitude, because you would not obey the voice of Yahweh your God. And it shall be, that just as Yahweh rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so Yahweh will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess (Solomon: I Kings 11:31-33).

“Then Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone (This all happened after the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.). And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there Yahweh will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were morning!’ because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see.” In Titus’ siege, a million Jews died—600,000 of them from starvation. Josephus reports that 97,000 were shipped off to Egypt to be sold as slaves, creating such a glut in the market that their value fell to almost nothing. How ironic it is that Moses had warned them: **“And Yahweh will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, ‘You shall never see it again.’ And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.”** (Deuteronomy 28:15-68)

I want to weep. This isn’t theoretical. It’s like reading a history book. All of this actually happened to the people of Israel, just as they had been warned. Curses instead of blessings. Disease instead of health. Fear instead of confidence. Natural disaster and plagues in place of beneficial weather and a dearth of pests. Subjection and slavery in place of peace and political ascendancy. A barren, rocky wilderness replacing the land of milk and honey. A cringing remnant in place of a teeming multitude. Frustration, not fulfillment. Poverty, not prosperity. Famine, not the fat of the land.

Read the histories of the sieges of Jerusalem, especially that of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and Titus Vespasian in A.D. 70. You’ll see that Moses’ description of desperate hunger was not exaggerated. They were driven to cannibalism—and worse: mothers eating their own newborn children along with the placenta (and not even sharing!). It’s enough to make you scream *why!* Why didn’t they listen? Why didn’t they heed the warning? The choices were so clear.

And then I look at the sins of my own life, and in the life of my beloved country. And again, I want to weep.

Seems every time Israel had a chance to blow it, they did. And yet God said that no matter how badly they failed, He would not give up on them—ever. He would chastise them, even going so far as to destroy their entire political existence. But they would always exist as a separate people. **“Behold, the eyes of Yahweh are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob.”** (Amos 9:8) Or, **“I will not make a complete end of you. And it will be when you say, ‘Why does Yahweh our God do all these things to us?’ then you shall answer them, ‘Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours.’”** (Jeremiah 5:18-19) Yahweh has always let men choose their own destiny.

Moses had pointed out that no matter how far they fell, there was always a way to get back up: **“But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt—then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them [there’s our six-plus-one reminder again]; they will accept their guilt, because they despised My judgments and because their soul abhorred My statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am Yahweh their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 26:40-45)

“I will remember My covenant; I will remember the land.” It may come as a surprise to some, considering their history, but God *wants* to bless this people. Like any loving father, he hates disciplining his children, but He will if he has to. **“‘As I live,’ says Yahweh, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’”** (Ezekiel 33:11)

Jews the world over are trying to figure out why He has been so hard on them over the centuries. It never occurs to them, of course, that they *asked* for it: **“When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.’ And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’”** (Matthew 27:24-25) *Oops*. Be careful what you pray for, folks. The question of Yahweh’s apparent abandonment of the Jews has driven

some of them to atheism—denying His very existence—and others to blind observance of traditions they don't understand. But the answer is right there in the Torah. All that's lacking to bring them back to the place of God's blessing is for Israel—as a nation—to confess their iniquity, admit their unfaithfulness; accept their guilt, and humble themselves.

Will they ever do this? Some Jews would protest that they already have. A few decades back, Christians where I lived took to displaying billboards and bumper stickers announcing, "I found it!" It meant, of course, that we had discovered what the whole world was seeking, a personal relationship with the true and living God. Not to be outdone, the Orthodox Jews came out with bumper stickers of their own: "We never lost it." A clever comeback, but untrue. If the Jews were honest with themselves, they would realize that they are nowhere near the center of God's blessing as described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. That means that either Israel is still in rebellion, or God is a liar. There is no middle ground.

The illustrious rabbi Moses Maimonides, in the eleventh century, compiled a list of thirteen articles of Jewish faith, pillars of orthodox Judaism to this very day. I find it fascinating that every one of them can be wholeheartedly espoused by Christians. They all start with the formula "I believe with a true and perfect faith...." Boiled down to their essentials, they say: God is the Creator, who works today and will work forever; God is one, unique and alone; He is incorporeal (this, of course, cannot be true of His manifestation as the Messiah—see Isaiah 9:6) and incomparable; He is the first and the last; He alone is to be worshipped; all the words of His prophets are true; Moses was the chief of these prophets; the Law we now possess is the same as that which Moses received; this Law will not be changed nor replaced; God knows all of the thoughts and deeds of men; He rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those who don't; Messiah will come (or as Christians would say, come *back*); there will be a resurrection of the dead.

I have often observed that the only significant difference between Christianity and Judaism is that Christians believe the Jewish scriptures, while the Jews do not. When Maimonides says that all the words of God's prophets—Moses being chief among them—are true, he is pronouncing a scathing indictment upon his own people. Will they ever turn back to God? Yes, they will. But not quite yet.

Yahweh didn't put a deadline on Israel's repentance. But He knew it would happen, and He knew when. (You will too before you've finished reading this book.) He instructed His prophets to predict it. All of His promises, both positive and negative, will stay in force until the day the Jews turn to their God.

Consider this: it's been three thousand years since the glory days of David, and four thousand since God called Abraham. How many national/ethnic groups can trace their lineage back that far? Not many. The very fact of Israel's existence today (whether or not they're in the Land) speaks of God's miraculous preservation of them as a people. When you consider the persecution or judgment the Jews have endured through the centuries, the numerous attempts of misguided men to systematically wipe them off the face of the earth, the hand of God becomes obvious.

David saw it happening: **“Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God! For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.’ For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagarites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot.”** (Psalm 83:1-8) Not to mention the ones David didn't see coming—Babylon, Persia, the Greeks, Rome, the Spanish Inquisition, the Czarist pogroms, the Nazi Holocaust, and the ongoing *jihad* of Islam (though David's list is actually a pretty good summation of modern Islam's family tree).

I don't know; maybe he *did* see it coming. We're not sure who wrote the 102nd Psalm (it isn't identified as one of David's), but in light of our recent history, it is clearly a prediction of the Nazi Holocaust. A careful reading reveals specifics that are too real to be coincidental. This is more than just a lament over a generalized Jewish “day of trouble.” This is future history. **“Hear my prayer, O Yahweh, and let my cry come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; Incline Your ear to me; in the day that I call, answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth.”** Sounds like systematic extermination and cremation to me. **“My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Because of the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop....”** Starvation, desperation, hopelessness.

“My enemies reproach me all day long, those who deride me swear an oath against me.” That could be rendered “use my name as a curse,” which is exactly what the Nazis did with their yellow star-of-David badges and “Jude” labels, separating the Jews from their neighbors so they could be rounded up and slaughtered more

efficiently. **“For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of Your indignation and Your wrath; for You have lifted me up and cast me away. My days are like a shadow that lengthens, and I wither away like grass....”** In the concentration camps, the Jews were forced to eat and breathe the very ashes of their brothers and sisters as they rained down upon them from the crematorium smokestacks. A “shadow that lengthens” speaks of the end of the day—they could envision the sun going down forever for the Jewish people.

“But You, O Yahweh, shall endure forever, and the remembrance of Your name to all generations. You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and show favor to her dust. So the nations shall fear the name of Yahweh, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. For Yahweh shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory. He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer....” This prayer could be the one spoken by so many generations of Jews, “Next year, in Jerusalem.” Or it might be the one uttered by millions in the camps, “God, help us!” Whatever it was, it was answered only three years after the Holocaust mercifully ended. On May 14, 1948, the sovereign state of Israel was declared, based upon a resolution agreed upon by “all the kings of the earth,” i.e., the United Nations. Since that day, Yahweh has “built up Zion” in times of peace, and “appeared in His glory” in times of war. And anyone who has traveled to Jerusalem knows how the Israelis “take pleasure in her stones.” Every building—by law—is faced with white Jerusalem limestone, making this one of the most beautiful cities on earth (but maybe I’m prejudiced). By the same token, the amazing Israeli farms, especially those built in the West Bank after 1967, prove that they “show favor to her dust.”

“This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise Yahweh....” The phrase “to come” is *acharon* in Hebrew. It means “hindermost” or simply “last.” That’s an eye opener. This verse is actually saying that the *last* generation is the one for whom this Psalm was written. Before their time (*our* time!), no one will really be expected to “get it.” Indeed, most commentaries spout non-specific drivel about how the psalmist is bemoaning Israel’s distress. No kidding, Sherlock. The passage indicates that the world will vividly remember the horrors of the Holocaust until this present age has ended—and the world, as you may have noticed, never remembers *anything* for very long. “A people yet to be created” can only mean the Church—we who are praising Yahweh daily for the miracle of Israel, even if the rest of the world isn’t.

The rest of the Psalm sounds to me like a telescoped view of the coming of the Messiah. This describes His first advent. **“For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven Yahweh viewed the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to release those appointed to death...”** The Jews of the Holocaust weren’t the only ones “appointed to death.” That describes all of us. Yahweh sent his Messiah to release

all mankind from our prison. The rest of the sentence has His final advent—still future—in view. **“...to declare the name of Yahweh in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem, when the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve Yahweh....”**

The end of the Psalm speaks, I believe, of the Tribulation, followed by Yahshua’s coming Millennial reign and beyond, but I’ll save the discussion of all this for later. **“He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. I said, ‘O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years are throughout all generations. Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end. The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You.’”** (Psalm 102) Notice that when God inspired the Psalm, He lumped everything together, as if it’s all part of the same scene. If my guess is correct, the Holocaust triggered a chain of events that will culminate in the glorious return of our Messiah.

And what became of Hitler and his Nazi horde? The same thing that Isaiah predicted would happen to all who plunder Israel: **“Woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the roar of the seas, and to the rushing of nations that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! ...God will rebuke them and they will flee far away, and be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before the morning, he is no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us.”** (Isaiah 17:12-14)

America, surprisingly to some, has not been entirely innocent in regard to the plunder of Israel. Journalist William Koenig, in his book *Eye to Eye* (2004, 21st Century Press) has tracked the remarkable correlation of America’s lack of support for Israel with disasters both natural and unnatural here at home. *Forty-nine* major catastrophes between October 1991 and November 2003 all happened within days of U.S. political pressure being brought to bear on Israel to do things against her best interests—mostly involving a “peace process” that grants the Palestinian Arabs Israeli land for the promise of peace. The catastrophes include record breaking tornadoes, ice storms, and fires, huge stock market sell-offs, the three largest insurance events and top seven FEMA disasters in U.S. history up to the date of publication—including hurricane Andrew and the Islamic Twin Towers and Pentagon attack of September 11, 2001. And you know what’s happened since then. One example among many: hurricane Katrina blew in on the heels of the American-sponsored Israeli pullout from the Gaza Strip. God is not impressed with our “separation of Church and state.” His word stands: **“I will bless those who bless you [Abraham], and I will curse him who curses you.”** (Genesis 12:3)

Face it: America is not the same thing as “the Church.” This is a dangerous and erroneous attitude that has crept in among well-meaning but ignorant American Christians. In reality, we are but pilgrims in this land, as blessed as it has been when it honored God. And as pilgrims, we need to follow the example of the Early Church, and insist that our national leaders do the same: **“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”** (Romans 15:26-27) The politically correct crowd won’t admit it, but we *owe* our support to Israel.

The Jews who survived the Holocaust should have sung the following words; and those who fought for their infant nation against insurmountable odds—and prevailed—in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973, should have them engraved upon their very souls: **“If it had not been Yahweh who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us. Then the waters would have overwhelmed us; the stream would have gone over our soul.”** (Psalm 124:2-5)

God’s ongoing protection of Israel is evident. But the prophets have not been coy about predicting the unpleasant fate of the unrepentant Jewish people. Everything they warned about has come to pass, from the judgment of the nation to the preservation of the race. As Ezekiel put it, **“Thus says the Lord Yahweh: ‘Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.’”** (Ezekiel 11:16) If they want *a lot* of sanctuary, they’ll have to repent.

God has told us precisely what He intends to do. The preservation and eventual restoration of the nation of Israel is no accident, no coincidence. The revelation of this plan goes all the way back to the exodus: **“Thus says Yahweh: ‘About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals. Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it before, nor shall be like it again. But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that Yahweh does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.’”** (Exodus 11:4-7)

There is a fine line between “God is no respecter of persons” and “Yahweh makes a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.” He is not impressed with

anything we do or have. But He *is* impressed with His own promises. He cannot lie; it's not in His nature. So that His chosen people would understand and remember this, He instituted an annual day of observance: **"Therefore you shall observe this day [Passover] throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance...."** This observance is eternally significant for only one reason: Passover was predictive of the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah for the sins of the world. **"For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you [Amen to *that*]. And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be that, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'" (Exodus 12:17, 23-27)**

Passover wasn't the last time God would save their bacon (so to speak). It was merely one of a long string of miraculous deliverances. **"And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to Yahweh. Then they said to Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, "Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?" For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of Yahweh, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. Yahweh will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.'" (Exodus 14:10-14)** Good thing *I'm* not God. I would have said, "Sorry, my mistake. Go back and croak in Egypt if you like it so much." But Yahweh had made a promise of preservation, and He kept it, parting the sea so they could escape. Then He told them, **"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** (Exodus 19:4-6) Once again, that's a big "if."

In all fairness, I can't imagine any Israelite at the time—with the possible exception of Moses—having the capacity to assimilate the significance of this proposition. How could they possibly know how good being Yahweh's "special treasure" would be? "A kingdom of priests and a holy, set-apart nation?" A few weeks before, they'd been *slaves*. They had absolutely no point of reference. It reminds me of C.S. Lewis' illustration of trying to explain the pleasures of sex to a boy who can't imagine anything in the world better than chocolate.

When the Israelites were about to enter Canaan, Moses reiterated God's promise of preservation: **"When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for Yahweh your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them... 'Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for Yahweh your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'"** (Deuteronomy 20:1-4)

Yahweh says that not only will He keep them from harm, provide for them and so on, as He'd been doing faithfully for the past forty years, but He would also proactively fight for them. It was enough to make Moses wax poetic: **"There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, [i.e., Israel; literally: upright] who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, 'Destroy!' Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop dew. Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by Yahweh, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, And you shall tread down their high places."** (Deuteronomy 33:26-29) Well, that's how it was supposed to work. There was still the little matter of their blessings being contingent upon their regard for His Law. God didn't say *when* this would all happen—as it turned out, He had to defer the promised perks, waiting for Jewish national repentance. He is still waiting.

The point is that the promises of *preservation* were unconditional; those of *blessing* were not. It's the same problem God had with Adam: if he had been allowed to eat of the tree that would have given him eternal life in his sinful, corrupted body, it would have been the ultimate good news/bad news scenario. The distinction between preservation and blessing became more marked as the Jews' behavior worsened. For example, **"And he [Jehoram] did evil in the sight of Yahweh. Yet Yahweh would not destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David, as He promised him to give a lamp to him and his sons forever."** (II Kings 8:19)

By the time of the prophets, you can almost hear the frustration, the sadness, in God's voice. He sounds like the anguished, loving father of a rebellious child. **"My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?... My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror."** (Hosea 11:7-9)

We have been speaking of preservation and blessing (or cursing) on a national scale. But we need to keep in mind that God's purpose is to have a personal relationship with each of His children—one on One. Under the right

circumstances, a single individual can turn the course of a nation's history—for better or worse. In Israel, for example, David did this—but so did Ahab. It is comforting to note that whatever our nation is doing right or wrong, God is still concerned with us as individuals. Consider this bit of prophecy:

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of Yahweh, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.’ Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.” God is able to preserve His friends from both man-made peril and natural disaster. **“He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made Yahweh, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone... Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him.”** Satan quite rightly applied this verse to Yahshua, who of all people “made Yahweh His dwelling place.” But because Yahshua *was* Yahweh, our deliverance is guaranteed through our love for Yahshua. **“I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.”** (Psalm 91)

Yep. That's where I want to live: in the secret place (Hebrew: *cithrah*, a place of hiding, shelter, protection) of the Most High. Thus it's a question of who we, as individuals, are trusting. And note: the psalmist says nothing about Israel here—this applies to all of us who “have known His name”—Yahweh.

Unfortunately, it appears that when God restores the nation of Israel to greatness, that's what they'll be reduced to: *individuals*—a remnant, not the teeming multitude numbering “as the stars of heaven” as they had been described in Solomon's day. **“In that day it shall come to pass that the glory of Jacob will wane, and the fatness of his flesh grow lean. It shall be as when the harvester gathers the grain, and reaps the heads with his arm.... Yet gleaning grapes will be left in it, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives at the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in its most fruitful branches.”** (Isaiah 17:4-6)

But whether many or few, there *will* be restoration for Israel. The Church has not usurped her promises. For that matter, the Church *can't* usurp her promises: any Jew who recognizes his Messiah during the Church age becomes *part* of the Ekklesia, the body of Christ, where there is “neither Jew nor Greek.” Jewish

national repentance must therefore come *after* the Church is taken out of the world (a subject we will address in detail in a later chapter).

God is faithful, compassionate, and extremely patient. His preservation of the Jews is a matter of history. His regathering of the nation of Israel is a prophecy we see unfolding before our very eyes: **“You, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, ‘You are My servant,’ I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”** (Isaiah 41:8-10)

The Jews will one day recognize that Yahshua is their Messiah, and they’ll sing with the sons of Korah, **“Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cause Your anger toward us to cease. Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations? Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, Yahweh, and grant us Your salvation.”** (Psalm 85:4-7)

They will enquire with the prophet Micah, **“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.”** (Micah 7:18-20)

They will fall on their knees in gratitude with Jeremiah, who observed during the darkest days of Judah’s history, **“[It is] through Yahweh’s mercies [that] we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness.... For Yahweh will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.** (Lamentations 3:22-23, 31-32)

And they will at last abide in the secret place of the Most High, acknowledging that **“Those who trust in Yahweh are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds His people from this time forth and forever.** (Psalm 125:1-2)

Chapter 6

Ground Zero

Something keeps popping up every so often in these scriptures pertaining to God's relationship with Israel, but I've been purposely avoiding the subject. Did you catch it? The *land*. What's up with that? Yahweh created the entire universe. What does he need with land—especially a tiny strip of semi-desert on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean with few known natural resources, too rocky to farm without intense labor, perennially short of water, and surrounded by people who hate Him? Why on earth does God love this land? *Canada* I could believe; not Canaan!

On the other hand, why does He love *us*? Humans, that is. On our own, we're pretty worthless too, more a part of the problem than we are of the solution. A few years on this insignificant rock and we go the way of the dodo. Why does God bother with us? Amazingly, it's because *we* are the whole point—beings formed in *His* image, made specifically to be companions for our Creator.

Remember, we were once “better” than we are now, immortal and sinless, and one day we will be restored to this state (actually, something even better). In the same way, there is evidence that the land of Israel was once much more than the barren, rocky semi-wasteland we see today, punctuated here and there by gardens wrested from the land with Herculean effort on the part of the Jews. At the time of the exodus, Canaan was apparently lush, fertile, and well watered. The spies Moses sent in came back with a cluster of grapes so big it had to be carried on a pole between two of them. The place was described by two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, as “**an exceedingly good land. If Yahweh delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey.**” (Numbers 14:7-8)

God had His eye on this land long before the exodus, of course. When he told Abram to “Get out of your country [Ur, probably in the southern Euphrates river valley, but possibly a site in Northern Mesopotamia], from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you,” He knew exactly where He wanted Abe to go. We pick up the story in Genesis 12: “**So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'**” (Genesis 12:5-7) Note that God didn't say Abram himself would be given the land, but his descendants (of whom he had none at the time) would. All Abe actually ended up “owning” of it was a burial plot he bought from some Hittite colonists.

“And Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.” (Genesis 13:14-17) I find it touching that Yahweh wanted Abram to personally experience the whole thing. It’s like a doting father—not satisfied with seeing his boy opening his birthday gift, but wanting to show him all the features, how it’s built, what it does. It just screams, “I love you!”

Later, He provided more specifics: **“Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”** (Genesis 15:18-20) Unfortunately, we don’t know the precise locations of all of these tribes. Canaan lent its name to the whole region, but the tribe was strongest along the coastal plain. The Hittites’ huge empire was centered far to the north, in modern Turkey. Thus, it’s probable that not all Hittite lands would be Abram’s, but only their colonies in the Levant. The reference to the Euphrates places Abram’s promised north-eastern border in today’s northern Syria, where the Hittites were particularly strong. (The Euphrates’ actual headwaters, however, are in east-central Turkey—the heart of the Hittite empire.) It’s hard to say exactly where the Hittites were in Abram’s day, or precisely what Yahweh meant, but we should note that the burial cave he bought from Ephron the Hittite was about 15 miles southwest of Hebron, midway between the Med and Dead seas.

The Rephaim were located in today’s southern Syria, east of the Sea of Galilee, including the land known as the Golan Heights. The Jebusites’ capital was Jebus, or Jerusalem. South of that, i.e., west of the Dead Sea, were the Perizzites. And the Amorites occupied, at the time, the Valley of Siddim, south of them. So at the very least, we can identify a territory far larger than modern-day Israel, one including all of Lebanon and a chunk of western Syria, but not Jordan. To the east of the Jordan River, south of the Rephaim, lived the Zuzites, Emmites, and Horites. Since these nations were not on Abram’s list, we can deduce that the river was meant to be the eastern border.

The Kenezites are a hard one to figure out. The Kenizzites (with an *i*) were an Edomite tribe, apparently neighbors of the Horites to the west, i.e., south of the Dead Sea. But at this point there were no such people as Edomites (descendants of Abraham’s grandson Esau), and there is no record of an earlier patriarch whose name suggests a connection with the Kenezites. The Kenites were a Midianite tribe, thus possibly (SF8) located south and east of the Gulf of Aqaba—the north-

western tip of present-day Saudi Arabia. The Kadmonites are a mystery. The name (*qadmoni*) simply means “eastern.” The Genesis 15 passage is the only time the name is used as a tribal entity.

The “river of Egypt” is often assumed to be the Nile, but it’s not. There was another river, about fifty miles down the coast from Gaza (entering the Mediterranean at its southeast corner) known as the river, or brook, of Egypt. Today it’s called the Wadi el-Arish; it’s a dry wash for much of the year. Some commentators have protested that the word for “river” (Hebrew: *Nahar*) means a real, flowing river, not a wadi. However, we must remember that in Abram’s day the climate in the region was quite different than it is today—the brook of Egypt likely flowed all year round. Besides, God called the Euphrates “great,” and it is, but not overly so when compared to the mighty Nile. Abram had seen and crossed both great rivers by this time (see Genesis 12), so it was clear that the “great river” was indeed the Euphrates and the “river of Egypt” was something less “great”—today’s Wadi el-Arish. Another point: the Amalekites, who lived just south of the brook of Egypt, were not included in the list of territories Abram was promised.

That covenant, by the way, was serious stuff. Normally, if two parties were striking a bargain, they would each remove a sandal and exchange them. That was the rough equivalent to “shaking hands on it.” But this was a covenant of blood: sacrificial animals were split in two and both parties would walk between the pieces, as if to say, “If I do not keep my end of the bargain, may I be cut in two like this.” But Yahweh put Abram out cold and went alone between the halves of the sacrificial animals, making this a unilateral covenant; Abram had no conditions whatsoever placed upon him.

Later, lest Abram (now Abraham) should think this deal had an expiration date on it, Yahweh told him, **“I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”** (Genesis 17:8) That, of course, reinforced God’s promise to preserve the nation. They couldn’t very well possess the land of Canaan if they were extinct.

Interestingly, the “non-Jewish” branches of the family eventually settled outside the land of promise. Lot’s descendants (related to Abraham but not in the line of promise) became the nations of Moab and Ammon, moving due east of the Dead sea (today’s Jordan). Ishmael settled in the wilderness of Paran, far to the south in the middle of the Sinai Peninsula. And what about Esau, Abraham’s grandson? **“Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were**

strangers could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom." (Genesis 36:6-8) Edom is located south and east of the Dead Sea, also in present-day Jordan—and outside the promised land.

It is tempting to explain away the tiny borders of present-day Israel by saying the promise applied to *all* of Abraham's descendents: including Ishmael, father of the Arabs, and the sons of Keturah, Abe's second wife. That theory won't hold water, however. The definition of his borders did not cease with Abraham, but was reiterated by Yahweh in successive generations, ruling out their application to anyone but the Jews.

Not surprisingly, God gave instructions on the subject to Moses right after the exodus, for he was supposed to lead his people into the promised land. The description, though, seems at first to be rather vague: **"And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you."** (Exodus 23:31)

Today, Israel's southern tip touches a hundred-mile long extension of the Red Sea called the Gulf of Aqaba. (This is the body of water referred to as the "Red Sea" in the story of the Exodus—underwater archaeologists have discovered Pharaoh's chariots strewn across the bottom like broken toys.) But the reference to Kenites above might (SF8) indicate that God really *did* mean "the Red Sea" proper, including the entire eastern shore of the Gulf—Saudi Arabia's northwest corner today (the place where Mount Sinai is *actually* located). Arguing against this theory, though, is the fact that the Midianites who lived there in Abraham's day were not specifically included in the list of nations his family would displace.

By the way, the liberals can't have it both ways. If, as they say, Moses merely parted the "Reed" sea, a foot-deep marsh on the northern end of the Gulf of Suez (miraculously drowning Pharaoh's entire army in this insignificant puddle), then according to the formula above, the Israelites were only being promised the Sinai Peninsula, west of today's Suez Canal. And if, as some would say, the "River" here meant the Nile (and not the Euphrates, as is blatantly stated in Deuteronomy 1:7 and elsewhere), then the promised land didn't come anywhere near Canaan (something that's specifically spelled out in scores of other places), but was comprised entirely of the very land in which they'd been slaves for the past four hundred years, the Land of Goshen in northeastern Egypt. Lesson: if you're willing to play fast and loose with the plain meaning of the

Hebrew text, be prepared to do a constant juggling act with the rest of the Bible. The Red Sea is *not* the Reed Sea.

The sea of the Philistines is obviously the Mediterranean, for Philistia was located along its southwest shoreline—today’s Gaza strip, more or less. “The River,” based on numerous other passages, is clearly the Euphrates. A quick look at the map reveals that the Euphrates actually comes within a hundred miles of the Mediterranean coast at about the 36th parallel (approximately the latitude of Antioch). I believe (SF1) the borders of the promised land were supposed to extend that far north, and as far south as the Gulf of Aqaba. That leaves only “the desert” undefined. At issue here is how far east along the Euphrates the promised land’s border went before it turned south. Today much of Syria, Jordan, and Iraq are desert areas. We have no idea what the land was like in Moses’ day, but the Euphrates river valley wasn’t called the fertile crescent for nothing. My guess, however, is that Yahweh’s intention was to go no further east than present-day Lake al-Assad, the river’s westernmost point. But I could be wrong: it could easily include the entire western half of modern Syria; the Anti-Lebanon Mountains form a natural barrier to moisture blowing in from the Mediterranean, creating desert behind them.

Lest there should be any misunderstanding, after forty years of wilderness wanderings Yahweh again told Moses what the promised land included: **“You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. Turn [northeast] and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites [southwest of the Dead Sea], to all the neighboring places in the plain [here He restates the overall objective], in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them.”** (Deuteronomy 1:6-8)

Significantly, He also told them where *not* to go: **“You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir [south and east of the Dead Sea] to Esau as a possession... Do not harass Moab [east of the Dead Sea], nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession... And when you come near the people of Ammon [east of the Dead Sea, north of Moab], do not harass them or meddle with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot as a possession.”** (Deuteronomy 2:4-5, 9, 19) I think we can safely say that Jordan (whose capital is still called Amman) was clearly out of bounds to Jewish settlement. The reason Yahweh was so careful to point this out was that Mount

Seir, Moab, Ar, and Ammon were not slated for destruction as the Canaanites were for their abominable religious practices. (That state of affairs will change drastically during the last days, by the way.) But the Israelites had to pass through these territories to enter the land from the Jordan River side. This passage makes it painfully clear that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh were in clear violation of the will of Yahweh when they insisted on settling in Ammonite territory east of the Jordan. God didn't give them this land; they simply took it.

That little observation makes the next passage sting a bit. **“For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him—then Yahweh will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory.”** (Deuteronomy 11:22-24) That's a really big *if*. God had told them precisely what land to occupy, but they (some of them) presumed they knew better than Yahweh. This is all too reminiscent of the attitude of our politicians today, who totally ignore the dictates of God in the matter of Israel's proper borderline, inventing instead a politically correct but scripturally *incorrect* “road map to peace,” intending to carve Israel up into an anorexic and indefensible scrap of Swiss cheese.

But excuse my rant. We were talking about history. The consequences of the geographic disobedience of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, if nothing else, make this whole study really confusing. Obviously the map of Israel today, even if you include the West Bank, looks nothing like what is being described here. There is a huge discrepancy between what God promised and what they got.

Does this make Yahweh a liar? No. The Israelites' ownership of the land was unconditional, but their possession of it was always predicated on their obedience—and they had *always* had a problem with obedience. Remember the twelve spies? God had told the people umpteen times, “Go in and possess the land; I've given it to you.” Instead, they sent in twelve guys to check the place out first (cf. Deuteronomy 1:21-25). You know the story: they came back after forty days and ten of them said the job was too tough. Bottom line—the Israelites all died off wandering around in the desert. But hidden in the minutiae is a telling little statistic: **“So they [the twelve spies] went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath.”** (Numbers 13:21) So what? They started where the people were camped, in the Wilderness of Zin, went to Hamath (or, more properly, *Lebo* Hamath, the entrance of the valley leading northward to it), turned around and came back, telling horror stories of giants armed to the teeth and a land that “devours its people.” Note that they didn't go

south first to the Red Sea, or even to the Gulf of Aqaba (considered part of the Red Sea at the time); nor did they go all the way to the Euphrates River, but stopped a hundred miles short of it. That betrayed a stunning lack of appreciation for the land God wanted to give them. Not only were they unwilling to go in on faith and take it, they were even unwilling to go and *look* at the whole thing.

So when the time came for the new generation to enter the land, God gave them new instructions, more in line with their own anemic expectations: **“When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance—the land of Canaan to its boundaries. Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea; your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon; the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea. As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border.”** (Numbers 34:1-6)

There is nothing vague about this one. God gave them everything but GPS coordinates. The southern border forms a curve dipping about twenty miles south from the Dead Sea, turning south, then west, then north, ending at the Brook of Egypt. (The Nile is nowhere close—this reference pretty much nails down the Wadi el-Arish theory.) Note that they didn’t get any land south of the Wilderness of Zin, not even to the Gulf of Aqaba. The spies’ lack of faith had cost them somewhere between 50 and 150 miles of north-to-south territory (depending on whether the Red Sea/Kenite theory is valid).

The western border is, as usual, the Mediterranean Sea. **“And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your border line to Mount Hor; from Mount Hor you shall mark out your border to the entrance of Hamath; then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad; the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.”** (Numbers 34:7-9)

This is obviously not the famous Mount Hor on the border of Edom where Aaron was buried. It is rather the mountain known later as Tavros Umanis, mentioned in Song of Solomon 4:8 as Amanah. It is located near the ancient seacoast town of Byblos—slightly north of the 34th parallel, near Lebanon’s northern border, midway between Beirut and Tripoli. The entrance of Hamath is the southern end of the valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains that leads north to the present Syrian city of Hama. It’s about forty miles inland from Byblos. Zedad I take to be the town of Sadad, about the latitude of modern Tripoli, perhaps sixty miles inland. Northeast of Damascus lies a mountain called Djebel Sefira, whose name is likely derived from Ziphron. The border then moves west a bit: Hazar Enan is probably the Arab village of Dar Anon (the Arabic *Dar*,

or Hebrew *Hazar*, means “dwelling;” *Anon/Enan* means “spring”), about twenty-five miles northwest of Damascus.

“You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham; the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; the border shall go down and reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth; the border shall go down along the Jordan [River], and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.” (Numbers 34:10-12)

The line continues south. Targum Jonathan identifies Shepham with Aphmia, which is Banias, about four miles east of Laish, a.k.a. Dan. Ironically, this area was traditionally reckoned as the northern tip of Israel: the idiom “from Dan to Beersheba,” came to mean “the whole country.” Beersheba, by the way, was forty or fifty miles *north* of the wilderness of Zin. The Israelites apparently believed that “less is more.”

Anyway, now we’re looking for “Riblah on the east side of Ain.” Ain is apparently *Ein al Malcha*, or “salt spring,” located between Kedesh and the Sea of Semechonitis, the small body of water upstream from the Sea of Galilee later known as Lake Huleh. Riblah must have been just east of this, i.e., on the northern shore of Lake Huleh. The Sea of Chinnereth, or Galilee, was included in Israel’s territory. The rest of the borderline simply follows the Jordan River south to the Dead Sea.

I realize that all of that is hard to follow without a detailed map in front of you. Basically, Numbers 34 defined Israel’s territory as all of present-day Israel (without the southernmost pointy part that extends from the Negev to the Gulf of Aqaba), including the West Bank and Gaza Strip (but not the Golan Heights, which *is*, however, encompassed in the Genesis 15 description), plus almost all of a Lebanon whose eastern border has been plumped up a bit to include a few dozen miles of Syrian territory.

Obviously, these borders differ from the land area promised to Abraham, and even to those specified to Moses at the time of the exodus. At that time, the land was described as extending all the way from the Red Sea in the South to the Euphrates River in the north. The eastern border didn’t change as far as we can tell: It extended to the “desert” in the north, and to the Jordan River in the south, beyond which, in Moses’ day, lived the nations of Ammon, Moab, and Edom, whom God had expressly told the Jews not to touch. These differences are indicative of a lack of faith on the part of Israel—leading to disobedience, leading in turn to estrangement from their God and His blessings. I find it touching that God gave them one last chance to possess *all* of the land when He gave Joshua his marching orders as they were going in for the first time. All they had to do was go out in faith and “tread upon” it: **“Go over this Jordan, you [Joshua] and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of**

your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites [a phrase that indicates a bigger, rather than smaller, hunk of present-day Syria], and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.” (Joshua 1:2-4)
History shows that they did *not* “tread upon” all of it, settling for a truncated country extending from “Dan to Beersheba,” and struggling to hold even that.

It cannot be said, however, that Israel *never* held the land promised to Abraham. David’s kingdom *did* apparently extend as far north as the Euphrates, for we read, **“David also defeated Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his territory at the River Euphrates.”** (II Samuel 8:3)

By the time Solomon inherited his father’s throne, he didn’t even have to fight for control of the land, though it appears that outside the secure country “from Dan to Beersheba” the lands weren’t settled exclusively by Jews, but were merely under the control of, and paying tribute to, Solomon. **“Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life... For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphshah even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.”** (I Kings 4:20-21, 24-25)
However, it is clear that the nation occupied at least the country specified in Numbers 34: **“At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt...”** (I Kings 8:65)

Not bad! One generation of national leadership under a king who was obedient to Yahweh, and Israel’s borders got stretched to the limits of the promise—and that after 400 years of shaky and uncertain occupation under the Judges. And the next generation, enjoying “leftover” blessings, was one of the most successful kingdoms in the history of mankind. Was it too good to last? Apparently. **“In those days [Jehu’s reign] Yahweh began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael [King of Syria] conquered them in all the territory of Israel from the Jordan eastward: all the land of Gilead—Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh—from Aroer, which is by the River Arnon, including Gilead and Bashan.”** (II Kings 10:32-33) Within 130 years of Solomon’s death, God had removed from Israel’s control all those territories east of the Jordan that should never have been theirs in the first place—having made permanent enemies of Moab and Ammon.

The slide continued, along with the slide in Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. This verse, chronicling the time of Judah’s last king, Jehoaichin, is one of the saddest in the Bible: **“And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon [Nebuchadnezzar] had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the**

Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates.” (II Kings 24:7) Who? What? “Belonged to the King of *Egypt*?” Yep. Israel’s disobedience—both by Ephraim and Judah—had cost them their control over the land long before the Assyrians and Babylonians actually came in and physically removed their sorry assets. Just as Moses had warned them. And warned them. And warned them.

God’s personal interest in the Jews is mirrored in His personal attachment to the land, whether they’re occupying it or not. His position is stated in the Law of Moses: **“The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.”** (Leviticus 25:23) This was the reason for Jubilee. According to the law, you couldn’t actually buy or sell land in Israel; you could only “lease” it. Its value, calculated on the number of harvests that could be expected, depended upon how long it was until Jubilee, when everything reverted back to its original owner. This was Yahweh’s way of instilling a pilgrim mentality into his people, telling them, in effect, “The Land is Mine, and the timing is Mine. For you, all of this is temporary; I am permanent. Worship Me alone.”

No matter who is living there at any given time, Yahweh considers the land of promise His possession. And being His, He can give it to whomever He chooses. David stated it this way: **“He is Yahweh our God; His judgments are in all the earth. Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as the allotment of your inheritance.’”** (I Chronicles 16:14-18; see also Psalm 105:8-11)

And there is one place, one city, within the land of Canaan that is of particular significance to Him. As He told Solomon, **“Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel. Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there; and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.”** (II Chronicles 6:5-6)

Actually, He chose the place where Jerusalem would be built long before there was a city there, long before there were any tribes of Israel. When He told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, He told him exactly where to do it: **“Go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”** (Genesis 22:2) At the time, there was no one living there—not even Jebusites. But as it turned out, Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem a mere 800

yards from the place where Abraham had prepared to make his supreme sacrifice—the very same spot where Yahweh *did* make the supreme Sacrifice exactly two thousand years later. Yes, Jerusalem is a special place, even to God.

Offhand, I can't think of a single city other than Jerusalem that God ever chose to defend, even temporarily. But when Hezekiah's Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian armies, Yahweh promised to protect it, not because Hezekiah was a good king, not because Judah was sinless, but because of His character and His friendship with a man who had passed into history and legend over 250 years earlier. **"For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake."** (II Kings 19:34) And although Jerusalem has been leveled and rebuilt several times since then, God's eye is still upon her, for she will be Messiah's earthly capital in the coming kingdom. I can guarantee that Yahshua wasn't talking about Herod when He said, **"I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King."** (Matthew 5:34-35) He was talking about Himself!

Muslims, those masters of revisionist history, would like us to believe that neither Israel nor Yahweh have any historical claim to Jerusalem or "Palestine" (a name coined by Rome's Emperor Hadrian in 135 A.D. in an futile attempt to sever the Jews' emotional attachment to the land). But the evidence is all over the ancient Hebrew scriptures—written in an alphabet that had fallen out of use a millennium before Muhammad was even born. And Allah? What did he "have to say" about Jerusalem? Nothing. The city is not mentioned *once* in the Qur'an.

The prophet Zechariah had a vision just before the second Temple was completed in 515 B.C. And although he lived to see the near fulfillment, he was probably unaware that God had something more permanent, more far reaching, in view. **"Thus says Yahweh of hosts: 'I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal. I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; for I was a little angry, and they helped—but with evil intent.' Therefore thus says Yahweh: 'I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,' says Yahweh of hosts, 'and a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.... My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; Yahweh will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem.'" (Zechariah 1:12-17)**

So at the risk of getting ahead of our story, we need to consider what would happen if the nation of Israel were to repent and turn back to Yahweh—or should I say, "What *will* happen *when*..." That very thing is prophesied in scores of places—far more often than any other future event. For example: **"Yahweh will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land. The strangers will be joined with them, and they will cling to the house of Jacob. Then people will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them for servants and maids in the land of Yahweh; they will take them captive whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors."** (Isaiah 14:1-2)

This scenario admittedly doesn't look terribly likely as long as the Messiah continues to delay His coming. But once God takes direct control of the earth's government in His own hands (remember Isaiah's words: **"the government will be upon His shoulder..."**), once the nation of Israel accepts Yahshua as their Messiah, then He will once again **"settle them in their own land."** But what land is that? The area the U.N. carved out for Israel in 1948? The ground they were able to seize in June of 1967? The specific boundaries laid out in Numbers 34? No. I believe (SF2) that in Messiah's kingdom they will own every inch of ground Yahweh originally promised to Abram: **"...from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates,"** and to Moses: **"from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the [Euphrates] River."**

Ownership, however, is one thing. Occupancy is another. Ezekiel, in a clearly Millennial passage, lays out the boundaries of the land that the people of Israel will occupy during the reign of Messiah. They are roughly coterminous with the Numbers 34 borders, i.e., most of modern Israel and Lebanon. **"Thus says Yahweh: 'These are the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions. You shall inherit it equally with one another; for I raised My hand in an oath to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance. This shall be the border of the land on the north: from the Great Sea, by the road to Hethlon, as one goes to Zedad, Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim (which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath), to Hazar Hatticon (which is on the border of Hauran). Thus the boundary shall be from the Sea to Hazar Enan, the border of Damascus; and as for the north, northward, it is the border of Hamath. This is the north side. On the east side you shall mark out the border from between Hauran and Damascus, and between Gilead and the land of Israel, along the Jordan, and along the eastern side of the sea. This is the east side. The south side, toward the South, shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribah by Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea. This is the south side, toward the South. The west side shall be the Great Sea, from the southern boundary until one comes to a point opposite Hamath. This is the west side. Thus you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance,' says Yahweh."** (Ezekiel 47:13-23)

Each tribe will be given an equal amount of territory, a strip of land extending all the way from the Mediterranean Sea to the eastern border of the land (the Jordan River, except in the far north), with a separate territory set aside for the Messiah, the Prince, and the Levites who are tasked with Temple service. I'll get into the details when we discuss the Millennial reign of Christ. For now, suffice it

to say that Israel has never been divided up this way, nor has it occupied precisely these borders before. The prophecy has yet to be fulfilled.

And what of the previously described land outside of these borders, that is, extending to the Euphrates in the north and to the Red Sea (or Gulf of Aqaba) in the south? Will this territory belong to Israel—and if so, how will these lands will be utilized? It is my belief that these areas will indeed be Israeli territory, though Ezekiel makes it clear that they will not be divided up among the twelve tribes. Precisely how Yahshua will use them is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps they will be “heritage” land held in common, like our national parks.

But today, Israel is continuously pressured by its friends and enemies alike to trade its land for hollow promises of peace. Now that the Gaza Strip has been abandoned to Yahweh’s enemies (with predictably disastrous results for all parties involved) the Muslims have once again cast a covetous eye toward the West Bank as their next target. Indeed, they have made no secret of the fact that they won’t be satisfied until all of Israel is in Islamic hands and every Jew is dead. Muhammad’s hallucination about riding a mythical white donkey to Jerusalem one night is their irrational, albeit unshakable, grounds for demanding total Muslim control over Yahweh’s chosen city. In light of the present political situation, then, the disposition of the prophetic borders of Israel seems to be a small point. Mere survival in the face of a hostile and unrelenting *jihad* is job one. Today’s Jews are not of a mind to quibble over esoteric points of ancient prophecy, even if it’s theirs.

But there will come a time in the not-so-distant future when the presence of Yahweh will again be real to them—as real as it was in the days of Moses—and the returning King will survey His domain anew. At that time, they will sing the anthem of the prophet recorded in Isaiah 26:12-15: **“Yahweh, You will establish peace for us, For You have also done all our works in us. O Yahweh our God, masters besides You have had dominion over us; but by You only we make mention of Your name. They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish. You have increased the nation, O Yahweh, You have increased the nation; You are glorified; You have expanded all the borders of the land.”**

Chapter 7

God's Timetable

God isn't finished with Israel, although there have been many times in her long history where a casual glance might have led someone to that conclusion. During one of these times, a bright young man of noble lineage named Daniel had been carried off to Babylon from his home in Jerusalem, never to return. Daniel's faith and courage during his long and illustrious career as a high ranking civil servant—one of the "wise men" of Babylon—singled him out as a man God could trust to receive the most sweeping prophecies in the entire Hebrew Bible. What Yahweh told him would prove to be the key to the chronology of God—His timetable for the whole human race.

In 538 B.C., sixty-seven years after he had been hauled off as a prize of war, Daniel realized that the prophet Jeremiah had predicted (in Jeremiah 25:11) that Judah would serve the king of Babylon for only seventy years—the time of her punishment was nearly over. Naturally, being a man of God and a "wise man" to boot, Daniel began to pray that God would fulfill his promise. (There's a lesson in there for us: if you want your prayer answered in the affirmative, pray for what you know God wants.) God had every intention of keeping His word, but He gave Daniel a bit more than he bargained for. We pick up the story in the ninth chapter:

"Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before Yahweh my God for the holy mountain of my God, yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man [i.e., angel] Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, 'O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.'" (Daniel 9:20-24)

Gabriel had just turned on the information fire hose. If we're going to drink it in, we'll need to slow it down to a trickle. First, what does "seventy weeks" mean? A "week" is literally a "seven." It could be seven days or seven years. The context is the key, and the context here clearly indicates that a seven-year "week" is meant. (Seventy weeks of days is only sixteen months, not nearly enough time for the fulfillment of the whole prophecy. And elsewhere when Daniel means a

week of seven days, he spells it out, as in 10:2, “three weeks of days.”) “Seventy weeks” is therefore seventy seven-year periods, or 490 years.

A “year,” by the way, would have been reckoned by Daniel to be an even 360 days—twelve months of 30 days each—not the 365.24219879 days we know and love. The Babylonians and their “guests” actually observed two calendars, a complicated lunar based model, which (like the Hebrew calendar) added seven intercalary months every nineteen years to adjust for the shifting seasons, and this 360-day schematic version, which compensated by adding five days at the end. Don’t think of them as naïve and backward for this practice. They were quite aware that the real year was about 365¼ days long. (Their lunar calendar, in use as far back as 600 B.C., was accurate to within two hours, four minutes, twenty-five seconds per year.) But these calendars made far more practical sense in the days before we had sophisticated mathematics, precise methods of measuring the sun’s path, and robust means of communicating what had been observed. With a lunar system, everyone had a reliable way to periodically “set their clocks.” Since a lunar cycle took 29.53 days to complete, every new moon marked a new “moonth.” But in practice, the schematic 360-day civil calendar was easier to use and communicate.

More to the point, Yahweh (who is always more precise in His use of terminology than we are) never actually used the term “year” to describe the duration being described. He referred to them as “times,” and called seven of them a “seven,” but the Hebrew word for “year” (*shanah*) does not appear. It’s merely a convenient (though inaccurate) way for us to express “360 days.”

“Your people” meant Israel, and “your holy city” meant Jerusalem. Although Daniel had spent his entire adult life in Babylonian society, he never lost sight of who he was—an Israelite, one of God’s chosen. He personified the pilgrim mentality that Yahweh wanted in his people.

The sledding gets heavier with the phrase “finish the transgression.” The breaking of God’s law was why Israel had been removed from the land of promise in the first place. It was the reason Daniel was here on his knees, begging for God’s mercy and restoration. Was Gabe telling him that there would someday be no more such transgression, that the apostasy of his people would have seen its last day? It must have seemed too good to be true.

“To make an end of sins” went even farther. Who could imagine a world—or even a nation—without sin? The Levitical sacrifices had been instituted to temporarily cover over the sins of the people, but *this* would require something more substantial, something permanent, something universal. Besides, the temple had been destroyed—almost fifty years ago now. Israel couldn’t have made sacrifices to atone for their sins if they wanted to. No, this would have to be something bigger than all that: this would have to be Yahweh’s doing.

“To make reconciliation for iniquity.” By this time, Daniel’s head must have been swimming. This was the one thing most desired by fallen man (or at least it should have been)—reconciliation with God, erasing the curse that had come upon us because of our sin. Perhaps Daniel thought back to Yahweh’s promise to Abraham: “In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” How could this be? What would God do? Whatever it was, it would happen within this 490-year period.

“To bring in everlasting righteousness.” Yes, that would follow our reconciliation, wouldn’t it? Daniel’s heart must have leapt at the word “everlasting.” It meant that once God had achieved his purpose, we would never again fall into sin. That implied that we would be fundamentally different than we are now—no more these frail, mortal creatures who can’t seem to make it through the day without grieving our Maker, but sinless, immortal beings walking in complete harmony with God and man. If there’s a Chaldean word for “wow,” he must have said it.

“To seal up vision and prophecy.” *Okay*, he must have thought. *At least this is familiar ground.* Daniel had been receiving visions and interpreting prophetic dreams since he was a young man. Gabriel was telling him that everything he had foreseen would come to fruition. For that matter, everything that had been seen by *all* of God’s prophets would come to pass; all of the dreams and visions, all of the one-on-one revelations, the types, the metaphors, the dress rehearsals—they would all be fulfilled when these last 490 years of Israel’s future history were finished.

“And to anoint the Most Holy.” This “Anointed One,” or Messiah, would be the great king who had been prophesied to reign forever from the throne of David. Daniel would have been quite familiar with his people’s expectations of this man, for his lineage and character had been prophesied. The time of His coming, however, had not—until now.

Gabriel’s message continues: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.” (Daniel 9:25) The word for “Prince” (Hebrew: *nagiyd*), stresses the aspect of command, whether civil, military, or religious. The root of this word, *nagad*, means to “stand boldly out opposite—to manifest, expose, predict, explain, or praise....” It’s not a stretch, then, to describe Messiah the Prince as a bold commander and prophet, anointed by Yahweh to be the manifestation of His power.

Daniel 9:25 is a passage that drives the skeptics nuts. It pinpoints the starting date of the “seventy weeks” period, and it specifies a length of time that is to pass

before Messiah, “the Prince,” is to appear. As we’ll see in a moment, the prediction is so precise and verifiable, it *requires* a miraculous knowledge of future events. Critics of the Book of Daniel have tried for years to establish a date of its writing hundreds of years after his death. Its plethora of specific and detailed prophecies about the times of the gentiles—prophecies that were fulfilled to the letter—prove that Yahweh’s knowledge transcends time, and/or that His ability and willingness to manipulate world events transcends the power of mortal man. And that makes their unbelief look foolish (which it is). So they usually suggest a date after the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.). But the Talmud supports authorship by the historical sixth-century Daniel. And, unfortunately for the skeptics, there’s the little matter of the Septuagint: the Old Testament scriptures were translated into Greek in Alexandria around 275 B.C. It’s hard to translate something that hasn’t been written yet.

Also, late second century B.C. fragments of Daniel have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QDan^c-4Q114)—making second-century authorship highly unlikely. But even if the book *had* been written in the second century B.C., it wouldn’t help the case of the anti-prophecy critics in the case of Daniel 9:25. This prophecy’s fulfillment occurred well into the first century A.D.

The chronology works out like this. The starting gun was a “command to restore and build Jerusalem.” This is not the edict of Cyrus (who had merely authorized the rebuilding of the temple) which was made within a year of Daniel’s vision, but rather the proclamation of Artaxerxes Longimanus almost a hundred years later: **“And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I [Nehemiah] took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, ‘Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.’ So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, ‘May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?’ Then the king said to me, ‘What do you request?’ So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.’ Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), ‘How long will your journey be? And when will you return?’ So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.”** (Nehemiah 2:1-6)

Most scholars (including the esteemed Sir Robert Anderson, whom I believe was the first to calculate this) peg the twentieth year of Artaxerxes at 445 B.C. It’s simple arithmetic. His father, Xerxes (a.k.a. Ahasuerus, husband of Queen Esther) died in 465; add twenty years to that and you come to 445. But they fail to take into account the little drama that transpired following the death (okay, *murder*) of Xerxes. The king had been killed in his sleep by an ambitious fellow named

Artabanus, the king's vizier or bodyguard, who also (according to Aristotle) killed the heir apparent, Darius. Another royal son, Hustapis, was out of the country, safe for the moment. That left Artaxerxes, a mere teenager at the time. Artabanus left him alive, figuring he could rule through him as regent. Then, seven months later, he changed his mind and tried to kill him, too. But as luck would have it, the lad killed Artabanus instead. Hustapis showed up shortly thereafter and tried to claim the throne, so Artaxerxes killed him as well. These guys needed a Constitution in the worst way. Anyway, all this maneuvering took the better part of a year: thus Artie apparently wasn't able to assume the throne until 464. That would make the starting date of Daniel's prophecy the 1st of Nisan, 444 B.C.

From this date, we must count "**seven weeks and sixty two weeks.**" That is, there would be forty-nine years until Jerusalem's "street and wall" were built, "**even in troublesome times**"—the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah relate just how troublesome they were—and another 434 years, or 483 years total, "**until Messiah the Prince.**" 483 years times 360 days—the length of the Hebrew prophetic year—comes out to 173,880 days, or 476 solar years and 25 days inclusive, i.e., to the 10th of Nisan, or March 28, A.D. 33. And on March 28, A.D. 33, if my calculations are correct, Yahshua of Nazareth rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amid the adulation of a teeming throng of Jewish worshipers in town for the Passover holiday. It was Palm Monday. Messiah the Prince had come.

God's Passover lamb had entered the household of Israel, just as the Torah required (see Exodus 12:3). Four days later, on April 1st (or the 14th of Nisan, Passover) that is, immediately "**after the sixty-two weeks,**" Yahshua was "**cut off, but not for Himself,**" a polite euphemism for being scourged within an inch of his life with a Roman flagrum, crowned with a wreath of cruel thorns, mocked, spat upon, crucified, and placed cold and dead into a borrowed tomb—though he was guilty of no crime. David had foreseen it: "**Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully. Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it.**" (Psalm 69:4)

Confirmation of the A.D. 33 date comes from several sources. First, the 14th of Nisan fell on a Friday in 33 on the Julian calendar, but on a Monday in 32, a poor fit for the Gospels' chronology. Second, there was a lunar eclipse on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan, 33, the very time of Christ's crucifixion. All three synoptic Gospel writers recorded it. "**Now from the sixth hour [noon] to the ninth hour there was a darkness over the land.**" (Matthew 27:45) An ordinary eclipse, of course, can't account for three hours of darkness but it's a significant sign nevertheless.

And then there's the matter of the letter purportedly written by Pontius Pilate explaining to the Emperor why he crucified Yahshua of Nazareth. The letter, now in the British Museum, is dated "The 5th of the calends of April," *calends* referring to the beginning of a month. If the crucifixion took place in A.D. 33, the

letter was written on the first Tuesday after the event. But in 32, the 14th of Nisan fell on April 12—seven days *after* the procurator wrote his letter. Note that even if the letter is a forgery, the author would have taken care to get the chronological details right. Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that Daniel’s first 69 “weeks” fell between 444 B.C. and A.D. 33.

There is a gap between the 69th and 70th weeks. We know this because several events are predicted to occur between the two periods. First is the “cutting off” of the Messiah, which happened four days after the deadline. The passage continues: **“And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with [or like] a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.”** (Daniel 9:26) This must have knocked the wind out of Daniel’s sails. He had been praying that the city and sanctuary would be restored. God, through Gabriel, is stating here that they will be, only to be destroyed a second time!

Remember, this is a continuation of the thought, **“Messiah will be cut off....”** There is a causal relationship between the two events. It’s not hard to figure out who “the people” who would trash Jerusalem are, of course. The Romans under Titus pummeled their rebellious province of Judea, starting in 67 A.D., capping their achievement with the sacking of the besieged and starving Jerusalem in 70. As Yahshua had predicted, not one stone of the temple was left upon another—the Roman soldiers completely dismantled the magnificent building looking for gold. (**“The prince who is to come”** whose people would destroy Jerusalem is a character who will have a major role in events still future; we’ll talk about him later.)

The phrase, **“Till the end of the war desolations are determined,”** brings tears to my eyes. You see, the war should have ended with the fall of Jerusalem. There were no longer any meaningful targets in all of Judea. But 967 diehard Zealot rebels holed up in Herod’s Dead Sea retreat, Masada, and the Romans under Flavius Silva, who refused on principle to let it go, spent seven months and hundreds of thousands of man-hours of Jewish slave labor building an earthen ramp through a gorge so they could storm the virtually impregnable fortress. But on the 15th of Nisan (The Feast of Unleavened Bread), 73 A.D., the night before the Romans finally breached the wall, all of the Jewish defenders—all except one woman who lived to tell the tale—committed mass suicide rather than submitting to the Romans. They destroyed everything of intrinsic value, leaving the Romans nothing to loot, but left untouched enough food and water to hold out for several years, their mute testimony to the Romans of what the Zealot leader, Elazar Ben-Yair had written: “It will bear witness when we are dead to the fact that we perished not through want but because, as we resolved at the beginning, we chose death rather than slavery.” The Jewish defenders were passionate and courageous, but the prophecy had been written: **“Till the end of the war desolations are determined.”**

Sixty-nine of the seventy weeks are thus accounted for. There is but one seven-year (i.e., 2,520-day) era left in which to complete the amazing list of events in Daniel's prophecy. The revelation goes on to describe events within this 70th week, and we will address them in due course, for they are still future. The gap between the 69th and 70th weeks is *outside* the time period Gabriel told Daniel had been "determined for your people and your holy city." In other words, God is not specifically dealing with the nation of Israel or with Jerusalem at this time, and has not been doing so for the past two millennia or so—an era defined as the church age. He hasn't forgotten about Israel, but this is not their time. "Their time" will begin again when this final "week" commences.

If you will recall from chapter 3, the Talmud predicted that the third two-thousand-year slice of human history—this same chunk of time we've been discussing, the gap between the 69th and 70th week—would be the "age of Messiah." And indeed, the called-out assembly of those who recognize Yahshua as their Messiah have been God's focus during this time—the same people who were addressed in Yahshua's letters to the seven churches of Asia, recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. But the Daniel 9 prophecy is about this same personality, "Messiah the prince." It reveals the timing of His advent.

The Jews by Daniel's time had reasonably well-defined expectations of who this Messiah, the Anointed One, would be. When John the Baptist was asked, "**Are you the prophet?**" (John 1:21) his questioners were referring to a prophecy from Moses: "**Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'** And Yahweh said to me: '**What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.**'" (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) Experiencing the glory of Yahweh had been too much for the elders of Israel. God knew that only a Man could communicate with them in terms they could comprehend. Here He predicts that this Man would be a Jew, a prophet like Moses, who would speak the words of Yahweh. "The Prophet" would turn out to be the same person as "the Messiah," though this was still being debated in Yahshua's day. John was not "the Prophet," and he said so. Yahshua was.

The Jews no doubt missed it, but when Moses asked God to choose a man to lead Israel after him, His answer was prophetic of the Messiah: "**Then Moses spoke to Yahweh, saying: 'Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the**

congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Yahweh may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.' And Yahweh said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him....' (Numbers 27:15-18) Many people know that "Joshua" is the same name as Yahshua (alternately rendered Yahowsha', Yahuwshuwa', Yahushua, Yəhowsu'a, Yāhowshuwa', Yāhowshu'a, Y'howshu'a, Yehoshua, Yēhōšūā', Yeshua, Yahoshua, Yeshuwa', or Y'shua, depending upon which lexicon you're using), the Anglicized "Jesus." What's interesting here is Joshua's *father's* name: Nun means "perpetual." In effect, the Spirit-filled man to be "set over the congregation," who would be their leader and shepherd, would be called Yahshua—which means Yahweh is Salvation—Son of the Everlasting.

Moses wasn't through with the subtle prophecies. When blessing the people near the end of his life, he addressed the tribe of Judah: "Hear, Yahweh, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; Let his hands be sufficient for him, and may You be a help against his enemies." (Deuteronomy 33:7) Messiah's established lineage from the house of Judah (cf. Genesis 49:10) is in view here. Moses was imploring Yahweh to bring the *Messiah* to his people.

Messiah was expected to come from Judah's royal line, the family of David: "Yahweh tells you that He will make you [David] a house [a royal dynasty]. 'When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.'" (II Samuel 7:11-12, 16; cf. I Chronicles 17:1-15) Thus he was to be both a prophet (like Moses) and a king (like David). The length of His reign was unprecedented: it would last "forever." He was also to be a priest, but not of the order of Aaron, for that would have required Him to be of the tribe of Levi, not Judah. But David wrote of Him, "Yahweh has sworn, and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" (Psalm 110:4) This too was something unique: no one had ever been a prophet, priest, *and* king.

What would His reign be like? David's dying words were, "When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth." (II Samuel 23:3-4 NIV) Would Messiah be any less righteous, any less kind to His people? No. The Jews expected someone just like David had described.

Benaiah predicted to Solomon that Messiah's reign would be one of peace, in contrast to the bloodshed wrought by his father's rivals: "Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever. But upon David and his descendants, upon his house and his throne, there shall be peace forever from Yahweh.... The king said moreover to Shimei, 'You know, as your heart acknowledges,

all the wickedness that you did to my father David; therefore Yahweh will return your wickedness on your own head. But King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before Yahweh forever." (I Kings 2:33, 44-45) The first-century Jews who longed for a warrior-prince Messiah to rid them of the Roman scourge (as Bar Kochba tried to do a hundred years later) should have read this passage. Once Yahshua has taken the throne of Israel, His will be a reign of peace.

The length of Messiah's reign, described here as "forever," was restated in dozens of places, such as Psalm 89:3-4: **"I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.'**" Or, **"For thus says Yahweh: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.'**" (Jeremiah 33:17)

Daniel was no doubt quite familiar with the writings of the prophet Isaiah, who lived about 150 years before his time. Isaiah's Messianic revelations went well beyond lineage and length of reign. They delved into the very personality of the Holy One. **"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law."** (Isaiah 42:1-4) Here is a picture of a gentle, quiet man, One who didn't have to file an environmental impact report every time He opened His mouth. He would nonetheless succeed in bringing justice to the whole world, especially to the gentiles. The Jews, presuming this would entail harsh punishments for their oppressors, probably liked that line a lot. They failed to realize that justice for the gentiles included mercy for those who turned to God, believing in and accepting Yahshua's offer of redemption. This explains why so many Jews had trouble with the concept of gentiles in the congregation of Yahweh.

Isaiah, speaking for the Messiah, went on to say, **"The Spirit of Yahweh is upon Me, Because Yahweh has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that He may be glorified."** (Isaiah 61:1-3) Here is a picture of the Anointed One, filled with God's Spirit, offering salvation and healing to the poor in spirit, replacing all the bad things in their lives with wonderful gifts from the hand of God. But in the same breath he warns of a coming day of judgment, and it's the same Person dishing out the comfort and the vengeance. If you'll recall, Yahshua applied this

prophecy to His own first-century advent, but He cut off the text at “**the acceptable year of Yahweh.**” Everything else, beginning with vengeance, is on *our* horizon.

For sheer prophetic clarity, you can’t beat Isaiah’s sweeping description of the Messiah: “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor [or wonderful Counselor], Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7) Notwithstanding the usual disconcerting prophetic convention of lumping widely separated manifestations into the same sentence, this is without doubt the most significant Messianic prophecy in the entire Bible. First, it confirms that He will be human, born into the world as a child, a son, and a physical heir to the throne of David. For all practical purposes, the first-century advent aspect of this prophecy ends there. No one has been able to demonstrate his royal Jewish lineage since the Temple genealogical records were destroyed in 70 A.D. And no one other than Yahshua of Nazareth has ever emerged as a plausible candidate for the job—never mind Bar Kochba and a plethora of others who gathered followers to themselves for a short time. Yahshua has no qualified historical rivals. If there were any, the skeptics would have found them by now.

The yet-to-be-fulfilled part is where Isaiah’s prophecy really gets interesting. Daniel’s understanding of who Messiah would be had to have been shaped by this passage. We could surmise that His being called Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, as well as His role as the eternal King reigning upon David’s throne, were all confirmations of earlier revelations. But when Isaiah states that He will be “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father,” and in the same breath says that He will come as a child, we have a whole new paradigm (though Messiah’s deity becomes somewhat more apparent through Yahweh’s choice of words in the original Hebrew text). This is Emmanuel, God with us.

Remember Daniel 9:24? “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.” The only way any of this could happen would be for God Himself to enter human history. He did—and He will again. Finishing the job will take only seven more years....

We now have a pretty good idea of God's timetable for the Jews: sixty-nine weeks down, one week to go. But what does He have in mind for the gentiles, who, after all, comprise 99.8% of the world's population? As it turns out, Daniel was shown the broad sweep of gentile progress as well. Much of what he was shown is now history, prophecies that proved so detailed and accurate that armies of liberal scholars felt compelled to label his book a fraud. Though they're a fascinating study, most are beyond the scope of this book. But some of his revelations spill over into events and situations yet future to us.

When we speak of "the times of the gentiles," it should be understood that the Bible does not concern itself with all of human history, but only that portion of it that bears directly upon the unfolding of God's plan of redemption. For all practical purposes, that means restricting the revelations to events that affect the Jews—Yahweh's vehicle for our salvation. Thus what happened (or will happen) in East Asia or South America has little bearing on the subject. It's not that God doesn't know or care about Japan, it's just that the Japanese don't play a pivotal role in this particular human drama.

By the same token, nations and peoples who interacted with the Jews receive a lot more Biblical "press" than their intrinsic significance might indicate. Who cares what the Babylonians, Canaanites, or Moabites did, anyway? Yahweh does, because their influence compromised the Jews' relationship with Him. As we look at Daniel's visions of the gentile kingdoms, then, bear in mind that the nations he "saw" all conquered and occupied Jerusalem, each in its turn.

Daniel's first brush with the times of the gentiles was a little bumpy. It all started when Arioch, Captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, came to him and announced, "Sorry, kid. You're one of the king's wise men, so I've got to kill you." *Excuse Me?* "Yeah, the king had this dream, and nobody could tell him what it was all about, so I'm supposed to chop you up in little pieces and burn your house down. No offense." *None taken. But what was that part about a dream? My God knows all about this stuff, Ari. Shoot, He probably gave him the dream in the first place. Gimme a couple days, and I'll ask Him.*

Okay, that's a paraphrase. The whole story is in Daniel, chapter 2. We'll pick up the narrative where young Daniel is making his subsequent appearance before the most powerful man on earth: "The king answered and said to Daniel, whose [Babylonian] name was Belteshazzar, 'Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?' Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, 'The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these'

“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image’s head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.” (Daniel 2:26-28, 31-35)

We aren’t told if the king couldn’t remember the dream or was merely being wiser than his wise men. I suspect it was the latter. After all, anybody can come up with an interpretation for a dream (even one as weird as this), but it can really be hard to verify his assessment. Seeing the contents of another man’s dreams, however, requires some divine help, which Daniel had and Nebuchadnezzar needed. Remember, too, that this was a politically charged situation. If the dream meant bad news for the king, the seer could lose his head even if he told the truth. Fortunately for Daniel, the king could feel good about this one. Notice how deftly Daniel stroked the king’s ego while ascribing none of Yahweh’s glory to him: **“This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.”** (Daniel 2:36-39) *Good news, bad news, Nebuchadnezzar. Yes, you’re the top guy now, but your kingdom won’t last forever. It will be followed by a string of others that will be progressively inferior to yours. Go figure.*

We needn’t be thrown off by the phrase “rule over all the earth,” something none of the kingdoms being referred to literally achieved—something *no* earthly kingdom has ever achieved (yet). The word for “earth” is the Chaldean *ara*, equivalent to the Hebrew *eretz*, which can mean country, earth, field, ground, land, wilderness, or world. It doesn’t necessarily mean this whole planet.

Daniel didn’t know who some of these nations would be—yet. In subsequent visions, he would be given detailed information about most of them, but for now he just saw trends, symbolized by a succession of metals, each less valuable but greater in strength than the one that preceded it. The first kingdom, the head of gold, was identified as Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. In a later vision, Daniel described it like this: **“I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion, and had eagle’s wings. I watched till its wings were**

plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it." (Daniel 7:2-4) Whereas "the land" is often a symbol of Israel, "the sea" is a common Biblical metaphor for the gentile world. The word for "wind," the Chaldean *ruwach*, can mean mind, spirit, or wind. The implication can be drawn that the "winds of heaven" are metaphorical of the mind or Spirit of God—in other words, Yahweh has stirred up these "beasts," these gentile nations, for His own divine purposes. Babylon, the first beast, was strong like a lion and swift like an eagle, but its wings were clipped and it had a change of heart when its greatest king was humbled by God and incapacitated by a seven-year period of insanity. The story is recounted in the fourth chapter of Daniel. Holding Nebuchadnezzar's vacant throne open during his time of madness stands as one of the great political achievements of human history—this *must* have been the head of gold.

The second kingdom, represented by the statue's chest and arms of silver, was that of the Medes and Persians, who conquered Babylon in Daniel's lifetime. It, too was described in a later vision: **"And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'"** (Daniel 7:5) Later still, a third vision revealed more about the second kingdom: **"Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great."** (Daniel 8:3-4) The Persians gained ascendancy over their allies the Medes, hence they were the side that was "raised up," and the second horn which grew higher. The three ribs in the Bear's mouth probably refer to their most significant conquests, Lydia (546 B.C.), Babylonia (539), and Egypt (in 525).

The third kingdom, seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as the statue's belly and thighs of bronze, would prove to be Greece under Alexander of Macedon. **"After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it."** (Daniel 7:6) Dealing with the symbols, we observe that leopards are swift and deadly hunters. This one was made even more so by virtue of his four wings and four heads—a reference to Alexander's four generals, Lysimachus, Cassander, Ptolemy, and Seleucus.

These men are also referred to in Daniel's later vision: **"And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns [Media and Persia], which I had seen standing beside the river [Ulai], and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his**

two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.”

(Daniel 8:5-8) All these horns symbolize power. The floating goat with the horn of note seen trampling Media-Persia is obviously Greece. The large horn is Alexander, whose conquest was indeed “sudden.” And the four replacement horns are again his four generals, who split up the conquered lands between them after Alexander’s death.

Before you get all impressed with my brilliant scholarship, I’ve got a confession to make: Late in Daniel’s life, Gabriel and another angel specifically told him who the second and third kingdoms were going to be. Media/Persia, the second kingdom, and Greece, the third, were peoples Daniel would have been quite familiar with, considering his office as a Chaldean Wise Man. But the prophecy came in “the third year of Belshazzar’s reign,” i.e., 551 B.C, fully twelve years before the fall of Babylon, when the very idea would have sounded preposterous: **“Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright. And he said, ‘Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be. The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.”** (Daniel 8:18-22)

Fifteen years later (i.e., 536 B.C., three years after the Persians had taken over) Daniel was given more information: **“Behold, three more kings [after the current king, Cyrus] will arise in Persia [Cambyses, Pseudo-Smerdis, and Darius I Hystapes, a.k.a. “Darius the Great”], and the fourth [Xerxes] shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. Then a mighty king [Alexander the Great] shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these.”** (Daniel 11:2-4) Alexander died at the tender age of 33 after carving out the largest empire the world had yet known. His only son, Alexander Aegus, born after his death to his Bactrian princess Roxana, would not live long enough to follow in his father’s footsteps. The empire, rather, was literally “divided toward the four winds,” when Alexander’s four generals split up the spoils among them.

By now, you’re probably muttering something like, “Gee, that’s just swell, but what on earth does it have to do with the future? I thought this was supposed

to be a book about eschatology.” In my experience, it’s hard to figure out where you’re going if you don’t know where you are. The four great gentile kingdoms described in Daniel (of which we have reviewed three) are the matrix of human history leading us inexorably toward the Kingdom of Yahshua. They are, if you will, the road upon which the salvation of mankind has been revealed, like Burma Shave signs along the way (ask your grandfather about those). So before moving on to the fourth kingdom, let’s take a moment to check our bearings.

We began with Babylon, or more properly Neo-Babylon, the “head of gold.” It’s ironic that the kingdom God used as His hammer of judgment upon apostate Israel was heir to the very originator of organized false worship, Nimrod’s ancient seat of power. On the other hand, Israel had been warned that if they would not observe God’s law, “Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone.” (Deuteronomy 28:64) In other words, “If you won’t honor the true God in the land of promise, then you can go and serve false gods someplace else.”

Yahweh held Babylon responsible for her own sins as well. The Medes and the Persians were raised up to deliver God’s vengeance upon Babylon, and did so handily in October, 539 B.C. In the first chapter, I mentioned the book of Esther among a mere handful of writings in the Bible that did not refer to the last days. Though it doesn’t, directly, the story of Esther is pivotal in God’s plan of redemption through the Jews—through the Jewish Messiah. Yahweh’s promise to preserve the Jews, and through them the Messianic line, came to a crisis during the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus (a.k.a. Xerxes). His hasty and ill-conceived edict to execute every Jew in his realm—which was at the time virtually every Jew on earth—was thwarted by the courage of his beautiful Israelite Queen Esther who interceded for her people.

Ironically, it was this same Xerxes who had been prophesied by Daniel “to stir up all against the realm of Greece.” It took 130 more years, but the military pressure he and his successors brought to bear on this loosely affiliated collection of independent city-states eventually created a political climate in which a strong central ruler could arise. That man, as we have seen, was Alexander, who in thirteen short years united Greece, crushed Persia, and spread Hellenism from Egypt to India. Though his empire promptly fragmented upon his death, the influence of Grecian culture and language remained. By the time the fourth great gentile empire made its entrance onto the world’s stage, the entire middle-eastern world was united by custom and tongue, if not by politics. Koine Greek, the most precise and expressive language on earth, was everyman’s second language, much as English is today. The world was almost ready for the coming of its Messiah.

Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream hadn't stopped with Greece, the belly of bronze, but had continued right down to the toes. At this point we need to stop and consider just what the statue meant: It's a timeline—it represents the whole of gentile history as it relates to Yahweh's plan of redemption through Israel.

Babylon, the head, was the first significant gentile power to “own” the land of promise. Yes, it's true that Assyria under Sennacherib had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and as many as forty-six cities within Judah, but they were stopped cold at the gates of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (cf. II Kings 18, 19). Egypt for a time controlled the territory and derived tribute from it, but they never settled it, nor did they take Jerusalem. But Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar did all of those things. Media/Persia inherited Jerusalem from Babylon, and Greece conquered the Levant under Alexander, subsequently controlling it, first under the banner of Ptolemy and later (after the battle of Panion in 200 B.C.) the Seleucids. The key, therefore, seems to be Jerusalem—what happened there in the past and what will happen there in the future.

The fourth kingdom starts where the Greeks left off, but if we examine the prophecies carefully, we will discover that this last kingdom, even today, hasn't come to an end. We're definitely down past the ankles, but we haven't yet reached the toes. Let's pick up the Biblical narrative as Daniel explains to Nebuchadnezzar what the statue means from the knees downward: **“And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.”** (Daniel 2:40-43)

In a later vision, Daniel again encountered this kingdom, this time as the last of the four beasts emerging from the sea: **“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it.... Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet.... Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces.’”** (Daniel 7:7, 19, 23)

There's only one logical candidate for the fourth kingdom. Rome not only conquered much of the lands previously taken by the first three, the Land of Promise in particular, it fits Daniel's description perfectly. It was extremely strong and perfectly ruthless, shattering everything in its path. It had two "legs," or branches as it developed, the western empire ruled from Rome, and the eastern empire, Byzantium, ruled from Constantinople. Its vast holdings made the empire a hodgepodge of dissimilar races and cultures, strong in places, weak in others, and forever threatening to crumble from its own weight. "Iron mixed with clay" is an apt description of historic Rome.

Rome is also the logical successor to the first three gentile kingdoms. Like Babylon, Persia, and Greece, it ruled Judea and Jerusalem with an iron hand (or should I say, foot). Rome played a personal (though unenviable) role in the redemption of mankind, for it was a Roman governor who gave the order to crucify the Messiah. Roman soldiers drove in the nails, gambled for his clothes, and pierced his side. But Roman rule also facilitated the spread of the Gospel. The *Pax Romana*, the enforced orderliness of society that followed Roman conquest from the Danube to the Sahara and from Spain to Syria, made it possible for Christians to move without restriction and with a minimum of danger from one end of the empire to the other.

You may be thinking, "Rome is dead, and has been for sixteen hundred years. How can it be the *final* gentile kingdom?" Though dead as a political entity, Rome lives on today through our languages and institutions, our affiliations, religious traditions, attitudes, and laws. Its ghost haunts our heritage in ways the earlier civilizations can't approach. Even the glory of ancient Greece came down to us primarily through the filter of Roman society. Rome's children are the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Its grandchildren are the nations and states of Europe and the Americas. One way or another, the "exceedingly dreadful" beast that was Rome will rise from the ashes to take center stage in the world's last drama—the seventieth week of Daniel, the culmination of human history.

I can still hear you protesting: "What about Islam? Muslims have held Jerusalem for all but a few of the years since they took it in the 7th century and lost it in the 20th." Though that's true, Islam has no role to play in the redemption of mankind (quite the opposite, in fact). That job was finished under the Romans, 537 years before Muhammad drew his first breath. They are (like Assyria) merely a tool in the hand of Yahweh to chastise and test His errant children—until He is ready to achieve His purposes. We haven't seen the last of *dar al-Islam*.

With all this talk about “God’s Timetable,” I’m sure some of you are beginning to harbor suspicions about my sanity. After all, didn’t Yahshua say, “No man knows the day or the hour?” And doesn’t it necessarily follow that we aren’t to enquire about the timing of anything in His plan? Let me assure you, it’s far worse than you’ve imagined. I have become convinced that we not only *should* look into the subject, but that He has told us the exact dates of all of the major last days milestones (with one exception). Not in so many words, you understand—you have to do the math, and you have to first come to grips with the fact that Yahweh has not told us anything on a pointless whim. Everything that’s in His word is there for a reason. Because the subject of chronology is going to be spread out over this entire book, I’ve boiled down the essentials of this narrow subject into an appendix, entitled, “No Man Knows... What God Has (and Hasn’t) Told Us About The Chronology Of The Last Days.” Please avail yourself of this information, if you’re not too uncomfortable thinking outside the traditional box.

Meanwhile, I assume you’ve noticed that I’ve been doing lots of judicious editing in my presentation of Daniel’s prophecies concerning the gentiles. So far, I have covered only those passages that help to define God’s broad timetable. There are significant truths in Daniel that I have not addressed, usually because their fulfillments are still in our future. Please be assured, I have not ignored them, only postponed them. The sections describing Rome are among those that flow seamlessly, as prophecies are wont to do, from one timeframe to another. On the one hand, Rome is obviously Daniel’s fourth kingdom; on the other hand, the same kingdom is seen in specific and detailed prophecies which have seen no fulfillment in all of history—yet.

Just as Yahshua is called the “Son of God,” one who has the attributes and authority of His Father, there is a future political entity on the horizon that could be called the “son of Rome,” a confederacy embodying all of the triumphs and terrors of its ancestor, Imperial Rome. Pictured as the fourth beast, it is said to have “ten horns.” That is, it will be comprised of ten nations. An eleventh “horn,” a little one, will destroy three of the ten, growing in power and ambition and doing all kinds of unpleasant things until the beast is itself destroyed. As I said, this is all future; we will discuss it all in due time.

But how is the fourth beast “different from all other kingdoms?” We read that, **“The beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.”** (Daniel 7:11-12) Whereas the first three beasts, or kingdoms, were absorbed into the nations that came to rule them, extending their lives for a time, the fourth will be completely and suddenly destroyed. And what happens to

the world it dominated? **“The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.”** (Daniel 7:18)

When explaining the first dream to King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel had concluded by telling him how the times of the gentiles would end: **“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”** (Daniel 2:44-45) Every gentile nation in history had a beginning and will see its end. But the Kingdom of God will not end.

Nebuchadnezzar had seen a Stone crush all of the gentile kingdoms, grinding the whole statue to dust and dispersing their pretensions of grandeur to the wind, starting with the final permutation of ungodly power, the feet of iron and clay—the son of Rome. **“A stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”** (Daniel 2:34-35) The “Stone” that achieves all this, the Stone that “became a great mountain and filled the whole earth,” is none other than Yahshua the Anointed One, who will sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of God forever.

The dream is certain, and the interpretation is sure.