Throughout history great thinkers and philosophers have pondered the meaning of life and the purpose for man. They have questioned the struggle between good and evil, of right and wrong. These great minds have sought to comprehend the cause of human suffering and injustice. They have tried to make sense out of a world that seems bent on its own destruction.

Even the most prominent theologians down through the ages have struggled with these issues—and today man seems no closer to an answer than he was at the beginning. A great question continues to haunt each succeeding generation: What is man? and where is he going? And why must he take a path that seems paved with so much misery?

Is a great plan being worked out through the human experience? Or is life simply the result of chance? The answers to these questions have eluded manking for millennia...

...Until Now

# A Vision A Plan and A Destiny Second Edition

By Dennis Fischer

© 2004, 2022 Dennis Fischer All rights reserved.

It is said that there are two kinds of books—those that make you think and those that make you wonder. I sincerely hope this will do both.

~Dennis Fischer

# Dedication



Dennis Luker

This book is dedicated to Mr. Denny Luker, a man of extraordinary grace and dignity. I was honored to call him my pastor, my brother, and my friend.

## Directory

Preface: A defining Moment

Introduction: The Master Architect

Chapter I: The Incredible Human Potential

Chapter II: The Birth of a Plan

Chapter III: A Plan Revealed

Chapter IV: A Home for Man

Chapter V: Satan's Rebellion

Chapter VI: A plan Moves Forward

Chapter VII: Two Trees and a Garden

Chapter VIII: Satan's Great Deception

Chapter IX: A Hope Restored

Chapter X: A Kingdom Won

Chapter XI: A Destiny Fulfilled

Chapter XII: The Glory of God

## Appendix

Appendix I: Man Made Religions

Appendix II: Man Made Christianity

Appendix III: God's Holy Days

Appendix IV: "The Day Christ Died"

Appendix V: "The Apprentice"

Appendix VI: "Count Fifty"

Appendix VII: "Forsaking the Messiah"

Appendix VIII: "A Great White Throne"

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Isaiah 46:9-10

#### A Defining Moment

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knew not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee to know that man doeth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

Deuteronomy 8:3

The gospels of Matthew and Luke describe an extraordinary event which took place at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. This event involved a titanic battle between Jesus of Nazareth and Satan the devil. It was a war of unimaginable magnitude and the stakes couldn't have been higher.

#### A Defining Moment

When examining this story, it is important to understand that throughout history there are, what are called "defining moments." These are events that can mold and shape the destiny of a people—and to be sure, this was such a moment. Consider the words the apostle Matthew used when introducing this great spiritual war.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.'" (Mt. 4:1-3)

It is hard to imagine a moment in human history that possessed greater drama than that which Matthew begins to chronicle in this chapter of his gospel. Here in a secluded dessert stand the two greatest opposing forces in the history of the universe. On one side, the "Lamb of God" and the "Savior of the World," while on the other, the "prince of darkness" and the embodiment of evil—a being totally bent on destroying every fragment of hope mankind ever had.

This moment stands as the quintessential struggle between good and evil, between decency and depravity, between hope and despair. And as monumental as this struggle was, it all took place in private. No fanfare. No great crowds cheering on their champion. No television cameras. No reporters or analysts. Just a Galilean Jew in the throes of death, and a spirit being so consumed with evil that the apostle Peter once described him as "a roaring lion... seeking whom he may devour" (1Pe. 5:8). These were the characters in this great drama and at stake was the destiny of the universe. At stake was your destiny.

## Why Stones to Bread?

When reading Matthew's account of this moment in the life of the Messiah, a question becomes very apparent. Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to turn stones to bread? Have you ever asked yourself this question? Why would it have been wrong for Him to accommodate this challenge? Certainly, there was no Biblical prohibition against it. And on more than one occasion, Jesus miraculously fed thousands of people using meager portions of bread (Mt.14:15; Mk. 8:1). Certainly His own hunger would justify taking such action, wouldn't it? But Jesus chose not to. Why?

Furthermore, why did Satan advance what appears to be such a benign temptation—turning stones to bread? Certainly the tests that followed must have been the big ones... you know: "Throw Yourself off a pinnacle of the temple and God will give His angels charge over you" (Mt. 4:5-7). That would be a great test of faith. Or, "Bow down and worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world" (Mt. 4:8-10). That must have been the greatest temptation, wasn't it? After all, the offer of wealth

and power has broken many a man and must have been a more formidable challenge. BUT WHY STONES TO BREAD?

#### One theory

There are some who believe that what Satan was trying to do with his first challenge was to manipulate Jesus in preparation for the greater temptations that would follow—ostensibly getting Him to cooperate a little before advancing the greater trials. But is it possible that the challenge for the Messiah to turn stones to bread was the GREAT TEMPTATION? And is it possible that what Satan was doing at this moment was placing before Him the source of all human suffering and cloaking it in something that appeared so innocent?

#### AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY

The story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness is told in just twenty-four verses of two gospels. Yet this single moment speaks volumes about the Greatest Being in existence, and a wisdom so perfect that only God Himself could possess it. When properly understood, this moment will enable man to make sense out of a world filled with evil and will answer virtually every question he has ever pondered concerning the meaning of life and the great struggles he faces.

#### A Great Triumph

The poise and virtue demonstrated by Jesus during this trial came at a time when He must have appeared so vulnerable—He was literally starving to death. Yet He never blinked in the face of a test orchestrated by none other than Satan himself. This alone should earn the undying devotion of every person who considers himself a "believer."

But the truth be known, there was something far greater taking place at this moment. This spiritual war was not simply about overcoming personal adversity. For in truth, this moment stands at the very center of man's purpose for existing. Through it is revealed the steadfast commitment of God Himself to a dream for mankind that would one day demonstrate His awesome power and love. This "defining moment" is a door, which when opened, will reveal an incredible Vision, an extraordinary Plan, and a magnificent Destiny. It reveals something about not only who Jesus was, but what man must become. It is a story of triumph over tragedy and stands as a beacon that set in motion the greatest victory in the history of the universe.

This book examines that moment and how it plays out in an incredible future the Almighty has prepared for the human family. It is a story about a Great and loving God and a wonderful Plan He has envisioned. It is the story of the birth of this Plan and how the forces of evil tried to thwart it. It is a story of how God overcame these forces to ensure that His Plan would be accomplished and a magnificent Destiny fulfilled. It is a story so rich in hope that it will one day bring every believer to joyfully kneel before its Author. However, before this story can be told and this Destiny revealed, it is essential that we first meet its Architect.

#### The Master Architect

O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwells between the cherubim, thou art the God, even you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: you have made heaven and earth.

Isaiah 37:16

Approximately thirty miles north of Seattle, Washington is the city of Everett. This charming community on the Possession Sound is the home of Boeing Aircraft Corporation. Boeing manufactures the greatest commercial jetliners in the world today. Perhaps the premier aircraft in its fleet is the 747, a massive passenger jet that is built at a cost of roughly two hundred million dollars (\$200,000,000) per plane.

The Boeing facility is truly a spectacular complex. The building where construction of its aircraft takes place is nothing short of colossal. According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, it is the largest structure in the world. If you saw it, you would not have trouble believing this claim. Everything about the complex is immense. The doors on the main building are one hundred yards wide. That is the length of a professional football field. There is a corridor below the main floor that is as wide as a city street and over half a mile long. Furthermore, the elevators used to transport personnel to various levels of the construction areas could easily carry one hundred people.





The size of this structure is simply overwhelming. To put it in perspective, you could place every major league baseball field, every NFL football field, and every NBA basketball court inside the structure and have plenty of room left over. The main building is so large that it would hold the entire Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, California. Suffice it to say, this structure is HUGE.

At any given time in the Boeing facility, one can see several 747s in various stages of construction. These gigantic aircraft have dominated the skies for over three decades, and like the place of their creation, they too, are immense. To put their dimensions in perspective, the length of each 747 "coach" section is longer than the distance of the entire initial flight of the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk. This spectacular aircraft is even used to transport the space shuttle.

But sheer size is not the only thing that defines Boeing and its 747 aircraft. The complexity of these planes is also staggering. Each jet consists of well over four million parts with each one being subjected to a battery of quality control checks by their manufacturer. Finally, when each 747 is flight tested, it is done so with only one of its four engines operating. This test is repeated three times, once for each remaining engine. This is done to insure the safety of every plane. The point being that even if three engines failed, the aircraft could still fly and land without incident.



Both the Boeing facility and its 747 airship stand as great marvels of human ingenuity and skill. Their size as well their sophistication are truly remarkable.

#### **Great Human Achievements**

Down through the ages man has constructed numerous architectural and technological wonders. There is the Great Wall of China, the Panama Canal, and Hoover Dam. There are the pyramids of Egypt, the Empire State Building in New York City and the massive Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. Additionally, there is the Space Shuttle, as well as massive cruise ships that are nothing short of floating cities.

For centuries, man has constructed monuments that soar into the sky, bridges that seem to be suspended in mid-air and great tunnels that wind their way through mountains as well as under oceans. He has built machines that travel to other worlds as well as those that can circle the earth with ease. To be sure, Man's credentials as an architect and designer are considerable and his accomplishments as a builder truly impressive.



Donghai Bridge in China over twenty miles long

#### The Master Architect

The Bible reveals that the Great God of Heaven is also an architect of considerable skill. Not only has He fashioned the entire universe, He has also designed the millions of laws that sustain it. To better understand the power of this Magnificent Creator, and His credentials as a builder, let us examine some of His work.

Mankind has only scratched the smallest surface of the heavens that God has made. However, even then, its size is truly staggering. Consider what mankind is aware of concerning the scope of the known universe, beginning with our own solar system. This celestial community is comprised of a sun and a family of planets and moons that are tied to it by gravity. Each moon is suspended in space as it orbits a particular planet. Each planet moves in a rhythmic orbit around a massive, energy-producing star we call the sun. Now if the entire universe consisted of only our solar system, it would be very impressive to say the least. Its area would literally cover trillions of square miles. The distance between the earth and the sun is a staggering ninety-three million (93,000,000) miles. Pluto, the most distant planet in our solar system, is approximately four billion miles away from the sun. That would make it over forty times further from the sun than our earth. Imagine the size of such a celestial body.

However, despite its scope, our solar system is less than a pinprick when compared to the enormity of the galaxy of which it is a part. The *Milky Way* is absolutely staggering in size. Unlike our solar system which has one sun, the *Milky Way* is a spectacular family of lights that contains over one billion suns. Imagine a billion suns supporting an endless array of planets and moons. The scope of such a creation is mind-boggling. It is immense beyond belief.



Milky Way Artist's Rendering

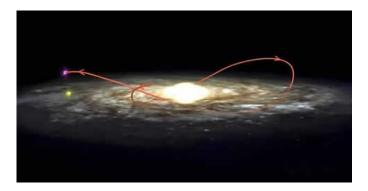
To illustrate how massive the *Milky Way* is, consider this: one very small piece of this immense galaxy is called the *Big Dipper*. Almost every child has gazed into the night sky and beheld its unique shape. On a clear night the *Big Dipper* looks like a giant pan with a bent handle. To the naked eye the pan looks empty. But looks can be deceiving, and in this case they are.

The huge Hale telescope on Mount Palomar has actually identified as many as one million stars (suns) within the pan alone. And remember, the *Big Dipper* represents only a very tiny piece of the *Milky Way*. However, within that tiny piece, reside one million stars. But it doesn't end there.



The Big Dipper

As a galaxy, the Milky Way, with its billions of suns, moons and planets, is also nothing more than a pinprick when compared to the universe of which it is a part—for this massive galaxy is only one of virtually billions of fellow galaxies. Some estimates in the scientific community have suggested that the known universe could be comprised of over one hundred billion (100,000,000,000) different galaxies, each with billions of suns and solar systems of its own. And remember, this is just the KNOWN universe.



#### How Big is the Universe?

The enormity of the universe God fashioned so very long ago is beyond comprehension. Even the scientific community is mystified by its size. For this reason, astronomers have developed a way, other than miles, to calculate the mind-boggling distances between the objects that so exquisitely decorate the heavens. Astronomers think in terms of time when calculating the distance between these objects. This unit of measurement is called a "light year." A light year is the distance light travels in one year. But how far is that?

The speed of light has been measured at 186,282 miles per second. Therefore, at that speed, in one year, light would travel approximately six trillion (6,000,000,000,000) miles. In other words, if you wanted to travel to the nearest star other than our sun, and you moved at the rate of 186,000 miles per second, in one year you would have traveled six trillion miles. That's the good news. The bad news is that you wouldn't be remotely close to the star you were looking for. To get there you would have to travel another three and a-third years. And this would only get you to the closest star. In other words, you would have to travel 26 trillion miles to visit our closest solar neighbor. How is that for size?



#### A Great Illustration

In 1974, Kenneth Weaver, assistant editor of *National Geographic Magazine*, crafted a very unique word picture when attempting to describe the size of the known universe. His words illustrate just how immense the heavens truly are.

"Imagine that the thickness of this page represents the distance from the earth to the sun (93,000,000 miles or about eight "light minutes"). This being the case, the distance to the nearest star (4-1/3 "light years") would be the size of a 71-foot high sheaf of papers. And the diameter of our own galaxy (100,000 "light years") would create a 310 mile stack, while the edge of the known universe is not reached until the pile of papers reaches 31 million miles high...." (*National Geographic*, May 1974, p. 592)

The size of the known universe is something that astonishes even the most brilliant scientific minds on earth. It is simply too immense to comprehend. To illustrate this point, consider the following. Recently, a team of prominent astrophysicists from the California Institute of Technology, using a process first proposed by Albert Einstein called "gravitational lensing," discovered a galaxy believed to be thirteen billion light years from our own Milky Way. If you would like to convert that number into miles the formula is quite simple: 186,000 x 60 x 60 x 24 x 365 x 13,000,000,000. And remember, this is just the KNOWN universe.

But just in case you still are not impressed, there is good news. The universe is expanding. That's right! It is actually growing. This fact was discovered by the astronomer Edwin Hubble in 1929. Hubble proved that the universe is steadily expanding, like an inflated balloon. His research revealed that all the galaxies in the universe are in motion and are actually flying apart from each other. This principle is known as "Hubble's Law."

#### The Master Architect

At this point a question emerges: How did the universe come into being? Who made it? And how was it done? Is it possible to find the answers to these questions?

The Bible reveals that the universe was fashioned by a Master Architect who presides over eternity itself. This Great Being is the God of all that exists. The prophet Jeremiah once wrote of God's immense skill in creating the universe. He stated that this task was not even difficult for Him.

"Ah Lord God! Behold you have made the heaven and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm, and there is nothing too hard for you." (Jer 32:17)

Later Jeremiah proclaimed that the vastness of space is a reflection of God's infinite wisdom.

"He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens by His understanding." (Jer. 51:15)

Imagine the power of an intellect that could envision the universe. Where would one even begin to fashion something so vast? Yet it does exist. And its very existence stands as proof of the infinite.

#### An Unimpeachable Argument

The apostle Paul once revealed a profound truth about the physical realm that we can behold with our five senses. This truth is recorded in his letter to the Church at Rome.

"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." (Ro. 1:20)

Here, Paul is declaring that the universe, which is not only infinite in scope, but perfect in its design and order, stands as an unimpeachable argument for the existence of an all-powerful, infinite Creator. It is as if Paul is explaining that God made an endless universe with the express intent of providing man with something finite that could only be explained by the existence of something infinite. This is why Paul uses the words "so that they are without excuse." In other words, Paul is saying, "It isn't as if God made it difficult to know that He exists. Just look around."

#### The Testimony of God

Not only does the Bible attribute the creation to the Great God of heaven, but God Himself stakes claim to this work. He did so in a series of rhetorical questions He asked to the patriarch Job. The book of Job quotes His actual words.

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if you have understanding. Who laid the measure thereof if you know? Or who has stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the cornerstone thereof...?" (Job 38:4-6)

Here, God is revealing that He is an architect to which man cannot be compared. His works cannot be contained or measured—but so many of them can be seen and observed—and when one considers their scope, they reveal something most awesome about the God who made them.

The Great Architect who created the heavens and the earth is an infinite Being. He is described in the Bible as occupying eternity itself. The scriptures declare that He is "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psa. 90:2). In short, God is eternal. He has no beginning of days, nor end of life. Furthermore, the Bible declares that His creative power is so great that He actually fashioned the heavens by His wisdom. He had but to speak and earth came into existence. Additionally, the scriptures proclaim that everything that exists is sustained by Him.

Perhaps the prophet Isaiah said it best. When describing the overwhelming magnitude of God's greatness. Isaiah quotes the very words of the One who crafted time and space—the very God who is aware of every molecule in existence because He created each one.

"To whom then will you liken me, or shall I be equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things, That brings out their host by number; He calls them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one fails..." (Isa. 40:25-26)

#### A Final Thought

The Bible identifies the God of heaven as the Great Creator of the very universe which simply overwhelms man with respect to its size and sophistication. That infinite God designed and fashioned virtually trillions of stars and planets and placed them in the heavens in perfect order. Additionally, the Bible declares that God is intimately aware of every square inch of that vast universe. Furthermore, the scriptures not only reveal why God would do such a thing, but how he did it, and even what he used for materials. Each of these aspects of creation will be explained in later chapters of this book.

However, even more astonishing is the fact that the Bible reveals that God is using the universe to help support an even greater architectural project—one that will ultimately stand as the greatest in the history of eternity itself—a project even greater in scope than the creation of the heavens and the earth.

At the very center of this wondrous architectural project is a God of infinite power and wisdom. And like the universe that is expanding, this magnificent Creator is also in a remarkable state of growth. The book you are about to read records the story of that God, and His Plan regarding eternity itself. It is a story that reveals an extraordinary Destiny for mankind—a Destiny that was envisioned by this Master Architect at some point in the vast expanse of eternity. And if you think the scope of the universe is too great to comprehend, you ain't seen nothin yet!

Chapter I
The Incredible Human Potential

And God said, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness..."

Genesis 1:26

Three thousand years ago, King David of Israel advanced a question that goes to the very core of man's existence. It is a question that has been pondered by the leading thinkers and philosophers down through the ages. This question has taken a variety of forms, but its intent is very clear. It seeks to identify the purpose for man—his reason for being.

When David presented his thoughts on this timeless puzzle, he saw man as infinitesimally small compared to the vastness of the universe around him. He then wondered why an infinite, incorruptible God would be so interested in finite, corruptible man. With this perspective, David ponders the meaning of life and specifically, mankind's relationship to his Creator.

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou visit him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou made him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet:" (Psa. 8:3-6)



David in his youth

For millennia man has questioned the meaning of life. He has wondered what he is and why he exists. This is understandable when one considers man's uniqueness. The human family is extraordinary when compared to every other earthly being. For example: man has the capacity to create and dream. He is a cognitive being with the power to solve complex problems. Man can translate languages, compose music, alter environments, build architectural wonders, and even fly. Imagine that! Man can soar above

the clouds and even into the darkness of space. He has actually set foot on another world a quarter of a million miles away.

n a very real sense, man is an explorer with an insatiable appetite for the unknown. The question is: WHY? Why would God place in him such extraordinary gifts? Why give him intellect and the power to think? Why give him emotions that can be touched? Why create in him the capacity to feel sorrow as well as joy, fear as well as contentment? And what about love? Why would the Great Creator and Sustainer of all that exists craft such a profound quality and entrust it to man? Finally, why did God make man in His image, after His likeness (Gen.1:26)? Is it possible to know the answers to these timeless questions? In short, what is man and why is God so mindful of him?

#### A Mystery of the Ages

Today we live in an age of "enlightenment" where knowledge is increasing at a frenetic pace. As a result of this growth of human understanding and wisdom, it has been estimated that with advances in science and technology, the accumulated knowledge of mankind doubles every three years. Imaging the learning.

Tragically, with all this growth in knowledge, man knows very little about himself. Oh, to be sure, the world has its theories. Libraries are filled with great works about the human mind and psyche. Universities throughout the globe have schools dedicated to understanding what makes man "tick." But the stark reality is that the vast majority of people on earth have absolutely no clue as to why man is here, or where he is going.

To illustrate this point, consider just some of the ideas that have been advanced regarding where man goes after this life. The theories on this topic are truly prolific. For example: some believe the departed are reincarnated and take the form of other creatures. The particular creature one becomes is determined by the kind of life he or she has lived as a human being. Others believe the dead are in a state of perpetual contentment and bliss. Those in this condition simply gaze for all eternity at the beauty of God. Then there are those who see life as possessing no value at all other than the "here and now." To them, when it's over, it's over.

#### The "Christian" View

Even in the professing Christian world, theories about the afterlife vary dramatically. Some believe the "saved" go immediately to heaven to be with the Lord. Others believe they serve time in some type of intermediate state in order to do penance for past sins. Others still, contend that the departed are held in some netherworld until their loved ones on earth perform the appropriate sacrament (such as baptism) on their behalf. There are even those who believe that some of the "saved" go to heaven while the rest of "saved" live for all eternity on a rebuilt earth.

Although the majority of "mainstream" believers are convinced that the departed faithful will go immediately to heaven, they also believe that at some point in the future, these believers will be reunited with their resurrected bodies, which will have been changed to a glorified body consisting of "flesh and bone"—this, despite the fact that the Bible clearly states that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom" (1Cor. 15:50).

But what is the truth? Does the Bible reveal what happens to man after this mortal existence? Does God's word provide a glimpse into eternity itself and man's role in it? Just what is man and what is his ultimate Destiny?

#### An Extraordinary Thought

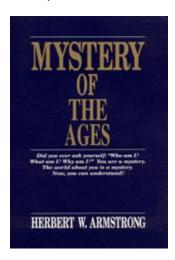
Herbert W. Armstrong was a prolific twentieth century author and teacher. He founded three colleges and was the creator and editor of one of the world's most widely circulated magazines. Mr. Armstrong traveled the globe as an advocate of a Kingdom he believed God would one day bring to this earth. He also believed this Kingdom was the central theme of the gospel preached by Jesus Christ and His apostles.



Herbert W Armstrong 1892—1986

Mr. Armstrong had a very interesting view of man's great potential and God's purpose for him. In his book, *Mystery of the Ages*, he poses a remarkable possibility concerning man's ultimate Destiny.

"WHY did the Creator God put MAN on earth? For God's ultimate supreme purpose of reproducing himself—of recreating himself as it were, by... creating... righteous divine character... in millions of unnumbered begotten and born children who shall become God beings, members of the God family." (Mystery of the Ages, pp. 102-103)



Mr. Armstrong would go on to postulate what those whom God has called would do once they were literally born into His Divine Family.

"Once this perfect and righteous character is instilled in man, and man converted from mortal flesh to immortal spirit, then is to come the INCREDIBLE HUMAN POTENTIAL – man being BORN into the divine FAMILY of God, restoring the government of God to the earth, and then participating in the completion of the CREATION over the entire endless expanse of the UNIVERSE." (*Mystery of the Ages, p.103*)

#### A Theory Dismissed

The belief that God would actually consider reproducing Himself in man has been rejected by the overwhelming majority of Christian denominations today. To them, such an idea seems inconceivable. After all, why would God do such a thing? Man is so frail. He is so corruptible and his life is so riddled with sin. The path man has taken since the dawn of time stands as incontrovertible proof that he is immeasurably inferior to the God who made him. What kind of candidate is he to assume leadership over the entire universe, as a God being no less?

Mr. Armstrong's words have been vilified by leaders in the Protestant world as the utterance of an apostate teacher and a heretic. Even his successors view the idea of God reproducing Himself in man as the teaching of a cult and its leader a false prophet.

But is it possible Mr. Armstrong was right? Could the Great and Infinite Governor of Eternity have planned to literally recreate Himself—to make beings who are just like Him? The Bible strongly suggests that this is exactly what God is doing.

#### To Be Born Again

The Bible reveals an extraordinary Destiny for man. Jesus spoke of this Destiny at the beginning of His public ministry. It was during the days of the Passover. At that time, He was in Jerusalem and was approached by a leader of the Jews named Nicodemus. This meeting is recorded in the third chapter of John's gospel. Notice what takes place.

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, "Rabbi, we know that You art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that You do, except God be with Him." (Jn. 3:1-2)

No sooner had Nicodemus finished his greeting than Jesus began to introduce one of the most radical ideas ever uttered.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Jn. 3:3)

Here, Jesus was explaining to this prominent religious leader that entrance into God's Kingdom was predicated on man going through a dramatic change. He would have to be born into it. Furthermore, absent this birth, one could never even obtain a glimpse of that Kingdom.

When Nicodemus heard Jesus' words he must have been mystified. How could such a birth be possible? And why would Jesus make what appeared to be such an outrageous pronouncement, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God"? What could Jesus have possibly meant in uttering these words?

At this point it is important to understand that Nicodemus clearly understood the terminology the Messiah was employing. He was not confused about grammar or syntax. After all, he (Nicodemus) was a highly educated man. Not only was he a prominent rabbi, but in all likelihood he was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews at that time. Despite these credentials, Nicodemus simply couldn't comprehend how such a birth could take place. As a result, he sought clarification from a man he called "a teacher from God."

"Nicodemus saith unto Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (Jn. 3:4)

When Nicodemus advanced this query he was not trying to be clever nor was he was mocking Jesus or His words. On the contrary, this Rabbi was very serious. However, he also was struggling with what Jesus could possibly mean by insisting that man be "born again" in order to enter into the Kingdom of God. Therefore, he pressed the Messiah to expand on His statement regarding a second birth.

The meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus as recorded by the apostle John, has been analyzed by some of the premier religious minds of our day. These great thinkers have attempted to gain insight into this "rebirth" by copiously scrutinizing Jesus' words. They have vigorously dissected the term "born again" and crafted a meaning that is used today to describe millions of professing Christians. In the Protestant world, a person is "born again" when he or she accepts Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior.

However, as important as accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior is: will such an act make you "born again?" Just what did the Messiah mean when He presented this profound truth about entrance into God's Kingdom?

#### Eye Witness Testimony

At this point it is important to understand that there was an eye witness to this meeting. This eye witness was Nicodemus himself. He heard firsthand what Jesus was saying—and contrary to popular belief, when doing so, he never once asked what "born again" meant. Notice Nicodemus did not ask "what?" but rather "how?" when questioning Jesus about this lesson. His precise words were "How can a man be born when he is old?" -- not "what do the words 'born again' mean?" Furthermore, at no time did Nicodemus question Jesus about the meaning of Greek verbs or Aramaic terms (the language Jesus was probably speaking at the time).

The point here is that Nicodemus understood Jesus' teaching regarding being "born again" as referring to a literal birth, as opposed to some "religious experience" or abstract spiritual concept. To Nicodemus, Jesus was describing something that was very real, not figurative or symbolic—and the truth be known, Nicodemus was correct in his understanding. Where Nicodemus was wrong was that he thought this literal birth was physical. Ironically, this is the same mistake made by the vast majority of professing Christians today. If you were to ask them about what happens to those who are resurrected form the dead at the last trump, they will tell you that at that time, God's people will be given a glorified physical body comprised of flesh and bone. However, Jesus said something quite different. Notice His response to Nicodemus' query.

"Jesus answered, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (Jn. 3:5)

Jesus then contrasts a fleshly existence with a spiritual existence. Notice His words.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (Jn. 3:6)

Here Jesus is being very specific. Flesh comes from flesh and spirit comes from spirit. Therefore, because mankind is currently in a fleshly state by virtue of his physical birth, he cannot at this time be "born again." However, Jesus also indicated that there is a spiritual state that is entered into as a direct result of a spiritual birth. A birth that is very real.

There are many who believe they are "born again" as a result of their conversion. But such an understanding contradicts Jesus' words. Remember, Jesus not only contrasted a physical birth to a spiritual birth; He also explained what it would be like to be born of the Spirit. Notice what He revealed to Nicodemus.

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind blows where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but can not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:7-8)

Here, Jesus was explaining that when one is literally "born again," they are no longer composed of corruptible matter, but rather of incorruptible spirit. They are like the wind. Their presence can be felt, but not contained in the way that physical matter can.

The point Jesus was conveying to Nicodemus, and to all of mankind for that matter, is that God has planned a Kingdom that was never designed to be inhabited by the physical realm. God's Kingdom is a spiritual Domain and its citizens will literally be made of spirit.

#### From Conception to Birth

To be sure, being "born again" is the culmination of a process that begins during this physical existence. Like a human life that begins at conception, the spiritual life that gains entrance into God's Kingdom also begins at conception—one that takes place upon man's conversion. At that time the true believer receives a small portion of God's Holy Spirit. This spirit is nourished by yielding to the Father and drawing closer to Him. As a result of this nourishment, that spirit grows until it becomes fully mature.

At the resurrection, God's Holy Spirit which was nurtured by obedience to Him will have reached full maturity. At that time man will be born into the magnificent Family of his Creator. This is a literal Family of spirit beings, each with a unique personality, but possessing a form that is made of incorruptible properties, and a virtue that is like that of God Himself. Contrary to what is commonly taught in professing Christianity, those born into God's Family are not going to be composed of glorified flesh and bone, but rather of incorruptible glorified spirit.

#### The Testimony of Others

If Jesus' words regarding being "born again" were the only ones contained in the scriptures, they would be enough. However, other champions of the faith also declared this marvelous truth regarding the change that man must experience prior to entering God's Kingdom. The apostle Paul spoke of it to the Church at Corinth. Notice what this great champion was inspired to write.

'Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.' (1Cor. 15:50)

Here Paul states with great clarity that the corruptible world, of which mankind is a part, is not compatible with the incorruptible world to which mankind is destined. Furthermore, in the very next verse, Paul explains how those called according to God's purpose will enter into this incorruptible Kingdom.

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1Cor. 15:51-52)

The moment Paul is describing represents the great hope of all true believers. It is a time when everything in man that is weak—the body, the mind and even man's character—will be changed to a perfect state. At this time man will take his first steps into eternity.

But Paul spoke even further about the great hope of this moment, when God's people will be changed from mortal to immortal. When writing to the Church at Thessalonica, he provides additional insight into the resurrection of the dead and the change God's people will experience. Here He even describes the order in which this community of believers will be changed from mortal flesh to immortal spirit.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with Lord." (1Th. 4:15-17)



The Apostle Paul, c. 1657
Rembrandt van Rijn
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

Here Paul is stating that the thousands of saints who have died in the faith down through the ages will not be denied this extraordinary rebirth. They will, in fact, experience it first, followed immediately by those who are alive when the last trump is sounded. This is the moment Jesus spoke about to Nicodemus. It is a time of birth, of new beginnings, as citizens of a realm without limits. In that realm God's children will be like Him. They will possess His spiritual genetic code. The apostle Peter described it this way in an epistle that bears his name.

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pe. 1:4)

The nature Peter was describing is more than God's perfect, righteous character. It also includes being made of incorruptible spirit just like God Himself. In short, Peter was explaining that at the time of this re-birth into God's Kingdom, these glorified saints will have God's entire nature. This would include His CHARACTER and His FORM. Imagine such a Destiny! Imagine being like the very Being who created you! As difficult as it is to comprehend, this profound truth is real. The world may reject it, but it is no less true. God's family will be just like Him.

But there's MORE.

#### The Testimony of a Friend

The apostle John, who was arguably the best friend of the Messiah, expressed what it would be like to be truly "born again" in words that couldn't be more clear. Notice the power and majesty of man's Destiny so eloquently expressed by this apostle.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." (1Jn. 3:2)

Imagine being just like God. But that is precisely what John is saying. His words are clear and direct. Although the human family is currently in a state that is so infinitely inferior to their Creator, they will one day be able to share a common nature with the Greatest Being in existence. Man will be like God.

The Bible declares that once "born again," man's awareness of the infinite will be similar to that of his Heavenly Father. This remarkable truth is revealed in one of the most cited chapters in all the Bible. In the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul contrasts man's present knowledge to the knowledge he will possess when his change comes.

"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (1Cor. 13:12)

Here, Paul states that those who are ultimately "born again," will know the very Creator as He knows them. This is a powerful claim, but it is clearly what Paul is stating in this verse. This servant of the ALMIGHTY does not qualify his words. There are no caveats, no fine print—just a simple statement about man's wisdom as a "born again" member of God's Family. Those who reach this state will know as much about the Creator and Sustainer of the universe as He knows about them. Now consider how much God knows about man?

Jesus once said that the Father knows every hair on man's head. That alone should establish God's credentials as the undisputed authority on the human family. But God's knowledge goes much further. There is no wisdom that man possesses of which God is not totally cognizant. The Eternal knows everything. He is aware of man's most intimate thoughts. He knows man's hopes, his dreams, his loves and his fears. God is the Master Architect of all that exists, and that includes man. In short, God truly knows what makes man what he is.

When Paul wrote these words, he was saying that the time is coming when those born into God's Kingdom will know God in a way that is inconceivable to mortal man at this time. This is because in this life, man's knowledge of his Creator is flawed.

However, the time is coming when man's understanding of God will be perfect and complete. God's children will know every facet of this Infinite Being. They will know His dreams and His hopes. They will be aware of His wisdom and His virtue. They will understand the great mysteries that have been woven throughout time and space. In short, man will comprehend the infinite. How is that for a future? This is the potential the Great God has planned for the human family. Man is going to be "just like Him."

This Destiny should fill every true believer with immense hope and excitement and great anticipation God's people should long for the day when they will truly be "born again." The great patriarch David, who will be king over all of Israel (Ezk. 34:23) in God's Kingdom, looked forward to the time when his change would come. Here is what David wrote.

"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness." (Psa. 17:15)

As incredible as it is to imagine, God's purpose for man is as infinite as God himself. The great Destiny that awaits those who yield to Him is that they will be just like Him: incorruptible, all-powerful, with perfect, righteous character. And there is a reason for this. These are the tools man will need to govern with God for all eternity. No less will do.

But alas the story continues...

Chapter II
The Birth of a Plan

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Job 38:4

One characteristic of mankind that distinguishes him from all other beings on earth is his ability to plan. Planning requires a vision of the future. But this future is not one that simply comes about by chance; it is one that comes by design. Planning is a process that defines what something will look like tomorrow, or next week, next month, next year, the next decade, or even the next century. As a result of this blend of vision and planning, mankind has profoundly affected his world—often for the better and regrettably, sometimes for the worse.

A prominent American educator once observed that "success is twenty percent skill and eighty percent strategy." The point he was making is that thoughtful planning is absolutely essential to success and human achievement. Without it, man is left with nothing but randomness and chance. However, with a well conceived plan, he has been able to build architectural wonders, explore the heavens, and manufacture vehicles that have revolutionized travel.

Man's capacity to envision his future has also led to great discoveries in science and technology. He has harnessed the atom, built satellites, designed computers, and created exotic communication systems. But it doesn't end with tangible products. Man has also planned entire industries as well as the businesses to make them flourish. Even great nations have been built from the visions of men. The United States is probably the most prominent example.

Today there is an endless array of plans and planners. There are financial planners, career planners, as well as business planners and forecasters. People plan weddings, plan families, plan for retirement, and even plan vacations. Sports teams have game plans, military experts have battle plans, and teachers have lesson plans. Our world has developed an endless array of blueprints, schematics, and story boards all designed to convey a picture of the future. And although man's plans may sometimes fail, it is no less noble to plan. As a matter of fact, planning is very God-like.

## A Godly Vision

The scriptures reveal that the Great Creator and Sustainer of the universe is also a Great Planner. One does not have to look far for evidence of this quality in Him. Consider the universe and the great order it reflects. Everything in it works with uncanny precision and accuracy. Planets maintain orbits and rotate in ways that defy chance. Tides ebb and flow with a rhythm so clear that one can almost hear them speak. Throughout the physical realm there is a symbiotic relationship that worshipfully cries out to a Master Architect. Everything in it works and declares that its Maker is real.

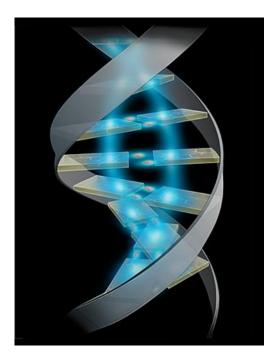
The apostle Paul once wrote that the physical domain of which mankind is a tenant reveals another dimension in which God Almighty resides. Notice what he writes to the Church at Rome.

"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead: so that they are without excuse:" (Ro. 1:20)

Here Paul is stating that the material realm stands as incontrovertible proof that there is a WONDERFUL DESIGNER who has fashioned the world we live in and the universe we can see. Clearly, the Great God of heaven is a Being of extraordinary talents, not the least of which is His capacity to plan and to build

However, the Bible also reveals that God has planned out and created more than a massive physical dimension of which we are a part. The scriptures also declare that He is engaged in a magnificent spiritual creation in which mankind is at the very center. As was mentioned earlier, God made man for a specific purpose—one that involves being born into the very Family of his Maker, as literal sons and daughters. As members of that Family, man will possess not only the character, but the very composition and form of his Creator. In short, man will be just like God (1 Jn. 3:2).

This Destiny was the central theme of the gospel preached by Jesus and the apostles during the first century. Furthermore, it is a message that continues to be proclaimed by His servants to this very day. As difficult as it is to imagine, God is working out in man the crowning achievement of His creative power, and He is totally committed to its achievement.



Model of a Double Helix which carries a unique genetic code for every human being

## A Labor of Love

The idea of God Almighty literally recreating Himself reflects a wisdom that is so distant from that possessed by man. For this reason he has rejected the idea that the ALMIGHTY would ever consider such a future for those whom He has created. This is because human nature cannot grasp the enormity of God's love. After all, what man would ever consent to having his innocent Son be executed in order to spare the guilty from being put to the same fate? But that is exactly what the Eternal did when He offered up the unblemished life of His beloved Son to atone for the sins of all mankind (Jn. 3:16, Heb. 2:9). This kind of compassion defines God's very nature (1Jn. 4:8) and it is what drives His purpose for those He has formed in His own image.

But it doesn't end there

#### Human Nature vs. God's Love

Human nature, however, rejects such an attitude. It feels compelled to protect itself from all who would do it potential harm. For the most part, man is prepared to fight to the death to protect what he possesses. When it comes to his power and authority, it is no different. Man is seldom willing to surrender such things.

Because of his self-centered nature, man is driven to defend his position and status. One only has to look at the tyrannical governments that fill the earth to see this attitude played out every day. Who really believes such "leaders" are genuinely committed to serving their people?

Oh, to be sure, man does have the capacity to do good. But this goodness is almost always measured. For the most part it is calculated and driven by self-interest. In short, man will rarely give something without getting something in return.

God, on the other hand, desires to share the infinite power and virtue He possesses with all His children. To this end, the Bible reveals that He has planned a future for mankind that involves positions of immense power and authority. Consider just a few examples: The book of Daniel indicates that the saints will one day possess God's Kingdom and rule over it forever (Dan. 7:18). The apostle Paul spoke of a crown of righteousness that God's people will receive at the return of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 4:8). Additionally, the book of Revelation declares that God's people will sit on "thrones" (Rev. 20:4) and serve as "kings" and "priests" (Rev. 5:10). At that time they will govern the entire earth. But this is just the beginning.



The Crown of England
A symbol of Authority

The book of Hebrews reveals that God's people will one day rule over all that exists. Imagine that! Man will rule over everything. Drawing on the words of a psalm written by King David (Psa. 8:3-6), the author of Hebrews reveals a profound promise regarding man's future responsibilities in God's Kingdom. Consider the power of his words.

"But one in a certain place testified saying, What is man, that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you visit him? Thou made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands: You have put <u>all things</u> in subjection under his feet. For that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. <u>But now we see not yet all things</u> put under him." (Heb. 2:6-8)

The scriptures reveal that man has the distinction of having been given dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:26). But in Hebrews (just cited) God is revealing that man's ultimate Destiny extends far beyond that. God has promised that those born into His spiritual Family will have dominion over "all things." This would include things not yet seen (verse 8).

Now imagine what God has created that man has not yet seen. For example: what about the spirit world? God made it (Psa. 104:4). It certainly is a work of His hands. That being the case, will man

have dominion over the great angelic beings that serve at the pleasure of the Creator of heaven and earth? He will if you believe the words recorded by the apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Church at Corinth. There, this great servant states that man will sit in judgment over the angelic kingdom (1Cor. 6:3).

#### Born to Rule

At this point it is important to understand that the GREAT CREATOR of eternity gave man dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26) for a specific reason. He did so because mankind was created to lead and to govern—and that is exactly what he will do in God's Kingdom. Those born into the Family of the ETERNAL will serve as Kings and Priests as well as Judges, ensuring that righteousness and justice fill the entire universe and that TRUE JOY abounds.

These are not simply petty positions with glorified titles. God is not trying to placate His Family nor is He using hyperbole when revealing the great Destiny that awaits those who will be born into His Kingdom. These positions are real and their importance is equally real. Throughout the pages of the Bible, God has declared that an everlasting Kingdom is coming that will be ruled by a Family of Kings.

#### A Plan Is Born

Because of God's infinite wisdom and love, He has not only purposed in His heart to expand His Royal Family, but He has also created a Plan to ensure this desire is realized. However, when considering the enormity of this Plan for mankind, a question emerges—one that demands to be answered.

When did God plan to recreate Himself?

In other words, when did this idea first come into His heart and His thoughts?

The answer to this question is of paramount importance—for by understanding when this Master Architect fashioned His Plan for mankind, the scope of that Plan will become abundantly clear. Regrettably, most "believers" have never grasped this critical piece of one of life's great puzzles. So let's ask ourselves: when did God first plan to expand His family?

## A Popular View

One of the more popular views embraced by sincere Bible believing Christians regarding this question is that God did not consider creating man until after the fall of the great archangel Lucifer (Isa. 14: 12-15, Ezk. 28:12-19). This thinking is driven by the belief that after creating the angelic realm, God made the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1) as a potential home for them (the angels). Once this was done, He placed a community of angelic beings on earth under the direct supervision of Lucifer. The assumption here is that God placed these great spirits on earth to oversee the completion of the planet as well as to establish the Government of God on the earth and ultimately assume permanent residence here. However, at some later point, Lucifer became embittered toward God and waged a great war against Him.

#### Plan "B"

Those who embrace this idea contend that it wasn't until after Lucifer's attempted "coup" that God decided to exercise a "contingency plan." In it He would create man, essentially making the human family "Plan B."

But is it possible that man was always "Plan A" and that there never was a "Plan B"? Is it also possible that long before the existence of the physical universe, God determined in His heart to create a Family consisting of beings that would be just like Him?

Those who believe that the creation of man was some type of back-up in case the initial plan didn't work should consider this: God's plans don't fail! Nor does He ever abandon them!

#### The Perfect Planner

At this point, it is important to understand something about the infinite God of the Bible. The scriptures reveal that His ability to plan and to carry out His plans is something that sets Him apart from every being in existence. The great prophet Isaiah once wrote that God's power extends far beyond simply creating the material universe. God also has power over the very destiny of this creation. At one point, Isaiah actually quotes God Himself regarding His absolute SOVEREIGNTY over the future and His ability to accomplish what He sets out to do. Notice how God describes Himself through the pen of this great prophet.

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:" (Isa. 46:9-10)

Here God is stating that He is steadfast and resolute in completing what He has begun. Now ask yourself: do these words sound like the utterance of someone who needs a backup plan? The point here is that if God planned the earth to be the permanent domain of the angelic realm, you can bet that's who would be living here. The Great Creator and Sustainer of the universe wasn't the slightest bit tentative when He spoke through Isaiah. Here are His exact words: "My council SHALL STAND and I will do ALL my pleasure."

However, if God didn't create the physical universe for the angelic realm, who did He create it for? Why did this Great Master Architect create the heavens and the earth? Furthermore, when did He first consider doing such a thing?

## Before the Worlds Began

The Bible reveals that God's Plan for mankind was in existence before the heavens and earth were created—even before the existence of physical matter. That Plan included: 1) creating man out of that which is corruptible, 2) teaching him those things that would build spiritual virtue and ultimately perfect righteous character, then 3) creating a path by which man could receive eternal life and enter into God's spiritual Domain (Kingdom). Furthermore, God's Word declares that all of this planning took place before the universe came into existence. To illustrate this truth consider the following.

When writing his epistle to the evangelist Titus, the apostle Paul expressed a remarkable understanding, and in doing so provided insight into the mind of God at work before the universe was created. Notice what Paul says in the introduction to this letter.

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began..." (Ti. 1:1-2)

Notice that Paul declared that God promised eternal life "before the world began." In order to do this He must have planned to extend this great gift prior to building the vastness of the heavens and the earth. But to whom did God extend this promise? Certainly it wasn't to the angelic realm. They were created immortal. They are a part of a spirit world which is incorruptible. That world is not subject to death. This being the case, to whom did God promise eternal life? After all, if He made such a promise, He had to have someone in mind to be its recipient.

#### A Promise of Life

The Bible reveals that God's promise of eternal life was given to man, even before man existed. This is because God knew He was going to create the human family. He also knew He was going to make them temporal beings, subject to death.

Unlike the angels, man is fully mortal and to him death is a matter of "when" not "if." The Bible says, "It is appointed unto all men once to die" (Heb. 9:27). No matter how great or small a man is, death is inevitable. The book of Ecclesiastes says it this way:

'For that which befalls the sons of men, befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yea they have all one breath; so that man has no preeminence above a beast. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.' (Eccl. 3:19)

Clearly death is a formidable part of the human experience. For all intents and purposes, it renders man impotent. When he dies, everything stops. He cannot think. He cannot act. He cannot feel. In short, when one dies he is gone. James, the brother of Jesus expressed it this way.

"For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (Jas. 4:14)

As a mortal being man's days are limited. When contemplating his own temporal existence, King David of Israel expressed the following.

"Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee..." (Psa. 39:4-5)

Today the vast majority of professing Christians are convinced that the saved don't really die. They contend that the departed "believer" lives on in heaven enjoying a better existence. But this is not true. Jesus Himself said, "No man has ascended into heaven but He that came down from heaven..." (Jn. 3:13). That should pretty much rule out the entire human family.

Even the great champions of the Bible eventually died and have returned to the earth, not heaven. When speaking of King David, the apostle Peter once said, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this very day" (Acts 2:29). Peter went on to say, "David is not ascended into the heavens (verse 34).

Furthermore, in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews great heroes of faith such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Enoch, and Moses are all identified as "dead." When speaking of these men the author says, "These all died having not [yet] received the promise" (Heb. 11:13). As was mentioned earlier, that promise was, and is, ETERNAL LIFE (Ti. 1:2).

#### The Great Enemy

The Bible calls death the "great enemy" (1 Cor. 15: 26) It robs man of the opportunity to create, to share, to hope and even to love. When speaking of the dead, the Psalmist wrote, "His breath goes forth, he returns to the earth, and in that day his thoughts perish" (Psa. 146:4). Later, Solomon, the great king of Israel, confirmed these words.

"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing neither have they any more reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." (Eccl. 9:5)

When describing the overwhelming power death has over the human family, the Bible says, "His sons come to honor him but he knows it not" (Job 14:16). In other words, those who have died are totally unaware of anything. It is true that man can delay death at times, but he cannot escape it forever. Death is inevitable.

#### The Soul is NOT Immortal

The idea that man has an immortal soul and therefore is still conscious upon the death of the body was never taught by Jesus or His apostles. However, such thinking was an integral part of pagan religions at that time. This fact is supported by very credible works of scholarship such as the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Notice what it says about the origin of this doctrine.

"The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is speculation nowhere taught expressly in the scripture. The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended." (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Immortality of the Soul," Vol. VI, pp. 564, 566)

Down through the ages, pagan religions have embraced an endless array of deities, as well as a "you can take it with you" view of the afterlife. Under this view, the soul lives on in perpetuity. To them it is immortal; it cannot be destroyed.

It is astonishing that the vast majority of well intended "believers" embrace many of these godless practices and beliefs—but embrace them they do. Virtually every leader in the Protestant world today believes the soul is immortal. Furthermore, they are convinced that this belief has been accepted by all the great champions of the faith throughout time. However, this is simply not true. Furthermore, this error in thinking is borne out in the words of author Frank Eakin in his book *The Religion and Culture of Israel*.

"Because of Greek influences on western culture, man is generally understood to be composed of either body and soul, or body, soul, and spirit. This bisection or trisection is totally incompatible with Judaeo-Christian tradition which accepts neither a body-soul dichotomy nor a body, soul, spirit trichotomy: man does not have a soul, he is a soul... Man is a psychosomatic (or psycho physical) whole, an entity who cannot be divided." (*The Religion and Culture of Israel*, pp. 92-93)

Despite any assertions to the contrary, man **is** very mortal. He **can** and **will** die. Furthermore, when he does, the only thing that will bring him back to life is the fulfilled promise of an infinite God.

#### A Great Promise

The Bible proclaims that for the true believer, the day of death is greater than the day of birth (Phil. 1:21). But why is this so? Why should anyone actually look forward to something so seemingly final? The answer to this question is profound indeed. The day of ones death is greater because of a wonderful promise God made before the foundations of the world—a promise of eternal life which only an Eternal God can give. That promise was bequeathed before the foundations of the world to those whom God would one day create in His own image. The apostle John declared this truth in his first epistle.

"And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life." (1Jn. 2:25)

Here John says that the promise of eternal life was given by God to His human family. In order for this to be true, the Great Creator had to know about that family before the world began—and that is exactly what the scriptures declare. However, God's word goes even further when revealing His Vision for man and the steps He is going to take to ensure it is accomplished.

The Bible declares that God not only promised eternal life before the foundations of the world, but He also provided a way for man to enter into that life. That entrance would be through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, God actually planned out this incredible act of selflessness before the universe was ever created. This truth was revealed by one of the premier figures of the New Testament.

A Great Hope

The apostle Peter was one of Jesus' closest friends on earth. He knew the Messiah as few did. Most certainly Peter had conversations with Him that revealed profound insights into what God the Father was doing through the human experience. These conversations, as well as his personal relationship with the Savior of the world, would help shape his life as a leader in the New Testament Church.

Peter was a man of intense passions and he did not hide his feelings. His life, as revealed in the gospels, shows a man who wanted to take the world by storm. He was probably a bit impatient—and on more than one occasion he even dared to rebuke Jesus Himself, although his chastising of the Son of God was somewhat misplaced.

The gospels reveal that one thing Peter could not come to grips with was that Jesus would have to die. Even during the Savior's arrest near the garden of Gethsemanae, he was prepared to fight in defense of his Lord (Jn. 18:10).

Peter's view of Jesus' crucifixion changed radically as an apostle who would later lead the early New Testament Church. This change would be reflected in the words he would write. In his first epistle, this man would make a profound statement regarding the enormity of Jesus' death and how that death fit into a great Master Plan. Notice his words.

"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was *foreordained before the foundation of the world*, but was manifest in these last times for you..." (1Pe. 1:19-20)

Here Peter is saying that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was **foreordained before the foundations of the world**. These words are powerful indeed. For if they are true, then the death of God's only begotten Son was imagined by Him *before* the physical creation was begun. Imagine how serious this Plan must have been to God the Father.

The *Expositors Bible Commentary* offers a very interesting observation about Peter's words relating to when God planned to offer up His Son as a ransom for mankind. It examines the word *"foreordained"* and offers an understanding that harmonizes perfectly with the scriptures.

"The Greek word for "foreordained" is *poregnosmenou*, and is often translated "known before." The meaning, however, must be more than "foresight." For why would Peter at this point make the obvious statement that God knew before about Jesus and His death? The word connotes purpose and has been translated as "predestined before the foundation of the world." The redemption was in the plan of God before Creation occurred. In other words, the salvation in Christ was purposed from eternity and is now made plain." (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12 p. 225)

It is hard to fathom the depth of a Plan so dedicated to success that God the Father would commit His most priceless resource to ensure its achievement. But that is exactly what He did. At some point in the vastness of eternity, the Greatest Being in existence consciously planned to offer the unblemished life of His own Son in order that man could be spared the effects of sin (1Jn. 3:4). This was done because of an extraordinary Vision the Father has for mankind and the Plan He has crafted to ensure its success. And if anyone ever had doubts about how serious God is about achieving success, consider what He put up as collateral.

The apostle Paul also expressed the level of commitment God had to His Vision of bringing mankind into His divine Family. In his letter to the Church at Ephesus, Paul said it this way.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will..." (Eph. 1:3-5)

Think about these words in the context of those spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and *I will do all my pleasure*." (Isa. 46:9-10)

God's pleasure is that His Plan of building a Family reflecting His perfect righteous character will come to pass. To this end, He fashioned a strategy that included the ultimate sacrifice. But this is only part of the Plan.

God's word says that although the death of His son would reconcile man back to Him, it would not give man salvation (Ro. 5:10). This being the case, how is man going to enter into an incorruptible state? What must happen in order for him to be "born" into the Family of God? This question was pondered during the days of the patriarchs thousands of years ago. The answer is timeless.

### Shall the Dead Live Again?

Some 4000 years ago, a man whom God called "perfect," advanced a question that has been pondered by almost every person facing death. The man's name was Job and his question is recorded in the fourteenth chapter of a book that bears his name. Job asked, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). This question, although simple in form, cuts through all the complexities in life. It has been a source of wonder to mankind for millennia. In short, it is asking: Is there something beyond what we can see in this existence, and how can we know it is real? To truly comprehend this great mystery, we must understand who God is.

The Bible reveals that the ALMIGHTY is a God of life. Furthermore, He has promised that the time is coming when life will fill the entire universe and every vestige of death will evaporate (Rev.21:4).

#### From Corruption to Incorruption

The apostle Paul spoke of the transition man will go through when entering into God's great spiritual Domain. This event will facilitate the change His children will experience as they move from a physical state to one that is spiritual. Paul characterized this transition as a "mystery revealed."

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Cor. 15:50-57)



**Arlington National Cemetery** 

#### The Power of the Resurrection

The Bible speaks prolifically concerning the power of death—but it also speaks of a great victory over that power. That victory will come through a resurrection which was promised by God from the very beginning. Jesus Christ believed in that promise and He knew that he would be the Architect of that victory. When speaking to the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." (Jn. 5:25)

Jesus had power over the grave, and His own life demonstrated that fact. Consider just one example. During the final weeks of His life, Jesus was summoned to Bethany to the home of his dear friend Lazarus, who had died just a few days before. When comforting Lazarus' sister, Martha, Jesus said, "Your brother shall live again." Martha responded, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus then offered words of extraordinary consolation and hope. Jesus told Martha and he tells all mankind, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (Jn. 11:25).

Here the Savior of the world declares that He has power over death itself. Earlier when describing His own impending death Jesus said, "I lay my life down and I take it [receive it] up again" (Jn. 10:17). Furthermore, His resurrection stands as incontrovertible evidence of God's power over the grave and what it pictures. The Great God of heaven truly is a God of LIFE.

Although many may not believe it, the promise of a resurrection is real. Fashioned by a real God, proclaimed by real servants, and made possible by a real Savior. The time is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice. He shall call and they shall answer.

But there is even more to this great story.

The Bible reveals that God's great love of, and authority over, his creation is even considerate of those who do not know Him. Think of the billions who never heard of the God of the Bible, or the billions who never understood when they did hear. Most religions consign such people to a horrible fate. But the God of hope has a promise for them. They, too, shall live again.

#### A Second Resurrection

In the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation the apostle John describes the Destiny of the true believer, but he also offers words of consolation to those who do not know God. Notice what John writes.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. <u>But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished</u>." (Rev. 20:4-5)

The scriptures declare that at the conclusion of the millennium, there will be a second resurrection, in which the billions of people who never truly knew about God or His Plan will be given an opportunity to know Him and his great law. It is then that they will understand a loving Father's hope and be given an opportunity to be a part of His incorruptible Kingdom and to choose life. This second resurrection will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter XI.

#### An End to Death

Today we live in a corruptible world—a world filled with suffering and death. But God's Word exhorts His children to take heart, for the day is coming when death will be no more and life will fill the entire universe (Rev. 21:4). When writing to the Church at Corinth, the apostle Paul said, "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1Cor. 15:25). Imagine a Kingdom where there is no death—a Kingdom where life is everywhere—a Kingdom where nature itself will be incorruptible.

What will it be like when this change comes? What will it be like when God's children become incorruptible? It will be a time that will behold the crowning achievement of the Master Architect. It is the fulfillment of a creation that is as magnificent as its Creator. It will reflect Who God is and what man shall be. Furthermore, God imagined it all before the first molecule came into existence.

It is hard to imagine such a Destiny because man is so weak, so flawed, so blemished, so corruptible, and so finite. What right does he have to the infinite?

The infinite is a Gift, given by an infinite God in order that man might enter into Life. That entrance is through a resurrection—a point at which God's children will move from corruption to INCORRUPTION, from weakness to POWER, from dishonor to GLORY (1Cor. 15:42-44).

The promise of a resurrection is indelibly etched throughout the pages of the Bible. That promise reflects God's great wisdom and love. It also reflects His hope and desire for all mankind. A desire that will see His children as citizens in an infinite Kingdom—a Kingdom of infinite possibilities, of music yet to be heard, of colors yet to be discovered, of dreams yet to be imagined. It is a Kingdom of Life where death has no power. And it is God's good pleasure to give that Kingdom (Lk. 12:32).

#### A Final Thought

The Bible reveals that God has envisioned an extraordinary Destiny for mankind. That Destiny is that man will one day be born into His Family as literal sons and daughters. The scriptures also reveal that He has envisioned this Destiny before the physical realm was created—even before the existence of matter. In order for this remarkable Destiny to be realized, this GREAT MASTER ARCHITECT also knew that a Savior would have to make the ultimate Sacrifice. This, too, was integrated into His Plan, the most well conceived Plan in history.

The next step would be to reveal this Vision and the Plan that would bring it about. But how would this Vision be revealed? And when would this great Plan be shared? And with whom would God first entrust with the knowledge of this magnificent Destiny? Read on...

# Chapter III A Plan Revealed

Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets.

Amos 3:7

Several years ago a beautiful young girl rushed into her parent's bedroom to share with them the most exciting news. The man she had been in love with for so long had just asked her to be his bride. He was a wonderful man and the proposal was like something out of a fairy tale. Unbeknownst to this lovely young lady, her father and mother suspected that tonight just might be the moment this long anticipated question would be asked. This is because her fiance had met privately with them just days before and asked for permission to marry their daughter. Regrettably, this tradition has all but faded from courtship in the western world.

## Tears of Joy

Although it was well into the evening, news this wonderful just couldn't wait. This young lady, who was beaming with hope and anticipation, just had to share it, and who better to share it with than the parents who loved her so much? This sweet child cried as she recounted every detail of this exquisite moment. While proudly displaying the beautiful engagement ring she had been given, the new bride-to-be could hardly contain her joy.

Her parents also cherished every second of this moment, because of the great love they had for their daughter. The young man who would now become a part of their family was a wonderful person—hard working, honest, and a real gentleman. They knew their "little girl" had chosen well. Add to that the joy was simply contagious. How could you not be happy?

In the days that followed, the announcement of her engagement was spread to friends and relatives with equal excitement. At one point this lovely lady said, "How could anyone get tired of spreading this kind of news? I could do it forever!"

Stories like the one just cited have been played out countless times, but they never seem to lose their richness. Almost everyone has experienced moments that simply had to be shared with someone. Throughout our lives there are great events as well as milestones that just cry out to be told. The birth of a child, a school graduation, a promotion at work, and yes, a wedding, are just a few of numerous reasons to proclaim a sense of joy to all who will listen.

The emotion of joy, and the desire to express that joy, is not limited to man. The spirit world can also experience a sense of elation, as well as express that feeling in ways that are very visible to others within their realm. For example: the Bible says there is joy in heaven when one sinner comes to repentance (Lk. 15:10). The scriptures also reveal that the spirit world can actually be moved to sing praises to God for His great works and His acts of love (See: Job 38:7, Rev. 5:9-11).

## Spreading Good News

Additionally, the angelic realm has also been used by God to announce significant moments and great events. The births of Jesus and John the Baptist were proclaimed by the archangel Gabriel (Lk. 1:13-18, 26). The book of Acts records that two angels announced the very spot where Jesus would set foot when He returns to this world and subdues the nations (Acts 1:10-11). Furthermore, the book of Revelation records the exact words an angel will utter when announcing the return of Jesus' authority over all the earth (Rev. 11:15). Even the wedding of Christ and His bride, the Church, will be announced by a great multitude of angelic beings who will proclaim it with immense joy (Rev. 19:6-7).

Clearly the expression of excitement and joy, as well as the announcement of great events, are very much a part of God's spiritual domain. With this in mind, consider the possibility of the "greatest of all announcements"—one so far-reaching in scope that it would have an effect on everyone and everything that ever existed, or ever would exist. Furthermore, this announcement was so important that it would set in motion the most magnificent idea ever imagined.

#### A Plan Revealed

In Chapters I and II we've seen that God has envisioned an incredible Destiny for man—one in which man will be born into His Family as literal sons and daughters. As members of that royal family they will hold positions of immense power and authority and rule the universe with Him.



Further, we've learned that the Great God who envisioned this Destiny also crafted a Plan to ensure that it would be accomplished. Additionally, all this was fashioned by the Almighty before the universe came into existence.

But what happens next? What would the Great Creator and Sustainer of all that exists do after formulating this Vision and the Plan to accomplish it?

The Bible strongly suggests that once God's Vision for mankind was established and His Plan for accomplishing this Vision was set, the Almighty formally announced what He intended to do. This announcement was first made to the great angelic citizens who served at the pleasure of their Creator—a and it is hard to imagine that what they heard didn't cause a buzz of unimaginable excitement throughout the spirit realm.

The scriptures do not specifically identify what details God included when He introduced this remarkable project to the angels. However, there are several things He may have disclosed. Each of these aspects of His Plan harmonizes perfectly with what the Bible reveals about man's ultimate Destiny. Imagine what God may have proclaimed as He prepared an entire kingdom of spirit beings for the arrival of mankind—His Family.

## A Proclamation Goes Forth

The following are seven specific aspects of God's Plan that the angels would have known at some point prior to the creation of the universe. Here is what their Creator may have revealed to them.

## Critical Components of the Plan

What God Revealed

- ◆ I am going to expand My Kingdom
- ◆ I am going to build a Family consisting of billions of sons and daughters.

- ◆ I will begin this creation by making man in My own image, after My likeness
- ♦ However, I will make man out of corruptible matter. He will at first be mortal.
- ◆ I will make him a little lower than the angelic realm.
- But ultimately he will preside over you and be your judge, and you will serve him as he rules with Me.
- ◆ Eventually, man will inherit everything and I will make my dwelling place with him. At that time, he will no longer be made of corruptible matter, but rather of eternal incorruptible spirit. He will be like Me.

What the angelic realm heard from this Master Architect was probably the greatest news imaginable. Here, from the very Source of life itself, and from a Being that embodied all that is pure, came an announcement that may have gone beyond even their capacity to comprehend. What the Creator was telling them was that there would be billions of beings like Him—infinite in love, infinite in mercy, infinite in compassion, infinite in wisdom, infinite in power, and infinitely creative. Imagine the possibilities!

## Was This Really Good News?

There are some who might argue that such news wasn't all that great, considering that it meant a kind of "demotion" for the spirit world. After all, according to the Plan, the angels would start out higher than man in God's organizational hierarchy, but eventually would find themselves below man on the power ladder. How could this possibly be construed by them as good news?

## Created to Serve

At this point, it is important to understand something about these majestic beings God created in the vast expanse of ETERNITY. The Almighty designed the angels to serve. They are even called "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14). Their greatest fulfillment comes from working on behalf of others. It is actually a source of great joy to them. This fact is made clear when one considers the role angels have played down through the course of human history.

Throughout the scriptures, there is not a single example of a **faithful** angel of God acting unilaterally. In every instance they are carrying out responsibilities under the authority given to them by their Creator. It is true that the demon world is driven by ambition and self-interest. But these spirits do not represent God or His Kingdom. However, when it comes to the loyal angelic beings who serve at the pleasure of the King of Creation, there are no "do your own thing" types. This is not to suggest that angels do not have free will, for indeed they do, as will be brought out in a later chapter. However, these great spirits have set their will to honor their Creator.

There is yet another reason that illustrates why the angels would have received this announcement with great joy. That reason is reflected in the relationship they had with the Almighty. The angelic realm knew God intimately. They saw firsthand His power and His virtue. They were eye witnesses to His wisdom and love. Now they are being told by Him that they would be on the cutting edge of a Plan that was literally infinite in scope. God was going to build a Family that was just like Him.

## Why Tell the Angels?

Some may wonder why God would share His Vision for mankind with the angelic world. In other words, apart from the obvious excitement it would generate, was there a reason for God to reveal it to the great spirit beings He had already created? Furthermore, is there any tangible evidence in the scriptures

that suggests God actually made such an announcement? The answer to both of these questions is a resounding YES!

First, let us examine why God would inform the angels of His Plan to expand His Family. In other words, why tell them at all? Wasn't it HIS Plan? Why tell anybody? It wasn't as if God was accountable to the angels. Therefore, why share this brilliant idea with them? Although this may be the way man thinks, it most certainly is not the way God thinks. When the Eternal revealed His Plan to the spirit world it reflected a great wisdom that is so much a part of His character. With this in mind, consider why God would do such a thing.

## Three Reasons

There are probably many reasons for God to announce His Plan to the angelic realm, but three reasons stand out as most prominent. **First**, God's Plan for mankind directly impacted the angels. In effect, He was revealing their Destiny as well. Under this Plan, the angelic world would also be given new responsibilities. They would eventually be working on behalf of beings they didn't even know at that time. At some point in the future, they would serve at the pleasure of an expanded God Family.

By virtue of this fact alone, their lives would change dramatically. Their positions and duties would also change. For example, consider one position certain angels would hold that would not even exist without God's Vision to expand His Family. This position is revealed in the book of Revelation. There it describes a great architectural wonder that will be the home of Jesus Christ and His bride as well as that of God the Father. This great architecture is called "The New Jerusalem" and it will be the universal headquarters of God's Government for all eternity (Rev. 21, 22). Surrounding this city is a great wall containing twelve gates, three on each side. Each of these gates will be attended by a powerful angelic sentry (Rev. 21:12). The specific duties of these twelve angels are not mentioned. However, it is clear that these are positions of great distinction in God's Kingdom.

At this point, it is important to understand that these positions would not even exist without the Vision God had regarding the Destiny of man. Without that Vision, the New Jerusalem would be irrelevant. Come to think of it, there wouldn't be an Old Jerusalem either. However, God did envision this Destiny and in doing so, He also fashioned a purpose for the angels who would serve there.

This is just one example of an endless array of new responsibilities the angels will assume once God's Plan for mankind is accomplished. For this reason alone, God may have seen the announcement of His Plan to the angels as appropriate.

## The Role of the Angels

A **second reason** for God to share His Plan for mankind with the angels is that these exquisite creatures would have a direct part in carrying out that Plan. In other words, the angelic realm would be instrumental in how God works with man during this life.

To illustrate this point, it is important to understand how extensively God has employed the services of the angelic kingdom down through the ages. Angels have served as messengers, protectors, and even the facilitators of God's judgment on earth. Consider just some of the roles they have played since God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

An angel guarded the tree of life after Adam and Eve defied God at the beginning (Gen. 2:16-17). Angels visited Sodom and Gomorrah because of the great depravity coming from those cities (Gen. 19). Centuries later, an angel executed God's judgment on the firstborn of Egypt during the days of Moses (Ex. 12).

Angels have also been dispatched as messengers to such people as Abraham, Lot, Gideon, and Elijah, as well as many of the prophets. But it doesn't end there. As was mentioned earlier, the great

archangel Gabriel announced the births of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist (Lk. 1:26-33, 13-18). Additionally, angels attended to Jesus after he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Mt. 4:11), as well as when He prayed to His Father in Gethsemanae (Lk. 22:43). Later, an angel rolled away the stone that secured Jesus' tomb after His crucifixion and burial (Mt. 28:2-4). Shortly after that, God again used an angel. This time it was to announce that Jesus had risen from the dead (Mt. 28:5-6, Mk. 16:5-7).

Even after the resurrection, God used angels extensively in carrying out His Plan. Angels spoke to the apostles after Jesus' ascension to his Father in heaven (Acts 1:10-11). Angels were used to deliver messages to seven Churches in Asia (Rev. 2, 3). Furthermore, angels will be used to execute God's judgment on the earth during the last days. At that time, seven angels will pour out great devastation on the earth through trumpet plagues (Rev. 8). Additionally, seven other angels will pour out God's judgment through a series of vial plagues, the likes of which mankind has never seen (Rev. 16). Angels were even used by God to escort the apostle John through an end-time vision that would be the central theme of the book of Revelation. But it doesn't end there.

God's word declares that shortly before the return of the Messiah, an angel will announce that "the kingdoms of this world are now become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). The Bible also states that even after the death of two special end-time witnesses, an angel will cry out and appeal to mankind to repent (Rev. 14:6-7). Additionally, once the Messiah returns to subdue the nations, an angel will bind up Satan and incarcerate him in a bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3).

## **Guardian Angels**

The Bible also reveals that God has enlisted the services of the angelic realm to do many things directly related to man, not the least of which is to protect His children. Notice what God's word says regarding this very important angelic function.

"For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." (Psa. 91:11)

Here God is promising those who are called according to His purpose that He will use angels to guide them in their walk. What a great honor and tremendous responsibility He has given to these ministering spirits—a responsibility that would not exist without God's Vision for man.

Jesus Christ was well aware of the angelic kingdom and its role in God's Plan for mankind. He even advanced a stern warning to those who would dare to tamper with the children His Father has placed in the direct care of these ministering spirits.

"Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." (Mt. 18:10)

Clearly, the angelic kingdom has played a prominent role in God's Plan for mankind throughout history. Therefore, in order for the Great Architect of that Plan to best use this valuable resource, it would have been incumbent upon Him to inform them of His Plan and their part in executing it.

## A God Who Reveals

Perhaps **the greatest reason** for God to share His Plan for mankind with the angels is that to do so reflects a fundamental fairness that is so much a part of Him. The scriptures reveal that throughout history, God has informed man regarding things He planned to do. He informed Adam and Eve of the consequences of disobedience (Gen. 2:17). He told Noah that He was going to take action on a world that was filled with violence (Gen. 6:13). He informed Abraham that a great nation was going to come out of him (Gen. 12:1-3, 15:1-5, 17:6-7). He told Moses that He was going to deliver the descendants of Israel into a land He had promised hundreds of years before. Furthermore, He sent His prophets to warn both Israel and other nations that He would take action to correct a world driven by contempt for Him and His MORAL AUTHORITY.

God also used servants like Daniel to announce that an everlasting Kingdom was going to crush all the kingdoms of this world and fill the earth with untold peace and prosperity (Dan. 2:44-45). He used Isaiah to describe the great health and hope that His Kingdom would bring (Isa. 35). Ezekiel was used to announce that God's spirit would one day be available to all mankind (Ezk. 11:19-20). Ezekiel also announced that there would be a time when the billions of people who never knew God would be resurrected and given a chance to learn of Him and enter into His Kingdom (Ezk. 37).

Not only did God use angels and prophets to announce significant events, but Jesus Christ Himself was also actively involved in announcing God's Plan for mankind. He spoke prolifically of a Kingdom to come and how to gain entrance into that Kingdom (Jn. 3:1-8). Furthermore, Paul announced that a resurrection would take place that would transform mortal man into immortal spirit (1Cor. 15:50-57).

These are just a few of virtually hundreds of announcements God has made to man regarding his future. Now here is the question: Does it make any sense for God to be so explicit with man regarding his Destiny and so elusive with the angels regarding theirs? Everything in God's word strongly suggests that He is One who reveals, not One who conceals. For this reason it is inconceivable to imagine that God would somehow fail to announce His Plan for the Destiny of the universe to those beings who had so faithfully served Him.

However, some may still ask: Is there any empirical evidence in the scriptures that proves God told the angels of His Vision for man and how He was going to carry out that Vision? Once again, the answer is an emphatic YES!

## The Evidence of Creation

The book of Genesis begins with the story of creation. Here, the Bible reveals that God was the Creator of the entire universe (Gen. 1:1). However, what it does not indicate is the presence of any eyewitnesses to the creation. In other words, where were the angels when God fashioned the heavens and the earth?

If the scriptures ended with Genesis, we wouldn't know the answer to this question, or many other questions for that matter. Fortunately, God's word is far more expansive and it most certainly answers this query. In fact, the Bible places every angel in existence at the very scene of creation when God made the heavens and the earth. This is important because of how the angels reacted when the universe came into existence.

This account of creation is recorded in the book of Job. Even more important is that it is told by none other than God Himself. In the thirty-eighth chapter of this book, God is engaged in a conversation with Job, a man of considerable talents. Some have even suggested that Job may have been a prominent architect and possibly the designer of the great pyramids of Egypt.

It is during this conversation that God presents His own credentials as an architect. Furthermore, when doing so, He reveals a crucial event that coincided with the creation of the universe. He does so by asking a series of questions that leave no doubt as to His credentials as a CREATOR.

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding? Who has laid the measures thereof, if you know? Or who has stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job. 38:4-7)

Notice that God said "the morning stars sang," and "**all** the sons of God shouted for joy." But who or what are these "stars?" And who are these "sons of God?" The "morning stars" as well as the "sons of God" referred to in this passage are angels. In this particular case, ALL the angels. Here, God is saying that when the heavens and the earth were fashioned, it caused such a buzz throughout the spirit world that these great beings couldn't contain themselves. They actually SHOUTED for joy. This shout was a

clear demonstration of true excitement. The angels were literally thrilled by this creative act. At this point we must ask a very important question.

## Why did the angels shout for joy?

This is a fair question. After all, God specifically included this angelic response when describing creation. He actually linked it to the creation itself. With this said, why would all the angels shout for joy when God created the universe? What was so spectacular about this physical creation?

Now, to be sure, the physical universe was beautiful, not to mention immense. But it was also corruptible. It was made out of physical matter. It was capable of decay. The angels on the other hand, were quite different. They came from a spiritual dimension. A dimension that was perfect and incorruptible. This being the case, why would they be so excited about a physical universe?

Furthermore, If it was the physical universe that caused such angelic joy, why would God ever allow it to disappear—because that is exactly what is going to happen? The book of Revelation indicates that at some time in the future, God is going to facilitate the passing away of the physical realm and replace it with an incorruptible spiritual dimension (Rev. 21:1). Therefore, the question remains: Why would the angels be so thrilled when God fashioned the heavens and the earth? What caused their joy?

There can only be one answer. The angels shouted for joy because they knew why God was forming a corruptible dimension. They knew that He was building a temporary home for man. Contrary to what some people of faith assert, the earth was never created for the angelic realm. It was created for God's human family. This fact will become abundantly clear in the next chapter. When the angels beheld this great creative act, they knew that God was taking a monumental step in a Plan they were very familiar with—a Plan that would affect eternity itself.

It is also interesting that God said "ALL" the sons of God shouted for joy. Based on this statement, one can only conclude that every spirit being in existence was invited to witness the shaping of the molecular universe billions of years ago. These beautiful angelic beings had the tremendous privilege and honor of sharing that moment with the Great Creator of Life and the Master Architect of all that is perfect. And to put it mildly, He didn't let them down. This event was nothing short of spectacular.

#### A Brief Review

We now know that the Great Creator and Sustainer of the universe has an incredible Vision concerning the very Destiny of mankind. That Infinite God is building a Family to rule with Him over the vast expanse of the entire universe. We also know that God has fashioned a Plan that will ensure the fulfillment of this Destiny.

Additionally, we have seen that this Plan was actually crafted before the foundations of the world, even before the existence of matter. Finally, we now understand that at some time in the distant past, God revealed this Vision, Plan, and Destiny to the angelic realm.

At this point He is now prepared to take a giant step. It is now time to build the very first "habitat for humanity."

# Chapter IV A Home for Man

And He built His sanctuary like high places, like the earth which He has established forever.

Psalms 78:6

As a young boy growing up in Southern California, Daniel Paulson had a wonderful childhood. His parents loved him dearly and were never ashamed to express their joy in him. He had an older brother that he once described as being "a tad bit smarter than Einstein, and a lot wittier than Johnny Carson." This brother once lobbied to have the family dog's name changed to "Flea" because he was convinced no other dog in the world would have such a cool name. How's that for witty?

Daniel also had a little sister who was a constant companion. She would follow him around like a shadow, but this never seemed to bother him. He really liked his "sis," and years later described her as the "sweetest girl in the world."

The neighborhood where Daniel and his family lived was a magical place. It was always filled with the sounds of children. On any given summer evening there would literally be dozens of kids playing in

Daniel's front yard. Often they would bring sleeping bags and spend the night together under the warm summer sky.

Daniel's home was a place where he and his family spent thousands of hours around the dining room table sharing their lives with the ones they loved most. He spent his entire youth in that house (from kindergarten through college) and it was a constant source of great comfort to him. Home was a place where he always felt safe. It was warm in the winter, cool in the summer, and constantly filled with hope. What a great place for a young boy to learn and grow.

The value of a strong home cannot be overstated. Character and virtue are shaped in such places. With this in mind, is it any wonder that as a part of His Plan, God would build a home for all mankind?

## In the Beginning

The scriptures declare that sometime after revealing His Plan to the angelic realm, God began to implement one of its most critical stages. He would build a domain in which man could learn and grow. The book of Genesis describes this creative act in words that identify the source of all that exists.

"In the beginning, **God** created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1)

It was at this precise moment that everything in the molecular universe began. The Bible does not indicate when this exact moment occurred other than to say "in the beginning." However, a strong case can be made that this moment may have taken place billions of years ago and perhaps even longer. The evidence for this position will be presented in Chapter V.

However, the scriptures do declare that at this very moment something spectacular occurred. Something so immense that the entire angelic realm could observe it. It was at this point that all the angels sang praises to the Great God and literally shouted for joy (Job 38:7).

#### How Did He Do It?

Many have wondered how God went about creating the universe. In other words, what specifically did He do? What materials did He use? Did He simply "blink" like some genie in a lamp, and "poof" everything appeared? Or was the universe painstakingly assembled like an intricate model with every piece delicately put in its exact place? Is that what God did? Just how did He create the vast expanse of the heavens and the earth?

As amazing as this might sound, the Bible provides some extraordinary insight into this great scientific puzzle. It actually describes the process that took place when this Master Architect created all that exists and when ding so it offers credence to three plausible theories/

## Three Plausible Theories

Several opinions exist among Christians concerning the forming of the material universe the human family calls home. Each of them emanate from an understanding of words expressed by the apostle Paul and recorded in his letter to the Hebrews. Notice what he wrote.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were made of things which do not appear." (Heb. 11:3)

Based on these words three prominent theories have emerged. They are:

- The universe was created from a Spiritual component referred to as "essence."
- It was created from pre-created inter-dimensional components specifically designed by God.
- It was created by divine decree.

Each of these positions harmonize with the sacred writings and are presented respectfully as follows:

# The "Spiritual Essence" Theory

The eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews is one of the most frequently read passages in all the Bible. This chapter is often called the "faith chapter." It identifies great champions of faith down through the ages, as well as the challenges they faced throughout their lives. However, this wonderful portion of scripture also addresses the very creation of heaven and earth and in doing so, reveals something extraordinary about this remarkable event. The author begins by providing an explanation of what real faith is. Notice his words..

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1)

The words in this verse are revealing that there are things that exist that cannot be grasped by the empirical senses. In other words: "things not seen." This however, does not mean that such "things" are not real. Notice this verse does not say "things that do not exist," but rather "things not seen." The point here is that there are things that do exist that simply cannot be comprehended by sight, scent, taste, touch, or sound. This is because these "things" are made of something beyond the physical realm.

At this point the author addresses the literal creation of the material universe—the heavens and the earth, and once again the existence of the "invisible" is presented.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." (Hebrews 11:3)

With these words, the Bible is revealing that the physical universe we see around us was made by the "word of God" out of something that is not seen.

## A Popular View

Although the scriptures do not specifically state what this "something" was, most believers are convinced it was not corruptible in nature. This being the case, they conclude that the ingredient God used when fashioning the universe must have been some form of spiritual material that had the capacity to be converted into a massive energy source. They then conclude that this material was a type of "spirit essence" that God used to create a highly concentrated molecular structure—and that this structure may very well have contained virtually all the elements that exist in the universe today.

Experts in the scientific community have also suggested that the molecular structure from which the universe came once possessed a perfect density. In other words, it was perfectly solid. To put this in perspective, imagine God placing the entire universe in His hand and squeezing all the air out of it. It was so concentrated that there was literally no space between the atomic particles of which matter consists.

Furthermore, the density of this structure was so great that its size would be remarkably small. Many leading quantum-physicists have suggested that it was no larger than a small coin. Imagine the entire universe being the size of a dime! Some have even suggested that it was so tiny that it could not even be detected by the most powerful microscope on earth today. Such a fact is just mind-boggling because the universe in its current state is so vast.

This concentrated molecular structure is in all likelihood what God made from incorruptible "spirit essence." In this process, the incorruptible became corruptible. Spirit became matter. This atomic structure would then be used by the Great Creator to form an architectural wonder that would come to be known as the universe. It was at this point that God spoke the "word" that would "frame the world." He commanded this massive energy source to "go forth!" and go forth it did!



This precise moment was nothing short of high drama in the history of God's plan. Virtually every angelic being in existence was poised as the Almighty was about to activate a power source so massive, its effects are still felt throughout the heavens to this very day. The universe today is still in a state of expansion (See: Hubble's Law).

It is hard to imagine how spectacular this moment was. Here, at this exact instant, organic matter was screaming through a newborn universe at speeds man simply cannot comprehend. The colors and sounds must have been breathtaking.

As this newly created material ripped through the blackness of space, stars were being formed, planets and moons were moving into orbits, honoring laws the Great Creator had already set in motion. Gravitational pulls were molding solar systems, Galaxies were forming their "borders." Great stars were exploding into bodies of unimaginable light and power. And this all came into being because an infinite God gave the "word." The Bible says, "God spoke and earth existed." This truth is affirmed by both scripture and science.

## Who Created the Universe?

The Bible states that the universe was created by God. But who is this God? And why would He build such a thing? The answers to these questions have enormous implications, and provide greater clarity when attempting to understand His Plan for mankind and the great Destiny that awaits His future Family.

The scriptures declare that the heavens and earth were created by the One who would later become Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Church at Colosse, the apostle Paul leaves no doubt regarding this truth. Notice what he says.

"For by Him [Jesus Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." (Col. 1:16-17)

Here Paul is declaring that everything that has a beginning was created by the Messiah. This is true for both the spirit realm as well as the material universe. None other than Jesus Christ is their Maker.

## A Grave Misunderstanding

There are some well-intended "believers" who contend that Jesus Himself was also a created being prior to His earthly life. Some have even suggested that He may have been the twin brother of the great archangel Lucifer—the very Lucifer who later became Satan the devil. Those who hold this view believe that God the Father stands alone as the One Being who has eternally existed..

However, the words of Paul just cited reject such a belief. This apostle plainly states that "ALL THINGS" were made by Him (Jesus Christ). Notice what Paul did not say. He did not say "some things." He did not say "most things." He did not say "everything except the Messiah." Paul declared without hesitation that "all things," in all places, and in all forms, were the product of Jesus' creative power. In other words, if they were made, Jesus made them. When they first came into being, Jesus was there. Therefore, if Jesus was a created being, it would have been necessary for Him to create Himself in order for the scriptures to be true. And that of course is IMPOSSIBLE.

Paul was not the only servant of God who believed Jesus was the source of all creation. The apostle John also understood that the Messiah was the Great Creator who fashioned everything that exists. When describing the pre-incarnate state of Christ John writes.

"All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." (Jn. 1:3)

These words state with great clarity that Jesus Christ can rightfully stake claim to creating all that exists. Jesus was the God who spoke and earth existed. He was the God who fashioned the heavens by His wisdom. He was the God who formed the oceans, fixed the currents, built great mountains, and gave life to all that lives, including the angels.

When the Savior stretched out the heavens and fashioned the earth, He was building something that was absolutely beautiful. The universe was exquisite—like a display of priceless jewelry gently resting on black velvet. Every piece was in its place. This is when the angels shouted for joy. But the joy they expressed was not simply over the great majesty of the heavens and the earth. The joy they were proclaiming reflected a beautiful understanding—for they knew what it all meant. The ALMIGHTY was preparing a HOME for His future FAMILY;

# The Pre-Created Inter Dimensional Component Theory

Recently a different theory was formulated concerning how the universe could be created **without** the aid of SPIRIT ESSENCE at all. Furthermore it is not without merit. What follows is a rather lengthy citation explaining how this new theory was expressed in a recent Christian publication. It begins with a challenge to the long held belief concerning the "Spirit Essence" theory.

"But is this hypothesis correct? In other words, is there nothing else in the third heaven **beyond the** "**spirit essence**" **[most believers embrace]**—something that also cannot be seen (invisible)—yet something that could actually perform the very creative function the Scriptures require? "

"The answer is YES and it begins with SCIENCE as it relates to the molecular universe today. It goes like this."

"The Principle of the Periodic Table"

"In our modern scientific world man has developed a tabular array of chemical elements referred to as a "periodic table of properties." The elements within this table are organized by atomic number, from the element with the lowest atomic number, **hydrogen**, to the element with the highest atomic number, **oganesson**. The atomic number of an element is determined by calculating the number of protons in the nucleus of an atom within that element, thus enabling scientists to ascertain how various elements interact. With this said, it is significant to point out that EVERYTHING in the molecular universe consists of elements. Therefore, these tables attempt to identify properties that make up all the ingredients that comprise the corruptible realm as we known it. Suffice it to say, they are pretty vast."

## A Point not to be Ignored

"With that said, consider that our world, which contains a massive array of solids, liquids, and gasses including vast numbers of metals, stones, woods, chemicals, and fabrics, not to mention an endless array of atomic and sub atomic particles as well as an endless array of types, sub types, groups and sub-groups of every possible piece of physical matter, that—with all the complexities in the finite molecular universe mankind calls home, that the infinite domain of the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY and His Heavenly subjects is at least as much, if not more intricate, more diverse and more complex? In other words, could the number of elements in the supernatural realm be vastly greater than those in the natural one?"

The article continues.

"What follows is a brief reconstruction of a real conversation regarding the origin of the universe and how it came into existence. it offers something most believers may never have considered."

## "An Interesting Dialogue"

Science VS Faith

"Several years ago a prominent theologian was featured in a discussion with an equally prominent astrophysicist. At issue was the origin of the universe and specifically, how it came into existence as well as what specifically the cosmos was constructed from."

"To virtually no ones surprise the theologian confidently responded, "God made it."

"This led the scientist to press the issue. "What did He make it out of? And don't tell me He made it from nothing."

"Upon hearing this challenge the theologian responded, "Well, what I can say is that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth—when before there was nothing."

"Growing somewhat exasperated, the scientist continued to press the issue. "What do **YOU** think He made it from?" he asked. The theologian confessed that he was uncertain but allowed for the possibility that the ETERNAL created the molecular realm through the power of His mind. In other words, His WISDOM."

"He then became more specific by attempting to add clarity to his answer. Here is what he said."

"The point I am trying to make here is that **everything that exists** in the natural universe **came into existence** because God commanded it to be so. There are NO exceptions."

"Feeling he had this "man of the cloth" on the ropes, this brilliant scientific thinker asked one last question. "Can you name one thing **man** has ever created out of **nothing** but WISDOM? Or, as you put it, the power of MIND?"

"The theologian thoughtfully pondered this query for nearly 30 seconds—(imagine the deafness of that silence) after which he quietly, in a near whisper, responded, 'A Symphony."

# The Divine Decree Theory

The publication offering this alternative continues under the sub-title **Something to Think About** and when doing so introduces a third theory concerning how God may have created the molecular universe—one that involved "DIVINE DECREE." beginning with an observation regarding the comment above made by the theologian.

## Something to Think About

"This is a remarkable reply because it may very well go to the heart of the origin of the universe and the role an infinite God may have played in it. In truth, everything ever created throughout history began, not with tangible components (invisible or otherwise), but rather, with an **idea**—a vision that first appeared in the mind of its **CREATOR**. Now imagine that **MIND** being INFINITE. Furthermore, imagine how an INFINITE GOD could express this idea and actually ENGAGE its CREATIVE POWER."

"With this said, is it possible that in the spirit realm, where the INFINITE is everywhere, and an ALL POWERFUL, ALL KNOWING, ETERNAL CREATOR resides, that wisdom and understanding may literally be actionable materials? And is it possible that God truly can speak things into existence by the POWER of His WORD and the FORCE of His WILL? According to the apostle John the answer just might be "YES."

## **Revelation 4:11**

"...for You created all things, and because of Your WILL they existed, and were created."

The publication continues to press the point in support of this third theory, Notice how this is done.

"At this point, it is interesting to note that the entire physical creation recorded in the first chapter of Genesis actually came about by <u>divine decree</u>. Light appeared because God said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). The earth's atmosphere appeared on the second day because God commanded it to be so (verses 6-8). The sun, moon and stars came about the same way (verses 14-18)—as did the seas and its creatures as well as every bird that flies (verses 20-22) and every mammal that roams (verses 24-25). Add to that, every body of water and every blade of grass and all manner of vegetation came into being after three short words, "AND GOD SAID."

"The dynamic power of God's **WORD** is graphically expressed by the Almighty Himself through the great prophet Isaiah. Think about this for a moment."

## Isaiah 55:11

"So shall my **word** be that goes forth out of my mouth. **It** shall not return to me void (unproductive) but **it** shall accomplish that which I please, and **it** shall prosper (bear fruit) in the thing whereto I sent **it.**"

"Notice that it is God's WORD that will never be <u>unproductive</u> and that it is His WORD that is <u>sent</u> and that it is His WORD that will always <u>bear fruit</u>. With this said, is it possible that God's word is more than a phonetic utterance? Is it possible that it not only conveys the Almighty's WISDOM and UNDERSTANDING, but actually <u>executes</u> His WILL as He directs? In other words is it possible that when Paul wrote of the universe being made out of that which is invisible he was actually referring to <u>God's Word</u> which he had just identified earlier in the same verse as the vehicle by which the universe came into existence?" In other words, it is God's that is invisible or as Paul expressed it 'NOT SEEN."

"Although there are those who believe that the language employed by Isaiah cited above, should be understood as <u>literary</u> (personification), many thoughtful voices are fully persuaded that they are <u>literal</u> and therefore, not to be so easily dismissed. When it comes to the Almighty, and His vast array of accomplishments, who honestly believes such a thing is beyond HIS POWER?"

"Here's a hint."

"Throughout His life, the Messiah performed spectacular miracles simply by uttering His voice. For example: He calmed a violent storm with the words, "Be still" (Mark 4:39). He raised a dear friend from the grip of death with the words, "Come forth" (John 11:43). He completely restored a man who was paralyzed for thirty eight years by telling him to:"Take up your bed and walk" (John 5:8-9). He exorcised a demon from a little girl when He told her mother, "Go and it shall be as you desire" (Matthew 15: 21- 28 NKJV).

"But there is more."

"Jesus revealed that the power of faith was so formidable that it could literally move mountains without the aid of a bulldozer or one ounce of explosives, but rather with a simple command, "Be moved" (Matthew 17:20-21). He also turned water into wine without using one grape (John 2). and actually healed the servant of a centurion without so much as even visiting him because this roman military officer was convinced the Messiah could do so simply by giving an order!" (Matthew 8: 5-10)

#### "The POINT"

"The point here is that God's ability to completely alter things with nothing but the strength of His VOICE and the POWER of His WILL is indisputable. With that said, who is man to suggest this couldn't include shaping the very formation of the universe by commanding what resides in His mind to come into existence?—in other words to make what is from what isn't."

"With that said, it is interesting that in his epistle to the Church at Rome the apostle Paul once indicated that God calls "things which <u>are not</u> as though they <u>are</u>" (Romans 4:17). One translation of this verse expresses it this way."

#### "Romans 4: 17"

"...even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist."

"This, of course, does not mean God created the universe out of nothing, but rather from an idea that took shape at His command including every sub atomic particle. Remember, <u>He is El Shaddai, THE ALMIGHTY.</u> Perhaps the prophet Jeremiah expressed it best when describing God's CREATIVE POWER."

#### "Jeremiah 32: 17"

"Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee."

## The Big Question

We've just endeavored to explore three possibilities concerning how the molecular universe was created. However, one critical question remains.

## Why Did God Make a Physical Universe at All?

In the prior chapter, we learned that when God created the universe, all the angels rejoiced with songs of praise and shouts of sheer delight (Job 38:7). Based on this reaction, it is reasonable to conclude that the angels must have known God's Plan for man and the role the earth would play in it. But some may ask if there is any scriptural evidence that provides absolute, incontrovertible proof that the earth was specifically created for man. The answer is Yes! Furthermore, this proof offers an incredible glimpse into the Destiny of the physical realm as well.

When writing to the Church at Rome, the apostle Paul presented a powerful lesson regarding the physical dimension in which man currently resides. In the eighth chapter of this epistle, he explains that the entire physical creation will one day go through a phenomenal transformation. At that time, the heavens and the earth will no longer be made of corruptible matter, but rather of incorruptible spirit. Additionally, Paul even revealed what specifically must take place in order for this transformation to occur. He begins this lesson by explaining that nature itself is longing for a dramatic change to take place in God's children.

"For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God." (Ro. 8:19)

The Greek word for "creature" in this verse is *ktisis*. This word refers to all that was created, not simply living creatures as some think. This being the case, Paul was explaining that the entire physical realm is anxiously waiting for the manifestation of God's children. This manifestation will occur when man is changed from corruptible flesh to incorruptible spirit.

Although this transformation occurs in phases, the last phase will take place at the conclusion of God's final judgment on all mankind (Rev. 20:11-15). Once this judgment is dispensed, all who enter into His eternal Kingdom will be born into it as members of His Family.

As Paul expands on this wonderful truth, he explains that the earth was never created to eternally exist in its corruptible state. It was actually created to be transitory—in other words, subject to corruption (death).

"For the creature (creation) was made subject to vanity (corruption), not willingly, but by reason of Him Who hath subjected the same in hope." (Ro. 8:20)

Today we live in a world that is truly in a state of decay. Some try to put a pleasant face on this fact by referring to it as "the circle of life." In this circle, all living things are born, move through an existence, then die, etc., etc. Although this is the natural order of things in this corruptible realm, the universe will not always be this way. The twenty-first chapter of Revelation describes a time when there will be a "New Heaven" and a "New Earth." At that time, the old heaven and the old earth will "pass away." Once this new universe is "born," death will also be destroyed and life will fill the entirety of time and space (1Cor. 15:26). Paul goes on to explain that the creation also has a Destiny. Like man, it, too, shall be delivered from the grips of death.

"Because the creature (creation) itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Ro. 8:21)

That "glorious liberty" will come when mankind is born into God's Family as literal sons and daughters. At that time, they will be made of incorruptible spirit and fashioned with God's perfect righteous character. They will be "just like Him (1Jn. 3:2). This is not to suggest that the entire material

creation will possess God's character and wisdom. However, it will be changed into that which cannot die. It. too. will be incorruptible.

Paul concludes this lesson by acknowledging that God's people share a great hope that will come to pass when their change comes. And like God's children, the entire creation is destined to become incorruptible and also enter into eternity.

"For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." (Ro. 8:22-23)

Throughout history, God's children have longed for the day when His desire for them will be accomplished. At that time they will no longer suffer pain or even death (Rev. 21:4). The time is coming when mankind will enter into an incorruptible state. This is his Destiny. This is also the Destiny God fashioned for the entire creation. The point here is that the Great Creator and Sustainer of all that exists is eventually going to breathe incorruptible life into the entire universe. Man may not be aware of this truth, but the heavens and the earth are in for a spectacular change. The author of Hebrews put it this way.

"And, you, Lord, in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of your hand: They shall perish; but you remain; and they shall wax old as a garment; And as a vesture shall you fold them up. And they shall be changed..." (Heb. 1:10-12)

Clearly, the physical realm of which we are a part is going to change. It will one day be incorruptible. With this in mind, why did God make it physical in the first place? Why didn't He make it a "glorified" universe at the very beginning?

The answer to this question is actually revealed in what lies ahead for the entire physical realm. In other words, its Destiny. Now consider this great truth. If the physical creation will become incorruptible when man becomes spirit (Ro. 8:21), then the only reason for its corruptible existence in the first place was to accommodate man in his physical state. In other words, God built the physical universe to be inhabited by physical beings. The prophet Isaiah put it best.

"For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited..." (Isa. 45:18)

Here, God clearly reveals that the earth was created because He already had a tenant in mind. God created a physical realm because man needed a home in which to learn and grow. Therefore, the Great Creator of all things must have planned for man to exist before the universe was fashioned. Therefore, by creating the universe, the Almighty was building a home for His future sons and daughters—His family.

## Preparing the Earth for Man

When God fashioned the heavens and the earth, He did not create it as some kind of resort where guests could be waited on and pampered. It is better to think of the universe as a great academy of learning. It was designed to be a place where virtue and character could be built and skills developed. For this reason, the Great Master Architect created the universe incomplete. It was designed to allow others to put their creative signature on it. To assist in this process, God provided great natural resources that could be used to beautify the universe—and by all indications, He chose to begin with the earth. Additionally, the ALMIGHTY first extended this creative opportunity to the angelic realm.

There are many reasons why God would have enlisted the angels to participate in this phase of His Plan. First, it would help develop their own creative talents. Secondly, it would enable them to assist in preparing the world for God's Family. But who would God use in this critical phase of His Plan? What angelic being possessed the talent to manage such an immense project?

Because of the tremendous importance of this enterprise, God recruited the finest team of spirit beings in the angelic realm to prepare the planet for its future tenants. The manager of this project would have direct access to God Himself and would be intimately familiar with His law and Government.

Furthermore, no resource would be left untapped. God would give the director of this project unlimited access to all the manpower—or should we say spirit power—he would deem necessary. At this point, God assigns the great archangel Lucifer and a contingent of angels to oversee the beautification of the planet and prepare it for man.

Lucifer was a logical choice for this responsibility. His credentials were impeccable. He was an exquisite creature, beautiful beyond belief. The Bible says he was "perfect from the day he was created" (Ezk. 28:15). Furthermore, Lucifer served in the very Throne Room of the Great Creator. God Himself called him "the anointed cherub that covers" (Ezk. 28:14). This title was given because Lucifer's wings actually provided a covering for God's throne.

Lucifer was brilliant, eloquent, and charismatic. Everything about him was compelling. He was an achiever of the highest order, and in all likelihood, he must have relished the assignment.

The scriptures do not indicate what specifically Lucifer and his subordinates would do to prepare the earth for man, but it is possible they may have been involved in creating vegetation, forming bodies of water, developing sources of food, and even designing living creatures that would roam the earth. The point here is that Lucifer and these majestic angelic beings were given an opportunity to have a hands-on part in God's Plan for mankind. Imagine being included in such a wonderful project. Now imagine being appointed by God Himself to preside over one of His Plan's most critical stages. This great honor was bestowed on a magnificent archangel who served at the pleasure of the King of the universe.

In a very real sense, God was giving Lucifer the greatest job—the most important job ever bestowed on a created being. Lucifer was commissioned by the Great Architect of Eternity to prepare the earth for His future family.

## The Scope of the Project

God's Plan of creating a home for man may have been simple in form but it was extremely complex in execution. It required strategic planning as well as organization and administration. There were also personnel considerations and the appropriate allocation of these resources. It is even possible that the angelic team assigned to the project may have included a division in charge of research and development. In short, preparing the earth for man was not going to be an easy job. It would require the total commitment of all the players. For this reason, it is very likely that every angel in existence played some role in this magnificent project. But clearly the lead in this phase of God's Plan was bestowed on His trusted servant Lucifer, and God was committed to placing him there until His entire Plan for mankind was successfully executed.

#### A Brief Review

Let's recap what we've learned so far. First, God has a magnificent Destiny for mankind that will result in man being born into His Family as literal sons and daughters. We also know that His Vision and its supporting Plan came into existence before the heavens and the earth were created, even before the existence of physical matter. Additionally, we learned that at some point in time, God shared this Vision, Plan and Destiny with the angelic kingdom, causing a great sense of excitement and a buzz that may have filled eternity itself. God then began the execution of this Plan by first building a physical dimension in which man could learn and grow.

Once God fashioned the heavens and the earth, He selected a team under the leadership of the great archangel Lucifer to prepare earth for man. However, at some point...

## The Unthinkable Happens

## Chapter V Satan's Rebellion

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before the fall

Proverbs 16:18

When the nation of Israel first became a monarchy, its king was instructed by the prophet Samuel to make war with the Amalekites. The Amalekites were comparable to a terrorist state of today. They preyed on the weak and were vicious in battle. When Israel was wandering in the desert just after coming out of Egypt, the Amalekites launched a ferocious attack on them. This war is described in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Exodus.

God knew that hostilities toward Israel would continue from generation to generation and that the Amalekites would be a constant source of agitation to His people. For this reason, He made a promise to Moses that the day would come when He would put an end to this horrible enemy (Ex.17:14-16). What He was conveying to King Saul, through His servant Samuel, was "this is that day."

The instructions given by Samuel came directly from God Himself, and were very specific. Saul and the armies of Israel were to utterly destroy this sinful nation. They were to lay waste to everything it possessed. Nothing was to be taken and no one was to be spared. In essence, God was instructing Saul to wipe the Amalekites from the face of the earth.

Here were His exact words.

"Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how that he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (1Sam. 15:2-3)

Upon hearing these instructions, Saul gathered a great army and waged war against the Amalekites and their leader, King Agag. However, at some point during the war, Saul made some "slight modifications" to the battle plan. Instead of doing what the LORD had directed him to do, Saul confiscated

some of the livestock and treasure held by the enemy, and spared the life of their king. It seemed like such a small thing to him. After all, he had won the battle and routed an evil nation!

## A Huge Mistake

What Saul failed to realize was that his decision was literally making a liar out of God. It was compromising a promise the Almighty made nearly five hundred years earlier. It also revealed an attitude in Saul that would ultimately lead to his downfall as the king of God's people.

By failing to comply with the instructions given by God's servant, Saul was suggesting that he knew better than God Himself when it came to dealing with evil. He even rationalized his behavior by suggesting that what was confiscated could be used in offerings to his Lord (1 Sam. 15:15). Imagine a man even a king, thinking he knew better than God Himself when it came to worshiping the Great Creator and Sustainer of the universe. But that is exactly what Saul was doing. This attitude reeked with arrogance and it devastated Samuel. According to scripture when word came to him concerning what Saul had done, he "cried unto the Lord all night." (1Sam. 15:11)

Shortly after the war, Samuel paid a visit to Saul. As he approached the camp, he saw firsthand what the king had done. Samuel heard the sounds of livestock that had been taken in battle.

While Saul was thinking that God's prophet had come to congratulate him on the victory, Samuel was there for another reason. He was bringing a message from his Lord, and the news was not good. Samuel began his words by explaining to Israel's king how God came to choose him as the leader of His people.

"Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell you what the Lord has said to me this night. And he (Saul) said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When you were little in your own sight, were you not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed you king over Israel?" (1Sam. 15:16-17)

Here, Samuel was telling the king that God desires the meek, not the proud to serve His people. Furthermore, Samuel was stating that there was a time when Saul was such a man. Additionally, because of his meekness, God chose him to reign over Israel. Sadly, however, things were now different because Saul was different. Samuel then presents evidence of this change.

"And the Lord sent you on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but did fly upon the spoil, and did evil in the sight of the Lord?" (1Sam. 15:18-19)



Samuel Reproving Saul by the colonial artist John Singleton Copley 1798

At this point, Saul became defensive and argued that his actions were actually intended to serve God. He actually contended that what was taken could be used in worship (1Sam. 15:20-21). However, Samuel knew better and informed Saul that God was not interested in "offerings," but rather in obedience (1Sam. 15:22). He then issued a crushing pronouncement concerning what Saul had done and the consequences he would have to suffer. Notice what Samuel says In one of the most famous indictments in all the Bible.

"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king." (1Sam. 15:23)

In these thirty-two words, judgment was pronounced on the first king of Israel. All that Saul had been given was going to be stripped from him because of his own pride and arrogance. Because Saul thought he had a better way of doing things than the God who made him, his throne was going to be given over to someone who understood that Israel belonged to God, not to a king.

This would be the last time Samuel would see Saul alive. However, he couldn't help but mourn for him. Samuel loved Saul. But he also loved the nation God had raised up. This must have been a very sad time for this great prophet. Even sadder were the words that reflected God's view of Saul's rebellion.

"And the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel" (1Sam. 15:35)

This is how the Great God will deal with pride that goes unchecked. He knows all too well where such an attitude can lead and how destructive it can be. This is because He saw this character defect actually wage war against His Plan for mankind.

#### Pride and Human History

The story of Saul asserting his right to reject God's instructions and do things his own way is not the only example of pride raising its ugly head. Throughout human history, leaders of nations have

followed that same path. Some have even gone so far as to demand that they be worshiped as gods. Whether it was the pharaohs of Egypt or the Caesars who ruled Rome, man has been obsessed with his own self-worth. Even religious leaders down through the ages have taken upon themselves titles such as "reverend" and "Holy Father" – and they continue to do so to this very day. There is even a prominent international society that refers to its leader as "Worshipful Master." Imagine such a title being given to a man!



King Nebuchadnezzar

One of the greatest examples of human pride and arrogance recorded in the scriptures occurred during the days of the Chaldean empire under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. Like countless rulers before him, Nebuchadnezzar demanded to be worshiped. He even crafted laws that compelled his subjects to bow before images of himself. Those who refused would be put to death (Dan. 3:4-6). But Nebuchadnezzar wasn't satisfied with the forced adoration of others. He was even so bold as to lavish praises upon himself for the things he had done. At one time this monarch looked out across the great city of Babylon and just couldn't contain himself. Notice what he said.

'The king spoke, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?' (Dan. 4:30)

Now compare these words with those uttered by none other than Christ Himself.

"I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me." (Jn. 5:30)

Imagine how different Saul's life would have been if he had spoken such words. Imagine how different the world would be if mankind could truly embrace such an attitude.

## The Birth of Pride

Tragically, pride and arrogance are not limited to the human experience. These horrible character defects even appeared in the angelic realm long before man was created—and their appearance would lead to catastrophic results.

The Bible indicates that at some point after being commissioned to prepare the earth for man, Lucifer began to have second thoughts. His change in heart may have been very gradual at first. But eventually it became more obvious.

Although the scriptures do not specifically reveal how Lucifer's discontent first manifested itself, some have suggested it may even have been reflected in the prehistoric world he presided over. For

example: Is it possible that the massive reptilian creatures that roamed the earth were created at the behest of Lucifer? Many of these animals were cold blooded and predatory in nature. Such creatures were vastly different from those that will live when God establishes His millennial Kingdom on earth. At that time, the nature in animals will render them peaceable creatures. Animals that are natural enemies today will dwell together without fear. The prophet Isaiah described this new relationship in words of great hope.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and the little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den." (Isa. 11:6-8)

The words of Isaiah declare that God's millennial Kingdom will be vastly different from the world that precedes it. This being the case, is it possible that as Lucifer became so fixated on violence, he actually designed creatures that would play to his fantasies?

There are also some who believe that Lucifer may have been responsible for designing prehistoric man. This idea is based on a belief that he did it to mock God's Plan of expanding His Family through corruptible human beings. In other words, prehistoric man may have been nothing more than a cynical attempt by an embittered archangel to illustrate how foolish God's Destiny for mankind really was.

At this point, it is important to understand that many of the views regarding what Lucifer did billions of years ago are conjecture. In other words, we cannot know for sure what role he played with respect to the prehistoric world. The Bible simply does not speak with force on this subject. However, it is also important to understand that the Bible most certainly <u>does not</u> contradict the view that Lucifer may have played a critical role in defining this era of our planet. That role started out very supportive of God's Plan, but then it changed.

#### From Lucifer to Satan

As Lucifer's resentment grew, his bitterness began to take root. This magnificent archangel, who served at the highest level of God's Government, had now become the enemy of that Government. He was no longer Lucifer, the great light bringer, but rather Satan, the great adversary. And he would direct all his energies to thwart God's rule and His Destiny for man.

At this point, one may wonder why a spectacular angelic being who had been so blessed would become hostile to the very source of those blessings. After all, Lucifer had everything: looks, brains, power and authority, and the favor of God himself. What more could he want—and why would he throw it all away?

The Bible reveals not only the nature of Satan's rebellion, but also his rationale for this act. This story is told by two ancient writers of God's word.

The great prophet Ezekiel records the tragic fall of this majestic being who served in the very throne room of God Himself. In the twenty-eighth chapter of his prophetic book, Ezekiel was inspired by God to describe the extraordinary qualities bestowed on Lucifer from the very beginning of his existence. God likened this exquisite angelic creature to the king of Tyre. But it is clear He is not speaking about a man.

"Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, 'Thus saith the Lord God; 'You sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty." (Ezk. 28:12)

Here God is revealing that Lucifer was created to be an extraordinary angelic being. He was a majestic creature. This truth is reflected in both the depths of his wisdom and the flawless beauty he was given. It is clear that he was not a typical spirit. Lucifer was very special.

God then elaborates on the qualities Lucifer had from the beginning of his existence. Notice the outstanding skills he possessed, including his musical prowess.

"You have been in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created." (Ezk. 28:13)

God then reflects on the tremendous responsibilities Lucifer was entrusted with. He was literally a part of the command center of God's Government.

"You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." (Ezk. 28:14)

When God referred to Lucifer as "the anointed cherub that covers," He was not simply being poetic. This powerful archangel literally served in God's throne room. In the twenty-fifth chapter of the book of Exodus this fact becomes very clear. In this chapter God provides a glimpse into the very headquarters of His Government in the third Heaven. Here, the Almighty provides Moses with specifications for building the Ark of the Covenant. Included in these specifications were instructions to make two cherubim of gold and place them on each side of the mercy seat. The mercy seat was a symbol of God's very throne. Additionally, God instructed Moses to have the wings of these magnificent creatures spread so as to provide a covering for the mercy seat (Ex. 25:20). This image reflects the very spot where Lucifer once served. The honor and dignity of such a position is almost too great to imagine—and Lucifer lived it.



The Ark of the Covenant

God then reveals the evolution of Lucifer's transformation from archangel to great dragon, and in doing so, He expresses what just might be the darkest words in all the scriptures.

"You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, <u>till iniquity was found in you</u>." (Ezk. 28:15)

With these words, God introduces the birth of evil. Here, at this exact moment, the source of all that is destructive came into being. Its natural progression would lead to a horrible violence that would come to define this once exquisite being.

"By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you with violence, and you hast sinned: therefore I will cast you as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire." (Ezk. 28:16)

At this point, God explains the root cause of Lucifer's downfall. Tragically, this source of destruction has been repeated in mankind for millennia. Lucifer's demise was born out of his own pride and arrogance. He saw himself as more beautiful than others. He was smarter than others. He was more charismatic than others. Let's face it, Lucifer thought he was better than others—and like King Saul of Israel, he thought he could do things his way.

"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness..." (Ezk. 28:17)

At this point Lucifer's judgment became warped. Evil and madness became viable alternatives to the righteousness espoused by the Great Creator of the universe. As a result of this new mind set, Lucifer began to seriously consider God's Plan for mankind, and in doing so he did not like what he saw.

# The BIG Question to Lucifer WHY?

## Through the Eyes of the Devil

Why did Lucifer rebel against God, who not only made him, but also gave him so much? What was his rationale for such an act of defiance? The prophet Isaiah provides the answer to this question, and does so with the very words of Lucifer himself.

"How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God." (Isa. 14:12-13)

The "stars of God" mentioned by Lucifer are none other than angels. These are the very beings God described as singing great anthems of praise when the heavens and earth were created (Job 38:4-7). Here Lucifer is declaring that he is going to claim authority over the angelic realm. He will be their king, and he will be their judge.

But who does God say will hold such authority? After all, this power is His to give. It cannot be taken. With this in mind, who will God give such power and authority to? The apostle Paul answers this question and in doing so begins to identify the object of Lucifer's hostility.

"Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know you not that we shall judge angels?" (1Cor. 6:2-3)

Presiding over the angelic realm is just one of many responsibilities man will have when he is born into God's Royal Family. This truth must have infuriated Lucifer. Furthermore, it may have festered in him until it became unbearable. In all likelihood, he may have begun asking himself question after question regarding God's ultimate Destiny for His human family. "How could God do such a thing? After all, man is so weak and corruptible. There isn't one angel in the entire universe that couldn't crush him effortlessly. Why would He even consider such a future for mankind? There could be only one possible answer—God must have gone mad."

However, Lucifer was not finished expressing his contempt for God's wisdom and His Plan for man. He then identifies what he must have thought was the greatest indignity God could ever have perpetrated on a being of his stature. Notice what this embittered creature cries out.

"I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High." (Isa. 14:13-14)

There are some who believe that with these words, Lucifer was expressing his desire to displace God as the King of the universe. But is this the case? Could Lucifer ever be like the Most High? At this point, it is important to understand that he was not created in God's image. This is a fact he must have known. After all, he worked so closely with God.

There was, however, someone yet unmade that would be created in God's image, after His likeness. Furthermore, that image and likeness would reach full maturity when this yet-to-be created being was "born again" as a literal member of God's Family. This "someone" is none other than MANKIND. God created man in His image because He knew that one day man would have access to an extraordinary Destiny. Once again, here is how the apostle John expresses it.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; for we shall see Him as He is. (1Jn. 3:2)

Imagine being just like God. It is obvious that Lucifer pondered that possibility and he liked the idea very much. However, to be like God was not in his future. That distinction was reserved for man—and quite frankly, the idea did not set well with this fallen cherub. For this reason, he asserted his "right" to sit on a throne that God would one day share with His "born again" sons and daughters.

The words of protest uttered by Lucifer express nothing short of psychotic rage. To him, the idea that God would consider any being in the universe (other than himself) for such a lofty position was total insanity. God must be crazy to have even imagined such a thing! And Lucifer wasn't going to stand for it. He was going to take action.

## A Stunning Answer

Why did Lucifer, who had now become Satan, rebel against his Maker? He did so because he was consumed with envy. In other words, he thought so much of himself and couldn't accept God's Destiny for man. This great being, who had so much, wanted it all. And if he couldn't have it, nobody could!.

At this point, it is important to understand that envy and jealousy are sins of the heart. They attack the very core of goodness. In the case of Lucifer, this sin would strip him of the great majesty he had and replace it with a moral core that was bent on destruction.

## Satan's Rebellion

When Satan realized the full impact of God's Plan, his reaction brought new meaning to the word "violent." He mobilized one third of the angelic realm into a great rebellion against God (Rev. 12:4). He then waged a ferocious attack on God's Kingdom in the third heaven. However, the rebellion was repelled and Satan was cast down to the earth. When speaking to His apostles about the power they had in casting out demons, Jesus revealed that He was an eyewitness to Satan's excommunication from God's Kingdom. Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall as lightening from heaven" (Lk. 10:18).

However, although Satan's attempt to seize control of God's Government was blocked, this great adversary was not finished with his attempt to destroy God's Plan for man. He then turned his wrath on the physical universe because he knew how essential it was for that Plan to succeed. He may have even thought to himself, "Without a home for man, God's Plan will be thwarted." As a result of this mind-set, Satan unleashed unimaginable devastation on the heavens and the earth. Like a child throwing a tantrum, Satan tried to break everything in sight—and he almost succeeded. What was once a beautiful creation now lay in ruins. Light and order were replaced with chaos and darkness.

## From Order to Chaos

The period when Satan attempted to destroy the molecular universe is described in one tragic verse of God's word. The book of Genesis states that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). However, the next verse makes a peculiar statement. Notice what it says.

"And the earth was **without form and void**..." (Gen. 1:2)

The words "without form and void" are somewhat cryptic and thus have been ignored by most professing Christians. Some even believe that this verse is simply describing the infant stages of the universe. In other words, at this point, God was not yet finished with the creation of the heavens and the earth. Although He had fashioned the universe, it was still in a nebulous state, and needed some finishing touches. However, this is not what the scriptures reveal and a closer examination of this verse bears this out.

The words "without form and void" are very important when understanding how our world came to be as it is. In truth, they reveal something quite interesting about the age of the universe. The Hebrew term for "without form" is *tohu va bohu*. Literally translated this term means "desolate" and/or "chaotic," a "waste place." This being the case, one might ask: why would God make the earth a desolate chaotic waste? The answer is: He wouldn't and the scriptures bear this out as well.

In the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, God's word declares that He did not create the world in a state of chaos and confusion. Notice how Isaiah makes this point.

"For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, **He created it not in vain...**" (Isa. 45:18)

The word "vain" in this verse is identical to the word "form" in Genesis 1:2. Once again, this term refers to a chaotic state, only this time Isaiah is explaining that God never created the world in such a condition.

At this point, it is important to understand that God is a God of order, not chaos. This being the case, something dramatic must have occurred at some point after He created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1)--something so severe that it would render the world desolate. This chaos was nothing other than the handiwork of Satan's rebellion. It was the great fallen archangel Lucifer, now Satan, who rained down massive destruction on the planet, leaving it in a state of absolute chaos.



Mount St. Helens
View from the south during its eruption on May 18, 1980

It is possible that he may have so radically altered the earth's environment that the planet couldn't even sustain life. Atmospheric conditions may have been adjusted, causing the earth to convulse with great natural disasters. The result: *tohu va bohu*. Furthermore, this event may have occurred millions or even billions of years after God first created the universe.

Although Genesis 1:2 reads "and the earth was without form and void," many scholars acknowledge that the word "was" in this verse is better rendered "became." Therefore, this verse should read "and the earth became without form and void." In other words, at some point after the universe was

first created, something happened that caused it to become chaotic and confused. That "something" was Satan the devil and his attempt to destroy the creation itself. In the wake of this devastation lay a scarred earth with every living being destroyed. It is hard to imagine a place that was once so beautiful crumbled in ruins. However, in all likelihood that is exactly what happened.

## A Final Thought

The power of pride and arrogance is so formidable that it not only destroys man, it can also destroy an angel who was actually created perfect (Ezk. 28:15). These moral defects are at the core of every act of evil ever fashioned by man. Furthermore, God hates them and makes that fact abundantly clear in His word. As a matter of fact, pride tops the list of the things God abhors (Pro. 6:16-19). So ugly is this character defect that one day He is going to utterly destroy it (Pro. 15:25).

God is well aware of the destructive nature of pride and conceit. He actually observed it affects firsthand. The result of a life driven by such things is truly devastating. In the case of Lucifer, a great angelic being was tragically lost and an exquisite universe was shattered.

It is hard to imagine what a loving God must have thought as he surveyed the eerie darkness that filled the galaxies. However, it is very possible that as this Great Architect pondered the massive wreckage of a once-beautiful universe, two images entered into his thoughts. The first image was of a wonderful Destiny for mankind—one envisioned at some point in the vastness of eternity.

The second image was resolute and immovable. It was His promise to bring that Destiny to pass. With this, a Great and Loving God prepares to take the next step in executing His plan.

## Chapter VI A Plan Moves Forward

No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Luke 9:62

The book of First Kings chronicles an event in which the great prophet Elijah confounded the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel. At that time, God used him to indict Israel because it had compromised the true faith and embraced a pagan religion. It is little wonder such a thing happened in light of the fact that Israel, at that time, had what may very well have been its most wicked king.

King Ahab reigned for twenty-two years and was everything a leader shouldn't be. Add to that, his wife Jezebel was even more despicable than he was. Jezebel was a devout worshiper of Baal and even commissioned a temple to be built in this pagan god's honor. She was a cold blooded and vicious queen and was ruthless in persecuting God's true servants—even resorting to murder (1Ki. 18:4).

However, the time had now come when God would use Elijah to offer a challenge to the pagan religious leaders who had infested Israel. This challenge was in the form of a great test to see who the true God was. In truth, it was really quite simple. Two altars would be built: one for Baal, and one for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A sacrifice would be placed on each of the altars. The prophets of Baal would then be given an opportunity to appeal to their god to consume the sacrifice they had presented. Once they were finished, Elijah would appeal to his God to consume the offering he had brought.

This contest was even structured to heavily favor the priests of Baal. For example, the servants representing this false god numbered in the hundreds, while Elijah stood alone as God's representative. Add to that is the fact that Elijah would saturate his altar with water, making it all but impossible to ignite. When this challenge was initially extended, the priests of Baal must have felt very confident.



Mount Carmel

The story of Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel is legendary in scripture. A false god and its worthless religion was exposed as impotent and feeble, while the true God was revealed as a great and powerful Being who would make Himself known through His servants. As far as Elijah was concerned, this challenge would put to rest, once and for all, any doubts about who the true God was—or so Elijah thought.

## Elijah's Discouragement

At the conclusion of this challenge, Elijah and his God stood victorious. When the people who had witnessed this event saw what occurred, they prostrated themselves and cried out, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God!" Elijah then executed the priests of Baal, and in doing so placed an exclamation mark on this moment. In a very real sense, Elijah's actions demonstrated how God will ultimately deal with false religions and their leaders (Rev. 19:20).



Elijah the Prophet

This statue was erected on the grounds of the Mukhraka Church located on the hillside of Mt. Carmel. It was once destroyed by Muslim armies during Israel's war of independence in 1948, however, it was subsequently replaced.

The scriptures suggest that even King Ahab was impressed with what God had done through His prophet. However, when news of what happened got back to Jezebel, she was furious. Furthermore, this bitter woman vowed that her fury was going to be appeased with the blood of Elijah—and she promised to make quick work of this vow. Jezebel immediately issued a death warrant on God's prophet and even sent him a copy. Notice the message she dispatches to God' servant—a message that makes specific reference to the pagan priests he had just killed.

"Then Jezebel sent a message unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not your life as the life of one of them [the priests he killed] by tomorrow about this time." (1Ki. 19:2)

Upon receiving this news, Elijah fled to Judah. While there, he expressed great discouragement over what had transpired and even appealed to God to take his life (1Ki. 19:4). At this point this Old Testament champion simply wanted to give up

## Wanting to Quit

Virtually every true believer has, at one time or another, been beset by trials that seemed too great to bear. Even the apostles fled when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemanae and led away to His death (Mk.14:50). Afterward, they actually pondered the idea of returning to their regular lives and giving up on the work they had been given to do (Jn. 21:3).

However, unlike man, God does not have the luxury, nor the inclination, to ever give up. Oh, to be sure, He has experienced disappointments and has also taken radical steps to deal with evil. But the Almighty is steadfast and determined to accomplish what He desires, and no power in the universe can thwart what He intends to do (Isa. 46:9-10). Never was this truth more apparent than when He renewed the face of the earth, and once again prepared it for man.

#### A Work Continues

The Bible reveals that some time after God created the universe, the earth became chaotic and confused (Gen. 1:2). In the prior chapter, we saw that this chaos was the work of the great archangel Lucifer who had now become Satan the devil. This diabolical enemy orchestrated this devastation in an attempt to thwart God's Plan for man. We also learned that God turned back this rebellion, but not before the heavens and the earth lay in ruins.

At this point, The Great Master Architect of eternity surveyed all that He had made and considered His next move. Furthermore, He knew all too well that in order for His Plan for mankind to go forward, He would have to refashion the earth and prepare it for His future Family—and that is exactly what He set out to do. The Sacred Writings reveal that God actually reconstructed the heavens and the earth. By doing so, man would once again have a home in which to learn and grow.

## A Second Creation

Most professing Christians mistakenly believe that the first chapter of the Bible describes the steps God took when originally creating the universe. However, in reality, this chapter is actually describing something that took place billions of years later. Here, the Great Master Architect is literally renewing a creation that had been wrecked by a fallen archangel. King David understood this truth and expressed that understanding this way.

"You send forth your spirit, they are created: and you renew the face of the earth." (Psa. 104:30)

## Six Miraculous Days

The scriptures reveal that God used six days to reconstruct the physical domain that would serve as man's home. The Great Creator would begin by commanding the presence of light in what was at that time a universe of darkness (Gen. 1:3). At this moment, the force of God's great POWER and WILL echoed through space, and light appeared. The Almighty then separated it from the darkness that permeated the vast expanse of space, bringing to a close the first day of re-creation.

For the next five days, the Eternal would painstakingly direct a remarkable work. During this period, He would create an atmosphere, form bodies of water, build mountains, and fill the earth with vegetation. He would also design living creatures to fill the seas as well as animals to roam the earth.

The Bible reveals that when God prepared the earth for man, He was providing more than the basic necessities. The earth would be a beautiful place, with wonders that would inspire all who dwelt there. It would be a place of endless discoveries and great treasures. Here, man could work as well as play. He could learn as well as teach. He could feel as well as touch. In this environment, man could discover profound truths about his Creator and the wonderful Plan that Creator has for him.

The great wisdom and mercy God employed when rebuilding the heavens and the earth is powerfully captured in an exquisite psalm dedicated to this very act. The 104<sup>th</sup> Psalm was written by King David of Israel and is a tribute to God's majesty and greatness. It describes both His creative power and His capacity to sustain what He has made. Notice the exquisite words that introduce the God who created heaven and earth.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed with honor and majesty. Who covers yourself with light as with a garment: who stretched out the heaven like a curtain." (Psa.104:1-2)

David then proceeds to describe God as a Great Architect, the One who was responsible for not only fashioning the physical world, but the spirit world as well.

"Who lays the beams of His chambers in the waters: who makes the clouds His chariot: who walks upon the wings of the wind: Who makes His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire: Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever." (Psa.104:3-5)

These words are more than the poetic utterance of some romantic thousands of years ago. They describe a real Creator with real power—a power that can even subdue physical forces.

In the New Testament, Jesus is described as walking on water (Mt. 14:25). Here, God is described as walking upon the wings of the wind. As the Creator of the forces of nature, God has authority over them. Additionally, when David said that "the earth should not be removed," he was declaring that when God laid the foundations of the world, He also set in motion laws that would sustain it. Therefore, the earth cannot be removed without the consent of its Maker.

Kind David then proceeds to describe how God fashioned the earth and consigned certain parts of it to their respective places.

"You cover it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they fled; at the voice of your thunder they hastened away. They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place you have founded for them. You have set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth. He sends the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills." (Psa. 104:6-10)

The words in this psalm reveal not only God's great power when crafting the heavens and the earth, but also His immense love—a love reflected in the way the Almighty shaped the earth. According to David, God's motivation was a deep consideration for those who would reside on this planet. In essence, God was making provisions for the inhabitants of earth to flourish.

"They (the streams and rivers) give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth..." (Psa. 104:11-14)

However, when God re-created the earth, He was not simply interested in providing the basic necessities. The Great Creator of the universe also appreciates pleasures. This truth is borne out in many of the gifts He included when making the planet. Notice how David acknowledges this fact.

"And wine that makes glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart. The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which He has planted;" (Psa. 104:15-16)

The Great God who made all that exists filled the earth with an endless array of delights, all intended to show His deep love for those who would soon dwell on this exquisite jewel in space. Jesus Christ was well aware of the beauty God had bestowed on the earth and spoke of it during one of His most famous messages. Notice His words in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Mt. 6:28-29)

The exquisite beauty that is so much a part of man's physical home reveals that the God who made all that exists is not only powerful, He is tender. No act is inconsequential to Him. The extraordinary detail that is a part of every facet of creation bears out this wonderful truth. God is a God of love. He is a giver of good gifts. The earth is such a gift and its Maker's signature is all over it. The creation truly reveals God's mercy and the scriptures proclaim this fact.

"To Him that by wisdom made the heavens: for His mercy endures forever. To Him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for His mercy endures forever. To Him that made great lights: for His mercy endures forever: The sun to rule by day: for His mercy endures forever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for His mercy endures forever." (Psa. 136:5-9)

God's mercy is the driving force behind His creative power. It is this wonderful virtue that defines His greatness. God is a merciful God and He demonstrates this fact in everything He touches, including the very world around us.

## A Message in the Heavens

The book of Genesis reveals that on the fourth day of re-creation, God fashioned the sun, moon, and stars. However, when describing this act, the scriptures also explain why He created these great astronomical wonders that so beautifully decorate the sky. Notice what God's word says.

"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and <u>let them be for **signs**, and for **seasons**, and for days and for years:" (Gen. 1:14)</u>

Here, the ETERNAL declares that the sun, the moon, and the stars are for "signs" and "seasons." These two words have profound meaning and reveal an extraordinary point regarding God's Plan for mankind.

The Hebrew word for "signs" in this verse is **owth**. This word can be translated as a "signal," "beacon," "evidence," or "mark." This is the same word God used when describing His Sabbath. Notice what God said when instructing the children Israel to honor this day—a day He blessed (consecrated) and set apart as Holy:

"Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a **sign** between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the Lord that

does sanctify you... It is a **sign** between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." (Ex. 32:13,17)

God created the Sabbath on the seventh day as a link between Himself and mankind. The Sabbath is a "sign" God gave that would enable man to know his Creator. On the fourth day, God created the heavens as an interstellar clock in which His soon-to-be-created Sabbath could be identified. But there is more.

The word "seasons" in Genesis 1:14 is *moed*. This word means "appointed times." Throughout history, God's appointed times have been His holy days. These days reveal a great Plan of salvation for all mankind—a Plan that God envisioned from the very beginning. The point here is that God created the heavens as an instrument that would help man identify specific holy days created by the One who would later become the Savior of the world.



The Sun and Moon over the North Pole

It is not by accident that down through the ages some of history's most significant events took place on God's holy days. Many of these events involved God's direct intervention and speak volumes about His Vision for mankind. The heavens as well as the holy days declare not only God's strength, but also His infinite wisdom and love (Psa. 19:1). They reveal that the Great Creator is mindful of His children and has a remarkable Plan that will ultimately lead them into His Family.

## In His Image

For six days, God painstakingly renewed what had become a shattered heaven and earth. However, toward the end of the sixth day, He would do something, that until then, had only been a dream. It was at this moment that the ALMIGHTY announced that the time had finally come to begin the creation of His Family. Notice the words that Jesus Christ, in His pre-incarnate state, spoke to His eternal Father.

"And God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Gen. 1:26)

Consider the power of these words. God was about to create a being who would be modeled after Himself. Man would be formed in the very image of his Creator—in the very likeness of his God. This extraordinary moment stood apart from all other creative acts performed by the Holy One of Israel.



The Creation of Man by Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel at Vatican City

The remarkable uniqueness of man is borne out not only in his image and likeness, but also in the way he was created. Until this point, God renewed the heavens and the earth by the power of His word. He spoke and there was light. He spoke and the waters were divided. He spoke and the dry land appeared. He spoke and vegetation came forth. He spoke and the heavens were fashioned. He spoke and the sea brought forth life. He spoke and creatures came forth to roam the seas and the earth.

However, this moment was to be very different. This is because God did not speak man into existence, He actually formed him with His own hands. This is a fact that should not be lost when understanding God's Vision for man and the wonderful Destiny that awaits him.

The Bible reveals that God formed man out of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). Imagine what was taking place at this exact moment. God was literally touching man during this process. He was gently forming and fashioning the clay that would become His child. And now, all the planning and dreaming was only seconds away from a miraculous beginning. God then breathed life into this great masterpiece and man became a living soul.

Imagine what the angelic kingdom must have been thinking as they witnessed God kneel on the earth and form a being whose ultimate Destiny would be to rule with Him for all eternity. It is very possible that these majestic creatures may even have knelt with Him.

## When Did God Create Man?

The Bible reveals that God made man on the sixth day of re-creation. However, is it possible to identify the exact day of the year this miracle took place? Furthermore, does it make any difference which day God would choose to do such a thing?

Although the scriptures do not specifically address this issue, a very interesting theory does exist. According to Jewish tradition, man was created on *Rosh Hashanah*, which literally translated means "the head of the year." *Rosh Hashanah* is also referred to as the "Feast of Trumpets." This day occurs on the first day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. This feast is identified in the book of Leviticus (See: Lev. 23) as the fourth of seven annual holy days ordained by God as Holy Convocations (commanded assemblies).

The belief that Adam was created on the Feast of Trumpets harmonizes with so many other aspects of God's word and His Plan. For example: the Bible strongly suggests that Jesus Christ, a second Adam (1Cor. 15:45) was also born in the fall, and very possibly on the Feast of Trumpets. Additionally, the scriptures strongly suggest that the return of the Messiah to this earth will occur in the fall. Furthermore, this return is pictured by the Feast of Trumpets. Finally, the Bible strongly intimates that God has a 7,000 year Plan in which man has been given 6,000 years to rule the earth. This being the case, it seems reasonable that if man's reign ends at the return of Jesus Christ (Trumpets), why wouldn't it have begun there?

## The Seventh Day

The scriptures declare that on the seventh day of re-creation, God rested. In other words, He ceased doing the physical labor involved in renewing the heavens and the earth. However, there was still more to do.

Although God rested from His labor, He did not stop creating. At this point, He would fashion something that went far beyond a physical world—and by doing so reveal a great lesson regarding man's ultimate Destiny. Notice what He did.

"And God **blessed** the seventh day, and **sanctified** it: Because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made." (Gen. 2:3)

The word "sanctified" in this verse is very interesting. Literally translated, it means "to consecrate" or "to purify"—In other words, to set apart for a Holy purpose. But why would God bless a day and "sanctify" it? Why would He set it apart as Holy? The Bible answers this question and in doing so reveals something extraordinary about God's Plan for man. Notice what the Creator Himself revealed to the children of Israel regarding why this day was unique. He did so when presenting a special [Sabbath] covenant.

Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a **Sign** between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the Lord that does sanctify you. (Ex. 31:13)

With these words, God was explaining that His Sabbath stands as a constant reminder that He has set His children apart for a Holy purpose as well. That purpose will be accomplished when those who yield to Him are ultimately born into His Family as literal sons and daughters.

## Of Great Importance

The Sabbath is so critical to God that he established it on the seventh day of creation. It was actually part of His creation. God made the Sabbath. It just didn't happen by chance. By this creative act, He concluded the beginning of man's extraordinary journey on this earth. Because of this, He indelibly stamped this day with His "mark" of spiritual perfection. The Sabbath was designed to be a weekly memorial of God's physical as well as His spiritual creation. In a very real sense, it is a link—a nexus—between corruptible man and his incorruptible CREATOR. God made it so that the human family would know Him and His Plan for them.

It is hard to imagine why man would think so little of this day. But regrettably, that is exactly what he has done. Even within the professing Christian community, the Sabbath has been dismissed as an outdated, burdensome practice. Most "believers" contend it is a part of the Old Covenant and no longer binding on God's people. This belief is not only untrue, it is insulting to the CREATOR as well. Failure to honor the ETERNAL and His day as He commands deprives mankind from truly knowing the very BEING who made him. However, throughout history, God's people in both the Old Testament and the New Covenant have failed to appreciate this truth.

## A Beautiful Paradise and a Serious Warning

As the first human being surveyed the beautiful garden that would be his home God provided him with very specific instructions concerning the life he was beginning; His words would hold a great promise as well as an ominous warning. However, at this point it is important to understand that when God created the first human family He gave them a very unique gift—one that would be instrumental in the choices they as well as every one of their descendants would make...

# Free will

# Chapter VII Two Trees and a Garden

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live

Deuteronomy 30:19

Several years ago, a longstanding member of a major Protestant denomination began questioning some of the traditions of his Church. Most notable among these traditions were the festivals and holy days taught by his pastor and embraced by his denomination his entire life.

As a child growing up, this man believed in these traditions. He loved Christmas with all its decorations and presents. He anticipated Easter with its candy and games. They were such great festivals; what was not to like?

Later as a young adult, this devout man tried to see meaning and significance in these seasons, but eventually the things he had long thought to be true began to look less true. Oh, to be sure, Jesus' birth is described in the Bible, but noticeably absent was any evidence of this event being celebrated by the apostles or the early New Testament Church. Furthermore, although Jesus' resurrection consumes a significant portion of the gospels, the early Church kept the Passover, not Easter.

Even a casual study of these holidays revealed that their origin came not from the scriptures, but rather from ancient pagan festivals dedicated to honoring an endless array of deities—but never the God of the Bible.

The young man's study would eventually take him to the Sabbath, and once again, another longstanding practice of his faith seemed to directly contradict the scriptures. As he continued to research this subject, he would discover that Jesus and His apostles, as well as the early New Testament Church, kept the seventh day (Saturday), not Sunday as he had been taught.

Overwhelmed by this new understanding, the young man approached his pastor for answers. However, instead of answers, all he seemed to get was rationalizing. His pastor argued that it doesn't really matter what day a Christian observes because "God looks on the heart." He then explained that Sunday worship as well as holidays such as Good Friday, Ash Wednesday, and Lent actually enhance the meaning of the "faith" and point believers to a deeper understanding of the gospel. Therefore, God couldn't possibly be opposed to such traditions.

As this meeting proceeded, the young man's pastor vigorously defended each of the festivals kept by the Church. At one point, he even argued that the world as we know it today, with all its complexities, made it impossible to keep the Sabbath and holy days as prescribed in the Bible. He then

argued that Christmas was a wonderful festival because of its impact on children, while Easter was equally beautiful because it was a means to evangelize to unbelievers about a risen Christ.

During this meeting, the young man's pastor actually suggested that the holy days kept by Jesus and His disciples were legalistic and burdensome and those who keep them today are simply being self-righteous.

When the young man indicated that not one argument advanced by his pastor could be supported by scripture, his pastor became furious. He accused the young man of being Pharisaical and intolerant. At one point, he even called him a "Judaizer." He then suggested that the young man look into his heart for answers, but never once did he encourage him to look into God's word for the truth.

As the young man began to leave his pastor's office, he paused, and then asked this man he had trusted for so many years one last question. "Sir," he said, "Does the Bible anywhere remotely suggest that man has the authority to decide for himself how he may worship his Creator?"

There is an extraordinary quality and strength to this question because it cuts to the very core of the faith proclaimed in the pages of your Bible. It is a question that when properly understood reveals a profound truth concerning two trees in a garden and man's ultimate Destiny.

#### Two Trees in Paradise



Butchart Gardens, Victoria, British Colombia, Canada.

The book of Genesis reveals that shortly after creating Adam and Eve, God placed them in an exquisite paradise and invited them to explore all that was around them. However, this invitation also came with a warning. God explained that in the midst of the garden was a tree whose fruit was life-threatening. If Adam or Eve ate of it, they would most certainly die. Notice God's words.

"And the Lord 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 of it: **for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die**." (Gen. 2:16-17)

As a loving Father, God was committed to protecting His newly created earthly family. For this reason, He gave specific instructions concerning their very survival. It is hard to imagine how anyone would decline to follow such a warning. After all, if you were at a restaurant and someone you trusted said, "Don't eat this. It's toxic and will kill you," you most certainly wouldn't eat it. This being the case, why would God's instructions be so difficult to follow? The answer to this question lies in understanding what these two trees actually were.

What Were the Two Trees?

Today there are numerous theories concerning the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Clearly, the tree of life would have been preferable to eat, but tragically, man declined the invitation to do so. On the other hand, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil should have been avoided at all costs. Yet that is not what happened. Why? Is it possible to know what these trees truly were—and will such an understanding provide greater insight into the course man took concerning the choices he was given?

To better understand these two trees, it is critical to understand the God who made them as well as the beings that resided in Eden. Let's begin with understanding something about mankind and the way he was made.

## The Moral Judgments of Men

The Bible states without ambiguity that man was never designed to be the moral authority in his own life. As difficult as this might be to believe, humanity simply does not have the proper equipment to navigate its own moral and ethical path. King Solomon, a man regarded by many as the wisest person who ever lived, came to understand this truth. When writing the book of Proverbs, Solomon made a profound observation about man and the moral choices he makes. Here is how he put it.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." (Pro. 14:12)

Virtually all mankind has witnessed Solomon's words in action. We have seen good intentions play out to catastrophic results. Even Solomon's own life and the choices he made reflect this great moral law.

Solomon was not the only one to draw the conclusion that man was incapable of successfully managing his ethical path. The great prophet Jeremiah also pondered man's qualifications to rightly preside over his moral decisions. He concluded that man would invariably fall victim to his own moral and ethical devices. Notice his words.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9)

Here, Jeremiah is stating that man cannot trust his own judgment because the seat of that judgment (the heart) is not trustworthy. But there is more. King David, who the Bible describes as "a man after God's heart" (Acts 13:22), expressed a profound truth about man's inability to grasp "right" and "wrong."

"Who can understand his own error?" (Psa. 19:12)

The question David asked in this verse is rhetorical. The truth of the matter is that no one can understand his own error. That is why man makes so many. The point here is that man's capacity to navigate his own moral path is nonexistent. Despite his assertions to the contrary, man was never designed to be the moral authority over his own life. The great prophet Jeremiah conveyed this absolute truth in words that couldn't be more clear.

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps." (Jer. 10:23)

The words of Jeremiah state a truth that this world has rejected since the Garden of Eden. Simply put, man left to his own moral devices will choose the wrong path. Jesus Christ himself understood this absolute moral law and His life reflected this understanding. The Bible states that when He walked as a man on the earth, He refused to do something that every other man has done without thinking since the days of Adam and Eve. Jesus refused to direct His own moral steps. That's right; even the Messiah did not rely on his own wisdom. Notice His words.

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just: [WHY?] because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me." (Jn. 5:30)

The Bible categorically asserts that the Great God, who made the heavens and the earth and all things, stands as the one and only unimpeachable Moral Authority in the universe. It is He who decides what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust, what is good and what is evil. Jesus totally understood this GREAT MORAL PRINCIPLE, and because of this, He totally surrendered His moral will to the Father. He did so because He absolutely knew that His Father was the source of all that possesses virtue and goodness. The point for man to draw from this is that the God of the Bible is infinitely wise, infinitely just, infinitely powerful, infinitely loving, and most infinitely MORAL. Man in his current state doesn't come close to "infinite" in any of these areas. However, there is yet another reason for man to tether himself to God and HIS moral compass.

## An Unchangeable God

The Bible also declares with great force that the Infinite Creator of all that exists never changes His moral positions. In other words, what He hated four thousand years ago He hates today. The apostle James once described Him as One in whom there is "no variableness nor shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17). With these words James is stating that there isn't even a hint of movement with respect to God's virtue. He doesn't change with the times. He is eternal. Time has no affect on Him or His moral core.

However, man's moral compass is always in a state of flux because his values are constantly being influenced by the world around him—a world that is always changing. To illustrate this point, consider how values have changed in the United States over the past 50 years. Our opinions regarding sex, marriage, and family would have astonished earlier generations.

Additionally, our contemporary world demands that all moral standards constantly adjust to conform to society's conduct. Because of this what we once thought was abhorrent moral behavior is now regarded as not only respectable, but even virtuous. The result of this thinking can be seen in every strata of society.

The morality of today claims to all who would hear: deviant behavior is acceptable as long as you remain true to yourself. This is the same logic used by psychopaths, rapists, extortioners, drug pushers, and every other kind of lowlife our world has ever produced—and it possesses about the same moral weight. Sadly, today this belief is embraced by an entire generation.

# "You Will Surely Die"

When God warned Adam and Eve about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He was identifying the very source of ALL human suffering. That source is man thinking he can decide for himself what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust, what is good and what is evil. Man has attempted to make these moral pronouncements for millennia and the result has always been untold suffering. The fact of the matter is that every tragic step man has taken has been guided by moral self-will. Every estrangement in human history is born out of self-will. Every divorce is born out of self-will. Every lie and every word of gossip is born out of self-will. Every obscenity and every profanity is born out of self-will. Every political debate is born out of self-will. Every crime that has ever been committed was born out of self-will. Every war that was ever fought has been provoked by self-will. The point here is that man might know "good" and "evil," but he will never be able to know good from evil. Six thousand years of human history has borne this out.

What was the forbidden fruit? It was and is MORAL SELF-DETERMINATION. It is man placing himself as the great moral judge in his own life. Man does not possess such authority because he was never given it by the only one who has it to give in the first place.

#### A Question Answered

When the young man mentioned at the beginning of this chapter asked his pastor if the Bible gave man the authority to decide for himself how he could worship his Creator, his pastor was silent. But the Bible shouts the answer to this question. The scriptures declare with great force that man does NOT have the moral authority to decide for himself how he will worship the Great Creator of heaven and earth. God alone has this authority. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments warn against thinking otherwise.

When speaking to the children of Israel, the Almighty once instructed them to not inquire about other religions and to never attempt integrating those religions into the truth He was giving them (Dt. 12:30-31). He then expressed a powerful principle regarding how He is to be worshiped.

"Whatsoever thing I command you, observe to do it: <u>you shall not add thereto nor diminish from it</u>." (Dt. 12:32)

Here, the Great Eternal who occupies eternity is stating that appropriate worship is defined by Him, not by man. God alone has the moral authority to determine how He is to be honored. This great moral law was later affirmed by Jesus when He said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him is spirit and in TRUTH" (Jn. 4:24). The operative words in this verse are "SPIRIT" and "TRUTH." At the very end of His life, Jesus defined what truth is. He said, "**Thy word is truth**" (Jn. 17-17). The point here is that if man desires to worship his Creator, he must do so as his Creator instructs through His word. Tragically, this is a principle that mankind has ignored since the beginning. The Bible is a chronicle of this defiance. Consider just two examples.

# Example I The Defiance of a Free People

Less than two months after the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt, Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive God's great moral code, the Ten Commandments. However, while this true and faithful servant was receiving God's law, the Israelites were demanding that Aaron fashion a golden calf so that they could have an idol to lead them. Once this idol was crafted, Aaron had the audacity to proclaim it as a gift to the very God who had delivered these slaves out of bondage. With the idol in plain view of this now emancipated people, Aaron declared "a feast to the Eternal." That's right—a Holy Day!

"And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord." (Ex. 32:5)

Imagine the scope of this act. While God Himself was commanding Moses to refrain from making any graven images (the second commandment), Aaron was fashioning a golden calf for God's people to worship! When God saw this attempt to build a faith using the traditions of Egypt, He was furious and even threatened to extinguish the Israelites for such defiance (Ex. 32:7-10). Now ask yourself: how much of professing Christianity today really comes from God's word? What about the many festivals and seasons it celebrates? Does God's word really command these celebrations? The answer is an emphatic NO!

Tragically, man continues to embrace what he believes are harmless worldly customs and even uses them to declare a "feast to the Eternal." The truth is that so much of what man thinks is harmless tradition is in reality nothing less than fruit from a tree that kills. Such acts go totally contrary to the very words of God Almighty. But then again, God's word doesn't seem to mean that much to those who believe they have the right to decide for themselves how they will worship the very Creator who made them.

Example II
The Defiance of a Proud King

In an earlier chapter we learned that when Israel was a monarchy under King Saul, God gave them specific instructions concerning how to prosecute a war with the Amalekites (1Sam. 15:2-3). However, as the war progressed, Saul made some modifications to these instructions (verse 9).

When the battle was over, Samuel came to Saul and asked why he hadn't followed God's word concerning the war they had just won (verses 10-14). Saul responded by explaining that he thought his approach would enhance Israel's worship of the Eternal (verse 15). Imagine Saul thinking he knew better than God about worship. But that is exactly what this kind had argued. And tragically, it is what so many "believers" argue today.

These are just two of many Old Testament examples where God's children tried to "do Him one better" when it came to defining the faith. Regrettably, such examples of defiance are not limited to the ancient nation of Israel. The New Testament also describes several examples of God's people thinking they could somehow decide for themselves how to worship the Savior of the world. Consider the following:

#### "In Vain Do They Worship Me"

The gospels of Matthew and Mark record an event in which Jesus was chastised by the religious leaders of His day because His disciples transgressed the "tradition of the elders" (Mt. 15:1-2, Mk. 7:1-5). Jesus responded to this accusation by rebuking these "pious" men because they held their traditions as having greater moral weight than God's law. Notice what He said.

"Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." (Mk. 7:6-9)

### A History of Defiance

Clearly, the story of mankind is a story of defiance. It is a story of man thinking that he can decide for himself how he will serve the God who made him. The danger of such arrogance is staggering and even threatens those who consider themselves true believers. Notice the sober warning Jesus gave concerning some who thought they could worship God on their terms.

"Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity." (Mt 7:21-23)

Here, the Messiah declares that simply confessing "Jesus is Lord" is not enough. God requires action. The faith of His people must be a living faith (Jas. 2:20)—one that demonstrates a total commitment to the Great God of Heaven. Such a commitment is reflected in obedience to Him and His law. It is never demonstrated in man-made traditions, regardless of how pious they might appear.

# The Forbidden Fruit Today

As a result of believing he can navigate his own moral path, man has wreaked havoc on the earth. Since the dawn of human history, he has crafted virtually hundreds of religions, multiple hundreds of governments, and thousands of laws. He has done so in an attempt to make his world better. But who really thinks it is? Virtually all suffering down through history has its origin in a tree emphatically declared "off limits" by none other than God Himself. (Gen. 3:3).

The great tragedy today is that man continues to eat of that tree. When man makes judgments that fail to reflect God's law, he is eating from a tree that brings death. When man crafts a culture that

ignores the great moral principles outlined in the scriptures, he is eating from a tree that brings death. When man declares the he can decide for himself what values are appropriate, he is eating from a tree that brings death. When man creates governmental systems that refuse to acknowledge the true God, he is eating from a tree that brings death. When man fashions religions that reflect the traditions of men and not the commandments of God, he is eating from a tree that brings death. And although many of man's attempts at crafting his own moral world may appear harmless, they most assuredly are not. If man can take one bite of that forbidden tree, another man can take two—and before long, man will become a veritable glutton for its fruit.

At this point, it is important to understand that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents everything God is NOT. That tree was toxic in the beginning, and it remains toxic to this day. In short, it was and is NOT God's tree. That is why He warned man not to touch it. To be sure, God consented to this tree being planted in Eden. But He most assuredly did not create what it represents. God is not the architect of self-will. He is the architect of righteous judgment (Isa.11:1-4).

# Literal Trees?

There are some who believe that the two trees spoken of in the book of Genesis were literal fruit-bearing trees. Furthermore, some believe that the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not lethal (poison), but rather the act of defiance to God's command is what would bring death. In other words, God created both trees and gave the command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to see if Adam and Eve would obey Him as opposed to making a decision based on their own moral standard. This belief is quite plausible and may very well be what took place. However, it doesn't change anything. The issue in the Garden of Eden was whether man would trust in the Lord or lean to his own understanding (Pro. 3:5).

Regrettably, the power of moral self-determination is immensely appealing. It certainly was to the great archangel Lucifer. This spectacular angelic creature thought he could be his own moral judge and decide for himself what was good and what was evil. However, that belief led to his own moral destruction—and regardless of how hard Satan tries to promote the idea that one should be able to direct his own moral path, that path will always lead to the same place: DESTRUCTION.

The great tragedy to this story is that there was another tree in that garden—one whose fruit was different. It was a tree that would sustain the perfection God had created when He renewed the face of the earth.

## The Tree of Life

When God warned Adam and Eve to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He was not arguing that this tree lacked appeal. He knew otherwise. However, as appealing as it was, it could only lead to misery and death.

However, there was another tree in that garden—a tree that would bring great hope and joy. It was a tree whose fruit would engender life. With this in mind, is it possible to know specifically what this tree was?

### What is the Tree of Life?

The short answer to this question is that the tree of life is everything the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not. But is there more? To better understand what this tree is, consider its name. It is called the "Tree of Life." Therefore, it seems logical to ask: what is it that brings life?

Earlier we saw that moral "self-determination" leads to death, and is symbolized by a forbidden tree. This being the case, is it possible that the tree of life is the rejection of moral "self-determination?" Is it possible that the tree of life symbolizes God's will and His moral authority over our lives? In other words,

by partaking of this tree, one is acknowledging Him as the sole moral force in your life. In essence, you are surrendering your will to Him.

If this is the case, then the tree of life embodies all that is Godly, including His will, His law, and His word. This is not to suggest that God wants intellectual "robots" in His Kingdom. What he Almighty is conveying is that He is the source of moral excellence, and as such, man needs to rely on Him. By doing so, man will avoid a self-destructive path and instead will travel a road that will lead to eternity. The key to this road is to honor God's word.

The scriptures reveal that God's word brings life. The Bible is a book of life. It reflects the wisdom of the Creator of all things. Kind David expressed great insight into the life-giving properties of God's word. His thoughts as expressed throughout the Psalms acknowledge the Creator as sovereign over all that exists, including morality. He actually declared that God's moral judgments, as reflected in His law, have the power to PRESERVE LIFE.

# The 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm

The 119th Psalm was dedicated to the greatness of God's law. Its words are compelling and true. Here, David is appealing to his Creator for that which possesses life-sustaining properties. Consider this king's words.

- Quicken me according to your word. (Psa.119:25)
- Quicken me in your way. (v. 37)
- Quicken me in your righteousness. (v. 40)
- Your word has quickened me. (v. 50)
- Quicken me, O Lord, according to Your word. (v. 107)
- Quicken me, O Lord, according to Your judgments. (v. 149)
- Quicken me according to Your word. (v. 154)
- Quicken me according to Your judgments. (v. 156)

The Hebrew word for "quicken" used in each of these verses is *khawyaw*. Literally translated, this word means: "to revive," "to keep or make alive," "to nourish or preserve," and "to restore to life." The point here is that God's word sustains life. In the very same way that God breathed life into man, He breathed life into His word. The apostle Paul acknowledged this profound truth in his second epistle to the evangelist Timothy.

"All scripture is given by **inspiration** of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That man may be perfect, throughly finished unto all good works." (2Tim. 3:16-17)

The word for "inspiration" used by Paul in this passage comes from a term that literally means "divinely breathed in." When Paul stated that all scripture is given by "inspiration," he was declaring that it was "God-breathed." His breath gives His word life in the same way His breath gave Adam and Eve life.

#### Choose Life

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden He had prepared for them, He was giving them the opportunity to define how the world of the future would be. If it was to be a place of great peace and prosperity, they would have to forsake their own moral will and instead yield to the moral authority of the Great Architect of hope.

On the other hand, Adam and Eve could go it alone, and see what the world would look like with man as the great moral authority. The choice was theirs to make. God gave them that power. However, He also exhorted them to choose wisely.

As Adam and Eve pondered the words of their Creator, they continued to explore the richness of a world designed by none other than God Himself. It was a beautiful world. Everything about it reflected God's wisdom and love. Little did they know that very shortly their world was going to change dramatically...

Chapter VIII
Satan's Great Deception

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world...

#### Revelation 12:9

Today we live in a chaotic world, a world filled with beliefs and superstitions that have brought about unimaginable suffering and heartache. Tragically, this misery seems to be getting worse. To illustrate this truth, imagine how much our world has changed since the morning of September 11, 2001. On that day, the United States was violently attacked by a well organized network of Islamic terrorists.



The Twin Towers in New York City
September 11, 2001 9:03 AM

While Americans watched in stunned silence as thousands of its citizens perished, religious fanatics around the world celebrated. Many actually viewed this destruction as an act inspired by none other than God Himself. In other words, there are those who believe that the nineteen terrorists who hijacked four commercial jetliners were actually doing God's work. The perpetrators of this savagery are even considered "holy martyrs" by millions of people throughout the Middle East. Furthermore, thousands of other zealots just like them aspire to join their fallen brothers in similar acts of suicidal terror.

#### A World of Violence

Since that tragic day, our world has become defined by war and violence. In the wake of this attack, two foreign governments have been toppled, thousands of American military personnel have died, even more opposition forces have been killed, a psychotic dictator has been captured and executed, and random acts of carnage and savagery have intensified around the world.

Terrorism has now become a part of our everyday life. It is inescapable. Furthermore, the precautions we must now take to protect ourselves from the threat of other attacks is overwhelming. The United States has even established a new governmental agency responsible for homeland security. This agency has created an endless stream of procedures designed to thwart future acts of violence. However, even with all the safeguards, Americans have been warned that another attack is inevitable. Today, it would seem that mankind has literally gone mad. Violence is everywhere.

Tragically, the insanity that fills our world is not limited to evil fanatics waging a "jihad." Society today is racked by all kinds of vicious carnage and mindless destruction, often perpetrated without purpose or reason. Throughout the world, horrible acts of depravity are becoming more common. Today, innocent people are gunned down by snipers playing out some grotesque personal fantasy. Others are kidnapped, then tortured and killed for no apparent reason. Recently in the state of Washington, a psychotic killer pleaded guilty to murdering forty-eight women. There was no explanation for the killings. He just did it.

Today, we may have no idea where or when the next horrific tragedy will strike, but sadly, we have no doubt regarding its certainty. Let face it, just as it was in the days of Noah, the earth today is filled with violence (Gen. 6:11, Mt. 24:37, Lk. 17:26).

#### A Modern View

In our modern world, violence is often seen as a viable solution to man's problems and it has become an all-too-common remedy. If someone cuts you off on a freeway, kill him. If someone terminates you at work, kill him. If someone fails to show you respect, kill him. If someone doesn't honor your "turf," kill him.

Even in societies that pride themselves as being "enlightened," snuffing out innocent life is viewed as a matter of "choice." In the United States alone, over fifty million abortions have been performed since the passing of Rowe vs. Wade. In other words, if an innocent baby will interfere with your plans, kill him.

It doesn't take a college degree to see that the world is broken. Tragically, we have now come to a point where the collective wisdom of all mankind cannot put it back together. In other words, if the world was a great wall, mankind would be "Humpty Dumpty." As a result, he seems poised to turn a once beautiful planet into a pile of uninhabitable wreckage. Does this sound familiar?

The great tragedy with the current state of things is that the world was once at peace. There was a time when abundance was everywhere and fear was nowhere. What happened to that time? And why was a world that appeared so perfect transformed into one that now appears to be so self-destructive? The answer to this query can be found in the midst of a beautiful garden thousands of years ago. However, before we go there, it is important to understand what has taken place up until this moment.

#### A Brief Review

In the previous chapters we have seen that the Great Creator of heaven and earth has crafted a magnificent Destiny for all mankind. That Destiny involves man being born into His Family as literal sons and daughters. Once this Destiny is accomplished, man will rule the entire universe and restore righteousness throughout eternity.

The scriptures reveal that God fashioned this Destiny and the Plan that would bring it about before the foundations of the world, even before the existence of physical matter. God then revealed His Plan to the angelic realm and explained their part in it. At some point after that, He created a physical dimension in which man could live and learn.

However, prior to creating man, God recruited a team of spirit beings, under the direct supervision of the great archangel Lucifer, to prepare the earth for its new tenants. Regrettably, Lucifer began to resent the magnificent Destiny God had envisioned for His yet-to-be created human family. As his resentment grew, he persuaded one third of the angelic kingdom to join him in a horrible uprising against the Great Creator of all that exists.

The scriptures reveal that God put down this rebellion, but not before Lucifer—now Satan the devil laid waste the heavens and the earth. He did this in an attempt to thwart God's Plan for man because he knew that man needed a physical domain in which to live and learn.

The Bible then explains how God renewed the physical dimension and personally prepared the earth for man. Once this was accomplished, He formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. At that moment, man became a living soul.

At this point, God placed Adam and Eve in an exquisite garden called Eden. When doing so, He warned them about a certain tree that grew in the midst of the garden. God informed His children that if they ate of its fruit, they would most surly die. We now come to one of human history's most significant moments.

#### The Great Deceiver

As Satan beheld God going forth with His Plan for mankind, his bitterness toward Him continued to fester. But what could he do? He had already attempted to thwart the Plan by destroying the physical universe. However, that didn't seem to stop God from continuing His mission regarding man's ultimate Destiny.

# The Perfect Solution

At this point, Satan had what he thought was the perfect solution. He knew he couldn't get God to reject His Plan for man, but could he get man to reject both God and His Plan? If he could, that Plan would be thwarted once and for all. Satan then embarked on a scheme that would convince man that God's way was wrong and that his way was right. In essence, he would persuade man to worship him instead of the true God.

#### Enter Satan

We now come to Satan's first contact with mankind. But when did this contact take place?--and does the timing of this event have any significance?

In an earlier chapter we learned that man may very well have been created on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri) as the Bible reckoned time during the period of Moses (Lev. 23:24). This day is referred to in the scriptures as the Feast of Trumpets. The belief that man was created at this time is very plausible because it harmonizes so well with other events surrounding this Holy Day and what it pictures.

But what about the day Satan entered into the Garden of Eden and spoke to Eve? Is there any evidence concerning the timing of this act? The answer is yes, and it, too, can be linked to other aspects of God's Plan for mankind.

There are some who believe that Satan first came into contact with man on the tenth day of the seventh month. This day is called The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). It pictures a time when God will deal directly with the source of all evil—and man will once again be reconciled back to his Creator.

The belief that Satan entered the Garden of Eden on the Day of Atonement makes sense if Adam was created on "Feast of Trumpets" as many believe. During the ten days between Trumpets and Atonement, man would have had ample time to do several things. For example: Adam would have been able to catalog the animals and name them (Gen. 2:19). Additionally, he could have been joined in marriage to Eve (Gen. 2:21-24). At that point, Adam and his new bride could have been taught by God about His law. Finally, Adam and Eve would have had time to familiarize themselves with their new environment. Ten days seems reasonable for this.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence supporting the belief that Satan first came into contact with man on the Day of Atonement is the nature of this unique Holy Day and the specific instructions God gave Israel regarding its observance. Later this evidence will be addressed in considerable detail.

#### Satan's Great Deception

The book of Genesis describes humanity's first contact with the greatest enemy in the history of the universe. At that time, Eve, the mother of all humanity, couldn't possibly have known the grave danger she was in. Notice how God's word describes this meeting.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, "Yea, hath God said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1)

Notice the subtlety of Satan's words. He knew full well that God never gave such instructions. Furthermore, he also knew that Eve was aware of this fact as well. In other words, Satan intentionally misspoke in order to give Eve the opportunity to correct him. He would let her be the "expert" regarding what God had said. And Eve readily accepted this invitation to "teach" the serpent.

And the woman said unto the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, 'Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." (Gen. 3:2-3)

The conversation between Eve and the serpent must have been very cordial. However, what she couldn't possibly know was that the one she was speaking to was dedicated to destroying her. It was his only reason for being there. He would begin by gaining her trust, but his goal was death. Satan wanted Eve to die. And he knew exactly how this could be accomplished.

The meeting between Eve and the serpent was truly extraordinary. Here, at this intersection in human history, innocence and evil collided. On one side was a young lady who had never seen corruption or sin. She was pure and trusting, as God had made her. On the other side was a being consumed with evil. His entire existence was dedicated to destruction. He would now continue this crusade to turn man against his Creator.

At this point, it is important to understand that Satan had nothing but contempt for the woman he was speaking to. She was disgusting to him. She was weak, and as such she was insignificant. Satan may have seen Eve as nothing more than a pile of garbage that was only fit to be discarded. As he spoke to her, his contempt for God must have been huge, but his focus on the task at hand was also great. He would not lose her. And just like a pedophile preying on a child, Satan was as charming as he could be.

#### The First Lie

It was at this moment that Satan would utter the first lie ever heard by a human being. He declared that sin would not kill you, on the contrary, it would actually empower you.

And the serpent said unto the woman, "Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:4-5)

Based on what would follow, Satan may have then made his boldest move. He may very well have encouraged Eve to decide for herself what she should do. He might have said something to the effect of, "You can't know for sure who is telling you the truth concerning this tree. After all, I say it is ok to eat and God says it is not. Therefore, why don't you decide for yourself? After all, you are very smart. You can examine the tree and make your own decision. Certainly you can trust your own judgment."

While Eve may have thought Satan was encouraging her to be objective concerning this decision, he was actually manipulating her into doing exactly what this tree symbolized. He was encouraging her to be the moral judge in this matter. Ostensibly, Satan was persuading Eve to decide for herself when determining what was right or wrong. He did this because he knew that man was never designed to be

the moral authority in his own life. Throughout eternity, God has always been the one who determines such things and it was no different now.

The trap was now set and the victim ready. Eve would employ all her physical senses as well as her moral sensibilities to determine what she would do. She begins to assess the situation.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise... (Gen. 3:6)

As Eve surveyed the tree that stood before her, she could easily see that every part of it appealed to the physical senses. First, the Bible says that it was "pleasant to the eyes." In all likelihood, this tree was also pleasant to the touch. Its fragrance was probably very sweet. It certainly appealed to the ego. After all, it was supposed to make one wise. Furthermore, it probably tasted delicious and its texture was seemingly perfect. However, there was one thing it could not do: it couldn't sustain life. On the contrary, it was lethal. At this point, Eve takes a step that will change human history.

...she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Gen. 3:6)

The decision by Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil placed man on a collision course with death. Human history would now be driven by self-determination which in turn would be driven by self-interest. In an act that many to this very day believe was liberating, man became a slave to evil and its god.

For six thousand years, the god of this world has affixed his signature to unimaginable human suffering. He has been relentless in exploiting every human weakness. He has even convinced the vast majority of mankind to believe that he doesn't exist or that he is easily outsmarted. Even some of the leading Christian evangelists mock the devil during their crusades. Often they will claim to "have Satan on the run." If they only knew how frequently they kneel before him.

Satan is referred to in the scriptures as the "great deceiver." That title wasn't given to him because he is stupid. He is cunning beyond belief and his handiwork can be seen throughout the world today. People just don't know it. Consider for a moment the credentials of this great enemy.

#### Satan's Resume

The book of Ezekiel outlines many of the talents and responsibilities of the great archangel Lucifer. It is clear that this being was a formidable creature. Tragically, Lucifer became lifted up with pride and ambition. As a result, he rejected every gift and skill he was given by his Maker.

Today this once great archangel is a dark and sinister creature: one that appears good and beautiful on the outside, but is in fact the embodiment of everything that is evil. Satan's credentials as a destroyer of hope are considerable. If he were to craft a résumé, it might look something like this.

# Satan the Devil

Formerly Lucifer

Names and Titles

The enemy (Mt. 13:39)

The evil one (Mt. 13:38)

The prince of this world (Jn. 13:31; 14:30)

The tempter (Mt. 4:3)

The prince of demons (Mt. 12:24)

The god of this world (2Cor. 4:4)

The prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2)

The adversary (1Pe. 5:8)

The deceiver (Rev. 12:9)

The great dragon and serpent (Rev. 12:9, 20:2)

The spirit of apostasy (2Th. 2:9)

### Dominion and Responsibilities

The prince of demons (Mt. 12:24; Mk. 3:22)

The god of this world (2Cor. 4:4)

The prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2)

The ruler of a kingdom (Mt. 12:26)

The prince of this world (Jn. 12:31)

The ruler of angels (Mt. 25:41)

## Abilities and Accomplishments

He has deceived the whole world (Rev. 12:9)

He seduced Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1-20)

He caused Paul's thorn in the flesh (2Cor. 12:7)

He caused Ananias to lie (Acts 5:3)

He blinds the minds of unbelievers (2Cor. 4:4)

He can produce false miracles (2Th. 2:9)

He moved David to number Israel (1Chr. 21:1)

He was the adversary to Joshua (Zech. 3:1-9)

He caused Job's troubles (Job 1:7-2:10)

He put betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2)

He works in disobedience (Eph. 2:2)

He sows tares among the wheat (Mt. 13:38)

He snatches the word from hearers (Mt. 13:19)

He bound a woman for 18 years (Lk. 13:16)

He will give power to the beast and false prophet

(Rev. 13)

## **Character Qualities**

He is a liar and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44)

He is a murderer (Jn. 8:44)

He is a perverter of scripture (Mt. 4:1-10)

#### The Great Deceiver

Ever since the first man and woman walked through the Garden of Eden, Satan has dedicated his strength to proving God wrong for ever thinking man could be a part of His Family. His tools are stealth and guile, and he uses these tools well. Throughout history, Satan has convinced man to believe a lie and reject the truth. He floods the earth with a steady stream of deception, distortion, and misrepresentation, all disguised as moral thought.

Consider how this once-beautiful angelic being has deceived the world today. He has corrupted its politics, its culture, its educational system, and even its faith. Satan has convinced the western world to believe that faith has no place in government and that freedom of speech can be expressed in an endless array of filth we call "art." He has convinced man to believe that the Bible is a threat to children but studying the occult can lead to enlightenment. Satan has convinced man to believe he has no Creator and that values are relative.

The devil has distorted every moral truth ever uttered by God Almighty. He has even redefined Jesus Christ to be a weak, soft-spoken, tolerant-of-everything Savior—and man has bought that lie hook, line, and sinker!

Satan's power to deceive is unmatched in the universe. He deceived one third of the angels. He deceived Eve. And he deceives all of mankind today. Perhaps his greatest deception was his first. At that time, he deceived himself. And he continues to believe that deception to this very minute.

Six thousand years ago, in a beautiful garden, Satan used his power to ruin two precious lives. He did so because he knew the purpose of those lives. Today, he continues to annihilate every fragment of hope mankind ever had. It is hard to imagine that all human suffering began with one terribly misguided decision in a beautiful paradise.

At this point, it is important to note that God never argued that the tree of life should be eaten because of its physical appeal. That is because God knows appearances can be deceiving. It certainly was with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While Adam and Eve relied on their physical senses to navigate a moral path, God never does (Isa. 11:1-4).

Tragically, man chose to rebel against God's clear instructions—instructions given by a caring Father in an effort to protect the children He loved so much. As a result of this sin mankind was cut off from the tree of life. The scriptures reveal that after expelling Adam and Eve from paradise, God dispatched angelic sentries to guard that tree until it was removed (Gen. 3:24).

# A Tragic Price to pay

For the rest of their lives, Adam and Eve toiled on an earth that would not be kind to them. They even experienced the death of a child at the hands of another child. It is hard to believe that they did not contemplate from time to time the decision that started it all. Now, for the next nine centuries they would live out the consequences of this foolish act. And not only them, but the entire human family would pay for this monumental self-serving blunder. It would truly seem that all hope was lost. Because of the reckless action taken in the Garden of Eden, mankind was condemned to death. The Bible says, "For as in Adam, all die... (1Cor. 15:22). However, the Bible also says something else...

# There was a second Adam

# Chapter IX A Hope Restored

...but the Lord will be the hope of His people and the strength of the children of Israel

Joel 3:16

Several years ago, a major motion picture was released depicting the life of a man sentenced to prison for a murder he did not commit. The movie shows how this "convict" dealt with the injustice he received from the courts as well as the evils he experienced in this maximum security facility.

As the story progressed, it became clear that its principle figure was unique. While his fellow inmates became hardened and cynical by prison life, this wrongly accused man maintained a great personal dignity in the most unlikely of places. Even after being raped multiple times by other inmates and repeatedly placed in solitary confinement ("the hole") by a corrupt warden, his spirit was never broken.

This great inner strength prompted another inmate to ask, "How do you do it?" Upon hearing this question, this man provided a one word answer, "HOPE." He then proceeded to describe the power of this quality to an inmate who seemed to have lost this gift long ago.

Toward the end of the story, this man, who had now escaped from incarceration and had exposed a corrupt prison system, wrote a letter to the inmate who had asked how he had survived in such a horrible place. At the conclusion of the letter, he wrote, "Hope is a beautiful thing."

It is hard to imagine anything possessing greater value than hope. It is a power that can sustain a person in the most trying of times. Hope is a voice that cries out, "Don't give up!" It proclaims, "There is something better ahead." In a very real sense, hope is a beautiful thing.

With this in mind, imagine a world where there is no hope—a world where dreams are only an illusion—a world where despair is all there is for as far as the eye can see. Imagine the thing you love most being taken from you and never given back. Imagine being stripped of your home, your parents, or even your children. Imagine solitude and nothing else. Imagine a world without laughter, or music, or color.

Down through the ages, our world has experienced periods of great despair and hopelessness. The ravages of human suffering fill the pages of history. Whether it's the crusades of the middle ages, the great inquisition, the Nazi holocaust, or the horrible genocide perpetrated on millions of Russians by the ruthless dictator, Joseph Stalin, mankind has had some very dark days. Throughout history, there must have been times when man undoubtedly thought, "All hope is lost."

The story of man is truly a story of dashed hopes and shattered dreams. It is true that he has experienced moments of contentment, but those moments, no matter how precious, are fleeting. Imagine how many murders have been committed since Cain slew his brother. Imagine the millions of abuses man has inflicted on his fellow man since Adam and Eve were exiled from a beautiful garden. Imagine how many have died from the ravages of disease or starvation. Imagine the broken homes and shattered lives. Imagine the lost innocence of children or the great perverseness that defines so much of our cultures. Imagine a world where gangs have taken the place of families and where therapists have become the moral voice. Imagine a world where there is no hope.

# The God of Lost Hope

The Bible reveals that Satan the devil is the god of this world (2Cor. 4:4). As such, he has dedicated his entire existence to the destruction of hope. He began by blocking man's access to God Himself in the Garden of Eden. And he has continued his assault on man's Destiny down through the ages. Satan is totally consumed with the destruction of God's Plan for man, and his last spiritual breath will be spent fighting against God's Kingdom and what it pictures.

#### A Steadfast Hope

Although Adam and Eve rejected God as the absolute Moral Authority in their lives when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, all hope was not lost. It is true that man was cut off from his Creator—but not entirely. The scriptures reveal that God continued to work with certain people, even when mankind was in its infant stages. For example, Jesus Christ referred to Abel as "righteous" (Mt. 23:35). This would indicate that he had a relationship with his Creator. Additionally, Enoch is described as

a man who "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22). Then there was Abraham, who God said would be a conduit for blessings that would eventually touch all the families on earth (Gen. 12:3). God has also worked directly with judges, kings, and prophets since the days of the patriarchs. This being the case, it is clear that despite Satan's grip on human history, God has not let go of His Vision, either.

## A Day of Hope

God's dedication to His Plan for mankind has been unshakable from the day it was first envisioned. Despite attempts by the forces of darkness to thwart it, that Plan continues to steadfastly move forward. Furthermore, the GREAT ARCHITECT of ETERNITY has provided tangible evidence that reveals how committed He is to the magnificent Destiny He has envisioned for His human family, and how He will accomplish what the Bible calls His "good pleasure" (Isa. 46:9-10).

Throughout history the ALMIGHTY has left clues that reveal a great hope still exists, a hope that when fully realized will reconcile man back to his Creator and pave the way for him to be born into God's ETERNAL Family as literal sons and daughters. Consider some of these clues.

The book of Genesis records a story of a unique sacrifice offered by Abel at the dawn of human history. This offering was brought by him "in the process of time" (Gen: 4:3). Theses words are more properly translated "at the end of days." It is then that Abel brought the "firstlings" of his flock to be presented to God. This sacrifice pictures a greater sacrifice that would come from God Himself and take place when He offered up His firstborn Son as a ransom for the sins of all mankind.

But there is more to what took place when Abel presented this gift to his Creator. Notice that it took place "at the end of days." In other words, a certain amount of time had to elapse before the first fruit of Abel's flock was to be offered. This being the case, is it possible that Abel was presenting an offering on what would later become the Day of Pentecost? Clearly, this offering came during a harvest season, as evidenced by Cain's offering (Gen. 4:3).

Pentecost is a very special Holy Day that pictures an important part of God's Plan for man. One unique aspect of Pentecost is that it does not fall on a particular date, but rather when a certain number of days elapse after a particular Sabbath (Lev. 23:15-22). In other words, Pentecost arrives "at the end of days."

This great Holy Day, which was kept by God's people in both the Old and New Testaments, occurs in the late spring and pictures a small, first harvest. This harvest reveals that God will initially select a small community of believers to be the "firstfruits" of His Kingdom. Regrettably, this truth is not understood by the vast majority of professing Christians today. Most believe that God is trying to save all mankind at this time. Tragically, according to this belief, He is not doing a very good job. For greater detail concerning this day see Appendix VI of this work.

#### Another Clue

Another clue demonstrating God's commitment to His Plan for mankind was revealed during the days of the patriarch Abraham. The Bible states that at that time, God instructed this great champion of faith to offer up his only son as a sacrifice. Notice the care God takes with this command. He even acknowledges the deep love Abraham had for his son, Isaac.

"And He said, Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and get you unto the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of." (Gen. 22:2)

According to the scriptures, Abraham did not resist what God had commanded him to do. He yielded to God as the Great Moral Authority in his life without question. The words from his CREATOR may not have been easy to hear, but they came from the One in whom Abraham placed all his trust. This

being the case, he took his son Isaac along with two servants and some provisions for the journey, and headed off to Moriah.

The journey took three days. During this time, Abraham undoubtedly pondered his son's impending death. However, it should not be lost on the reader that God would later ponder the death of His own Son for three days. Additionally, when Abraham's party approached Moriah, he and Isaac left their servants and continued the last day of the journey alone. At that time, Isaac carried the wood that would be used for the sacrifice (Gen. 22:6), just as Jesus carried the instrument of His crucifixion (Jn. 19:17).

Although the timing of this event is not addressed in the scriptures, it is difficult to believe it did not coincide with the timing of the Passover. All of the images in this story reflect "types" that would appear in the same place nearly two thousand years later.

When God commanded Abraham to offer up his only son, it was clearly a test of loyalty (Gen. 22:1). But there was something far greater being played out in this event. God was revealing that He, too, would demonstrate His loyalty. That loyalty would be to a Plan that would redeem mankind from the consequences of sin—only this time there would be no angel to cry out, "Lay not your hand upon the lad" (Gen. 22:12).

## God's Holy Days

Perhaps the greatest evidence that God is working out a Plan for mankind is His holy days. These special days tell an incredible story that when fully played out, reveal a great Destiny for all mankind—a Destiny that will see God's human family ultimately born into His spiritual Family as literal children of their Creator. It is for this reason that God commanded His people to honor His Sabbaths. Notice the force of His words when directing the children of Israel to keep the days He declared as "holy convocations."

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 'Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, 'Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be <a href="https://example.convocations">holy convocations</a>, even these are My feasts..." (Lev. 23:1-2)

The Hebrew word for "convocations" in this passage is *miqra*. Literally translated it means "an assembly," "a calling together," "an appointed meeting," or "a rehearsal." At this point it is important to understand what *miqra* does not mean. *Miqra* does NOT mean "optional, but we wish you would come." It does NOT mean "a good idea if you don't have other plans." Furthermore, despite what many "theologians" may argue, *migra* does NOT mean "a nice tradition, but not essential for salvation."

When the Almighty directed Moses to speak His words, He was not being vague. On the contrary, the Eternal God was being crystal clear. He was commanding the children of Israel to assemble on the days He would choose. At no time did He ever invite them to create their own weekly Sabbath or annual Festivals. Furthermore, He has never extended such an invitation to this very day. Mankind has invented all kinds of religious holidays, but NEVER with God's blessing.

#### An Architectural Roadmap

God's Sabbath and holy days reflect His wisdom and reveal His Plan for mankind. In a very real sense, these days represent the architectural drawings to the Destiny of the universe. They reveal the steps God is going to take to accomplish what He envisioned before the foundations of the world. Because of this fact, God is by far the best equipped Being in the universe to design His *migras*.

When the Almighty introduced His "holy convocations" to Moses, He began by describing His weekly Sabbath. Notice His words.

"Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings." (Lev. 23:3)

God then outlines seven annual holy days, beginning with the Passover and concluding with the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:36). Included in these special feasts is a day that actually reveals how God will ultimately deal with evil. In a very real sense, this particular day is a re-enactment of what took place in the Garden of Eden, with one notable exception. This time, God's children will reject the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and will instead, choose life. This day is called the "Day of Atonement" and reflects God's total commitment to the success of a Plan He envisioned so very long ago.

## The Day of Atonement



The Shofar

Ram's horns with silver and gold mouthpieces.

The one with the gold mouthpiece is sounded on the Feast of Trumpets.

The silver one is sounded on the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement is the fifth of God's seven annual holy days. However, this day is unlike any of the other commanded assembly ordained for the children of Israel. On Atonement, God's people are commanded to "afflict themselves." Notice the very specific instructions concerning the observance of this day.

"Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be a holy convocation unto you; and you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord. And you shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the Lord your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his People." (Lev. 23:27-29)

These words are powerful indeed. Here God is stating that anyone not afflicting their soul on the Day of Atonement will be cut off from among his people. Make no mistake about it, this is not what anyone wants to have said about them. To be cut off from God's people is to be cut off from God Himself. This is a fate that could only lead to certain death. But what did God mean when He commanded the children of Israel to "afflict" their soul?

The term "afflict" used in these verses is very interesting. It comes from the Hebrew word *anah*. Literally translated this word means to "beat down," to "depress," to "abase," to "chasten," and to "humble." It is the same word God used when speaking to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron.

"And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, 'Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, 'How long will thou refuse to humble (anah) yourself before Me? Let My People go, that they may serve Me..." (Ex. 10:3)

## Humble Yourself with Fasting

When God directed the children of Israel to keep the Day of Atonement, they were told to humble themselves before their Creator. Furthermore, this act of humility was to be demonstrated by fasting. In other words, on the Day of Atonement, God's people are to refrain from doing that which sustains their physical life.



With this in mind, a very important question needs to be addressed: Why does God want His people to fast on THIS day? Why not fast on the Passover? Why not on Pentecost? Why not on Trumpets?—or during the Feast of Tabernacles? Why does God command His children to fast on this particular holy day—the Day of Atonement? The answer to this question reveals a profound truth regarding God's Plan for man and the events that have been shaped by God's Vision for His Kingdom.

#### The First Atonement

In the previous chapter, we learned that it is very likely that Satan first came into contact with man on the Day of Atonement. At that time, he persuaded Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was done by convincing her that she could be her own moral authority and decide for herself how to conduct her life. Satan did this because he knew that God was the true Moral Authority of the universe, although he resents this fact with his entire being.

When God told Adam and Eve to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He was appealing to them to accept Him as the Moral Authority in their lives. This would be accomplished by them rejecting that which was physical and instead embracing that which was spiritual. This spiritual food was pictured by the tree of life. As we learned earlier, the tree of life symbolizes God's will and His way. It reflects His wisdom and virtue. This tree represents everything that is good and just, and rejects everything that is not. In a very real sense, the tree of life tethers man to the source of all that is MORAL.

When God gave the Israelites specific instructions concerning fasting on the Day of Atonement, He was appealing to them to do the same thing He wanted Adam and Eve to do. He wanted them to reject the physical and embrace the spiritual. He did so because He knew that the Kingdom they would ultimately inherit was a spiritual Kingdom.

So important was obedience in this matter that God said failure to honor His instructions would result in being cut off from His people and His Kingdom. In other words, God was telling His children: "If you want to be the moral authority in your life, then go ahead and eat. Just don't expect to be a part of a Kingdom where I am the Moral Authority."

Every year on the Day of Atonement, God's people around the world act out what took place in the Garden of Eden. Two trees are figuratively placed before them. One tree will sustain the physical but has no power over eternity. The other tree will engender eternal life—a life that cannot be destroyed by anything. By fasting on this day, God's people are declaring their desire to embrace the tree of life.

The irony to this is that today, the vast majority of people on earth go about their daily lives every Atonement and eat to their heart's content. Little do they know that by doing so, they are literally starving to death because they are eating from a tree that God Himself said was lethal. Meanwhile, the few who are truly honoring this day as God commanded, refrain from eating physical food and instead partake of a great spiritual feast. In reality, they are eating from a tree that brings life.

# Tethered to God

As we have just seen, the Day of Atonement pictures mankind renouncing his claim to be the moral authority in his life and instead humbling himself and acknowledging God as the true Moral Authority. As a result of God's children being humbled through fasting, they will be tethered to Him as the Great Moral Force in the universe.

This is not to suggest that man can enter into God's Kingdom by works. In truth he needs the atoning sacrifice of a real Savior. However, it is absolutely essential to understand that the sacrifice of the Messiah will not atone for the sins of anyone who refuses to humble himself before God and to honor his Sabbaths. This is why God said that anyone who does not fast on the Day of Atonement will be "cut off from among his people." That promise is as alive today as it was on the day God first uttered it.

In essence, the Day of Atonement pictures a time when the effects of man's decision in the Garden of Eden will be reversed. In other words, instead of being cut off from God as a result of disobedience, man will be reconciled back to God because he chooses to obey. But there is more to this incredible holy day. The Bible declares that the Day of Atonement not only reflects events that took place when Satan first entered into human affairs, but it also reflects events that will take place when he exits.

#### A Lesson from Two Goats

The sixteenth chapter of the book of Leviticus records specific instructions given by God to Moses regarding entrance into the inner sanctum of the tabernacle. This inner sanctum is called the "Holy of Holies" or the "Most Holy Place." God informed Moses that Aaron, the high priest, may only enter the "Most Holy Place" once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Failure to obey this instruction would result in death. The "Most Holy Place" is the location of the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat, and according to God when speaking to Moses, "AND I MYSELF AM PRESENT" (Lev. 16:2).

God then informs Moses that every year on this precise day, a special service is to be conducted. He explains that this service is to make atonement for the sins of all Israel. So important is this ceremony to God that He gave very specific instructions concerning what Aaron must do prior to, during, and after he enters and leaves the Most Holy Place. Included in these instructions is a description of the clothing he must wear, the sacrifice he must offer on behalf of himself and his family, the selection of animals to be offered, the protocol for the offerings, and the specific steps to be taken upon leaving this inner sanctum.

God explains to Moses that at one point during this service, Aaron is to present two male goats to the Eternal at the entrance of the tabernacle. At that time, he is to cast lots to determine the fate of each goat. One goat will be chosen to be sacrificed as a sin offering for the entire nation of Israel. Its blood will be brought into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled on and before the Mercy Seat. This blood will make

atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the sins of God's people (Lev. 16:16). This goat represents the one who would become Jesus Christ and the great sacrifice He would make some fifteen hundred years later.

However, there was a second goat that was not sacrificed, but rather is presented to the Lord alive. This second goat is called a "scapegoat" and has immense significance. God instructed Moses that Aaron was to lay both his hands on this goat and confess over it all the sins of Israel. He then explained that by doing this, their sins would be conveyed to this goat and placed on his head. Finally, God tells Moses that this scapegoat is then to be exiled from the camp and led away into a desolate place.

## Who Is the Scapegoat?

The identity of this second goat has been at the center of considerable discussion among many Biblical scholars. Some have even suggested that it is a symbol of Jesus Christ. However, this understanding is not true. Notice that the second goat's blood could not atone for the sins of the people. It is true that the act of conveying their sins onto this goat did constitute an act of atonement, but the question is why? Furthermore, why was this second goat not killed? The answer to these questions can be found in understanding who this goat is and what it represents.

# The "Azazel"

The Hebrew word translated as "scapegoat" in these verses is *azazel*. According to the book of Enoch, Azazel was the leader of evil spirits (Enoch 8:1; 10:4). This being the case, is it possible that the scapegoat mentioned in connection with the Day of Atonement is a symbol for none other than Satan the devil? The Bible indicates that Satan will one day be exiled to a desolate place, where he will no longer be able to deceive mankind. At that time, all the sins he has orchestrated throughout history will be conveyed back to him and the misery he has wrought upon man will be removed forever.

The Day of Atonement not only pictures man being reconciled back to his God, but the removal of the very being who orchestrated his estrangement in the first place. In a very real sense, this day pictures the first and last page of Satan's influence on mankind. The Day of Atonement looked forward to the time when the Savior of the World would come and shed His blood for the sins of all mankind. It also pictures a time when Satan the devil will be removed from his seat as the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4). However, before he can be removed, a great battle must be waged—and as amazing as this might be to believe, it has already been fought.

# A Hope Delivered

The Bible reveals that as a result of man's sin in the Garden of Eden, death came into the world. The apostle Paul wrote that "by man came death" (1Cor. 15:21). In the very next verse, Paul identified who that man was. Because of Adam and Eve's rejection of God as their Moral Authority, mankind was consigned to a corruptible existence: "for as in Adam all die" (1Cor. 15:22) But the Bible also reveals that there would be a second Adam. This "Adam" would change everything. Through Him would come life, and the great hope God had envisioned for mankind.

#### A Defining Moment

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ came to earth to restore a great hope However, in order to succeed, He would have to face the greatest adversary the world has ever known. Jesus' entire life was punctuated by a series of battles against this adversary—a being who also stood as the great destroyer of hope. Jesus' birth, His life and trials, His betrayal and His ultimate crucifixion were profoundly influenced by a real devil whose contempt for Him was unimaginably all-consuming.

Perhaps the most prominent moment where the life of the Messiah and the life of Satan the devil intersected took place shortly after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. This event stands as what might

very well be the defining moment in the history of God's Plan and matched only by Jesus' crucifixion and subsequent resurrection.

The apostle Matthew captures this moment in the fourth chapter of his gospel. There, he indicates that Jesus was "led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Mt. 4:1). These words clearly reveal that Jesus was fully aware of what was going to take place. In other words, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness did not simply happen by chance. He was literally led to it.

To prepare for this great trial, Jesus fasted for forty days, leading Matthew to make what just might be the greatest understatement of all time:

"And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered" (Mt. 4:2).

Hunger would hardly seem like the appropriate word to describe the state of a man who had gone without any nourishment—food or drink, for well over a month. Quite frankly, Jesus must have been a physical wreck. His body may even have been convulsing with the effects of starvation. However, at this point, He was also totally connected to the Source of all strength. For forty days and nights Jesus had rejected that which sustains the physical and instead had embraced that which sustains the spirit. The intense prayer and reflection that took place during this retirement in the desert are simply inconceivable.

When Satan approached Jesus, he may have even thought this great confrontation was going to be little easier than he first imagined. Jesus was clearly in bad shape. He would even need angelic help to assist Him after the battle. With this as the backdrop, Satan advances his first temptation.

"... If you be the son of God, command that these stones be made bread." (Mt. 4:3)

To many, this temptation appears to be very benign, even harmless. However, in truth, this first test may clearly have been the most deadly. To better understand what was taking place at this moment, it is essential to know when this temptation was being advanced.

Almost all authorities believe this event took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. But when did His ministry actually begin? The answer to this question can be arrived at by applying some basic deductive reasoning. If Jesus' ministry lasted three-and-a-half years as the book of Daniel suggests (Dan.9:27), and it ended during the time of the Passover as the gospel records state, then we can know that this event took place in the fall. But is it possible to get even closer to the time of this event? The answer is yes, and once again it requires deductive reasoning, based on an understanding of precisely when Jesus' ministry ended.

In all likelihood, Jesus' public ministry officially concluded when He entered Jerusalem riding on an ass (Mt. 21). At that time, the Messiah was presenting Himself as a Lamb that was going to be slaughtered. This event corresponded to the time the children of Israel were instructed to bring a lamb into their home and prepare it for the Passover. This took place on the tenth day of the first month (Nisan or Abib) in accordance with the scriptures (Ex. 12:3-6). With this understanding, if one goes back three-and-a-half years from the time Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he will find himself on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri), or the Day of Atonement. That's right, Jesus' first temptation may very well have taken place on the Day of Atonement.

With this in mind, Satan began his testing of God's beloved Son by doing the same thing he did to Eve over four thousand years earlier. He appealed to HIM to rely on the physical when making a moral judgment (Mt. 4:3). However, Jesus knew what this temptation was really all about. IT WAS ABOUT TWO TREES. With great spiritual strength and virtue, He responds by delivering the true Source of life—God's word.

"But he [Jesus] answered and said, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Mt. 4:4).

With these words, Jesus was declaring that although bread will temporarily sustain the physical, it has absolutely no impact on that which is spiritual. Furthermore, Jesus knew that everything in God's Kingdom was spiritual and could only be sustained by spiritual food. Additionally, He knew what that spiritual food was, and He declared it to the Jews of His day.

"I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever..." (Jn. 6:48-51)

Here, Jesus was declaring that He is the true Source of life. In an earlier chapter we learned that it is God's word that "quickens." In other words, it gives life. This being the case, it is Jesus Christ who "quickens," because He is God's Word manifested in the flesh. This truth is confirmed by the apostle John. Notice how John introduces his gospel by identifying who Jesus was before He came to earth as a man.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." (Jn. 1:1)

The great distinction of being the Word of God will be displayed for all to see when the Messiah returns to this earth and subdues the nations. When describing this return, the book of Revelation says the following.

"And He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The **Word** of God." (Rev. 19:13)

Throughout the scriptures, Jesus our SAVIOR is identified as the Word of God. As such, it is He who sustains life. Therefore, as amazing as this might be to believe, Jesus Christ was and is the tree of life. He was and is the great Moral Authority of the universe because He is intimately connected to the Father. It is Jesus who can keep man tethered to the Great Being He called "Abba" (Mk. 14:36).

#### A Great Victory

The scriptures reveal that Satan the devil tried to prevent man's access to God at the very beginning and succeeded. This was almost surely done on the Day of Atonement. The Bible also declares that He tried to do the same thing to the Messiah. Only this time he failed. And once again, this was very likely done on the Day of Atonement.

When Jesus Christ overcame Satan in the wilderness, He paved the way for the fulfillment of God's Plan concerning the Destiny of man, a Destiny rich in hope. He was able to do this because He had a profound understanding concerning physical and spiritual nourishment. At one point in His ministry, Jesus shared this understanding.

## A Food that Endures

The gospel of John indicates that shortly after feeding several thousand people, Jesus spoke to the Jews concerning what real food was. He indicated that physical food may, in fact, be overrated.

"Labor not for the meat that perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you..." (Jn. 6:27)

# An Interesting Illustration

To illustrate the point Jesus was making, imagine you are sitting at a table and on that table is a crisp, cool apple and a soft dinner roll. Now imagine you are sitting there on the Day of Atonement. Furthermore, in accordance with God's command, you are fasting. As the time passes you become hungry—very hungry. As you look at the apple, you can almost taste it. It looks absolutely delicious. You

then consider the roll: put a little butter on it, and it would give such great pleasure. At this point you consider your hunger. You haven't had food or water for nearly a day. What could God possibly want you to learn from such "torture?" Well, here is the lesson.

If you were to leave these pieces of food out on that table, after a few days, the apple would begin to soften, and the bread would become hard (stale). After a few more days, the apple would begin to rot, while the bread would begin to mold. Furthermore, if these two pieces of food were left on that table long enough, they would start to decompose, and eventually, they would become nothing but dust.

The point to this illustration is this: no matter how great the nutrients in the apple or the roll, they will only sustain you for a little while. Furthermore, there is no physical meal on earth that will protect man from death. No matter how healthy our diet, eventually, we will die.

Now imagine something else on that table. It's a Bible, perhaps dusty and unread. But what possible benefit could a Bible have to someone so hungry? The answer is: more than you could possibly imagine, for within that book resides food that engenders life. That food is God's word. God's word possesses life-sustaining properties that are so powerful, those who partake of them will actually live forever. The point here is that the words in your Bible are eternal. Jesus said as much.

"Heaven and earth will pass away but My words shall not pass away." (Mt. 24:35)

The great prophet Isaiah once declared that God's word is everlasting. It possesses qualities that cannot "wither" or "fade." Here is how he expressed this wisdom.

"The grass withers, the flower fades: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." (Isa. 40:8)

# Why Do God's People Fast on Atonement?

God's people fast on the Day of Atonement because by doing so, they acknowledge that the true Source of nourishment for those destined to be in God's Kingdom is not bread, but rather the Bread of Life. This was the challenge to Adam and Eve in the garden. They failed. It was the challenge to Jesus Christ in the wilderness. He succeeded. And it is the challenge to every true believer today. When God's people say, "No!" to the physical, they are saying, "Yes!" to the spiritual. They are saying, "Yes!" to the tree of life.

# Victory Declared

Throughout His life, Jesus was well aware of the immense destructiveness Satan possessed. He also knew that this evil being must be deposed as the god of this world. When the Messiah met this master of evil in the wilderness, He would lay to rest any doubt as to who the real King was. His great victory over the devil set in motion events that would culminate with God's Kingdom being restored and Satan being removed.

The gospel of John indicates that during the final hours of His life, Jesus offered a pronouncement regarding the ultimate fate of Satan the devil. As He and His disciples walked toward the garden of Gethsemanae shortly before His arrest, trial and crucifixion, Jesus explained to these men that His departure would enable Him to dispatch God's Holy Spirit to them. Jesus then offered words of great consolation and hope. He explained what it all meant.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." (Jn. 16:7-11)

The Greek word for "judgment" used in this passage is *krino*. Literally translated this word means: "to condemn," "to sentence," and "to avenge." When Jesus spoke of Satan's judgment, He was declaring

that this great architect of evil was ruling the earth on borrowed time. He was now a "marked man," and his ultimate Destiny would be to spend eternity in a desolate place, a place where there is no hope.

# A Final Thought

Six thousand years ago, in the fall of the year and very possibly on the Day of Atonement the great adversary, Satan the devil, deceived man into rejecting God's will, and as a result, brought death on all mankind. Two thousand years ago, in the fall of the year—and very possibly on the Day of Atonement Satan tried to destroy God Himself, but was overcome by the Savior of the world. As a result, the hope of life was restored to all mankind.

When the Messiah squared off with the great enemy of all that is decent, He brought a profound spiritual strength that was fueled by His relationship with His Father. As He stood in that Judean desert He knew that a great battle was about to be waged. At stake was hope versus despair.

# Hope Won

P.S. Hope is a beautiful thing.

# Chapter X A Kingdom Won

But seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:33

Over one hundred years after the nation of Israel was routed by Assyria, the southern kingdom of Judah met with a similar fate. They were defeated and led into captivity by the great Chaldean empire under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. During this captivity, certain young Jews were taken to Babylon to serve at the pleasure of their new king. These men were chosen because of their extraordinary knowledge and wisdom (Dan. 1:3-4). This "Babylonian captivity" is described extensively in the book of Daniel.

#### A Troubling Dream

At one point while these captives were in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had a very troubling dream, causing him considerable distress. To remedy this problem, he summoned the leading magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers throughout his kingdom and demanded that they explain what his dream meant. In order to be sure this religious "brain trust" wasn't simply guessing at their interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar would not disclose what the specific dream was. He actually informed his religious advisors that the dream was "forgotten." However, despite this lapse in memory, he insisted that these wizards conjure it up again and explain its significance. In other words, the king wanted these men to explain what the dream WAS, as well as what the dream MEANT. Failure to accomplish this task would constitute a capital offense and would result in their death.

Suffice it to say, sheer panic filled the heart of virtually every soothsayer in Babylon. If they couldn't figure out what Nebuchadnezzar's dream was, they would find themselves on the wrong end of an execution. These "advisors" knew all too well that their king was not simply issuing an idle threat. He was serious—"dead" serious.



King Nebuchadnezzar

When word of the king's decree reached the Jewish captive Daniel, he appealed to Nebuchadnezzar to be patient and promised that shortly he would tell the king both the dream and its meaning. But how would he do such a thing?

Clearly, this was going to be a daunting task. But Daniel had extraordinary resources, not the least of which was God Almighty. He immediately informed his fellow Jewish exiles of the king's decree, and appealed to them to ask God to reveal his dream, so that they would not suffer at the hands of the royal executioner (Dan. 2:17-18). The scriptures indicate that God heard their prayers and made known the king's secret to Daniel in a dream of his own. Daniel then acknowledged God as the Source of all wisdom as well as the One who reveals every mystery.

"Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: And He changes the times and the seasons: He removes kings, and He sets up kings: He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He reveals the deep and secret things: He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. I thank you, and praise you, O thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and has made known unto me now what we desired of you: for you have made known unto us the king's matter." (Dan. 2:20-23)

Shortly after his prayer, Daniel appeared before Nebuchadnezzar and informed him that only the true God could do what the king had demanded. He then told him that such a God does exist and that He would now make known to Nebuchadnezzar both the dream and its meaning.

At this point, Daniel described the king's dream in striking detail. He began by informing him that the dream was prophetic and revealed a picture of world events that would come to pass down through the centuries.

"As for you, O king, your thoughts came into your mind upon your bed, **what should come to pass hereafter**: and He that reveals secrets makes known to you what shall come to pass." (Dan. 2:29)

Nebuchadnezzar must have been stunned as he listened to Daniel reconstruct every facet of his vision. No detail was omitted, including where the king was when the dream first came to him. The precision of Daniel's words left no doubt that his God was real and that He was aware of man's most private thoughts and intimate secrets.

First, Daniel explained that in this dream, the king saw a great image. When describing this image, Daniel indicated that its head was made of gold, its breast and arms were silver, its belly and

thighs brass, while its legs were made of iron and its feet consisted of part iron and part clay (Dan. 2:32-33). Daniel went on to explain that this image was utterly destroyed by a very unique rock. This rock would then become a great mountain and fill the entire earth. Notice Daniel's words as he describes this part of the vision.

"You saw (the image) till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." (Dan. 2:34-35)

With these words, Daniel informed the king of exactly what he had been dreaming. Imagine how you would feel if someone could tell you your dreams without ever hearing about them. But that is exactly what God did through Daniel. Such power is unimaginable. And Daniel stood as undeniable proof that his God had that power.



The image in the king's dream

# The Meaning of a Dream

Despite the miraculous nature of Daniel's revelation, what would happen next was simply monumental. Daniel would then do something so unbelievable that it continues to mystify many scholars to this very day. He would provide the king with the meaning of his vision.

However, unlike the generic interpretations Nebuchadnezzar must have heard throughout his rule, the one he was about to hear was going to be very specific. He was going to learn from this Jewish captive God's pronouncement regarding how human history would ultimately play out. Furthermore, so accurate was Daniel's interpretation of this dream, that many modern scholars believe it wasn't even given by Daniel at all, but was rather told centuries later and attributed to him. However, Jesus Christ Himself attributed the prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel to the young Jewish captive who spoke to Nebuchadnezzar about his troubling nocturnal vision (Mt. 24:15).

Daniel began by explaining that the image in the king's dream symbolized a series of kingdoms that would rule the earth. The first kingdom, pictured by the head of gold, was Nebuchadnezzar's

Babylon. In Daniel's words, "You are this head of gold" (Dan. 2:38). He then informed the king that other rulers and nations would follow the great Chaldean empire. These kingdoms would be inferior to Babylon, but would nevertheless be great in their own right.

"And after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: for as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things: and as iron breaks all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise." (Dan. 2:39-40)

History reveals that God's word, through Daniel, had pinpoint accuracy. Great world-ruling empires fell just as he had predicted. The Babylonian empire was ultimately conquered by a less sophisticated Medo-Persian kingdom under the leadership of Cyrus the Great and King Darius. However, this kingdom would also fall and eventually be supplanted by the Greco Macedonian empire under the rule of Alexander the Great. His empire would extend its influence to all the known world, just as Daniel had said. Finally, as powerful as Greece was, it too would fade into the pages of history and be replaced by the Roman Empire under the rule of the Caesars.



Octavian [Caesar Augustus]
63 BCE—14 CE

# The Greatest Kingdom

But Daniel wasn't finished interpreting the king's dream. He would now reveal the true identity of the rock that would destroy the last generation of these kingdoms. This generation was symbolized by the feet of this great image. These feet were made of a mixture of iron and clay and were an extension of the Roman Empire. This "resurrected" Roman Empire would exist in the very last days of man's reign on earth and exert tremendous influence throughout the world.

Daniel explained that at this time, God Himself was going to subdue all the kingdoms of the earth and set up a Government that would be presided over by a Great Deliverer. Furthermore, this new Government would never be destroyed.

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was

cut out without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the Great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter..." (Dan. 2:44-45)

The stone that was "cut out without hands," is none other than Jesus Christ. The scriptures reveal that it is He who will subdue all the nations of the earth when He returns to establish God's Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 11:15). At that time, the misery and suffering created by a world that believes it can decide for itself what is "good" and what is "evil" will be replaced by a Government that will judge righteously. This was the message Daniel proclaimed to this "head of gold." However, there was one more thing he would declare.

# "The Dream is Certain"

At the end of his meeting with the king, Daniel made one final pronouncement concerning what he had just spoken regarding Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The words that would follow leave no doubt that Nebuchadnezzar's nocturnal vision was inspired by none other than God Himself—for it would reveal how the Great Creator and Sustainer of the universe would accomplish a critical part of His Plan for man. As Daniel prepared to leave, he indicated that what Nebuchadnezzar had witnessed in the privacy of his bedchamber would play out publicly for all the world to see. He then informed the king that the dream was a one hundred percent certainty. It was going to happen and nothing was going to stop it.

"And the dream is certain and the interpretation thereof is sure." (Dan. 2:45)

Here, God is revealing a profound truth through His servant Daniel. He is declaring that the Great Kingdom He envisioned before the world began is an absolute certainty. No power in the universe can stop it from coming into being. God was not speculating when He inspired Daniel to utter these words. Every syllable reflected His intention concerning how human history would play into His hands.

The Bible reveals that God does not speak idle words. Every one has meaning and strength. The prophet Isaiah understood this truth and expressed this understanding.

"So shall My word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return to Me void (unproductive), but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper (bear fruit) in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isa. 55:11)

The point here is that when God makes a pronouncement, His word goes forth and makes it come to pass. In other words, God's word CANNOT be thwarted. With this in mind, consider the implication of Daniel's declaration. Imagine all the things that would have to come to pass in order for this dream to play out just as Daniel had said. Not only would these great nations have to rise and fall, but Jesus Christ Himself would have to succeed in His mission on earth. He would have to overcome the world and live a sinless life. While man may argue wether Jesus risked failure when He walked the earth as a man, God clearly never considered that as a possibility. His words through Daniel are unqualified: "the dream is CERTAIN and the interpretation thereof is SURE."

## A Great Kingdom

The Kingdom of God that Daniel said would one day fill the whole earth is the central theme in both the Old and New Testaments. It is spoken of prolifically throughout the Bible. In a very real sense, the Bible is a story of man's journey to a world God had envisioned long ago in the vast expanse of eternity. It is the history of a nation called Israel and how that nation will one day touch all the people on earth. The Old Testament describes the physical nation of Israel and its quest for a land of promise. The New Testament describes the spiritual nation of Israel and its pursuit of an eternal realm. Wherever one looks in God's word, the Kingdom is there.

#### The Wonderful World Tomorrow

Today, we live in a world of great suffering. One only has to turn on a television set to see the ravages of man expressing his own moral independence. Societies in all parts of the globe have clearly rejected the Great God of Heaven as the true Source of morality and virtue. As a result, man violates every tenant of decency, and while doing so, he proclaims himself "good."

However, this will not always be the case. The scriptures reveals that a time is coming when a new world will replace the scarred wreckage of the one man has produced. It is then that Jesus Christ will establish a Government that will be above all governments. The prophet Micah described what this world of tomorrow would be like.

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Mic. 4:1-3)

The Bible describes a time when the world will be filled with great peace and prosperity. The prophet Isaiah wrote that "Israel will blossom and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6). He would later write that the earth "will be fat and plenteous" (Isa. 30:23). Imagine such a world!

Today, man battles hunger and despite his best efforts, hunger seems to be gaining the advantage. In the world today, more people die of starvation than perish in war. But that will not always be the case. The Great God of Heaven has promised that the time is coming when hunger will be a distant memory. It will be a time of such abundance that the reaper will not be able to keep pace with the one who plows (Amos 9:13). In this world there will not be one square inch that shall not be able to bring forth fruit. Even "the desert shall blossom like a rose" (Isa. 35:1). Notice the powerful words Isaiah used when describing this world.

"And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons (lizards) where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes." (Isa. 35:7)

#### A Time of Great Health

The wonderful world tomorrow will not simply be a place of immense prosperity and abundance. It will also be the home of health. Imagine a world where vibrant health is the rule and not the exception. That world is soon to be a reality, and you have God's word on it! The time is coming when the ravages of disease that fill our world today will be replaced with strength and vitality. When describing this time, Isaiah said there would be no blindness and all the deaf would hear (Isa. 35:5). Furthermore, the lame would throw down their crutches and actually leap like deer (Isa. 35:6).

In the world today, man is constantly waging war against diseases and plagues that cripple, maim, and kill. There are virtually thousands of hospitals and tens of thousands of physicians. Tragically, however, there are countless millions who suffer from an endless stream of pandemics that now wreak havoc on man's health and his hope. But once again, this will not always be the case. The time is coming when a Great Physician will rule as King (Mk. 2:17). At that time, all who suffer will be healed.

#### The Knowledge of God Will Proliferate

This is only a small glimpse of a Wonderful Kingdom that will one day fill the earth. It will be governed by the most moral Being in existence. The Great King who will preside over this Government will nurture and sustain it in righteousness, and His influence will be felt everywhere. The Bible reveals that in this Kingdom, the knowledge of the true God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). As a result of God's presence, optimism and hope will stretch from one end of the earth to the

other. There will be no more anguish, and the Bible even promises that "sorrow and sighing" shall actually take flight ("flee away" Isa. 35:10).

#### Wild Beasts Will Be Tame

The presence of peace and harmony under the leadership of the King of kings will be so pervasive, it will even touch the animal world. The prophet Isaiah captured this truth with words that may only seem like a fantasy today.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the cockatrice' den." (Isa. 9:6-8)



God's Great Kingdom described by the prophets of old is the same everlasting Kingdom Daniel revealed to Nebuchadnezzar over twenty-five centuries ago. It will begin with a great physical realm and grow into an incorruptible spiritual Kingdom that will last forever. And as distant as this Kingdom was to Daniel's generation, it may seem even more distant to the generation of today.

# Subduing the Nations

With this in mind, how will God establish such a Kingdom? How will He "break in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold" as Daniel declared He would do, so very long ago (Dan. 2:44-45)? In other words, how will God conquer the great governments that rule the world today, and replace them with His Everlasting Kingdom?

The answer to this question is powerfully proclaimed in the pages of your Bible. It describes a point in time in which God will correct the nations—and He won't be employing His psychotherapy skills when He does. His judgment will be direct and very forceful. It won't contain one ounce of ambiguity. When it comes, man will know that its Bearer means business.

#### A Great Warning

During the final week of His life on earth, Jesus was approached by His disciples and asked a question regarding "the end of the world." They did this because they were all too familiar with the numerous prophecies describing the victorious return of the Messiah and the establishment of God's

Kingdom on the earth—a Kingdom that Jesus also spoke of so frequently. These men were clearly anxious for that Kingdom to come. There was great anticipation in their words. Notice what they said.

"And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Mt. 24:3)

#### A Great King Answers

Jesus responded by explaining to these founding fathers of the New Testament Church that certain events would have to take place prior to His return. As he described the last chapter of man's rule on this planet, Jesus painted a picture that has a striking resemblance to the world of today. Included in this picture is a proliferation of wars, famines, diseases, and even natural disasters. Additionally, Jesus indicated that there would even be a great religious deception perpetrated by those who actually asserted a loyalty to Him (Mt. 24:5). Furthermore, He declared that because God's way would become so abhorrent to mankind, His end-time Church would suffer horrible persecution and even death (v. 9).

# The Last Days

The words Jesus spoke to His disciples were bleak indeed. This is because He knew that before a Kingdom of great hope could be restored to earth, mankind would have to witness history's darkest moment—one that would contain unspeakable depravity and lawlessness. Jesus also knew that Satan would play an active role in man's defiance against his Creator. At this time, the devil would influence governments and the leaders who preside over them.

The Bible declares that man will be so far from God in the last days that sin will literally fill the earth. Jesus characterized this time as being similar to the days of Noah (Mt. 24:37-39), and the scriptures state that at that time, man's thoughts were "only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). When writing to the evangelist Timothy, the apostle Paul characterized the end time this way.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good." (2Tim. 3:1-4)

According to the sacred writings every despicable act imaginable will define our world during the last days. Furthermore, the level of violence around the world will be so great that God will have to intervene in order to save the planet from total annihilation (Mt. 24:22). When He does, He will not come as an agent of peace, but rather as the Commander of a great army.

# God is Not a Pacifist

At this point, it is important to understand that God is NOT a pacifist. He is fully capable of waging war under the appropriate circumstances. During the last hours of His life, Jesus even informed Pontus Pilate that His servants were prepared to fight on His behalf, when those circumstances presented themselves (Jn. 18:36). The Messiah was not simply advancing a hypothetical situation when He spoke these words. His end-time return to earth will graphically bear this out.

The Bible reveals that the time is coming when great voices in heaven will proclaim: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). At this moment, a powerful army under the leadership of the Savior of the world will prepare to make war with the nations. When that time comes, man will witness firsthand the compelling force God will use to conquer this world. When Daniel spoke to Nebuchadnezzar about a "rock" breaking in pieces all the great kingdoms of the earth, he wasn't using hyperbole. This is exactly what that "rock" is going to do. In truth it will utterly destroy the nations—and God's word provides striking proof of this fact.

#### The Day of the Lord

The Bible speaks of a time when great distress will come upon the earth. This time is called "the Day of the Lord" as well as "the Day of God's wrath." This period represents the last year of man's reign on this planet. It will be a time when man will experience firsthand how serious God is about defiance to Him and His law. The prophet Joel characterized this period as a time of such devastation that few would survive.

"And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: he is strong that executes his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and **who can abide it?"** (Joel 2:11)

Joel was not the only one to describe "the Day of the Lord" in such terms. The apostle John expressed it this way.

"For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17)

John also stated that this would be a time when even the mightiest men on earth would be consumed with fear.

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains." (Rev. 6:15-16; Isa. 2:19)

Imagine the level of terror that would have to beset battle-tested soldiers (mighty men), causing them to take flight into the mountains to save themselves. But that day will come, and it will only get worse. The scriptures reveal that during this time, the world will be so filled with terror that mankind will actually seek death, but death will be denied them.

"And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them." (Rev. 9:6)

The Day of the Lord will be a time when no one on earth without God's protection will be able to escape. There will be no place to hide, nor will man be able to buy his way out of the distress that will come upon him.

"Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land." (Zeph. 1:18)

The prophet Isaiah described the overwhelming strength of God's judgment on a world totally defiant to Him. His words are compelling and leave no doubt as to how serious the ALMIGHTY is about the state of a world so totally immersed in evil.

"For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." (Isa. 66:15-16)

The prophet Hosea referred to this time as "the day of rebuke" (Hos. 5:9). During it, God will chastise His people with great strength. When describing this correction, the ALMIGHTY says, "I will pour out My wrath upon them like water" (verse 10).

The magnitude of God's judgment on a rebellious planet is inconceivable but real. It is a time that will see seven trumpet plagues unleashed with unimaginable force and conclude with seven vial plagues, the power of which will make absolutely clear that God is in charge of His creation.

It Begins with Silence

The Bible goes into considerable detail when describing this period called the "Day of the Lord." The eighth chapter of the book of Revelation indicates that it begins with silence.

"And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." (Rev. 8:1)

The scriptures do not say why this silence takes place. However, it is possible that God may be reflecting on what He is about to do. At this point, it is important to understand that He is a Being of Supreme love and mercy, and the action He is about to take must cause Him great sadness. However, the scriptures also reveal that there is a time when the Creator will delay no more His judgment on man. Notice what the apostle John was inspired to write when recording this TRUTH.

"And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that **there should be time no longer**: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." (Rev. 10:5-7)

At one point during this year of judgment, a massive military attack and subsequent counterattack will take place involving a 200 million man infantry (Rev. 9:15-16). To put this number in perspective, it is over 150 times greater than the entire military machine of the United States. This massive conflict will bring greater death and destruction than any war in human history. The casualties will number in the billions!

# Seven Trumpet Plagues

The Bible reveals that during "the Day of the Lord," God will pour out seven trumpet plagues. Each of these plagues will be delivered by a great angelic being charged by the ALMIGHTY to administer His judgment on the earth. This judgment will span a period of one year.

Additionally, this period in prophetic history is pictured by the fourth of God's seven annual holy days, the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24). This holy day takes place in the fall and precedes the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. Furthermore, it is very possible that the precise timing of this year of judgment will directly coincide with this feast.

# The Last Trump

The Bible reveals that at the sound of the seventh and last trump a series of new plagues is poured out of seven vials by seven angels and will be so devastating that their duration will be very short.

# When is this last Trump Sounded?

Although the most prevailing view concerning the precise timing of this particular trump is that it occurs on *Rosh Hashanah* (the feast of trumpets), a compelling case may be made that it actually occurs on a different Holy Day altogether—Pentecost. This view is based on the understanding that each of God's annual High Days is announced with a trumpet (Shofar) blast and because the Day of the Lord (the final year of man's reign on earth) begins on Trumpets it would stand to reason that it would include a trumpet blast (first trump) announcing it's arrival and with it a series of seven successive plagues inflicted on a defiant world—and corresponding plague. The second blast would announce the Day of Atonement—with the third blown on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. The fourth would be sounded on the eigth day of that feast. The next day to occur would take place in the spring during the time of the Passover and the days of Unleavened bread, a festival lasting seven days with the first and seventh day designated by God as "Holy Convocations" announced with the sound of the fifth and sixth trumpet. We now come to the seventh Holy day and the LAST TRUMP—Pentecost.

However, this last trump also initiates a great moment in God's Plan for man. The scriptures reveal that at the precise moment it is sounded, a special community of believers will experience a dramatic change. They will literally be born into God's Family. At that time, they will no longer be made of corruptible matter, but rather of incorruptible spirit. Notice what the apostle Paul writes concerning this first generation of God's eternal Family.

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1Cor. 15:51-52)

These words express an extraordinary hope that has been shared by all of God's people down through the ages. They describe the precise moment when the first phase of God's saints will enter into another realm. They will be born into a spiritual dimension where death has no power. Those who are a part of this "first resurrection" have come to a point when they no longer desire to be their own moral authority. These "firstfruits" have striven to reject the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and have instead embraced the tree of life.

Paul also described what would happen to those who were a part of this resurrection to the Church at Thessalonica. He indicated that they will share eternity with Jesus Christ.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1Th. 4:15-17)

Here, Paul is stating that when Jesus Christ returns, the firstfruits of God's Family will be changed into spirit and meet Him in the air. But what will they do when they meet Him? Furthermore, what happens to those who are not changed? What about the millions of people who are left behind?

The Bible identifies several key events that will take place once the last trump is sounded. First, there will be the resurrection of the saints who have died throughout history. Immediately after that, God's people who are alive at this time will be changed and join their resurrected brothers and sisters in the clouds (1Th. 4:16-17). Once this takes place, seven last plagues are dispensed by angels carrying seven vials (Rev. 16). These plagues are often referred to as "vial plagues," and are not to be confused with the "trumpet plagues" which begin at the start of the "Day of the Lord" (Rev. 8 and 9). As was mentioned earlier, these vial plagues encompass a very short period of time. At the conclusion of these plagues, Jesus Christ will lead an invasion of earth and subdue the nations.

But what will Jesus and the saints do while these "vial plagues" are being poured out upon the earth? The answer is extraordinary and reflects another defining moment in history.

# The Marriage of the Lamb

The Bible reveals that after the resurrection of the saints – but prior to an invasion of earth – Jesus Christ will be the groom in a great wedding. Although the scriptures do not identify the location of this wedding, it is very likely that this spectacular event will take place at the home of God the Father in the third heaven. Additionally, the bride of Christ is identified as His Church and is comprised of the community of believers who were resurrected at the last trump.

It is hard to imagine an event possessing greater beauty and joy than the marriage of God's Son and His Church. Additionally, it is clear that to attend such an event is a distinction of unimaginable honor. The splendor and majesty of this wedding is captured in part in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Revelation.

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he said unto me, "Write, 'Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said unto me, "These are the true sayings of God." (Rev. 19:6-9)

Throughout the scriptures, the relationship between Jesus and His Church is characterized as that of a groom and His bride. Even John the Baptist saw Jesus as a bridegroom and rejoiced at that fact.

He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. (Jn. 3:29)

The apostle Paul also understood the significance of this relationship and used it to encourage God's people. When writing to the Church at Ephesus, Paul exhorted husbands and wives to use the love and devotion of Christ and His Church as a model for their marriages.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:22-27)

Today, these words have been rejected by the vast majority of people in the western world. To them they smack at male dominated sexism and violate every tenant of equality. But Paul saw it much differently. Under the inspiration of the holy spirit, he would go on to say that the institution of marriage, which was created at the very beginning (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:4-6) was designed to picture a divine relationship between Christ and His Church. As you read these words ask yourself: who should be the head of Jesus' marriage?

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." (Eph. 5:32)

Paul's words make it clear that marriage is a divine institution with profound significance. With this in mind, it should be easy to understand why Jesus once defended marriage with the words: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt. 19:6). Clearly, Jesus saw the connection between marriage and the relationship He would ultimately enjoy with His Church. The great wedding described in the book of Revelation which takes place shortly after the resurrection of the saints stands as one of the greatest moments in the history of the universe. But there is more...

# A Great King Returns

The scriptures reveal that after the marriage of the Lamb, Jesus Christ prepares to return to the earth with power and glory. At this time, the heaven opens, revealing the Lamb of God sitting on a white horse (Rev. 19:11). Although He is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), He is now returning to earth as the Commander of a GREAT ARMY.

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse; and He That sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God." (Rev. 19:11-13)

The Bible reveals that when Jesus returns in power and great glory, He will not be alone. The book of Revelation indicates that He will be accompanied by a powerful army clothed in fine linen, clean and white. This army will also be riding on white horses and will follow the King of kings as He seizes control of the earth. The scriptures indicate that this conquering army consists of His resurrected saints (Jude 14) as well as a contingent of angels (Mt. 25:31). Notice what this army prepares to do under the leadership of the Messiah. Clearly, they are totally focused on VICTORY.

"And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Rev. 19:14-16)

As Jesus and His saints descend, the great armies of the earth prepare to fight against them. These defiant troops are influenced by a great political leader known as the "beast," and an apostate religious figure, known as the "false prophet." For several years these two men have been empowered by Satan himself (Rev.13:4) to destroy God's Plan for man.

During their rule, they deceive the vast majority of people on earth into worshiping them and the system (both religious and civil) they espouse. Their contempt for God will be so great, they will actually make war with His people on earth (Rev. 13:7) and even prevail against them (Dan. 7:21). But now it is the saint's turn—and these children of God will return with the Messiah to seize a kingdom, just as Daniel said they would (Dan. 7:18).

When Jesus and those servants accompanying Him descend upon the earth, the strength they will bring is overwhelming. The book of Zechariah indicates that Jesus will stand on the Mount of Olives and the mount will literally break apart (Zech. 14:4). At this point, a great battle ensues. However, it will be the most one-sided conflict in history.

Virtually all the prophecies describing this battle declare that every facet of it is nothing short of a rout. By all accounts, the entire earth is subdued in a matter of days. The apostle John describes this invasion of earth by its rightful OWNER this way:

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the Great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great." And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him That sat on the horse, and against His army." (Rev. 19:17-19)

At this point, Satan's two greatest agents on earth are removed and destroyed. Their grip on a God-rejecting world is now over. In a very real sense, all the power and influence they exerted over the earth is going to go up in flames, LITERALLY!

"And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." (Rev. 19:20-21)

Jesus Christ has now subdued the nations, but before He can establish His millennial Kingdom, one thing remains. Furthermore, by all indications, it will take place on the Day of Atonement.

# Satan is Bound

The twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation begins with John recording an event in which an angel comes down from heaven with a special key and a great chain. With these items, the angel lays

hold of Satan and binds him up. He then casts this prince of demons into a bottomless pit where he will be restrained and cannot influence mankind.

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season." (Rev. 20:1-3)

# A New Hope

In the previous chapter you were asked to imagine a world where there is no hope. That world is the very one Satan the devil has ruled for several millennia. But now things are different. This great enemy is imprisoned in an abyss. He is cut off from the human family he has tried to destroy. The hopelessness he spent a lifetime creating is now gone. Imagine that! Imagine a world where the architect of evil and misery has been removed. Imagine a world where hope has been restored, a world where hope is everywhere.

Think for a moment what the world would be like without the devil. His influence on mankind has been so overwhelming that it has touched every human being in history. Jesus Christ Himself bears the scars of Satan's impact on the human family. Consider just some of the "accomplishments" the Bible attributes to this diabolical demon. For example: The scriptures declare that Satan has deceived the whole world (Rev. 12:9). God's word also certifies that he is responsible for snatching the word from hearers (Mt. 13:19), sowing tares among the wheat (Mt. 13:38), and working in disobedience (Eph. 2:2). He has been called a deceiver and a perverter of scripture. The apostle Paul labeled Satan as the one responsible for blinding the minds of unbelievers (2Cor. 4:4).

While in the Garden of Eden, he seduced Adam and Eve to reject God's Moral Authority over their lives (Gen. 3:1-20). Additionally, he moved David to number Israel (1Chr. 21:1) and caused Paul's thorn in the flesh (2Cor. 12:7).

This once-beautiful archangel became so consumed with himself that he actually thought his wisdom was greater than that of God's. As a result, he waged a rebellion so filled with hate that his entire character became immersed in evil. The apostle John once called Satan a murderer and a liar (Jn. 8:44) and his influence on society throughout history has been so devastating that at the end of man's reign on earth, the evil and violence he has spread will be so horrible that God will have to intervene, or man will literally destroy himself (Mt. 24:22).

Satan, who is called the god of this world (2Cor. 4:4) and the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), has done everything he can to destroy God's Plan for mankind. He put betrayal in the heart of Judas Iscariot (Jn. 13:2), and will one day give power to a God-rejecting beast and a false prophet (Rev. 13:4).

This evil creature has sought to destroy everything that shows God as merciful and just, and he has perverted society into actually rejecting its Creator and Sustainer. The apostle Peter called Satan the great adversary and compared him to a roaring lion (1Pet. 5:8). The apostle Paul indicated that he fashions himself as an angel of light (2Cor. 11:14). As a result, man has been deceived from the beginning, and that deception has not let up for six thousand years of human history. Now imagine a world WITHOUT such an adversary.

The words recorded by John in Revelation 20, which describe Satan being cast into a bottomless pit, stand as one of the most powerful declarations of hope ever uttered. The day will come when the great enemy who has enslaved this world with every imaginable evil will be removed, and a new King will come who will restore a Government driven by mercy, judgment, and faith. Today, that Kingdom is the hope of not only every believer, but of every non-believer as well, even though they do not know it yet.

## A Final Thought

At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, He gave what is commonly referred to as the "Sermon on the Mount." The theme of this message is God's Kingdom. At the beginning of this sermon, Jesus explains how to enter into and flourish in this Kingdom. He identified its blessings and the specific actions it will take to be the recipient of those blessings. Later, He identified potential threats that could prevent a person from becoming one of its citizens. He even warns those who claim to be doing His work that they could find themselves on the wrong end of His judgment if they fail to honor His law (Mt. 7:21-23).

At one point, Jesus even exhorts His followers to dedicate all of their energies in the pursuit of this great Realm—one that will be presided over by the Holy One of Israel. Jesus said, "...seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33).

God's Kingdom should be the number one priority of all believers. It certainly was the number one priority of Jesus Christ and His Father. Furthermore, it continues to be so to this very day. Virtually every promise in the Bible points toward God's Kingdom and its Great King. The question we should ask ourselves is: How committed are we to it?

When Daniel appeared before Nebuchadnezzar and revealed the meaning of a dream that so vexed the king, he was a captive slave. However, the instant he spoke, he became an Ambassador of the greatest Government in history. That Government represents the fulfilled promise of the King of the universe—a promise that was envisioned before the world even existed.

The Great God of hope has never lost sight of His Kingdom. He knows what it will require to bring it into being, and He is totally prepared to pay its price. Every person who considers himself a true believer should look to that Kingdom with great hope and remember what its King once revealed through Daniel so very long ago:

"The dream is certain and the interpretation thereof is sure."

Chapter XI
A Destiny Fulfilled

# Precious in the site of the Lord is the death of His saints.

Psalm 116:15

One of the greatest champions of faith in all the Bible was a man named Abraham. Most practicing Jews identify more with him than any other character in the scriptures, even more than Moses or Elijah.

Abraham, whose name was originally Abram, lived approximately four hundred years after Noah's ark came to rest on Mount Ararat. He grew up in Mesopotamia, in a place called Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:31). Ur was located near the mouth of the Euphrates river in the Persian gulf. According to archaeological records, this city was immensely pagan, and immersed itself in the worship of idols. The Bible indicates that the influence of idolatry in this region was so pervasive that even Abraham's family was affected. According to the book of Joshua, Abraham's father Terah "served other gods" (Jos. 24:2).

The scriptures indicate that Terah would eventually move his family from Ur to a place called Haran where he would die (Gen. 11:31). Abraham would remain in Haran until he was seventy-five years old. At that time something would take place that would change his life forever.

# A Call that Changed Eternity

The book of Genesis indicates that during this time, God spoke to Abraham and instructed him to leave his father's house and go to a land that he did not know. However, God also promised to guide him on this journey and show him a very special place that would ultimately be a home to him and his descendants forever. Additionally, God informed this patriarch that if he honored these instructions, a magnificent Destiny would be fulfilled through him. The Great Creator actually identified seven specific blessings that would come to Abraham and his descendants if he obeyed.

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, 'Get thee out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you: And (1) I will make you a great nation, (2) and I will bless you, (3) and make your name great; (4) and you shall be a blessing: (5) And I will bless them that bless you, (6) and curse them that curse you: (7) and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3)

The scriptures reveal that Abraham left his father's house just as he was told and began a journey that would change human history. His pilgrimage was long and would even include a stop in Egypt but would eventually take him to the land of Canaan. There, on a high mountain, God instructed him to look out in every direction for as far as the eye could see. God then told this great champion of faith that everything he beheld was going to belong to him and his children forever (Gen. 13:14-15). God also promised Abraham that his descendants would be so prolific they couldn't even be numbered; they would be like the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16). Later this promise would be repeated, only this time God would declare that Abraham's seed would be like the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5). Consider the scope of that promise in light of what was learned about the size of the universe in the Introduction of this book.

## A Father of Kings

Throughout his life as a sojourner, Abraham must have reflected often on the immense blessings his Maker had promised him. However, few could match the one God would make nearly twenty-five years after he began his journey. It was then that God changed his name from Abram to Abraham. This change signified that he would be the father of nations, and that a great line of kings would descend from him. Notice the extraordinary words the ETERNAL spoke when establishing His covenant with this man of faith:



The March of Abraham

by József Molnár, 19th century The Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, 'I am the Almighty GOD; walk before Me, and be you perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." And 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. Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you. And I will make you exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you..." And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you. And I will give unto you, and to your seed after you, the land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Gen. 17:1-8)

God's promises to Abraham were truly remarkable. From the time He first spoke to him in Haran, He laid out monumental blessings that would befall this patriarch if he surrendered to his Creator as the Great Moral Authority. Consider what God said Abraham could look forward to:

- 1) He would be a great nation (Gen. 12:2).
- 2) All the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3).
- 3) His seed would be given the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:6-7).
- 4) They would possess that land forever (Gen. 13:14-15).
- 5) His descendants would number as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16) and
- 6) As the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5).
- 7) He would be exceedingly fruitful (Gen. 17:6).
- 8) Nations would come out of him (Gen. 17:6).
- 9) Kings would come out of him (Gen. 17:6).
- 10) And the Great Creator of all that exists would be his God and his children's God forever (Gen. 17:8).

It is hard to imagine that a man could be offered anything possessing greater value than the promises the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY had given Abraham. Essentially, God was telling this father of the faithful that His Plan for mankind would be inextricably linked to him. This was because Abraham

continued to believe and trust in the true God, despite the world around him—a world that had rejected its Creator since the beginning.

The scriptures reveal that Abraham's faith and obedience paved the way for Jesus Christ to come into the world and redeem mankind from the consequences of sin (Gal. 3:6-16). His place in God's Plan is truly significant. It was made that way because of the humble attitude he possessed. Abraham trusted in God to know more than he knew. It is actually a very simple formula for righteousness. Unfortunately, it is almost never applied by mankind. But Abraham did apply it because God's wisdom and virtue was real to him. As a result, Abraham declared his faith in the steps he took; steps guided by none other than his Creator.

#### A Great Lesson

The story of Abraham stands as a great lesson to all who will ultimately be born into God's Family. In a very real sense, it is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. The scriptures declare that man must come out of a world that rejects its Creator. Once this is done, he must allow the true God to guide his moral path. In the case of Abraham, God told him to come out of a place where idolatry and self-will defined his world, and to follow Him.

The Bible also reveals that similar instructions have been given by the Great Creator down through the ages. For example, God told Moses and the children of Israel to come out of Egypt where idolatry and self-will defined their world, and to follow Him. Furthermore, God tells every believer today to come out of Babylon, where idolatry and self-will define this present age, and to follow Him (Rev. 18:4).

In a very real sense, every admonition in the scriptures regarding God's desire for mankind to forsake this world is an appeal for His human family to reject the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree defines man's world, a world that goes totally contrary to God and His way. That world is based on the premise that man can decide for himself what is "good" and what is "evil." As a result of this thinking, man has concocted an endless array of religions, ideologies, and philosophies, each of which has only brought war, strife and oppression to the human experience.

Tragically, man is convinced that eventually he will get it right on his own. He truly believes he can make his world better using nothing more than his own wisdom. All he has to do is apply his intellectual skills and "good judgment" and everything will work out. However, God knows where this thinking will end because He knows where it began. Mankind has been convinced that he can decide for himself what is "good" and what is "evil" since the day he called the Garden of Eden his home. Tragically, he can't.

# Why Come out of Babylon?

Throughout the Bible, God declares that man left to his own moral devices will only create a world of pain and anguish (Pro. 14:12). For this reason, He has appealed to man to turn back to Him. This is because God knows the true source of happiness and desires that His children experience the joy that can only come from obeying their Creator.

The Great Governor of the universe also knows how contaminated this world is. He watched as Adam and Eve rejected Him as the guiding moral presence in their lives. Furthermore, He saw how that decision wrecked their world. Additionally, He beheld the depravity that filled the earth during the days of Noah. He knew that the violence and brutality that defined that society had its roots in man believing he could be his own moral judge.

God has been an eye witness to every second of human failure, and He knows the cause behind it. The world man has built is based on the rejection of everything God stands for. And while our planet is filled with so much suffering today, mankind continues to point an accusing finger at anyone but himself as the cause of that suffering. Tragically, humanity has been a willing accomplice to the one who

orchestrated the evil that has defined our world down through the ages. That one is none other than Satan the devil.

With this in mind, God knows all too well that man's ways don't work. Furthermore, He knows that the only way man can escape this world's influence is to consciously reject the belief that he can be his own moral judge. To do that, man must reject the Babylon he is in, and instead, honor the true source of hope. That source is God and a different TREE.

For this reason, God not only instructs His people to take flight from this world's moral guidance, but He also instructs them to move toward a place that He will make, a place where He is the Architect of morality. This was the admonition to Abraham some four thousand years ago. It was the admonition to the children of Israel some thirty-five hundred years ago. And it continues to be the admonition to God's people today. What the ETERNAL was telling Abraham was that he must leave man's world behind, and follow Him to a new world that lies ahead, a world that God himself would build.

But how will God build this World to Come? What will he do first after He subdues the nations? Finally, how will this Great Kingdom affect man's ultimate Destiny—a Destiny He promised to Abraham? The answers to these questions are truly remarkable and reveal a great hope to believer and non-believer alike

# The Building of a Kingdom

The twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation states that once Satan is bound and placed in a bottomless pit, God's millennial Kingdom, under the rule of Jesus Christ and the saints, will begin. The apostle John described this time by indicating that those who were martyred as well as those who had not worshiped the "beast" would hold positions of great distinction and authority.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (Rev. 20:4)

The scriptures reveal that during this millennial reign, the resurrected saints will serve as kings and priests under Jesus Christ (Rev. 5:10). As such, they will be responsible for the administration of God's Government on earth. By all indications, their number is not great. According to the book of Jude, this leadership team can be measured in the tens of thousands (Jude 14). Although this number may seem substantial, it is infinitesimally small when compared to the multiple billions who have lived since the beginning.

However, God has a history of starting small (Dt. 7:7) and apparently it is no different here. Therefore, those who are resurrected at the last trump will represent only a tiny fraction of all mankind. These saints are the ones who were called by God during this physical life. Furthermore, they responded to that call and yielded to His way. They rejected the ways of this world and accepted God as the true Moral Authority of the universe.

Counted among these saints are people like Moses and Elijah, David and Samuel, Noah, Enoch and Abel, and of course, Abraham. Additionally, God's prophets and apostles, as well as His true servants down through the ages, will hold positions of great responsibility in this Kingdom. Furthermore, thousands of unnamed champions of faith will also serve at the pleasure of the King of kings when His Government is established. Each of these saints will represent a part of the greatest management team in history. This is because they will be totally connected to the greatest Moral Being in existence.

In the scriptures, this leadership team is revealed as a first harvest. This small harvest is pictured by the Day of Pentecost. Like all of God's holy days, Pentecost tells a remarkable story regarding how the Master Architect of all that exists will accomplish His Plan for mankind. This day reveals how God will

begin to call mankind into His eternal Family. He will start with a small community of faithful. But He most certainly will not end there.

## Who Do They Rule?

At this point, one may wonder who these resurrected saints govern. After all, if they are going to be kings and priests in God's millennial Kingdom as the scriptures declare (Rev. 5:10), then there certainly must be subjects for them to govern. But who are these subjects?

The Bible indicates that when Jesus Christ returns to subdue the nations, there will be survivors. It is true that the casualties will be great, but not everyone will die. God's word indicates that there will be physical human beings from around the world who live into His great millennial Kingdom.

During this time these survivors will be eye witnesses to an enduring peace that will eventually cover the earth. Furthermore, although these survivors represent only a fraction of those living in the last days, their number may be significant, perhaps in the hundreds of millions. These physical citizens are those whom God, with the aid of His saints, will work with first in His new earthly Kingdom. His purpose will be to show them what it would be like to have a genuine God-King as their leader.

By all indications, these physical citizens will not know the true God at the beginning of His Kingdom, although they may think they do. However, as this Kingdom continues to touch its people, its subjects will come to understand that many of the things they held to be true were not true at all. As a result of this new understanding, they will learn to reject the world of their past and to embrace a Kingdom prepared for their future. These citizens will begin to honor God and will receive His blessings for it. Here, God's Plan for man continues and takes another significant step.

With this in mind, what will God's servant leaders do first to introduce these citizens to God's way? What will be the number one priority of these kings and priests? The Bible actually provides a very specific answer to this question. Ironically, it may be the last thing most professing Christians would think God would place at the top of His list. However, history, as well as God's very nature, reveal it is exactly what He will do. To better comprehend this first step, we must understand how God worked with an ancient people thousands of years ago.

## A Lesson from Israel

There are numerous lessons that can be gleaned from the history of ancient Israel. God chose these people not because of their greatness or wisdom, but rather because of His greatness and wisdom. The infinite Creator and Sustainer of all that exists selected the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to reveal His Plan for mankind and to show how He would accomplish a magnificent Destiny for His human family.

The story of Israel also reveals a great deal concerning how God will establish His millennial Kingdom on earth. In reality, Israel's deliverance out of bondage in Egypt and their ultimate entrance into the land of Canaan represents a type of the deliverance God's people will experience at the end time, and their entrance into His Kingdom. Consider the similarities between ancient Israel then and spiritual Israel at the end of the world.

First, the Egyptian empire in which the Israelites were enslaved was filled with superstition and myth. Egypt rejected the true God and even persecuted His people. The scriptures reveal that this will happen again to God's children in the last days (Mt. 24:9-10). At that time, they will live in a world filled with false ideas about the Creator and his Plan. Once again, God's people will be targeted by a world gone mad. Society will even seek to kill them.

Secondly, God used supernatural power through ten plagues when dealing with Pharaoh and his realm. The scriptures indicate that despite these plagues, Pharaoh's heart was hardened against God. He

even dispatched an army to pursue the Israelites during their Exodus. However, that army was swallowed up by the Red Sea (Ex. 14:22-28).



A Depiction of the Red Sea God's deliverance of Israel out of the hands of Egypt

At the time of the end, God will once again deliver His judgment to a rebellious world through a series of trumpet and vial plagues. And once again, the world will stand defiant. The scriptures even indicate that God's people will be pursued by a great flood (possibly an army) bent on destroying them. However, God will intervene once again, and the flood will be swallowed up by the earth (Rev. 12:13-16).

Finally, the ancient Israelites were ultimately led to a place appointed by God Himself. This place was a land where God's Government would be administered and His people could flourish. The Bible states that this too will happen when Jesus Christ returns, only this time, God's Kingdom will fill the whole earth.

#### Canaan and the Kingdom

Clearly, the land of Canaan, where Israel ultimately settled, was a type of God's Kingdom. The Great Creator provided it for two reasons. First, it fulfilled a promise He made to Abraham some five hundred years earlier. However, there was another reason. God raised up Israel to reside in Canaan so that it could be an example to all other nations. Israel was to show the world what it would be like to have God as its Moral Authority. They were to live by His laws, and they would be the recipient of His blessings. Notice what Moses told the Israelites when preparing them to enter into their new land.

"Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who has God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Dt. 4:5-8)

Here, God was revealing to His people that they were to be an example to all the world of how to live. They were to be a city on a hill that could be seen by all other cities. They were to be the model of a perfect Government. As such, they would point the way for all other people to go.

Regrettably, Israel failed in this calling. They did so because they fell into the same trap that has ensnared mankind since "day one." They thought they could decide for themselves what was right and what was wrong, what was just and what was unjust, what was "good" and what was "evil." Once again, the result was misery.

This nation that had so much would eventually lose it all because they rejected God's wisdom and instead relied on their own. Because of this rebellion, the descendants of Israel would be conquered by their enemies and go into a horrible captivity.

But what does Israel going into the land of Canaan and ultimately rejecting God have to do with the beginning of the millennium. The answer: PLENTY!

# First Things First

As the Israelites prepared to enter into Canaan, God gave them specific instructions concerning what to do first. These descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to destroy every vestige of paganism in the land. God told them that nothing was to be spared. Notice the severity of His words.

"Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it be for a snare in the midst of you: But you shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For you shall worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (Ex. 34:12-14)

When God told the Israelites to destroy the idols that filled the land of Canaan, he wasn't being vague. His words were clear and direct. This is because God knows the effects of man-made religions. THEY NEVER WORK!!! Furthermore, they are the source of all human suffering. This may be hard to believe, but religion is the cause of man's problems, not the solution. The belief that man can somehow decide for himself how he will worship his Creator is a view that is totally foreign to God's word. Man may embrace this idea, but God HATES IT! Notice the warning He gives His people regarding capitulating with false religions.

"Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (Dt. 12:30-32)

Here, God is declaring that His people are not to integrate pagan practices into the worship of the true God. This is because He HATES false religions. He knows what they have done to His truth and how they have mocked His Plan. Therefore, God forbids any part of them being used in the true faith.

Now consider this command in light of how professing Christians today worship their God. Consider the accouterments surrounding the practice of their faith. Consider the crosses, medallions, and prayer beads worn by millions of "believers." Consider the so-called pictures of Jesus that decorate so many homes and Churches. Consider the statuary that is so much a part of Christian sanctuaries around the world, or the images portrayed on stained glass windows on so many places of worship. Where did God command such things?

Then there are the festivals such as Christmas, Easter, Lent, and a host of others that fill the calendars of Christianity today. Each of these seasons trace their origins to ancient pagan practices and beliefs. However, despite the fact that none of these religious trappings are enjoined in the scriptures, mankind employs them in his worship and is totally convinced he has God's blessing to do so. The fact of the matter is that God hated these practices thousands of years ago and He continues to hate them today.

God's warning to the children of Israel regarding their entrance into Canaan revealed what He understood to be the greatest threat to His people. And He knew how to deal with this threat.

"When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land where you go to possess it, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you; And when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you; you shall smite them, and utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: Neither shall you make marriages with them; your daughter you shall not give unto his son, nor his daughter shall you take unto your son. For they will turn away your son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy you suddenly. But thus shall you deal with them; you shall destroy their altars, break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire." (Dt. 7:1-5)

The Bible reveals that the true God not only condemns borrowing the religious traditions of other faiths, He doesn't even want His people to utter the name of another god. It shouldn't even be whispered.

"And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of your mouth." (Ex. 23:13)

These words may seem a bit extreme to a world that promotes tolerance. After all, to most people, religion is just a way to express a personal faith. Therefore, what difference does it make? As a result of this thinking, religions around the world are embraced by "Christian" nations today as morally equivalent to the faith espoused in the Bible.

However, the Great God who made the universe doesn't agree with that view. When it comes to religious diversity, God is totally INTOLERANT. He is not a "Do your own thing" type of deity. He takes the way He is worshiped very personally, and He will demonstrate that fact when His servants carry out His first mandate.

# Tearing Down Idols

With this in mind, imagine what God's servants will destroy when His millennial Kingdom is established. Certainly they will utterly destroy every piece of the numerous pagan religions that have saturated the globe for thousands of years. All these beliefs will be exposed for what they really are – NOTHING. Imagine the billions of people who thought they were honoring God with mindless NOTHING!

But what about professing Christianity? Consider for a moment what will be removed from their religious "treasure chest." What will God's servants do to the things these "believers" value so greatly? By all indications, God's servants will utterly destroy every vestige of man's expression of faith that is not specifically enjoined in the scriptures. This would include every cross, every steeple, every statue, every picture, every robe, every altar, every candle, every medallion, every pin, and every bead.

Furthermore, the Bible indicates that the festivals and seasons embraced by this world will be replaced by the holy days God ordained and gave to His people. The scriptures declare that God's true Sabbath will be kept in His millennial Kingdom (Isa. 66:23). Additionally, God's annual holy days will be restored to their rightful place. The book of Zechariah states that those who refuse to honor God's feasts will be denied His blessings. Even the weather will turn against them (Zech. 14:16-19).

#### Learn Not the Way of the Heathen

Throughout the Bible, God's people are exhorted to reject man's method of worship as well as the gods he has created. The great prophet Jeremiah may have said it best: "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jer. 10:1). He then described a pagan custom that has a striking resemblance to a very popular practice in the world today. He indicated that the heathen would cut a tree out of the forest and take it to a

place where they could behold it. At this place they would decorate the tree and fasten it, because it could not move on its own. Jeremiah then calls this tree a GRAVEN IMAGE! The pastors who embrace this custom he calls "brutish." Finally, Jeremiah declares that in the day of God's visitation, this custom will be obliterated (Jer. 10:15).

This is how God will deal with man's religious customs and traditions. He will destroy them – ALL OF THEM! And the destruction will be complete. Nothing will remain. With this in mind, it is inconceivable that God would allow any semblance of man's religious expression to survive in His millennial Kingdom. The history of mankind has shown that such things are toxic and will contaminate man's access to the truth

## A New Beginning

Early in God's millennial Kingdom, man will have to unlearn many things. He will have to rethink his politics, his culture, his science, and his laws, as well as the values that defined his world. God's servant leaders will be instrumental in teaching man to understand the flaws in the world he has built. They will also teach these citizens the formula for building a prosperous world.

At the center of this formula will be relying on God as the true Moral Authority of the universe. Everything will be driven by His law, a law that exhorts His children to love one another. In this Kingdom, competition will be replaced with cooperation. Discord will be replaced with unity. As a result, prosperity and hope will be everywhere.

When describing this millennial Kingdom, the scriptures reveal that God will put a new spirit in its citizens (Ezk. 11:19). This spirit will make it possible for them to truly understand the True God's and to obey Him (Ezk. 11:20). For one thousand years, mankind will enjoy uninterrupted peace and prosperity. The King of this Government will be none other than the Savior of the world and for the first time in history, man will have leadership that is truly interested in serving the needs of others. As a result, humanity will learn God's great truth. It will be spoken without apology throughout this Kingdom.

The Bible speaks prolifically about God's millennial Kingdom. It describes it cities, its language, its laws, and its faith. It will be a kingdom that will be unmatched by anything man has ever experienced in a government. Everything about it will be worthy of trust. Imagine trusting your leaders. Imagine knowing that they genuinely desire to be true and faithful servants. This is the Kingdom that awaits His human family.

#### A Great Question Arises

At this point, some may wonder about the rest of humanity that did not survive the last days. Or, the countless billions of people that were not resurrected at the last trump. What happens to them? Are they lost? These are fair questions. And the answer is not only fair, it is also rich in hope.

The Bible declares that God is not a respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). He does not arbitrarily give the breaks to some and the blows to others. God is infinitely fair. But He is more than that. He is a loving Father who is considerate of all His children. The short answer concerning the fate of those who are still in the grave during the millennium is this: THEY, TOO, SHALL LIVE.

#### A Second Resurrection

The Bible speaks extensively concerning the power God has over the grave. It even states that the day will come when death will be no more, and life will fill the entire universe (Rev. 21:4). Jesus Himself once said that "all who are in the graves shall hear His voice" (Jn. 5:28). This will be accomplished through the power of a resurrection—and the truth be known, God's word actually mentions more than one. This is a fact most professing Christians do not know, but it is true nevertheless.

The book of Revelation indicates that when the apostle John was taken in vision into God's millennial Kingdom, he saw the saints sitting on thrones, governing the world under the leadership of Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:4). However, John records something else—something that will impact all mankind. Notice his words beginning with the role of the saints as leaders in God's millennial Government:

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. <u>But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished</u>. This is the first resurrection." (Rev. 20:4-5)

The "first resurrection" mentioned in this passage belongs to those who are raised at the last trump prior to the Messiah's return to subdue the nations. However, if there is a "first resurrection," by default, there must be at least a second as well. Otherwise, John's words make no sense. Additionally, this apostle indicated that "the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." These words clearly indicate that the balance of humanity will be raised up at some later point in time, after the millennium. Tragically, this truth is rejected in the doctrines of the vast majority of Christian Churches today. This is because they do not understand God's Plan of salvation as revealed in His holy days.

## A Great Misunderstanding

One of the great errors advanced by much of professing Christianity is that God is trying to save everyone at this time. Therefore, those who fail to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior during this life are lost for all eternity. But is that really the case? To those who believe it is, consider the following questions. What about the billions who never knew about their Saviorr or the Bible? Are they lost? What about the Canaanites during the days of Moses and Joshua? Or pagan countries such as Assyria, whose capital city, Nineveh, God described as "not knowing their right hand from their left" when it came to understanding His truth (Jonah 4:11)? What about the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, or Persians? All these great kingdoms had a faith that was light years away from that held by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Are they lost?

Furthermore, consider how many people have never heard the gospel during the first century. What about Asia, Russia, Africa or the Americas? What did they know of this man called Jesus? And what about today? It has been estimated that on the earth today, as many as three billion people have never even heard the phonetic utterance "Jesus Christ," let alone His gospel message or God's Plan of salvation. What about them? Are they lost? Do they simply fall through the cracks of God's Plan? What about the millions of infants that tragically die without ever learning about the Great God of the universe? Or what about the millions of unborn children whose lives are snuffed out by abortions every year? Are they lost for all eternity?

Although many believe God is trying to save the world at this time, the Bible states otherwise. The scriptures reveal that God is intimately aware of all mankind, and His great love demands that he provide a way for them to know Him. Jesus Christ Himself declared that it is God's good pleasure to give His children the Kingdom (Lk. 12:32). This being the case, does it make any sense for Him to leave the gift of eternal life up to time and chance? The idea that God would work directly with one person and simply let another "roll the dice" to determine entrance into His eternal Family is a horribly cynical view of the Great God of MERCY. Thankfully, it just isn't true.

# Two Harvests

The Bible reveals that God has a Plan of salvation which includes all mankind. This Plan is revealed in His holy days (Lev. 23). These commanded assemblies tell an extraordinary story and unlock some of the greatest mysteries ever known.

One of the most important truths revealed by God's annual feasts is that there are two harvests of man. The first harvest, which is pictured by God's spring holy days, is very small. The latter harvest, pictured by God's fall holy days, is very large.

This initial spring harvest is reserved for God's elect throughout history, those who have been called in this present life according to His purpose. Their entrance into God's Kingdom constitutes what the Bible refers to as "the first resurrection" (Rev. 20: 5). It is also referred to as a "Better resurrection (Heb. 11:35) John characterizes this resurrection as having power over death (Rev. 20:6). In other words, those who are a part of the "first resurrection" are, at that moment, born into God's Family as literal sons and daughters. At this point, they will be made of incorruptible spirit. They will be just like God (1Jn. 3:2).

However, this is not the only resurrection John describes. He would go on to state that when the thousand years of Jesus' millennial reign was complete, there would be a great resurrection of all the billions of people who never had God's Plan revealed to them (Rev. 20:5-6). This resurrection is pictured by God's fall holy days. This is a time when there will be a GREAT harvest. That harvest will include the vast majority of people who have ever lived. Their number will be in the tens of billions.

The thirty-seventh chapter of the book of Ezekiel reveals that this will be a physical resurrection, in which those raised to life again will be made of flesh and bone, just as man is today. In other words, this is not a resurrection into God's eternal Family, but rather one that will provide an opportunity for man to choose whether he will honor the true God. Those who are a part of this resurrection will see firsthand what the world will be like after one thousand years of harmony under the rule of Jesus Christ and His saints.

Imagine how different that world will look to them. All the suffering that was a part of every generation throughout history will be gone. In its place will be peace and harmony. The world they will enter will know one God—THE TRUE GOD. Furthermore, His realness will be evident everywhere. At this time, the human family who resides in this Great Kingdom will be considerate of each other. Children will respect their parents. Husbands and wives will cultivate loving relationships, built on a common faith. Racial harmony will be the rule and not the exception. Justice will be just. Truth and honesty will be everywhere. And deception and treachery will be nowhere.

To be sure, man will still have human nature. He will have to struggle with his ego and self-will. But he will also have teachers who have gone through the same struggle. They will guide him in his journey toward eternity (Isa. 30:21). This is the world "the rest of the dead" will first see when they are raised to life.

Furthermore, those who are raised to life at this time will be introduced to God's Plan, a Plan they never knew. They will learn about the great sacrifice made by the Savior of the world and how that gift paid the price for every sin repented of. They will then be given an opportunity to submit to God's Moral Authority and to practice His way of life.

The book of John records a message given by Jesus Christ concerning this very time. It was presented on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a day that pictures this great resurrection.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood up and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (Jn. 7:37-38)

The great fall harvest of man illustrates God's compassion for every member of His human family. It is a period in time when every human being will have access to the true God. The point here is that no one who has ever lived will be denied entrance into God's eternal Kingdom because they were unaware of the Great God. When describing this point in history, the book of Ezekiel says "and all will know that I am the Eternal."

It is at this point that those who have not yet been born into God's incorruptible, eternal Family are taught His way, a way that leads to life. Once they truly understand the wonderful purpose their Creator has for them, they will be presented with a choice. It is a life-and-death choice—a choice that will determine their very Destiny. And as amazing as this might seem, someone else is invited to this decision—a most improbable being.

#### A Dragon Released

The book of Revelation indicates that at some point after the millennium, Satan will be "loosed out of his prison" (Rev. 20:3, 7). The scriptures also indicate that this release will be "for a little season" (verse three). The Bible does not reveal specifically how long Satan will be allowed to roam the earth. However, by all indications this release takes place toward the end of the second resurrection—which takes place at the conclusion of the millennium. By then all mankind will have a full understanding of God's truth and His way. Once this occurs, Satan will be set free, and he will immediately go forth to the earth. There, he will do everything in his power to destroy the world and God's Plan for mankind.

This "little season" is an extraordinary period in God's Plan, and many may wonder why He would give the devil one last swing at man's Destiny. The Bible does not directly answer this question but there is an interesting possibility. The Great Creator and Sustainer of eternity may be making a statement of infinite importance with this move. Is it possible that man must face his greatest enemy in order to be linked to his greatest Friend?

Throughout human history mankind has forsaken his Creator. He has rejected God as the Great Moral Authority of the universe. Instead, humanity has embraced a world that has been dominated by a real devil dedicated to the destruction of hope. This being the case, is it possible that man must, as his final act, reject the devil and his moral grip over him? By doing so, he will be declaring his unqualified love for God and His way. Additionally, by rejecting the devil, man will be rejecting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Furthermore, he will be appealing to his Father in heaven to restore the tree of life.

In a very real sense, this moment is not unlike countless others that have been placed before God's people down through the ages. During their time on earth, these champions of faith were willing to surrender everything for God's Kingdom. Often they were stripped of their homes, their families, their dignity, and even their lives. These saints spent their last breath overcoming this world (Rev. 3:21) and declaring their commitment to the true God and His way. He was their guiding Moral Authority and their lives reflected this fact. Furthermore, they overcame Satan and this world, when their God had to be seen through the eyes of faith.

However, this time it will be different. Those who engage in this final titanic struggle will know so much more about God's truth. They will have seen its effects on the earth. They will also have known the peace and abundance that comes from having the King of kings rule the world righteously for a thousand years. They will have personally known His resurrected saints and the struggles they won (Isa. 30:20). They actually will have had these saints as their teachers.

Finally, they will know how to win. They will know the true Source of their spiritual strength (Zech. 4:6) and they will know how to access that Source. But in the end, the choice will have to be theirs, just as it was Abraham's and all of God's people down through the ages. Additionally, in order to truly make a choice, there must be at least two options. The question now is: how will it turn out?

#### Satan's Last Stand

The Bible indicates that once Satan is loosed, he will go out and "deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth" (Rev. 20:8). These nations are identified as "Gog" and "Magog." But who are they? The thirty-eighth chapter of Ezekiel indicates that Gog and Magog are literal countries located in Asia. However, in the book of Revelation, they are described as encompassing the entire planet.

Opinion is divided concerning the specific identity of Gog and Magog. However, by combining the accounts in both Ezekiel and Revelation, it is likely that these two nations are located in Asia but their attitude of defiance and rebellion have spread around the world. Regardless of who these people are, it is clear that they are prolific in number and that Satan uses them in a final attempt to destroy God's people and His holy city Jerusalem (Rev. 20:8-9).

We now come to the final chapter of human history. Here, Gog and Magog prepare to attack this great city of peace. However, they will not succeed. This is because God will intervene with great force and rain down fire from heaven. This fire will devour them. Additionally, it will crush Satan's last attempt at destroying God's Plan (Rev. 20:9). At this point, Satan will be cast into a lake of fire where he will be tormented for all eternity (Rev. 20:10). He will never again contaminate the universe with his presence. With this act, his impact on humanity is officially concluded.

Additionally, as far as mankind is concerned, THE GAME IS OVER. This extraordinary human experiment has now come to an end. But how does it turn out? What is God's judgment? And what will happen to His human family?

#### The Last Word

The apostle John indicates that after Satan is cast into the lake of fire, there is a third and final resurrection. During this resurrection, all who were not a part of the first resurrection, which took place at the last trump, will be raised to life and appear before God to receive His final judgment. This would include three groups of people.

# Group I

The first group consists of those who knew the true God in this present life, but rejected Him as the Great Moral Authority of heaven and earth. The people in this category should not be confused with the countless millions who "thought" they knew God and His truth but in reality did not. The world is full of such people. However, most of them don't have a clue who the true God is. They think they can worship their Creator on their terms. They believe they can fashion their own faith, make their own festivals, and pick and chose the commandments they will obey. Clearly, they do not know the All-Powerful God of heaven; they only think they do.

However, the people in this first category are men and women who were truly called by God and had His magnificent Plan revealed to them. Furthermore, they understood His Plan. They knew its rewards as well as its consequences. Tragically, they rejected it and now must pay the price. These people will have been in the grave since their physical death, but now is the time of their judgment.

With this said, it is not likely there are very many who will fall into this category. But there will be some. It has been suggested that people like Judas Iscariot, the beast of Revelation 13, and the false prophet fall into this group.

Some also believe, based on Jesus' words to Pontius Pilate, that the Jewish high priests, Annas and Caiaphas, have also sealed their fate with God. (Jn. 19:11). Although we do not know for sure who will be in this group, the Bible does say that those in this company will be cast into a lake of fire for their defiance (Rev. 20:15). Once again, they had their chance in this life. Tragically, they rejected it.

# Group II

The second group to appear before God's judgment includes all who lived during the millennium. It was during this time that they learned God's truth and were given an opportunity to act on it. Now they must appear before the Great Moral Authority of the universe and receive His infinite mercy, or His eternal punishment. Those who repent and yield to Him will receive the former. Those who don't, won't.

# Group III

The third group standing before God's Great White Throne Judgment will consist of the rest of mankind who will not yet have entered into eternal life. These people constitute the billions who were raised up in the second resurrection. During this resurrection, they, too, were given a genuine chance to know their Creator and Sustainer. They were introduced to His love and His law, and were challenged to choose life.

These three groups combine to create an enormous company of people. They will comprise nearly all of the human family that has ever lived. They now appear before a White Throne and hear the pronouncement of the Great Moral Authority of all that exists. In other words, this "third resurrection" includes everyone who has ever lived, with the exception of the saints who were born into God's Family at the last trump. (This is because God's judgment was already dispensed on them prior to the return of Jesus Christ; 1Pe.4:17).

But now is the final dispensation of justice for the rest of mankind. Appearing before the Supreme Judge are "the small and great" (Rev. 20:12). Each will stand before the unimpeachable Moral Authority of the universe and be held accountable for their lives.

God's word states that during this judgment, "the books were opened" (Rev. 20:12). These books are, in all likelihood, those contained in the Bible. Jesus once said that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). This being the case, it is appropriate that man should be judged by God's word, a word that quickens, that revives, that sustains life. But God's word also indicts, and it will condemn all who refuse to yield to it.

The scriptures also indicate that another book will be opened during this judgment. This other book is called the "Book of Life" (Rev. 20:12). The apostle John records that anyone whose name is not written in this book shall be cast into a lake of fire and destroyed, never to be heard from again (Rev. 20:15). These people will leave no legacy, good or bad (Mal. 4:1). Even the memory of them dies (Isa. 26:14).

On the other hand, those whose names are written in the "Book of Life" will be changed from corruptible flesh to incorruptible spirit, joining the saints who were "born again" at the "first resurrection," whose names are also written in that book. This huge company will now take their first step into eternity as literal sons and daughters of the Most High God.

#### An Unforgettable Moment

At this very moment, God's eternal Family will be established. Imagine what these born-again children will feel at this time. In an instant, they will be changed from mortal to immortal. In the words of the apostle John, they will be "just like Him" (1Jn. 3:2). Their beauty will be magnificent. Their character will be perfect. And the great love and joy they feel will be immeasurable.

This is the moment God envisioned in the vast expanse of eternity. It is the one He revealed to the angelic realm so very long ago. This is the moment which Jesus spoke of to a man named Nicodemus. It is the fulfillment of an extraordinary Vision that reveals the infinite love of a Master Architect. It is a Destiny where words like infinite, eternal and forever are just not enough.

This Destiny was so important to God that He bought and paid for it with the blood of His own Son. Furthermore, that Son offered Himself willingly. He died so that man could live and share eternity with Him. God's dream of building a Family that was just like Him is now accomplished. Despite all the attempts by the forces of darkness to thwart this Vision, God's Destiny for man stands VICTORIOUS.

# How Many Will Make It?

At this point, some may wonder how many children in God's human family make it into His spiritual Kingdom. In other words, what are the casualties? How many will live and how many will die? The Bible does not specifically answer this question, but it does give a hint.

The apostle John described an incredible company of people gathered before God's throne. Each was clothed in white and proclaimed a great tribute to their Creator. When describing this company, John states that their size was too great too number. He is actually taken aback by how many there are. Notice the word "lo" when John speaks. It is almost as if he is saying, WOW!

"After this I beheld, and lo a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindred, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and psalms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9-10)

These words indicate that the overwhelming majority of mankind will be a part of God's eternal Family. And who could really think otherwise? The beauty and majesty that will be a part of every bornagain citizen of God's Kingdom is more than worth the price one must be willing to pay to enter (Ro. 8:18).

At this point, it is important to understand that those whose names are written in the "Book of Life" did not **earn** salvation but rather were given salvation as a **gift** (Ro. 6:23). However, this gift will only be extended to those who will truly cherish it. Jesus Christ paid for this moment with His blood. He did so because He had a love that also cannot be measured. Those who are a part of His Kingdom will be eternally aware of this fact and it will never become tiring to reflect on this gift.

#### A Final Thought

When God spoke to Abraham so very long ago and instructed him to leave his father's house and go to a place he had never seen, Abraham obeyed. Not once did he question this command. He simply packed up his family and moved. The question is: Why? What motivated him to do such a thing? Was it the blessings God had promised him? They were impressive to be sure. But is that what did it for this champion of faith? After all, Abraham died long before most of God's promises were ever fulfilled.

Or, was it the hope of a better life? Or perhaps a chance to start over? Many people have left their homes in search of a brighter future. Was this on Abraham's mind when he left Haran and sojourned throughout a great part of the known world at that time? Or was it something else? As surprising as this may sound, the book of Genesis does not answer this overriding question. However, God would reveal the answer nearly twenty-one hundred years later in a unique letter.

The book of Hebrews chronicles the lives of some of the Bible's greatest heroes. Included among them is Abraham. Here, Abraham is portrayed as a man with a remarkable trust in his God and a great hope in his heart. Abraham longed for God's Government to be established. But this desire was not simply for a physical kingdom. What Abraham was seeking was a magnificent spiritual realm. Within this realm would be a wonderful CITY. It would be an exquisite place, one whose beauty is far greater than anything man has ever beheld. This is what drove Abraham. A city. A GREAT CITY.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:8-10)

The city Abraham sought was very real. It was not an illusion. It was not some dream or fantasy. It is a place that is more than worthy of being sought. It is a place of remarkable beauty—a place of infinite peace. It is a city that will one day be the center of the entire universe. Furthermore, it will be the residence of none other than God Himself. And will reflect His virtue and His love.

The Bible actually describes this city in remarkable detail. It provides its dimensions. It reveals its materials. And it identifies its residents. Furthermore, God's word declares that although Abraham never entered into this magnificent architectural wonder, the day is coming when he, too, will call this city, HOME.

But how can one find this city? Where is it? And how can it be entered into? Finally, why did Abraham so desperately seek it? What did it offer him? The answer to these questions lies at the end of this story. Or perhaps it is just the beginning. Read on...

# Chapter XII The Glory of God

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18

Just hours before His arrest, trial and crucifixion, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane and poured out His heart to His Father in heaven. The words He would utter at this particular time are among the most poignant ever recorded. It is simply impossible to truly grasp what was taking place in the stillness of that evening. However, it is clear that this was a very special moment.



The Garden of Gethsemane

The events that were about to cascade down upon the Messiah bore tremendous weight and stand as a pivotal point in God's Plan. For this reason, He sought the strength and virtue of the only person in the entire universe who could lead him through it. Kneeling before His Father in heaven was something that defined so much of the Jesus' life. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that this is what He would be doing as He prepared for His death.

The immense love and devotion these two Beings had for each other is simply beyond human comprehension. For all eternity this Father and Son had shared life's greatest mysteries. They were together when the angelic realm was created. They were together when the universe was fashioned. They were together when Lucifer rejected God's sovereignty and moral leadership. They were together when man was formed out of the dust of the earth. They were together when the Destiny of all mankind was first envisioned. They were together when the Plan that would bring that Destiny to fruition was crafted.

Now, once again, they are together. They are intimately connected as the most selfless act in history is about to play out. With this said, there is something else taking place at this moment. As they share this final evening of Jesus' life, the time is now rapidly approaching when they will no longer be together. Imagine being cut off from the one Being in the universe who meant everything to you. This is what these two Wonderful Champions would experience in just a matter of hours.

As Jesus cried out to His Father, the agony He was going through was very apparent. The gospel of Luke states that the perspiration that fell from Him "became as it were great drops of blood" (Lk. 22:44). So intense was this moment that an angel was dispatched from heaven to strengthen Him. However, at this point, for the next precious minutes it would be just Jesus of Nazareth and His Eternal Father.

## An Extraordinary Appeal

The gospel of John records words of extraordinary power spoken by the Messiah as he approached the garden of Gethsemanae. Here, in a prayer that may very well have been in the presence all His disciples (less Judas Iscariot), this Messiah reveals that He was fully aware that something horrible was looming over Him. He knew that His end was near.

"These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you. As you have given him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as you have given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have glorified you on the earth: I have finished the work which you gave me to do." (Jn. 17:1-4)

It is interesting that Jesus said He had "finished" the work His Father had given Him. This, even though He had not yet been crucified. At this point, it is important to understand that He was fully aware of the significance of His impending death as well as its method (crucifixion). Clearly, the Messiah knew that His sacrifice represented a critical part of the work He had been given (1Jn. 3:5). Yet He still uttered these words. This being the case, it is obvious that Jesus was speaking in a very assumptive tone. He was declaring that His sacrifice was already fixed in His Father's WILL and He knew that He would carry it out. In other words, it was as good as done. With that said, it is interesting that in his epistle to the Church at Rome the apostle Paul once indicated that God calls "things which <u>are not</u> as though they <u>are</u>" (Romans 4:17). This is such a moment.

Jesus would then appeal to the Father to restore to Him the glory He possessed prior to his incarnation, even prior to the time the earth came into existence. Notice what He said.

And now, O Father, glorify you me with thine own self with the glory I had with you before the world was. (Jn. 17:5)

The Greek word "glory" used by the apostle John when recording Jesus' prayer, is *doxa* and can be translated: "dignity," "honor," "praise," or "worship." Here, Jesus was importuning the Father to return to Him the great dignity He surrendered when He came to earth as a man. Consider what Jesus willingly left behind in order to become flesh.

Prior to His birth, the Messiah was infinitely powerful. Even time and space could not subdue Him (Psa. 90:1-2). His strength was endless. His beauty and majesty was unmatched. His wisdom and virtue was pristine.

Jesus was the God of the Old Testament. It was He who spoke and earth existed. It was He who fashioned the heavens by His Wisdom. Jesus was the One who spoke to Abraham in Haran and to Moses on Mount Sinai. He was *El Shaddai*, the Almighty.

But now he was just a man. He had all the weaknesses that come with being human. Jesus could tire and even become exhausted. He could suffer hunger and thirst as well as pain. Furthermore, all the love and mercy He possessed could not insulate Him from the excruciating agony He would soon experience at the end of His life. His body was literally going to be ripped apart in a brutal ritual called "scourging." He was then going to be nailed to a stake and left to die in the presence of His own mother. This is not something anyone would normally look forward to. But Jesus gave up eternity to be in this very spot. And He had no illusions regarding what was about to occur at a place called Golgotha. He was well aware of the numerous prophecies describing the gory details of His death. He inspired the twenty-second Psalm and the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah. With this in mind, consider how this perfect Savior's life would come to an end.

## The Death of the Lamb

No single event in all the Bible consumes more room in the scriptures than the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life. In the gospels alone, thirteen chapters are dedicated to this moment. Here, God's only begotten Son will be offered up as a perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of all who will accept this great gift.

This period would begin with Jesus and His disciples partaking of the Passover in accordance with God's command (Lev. 23:5). At this time, the Messiah would reveal that He was the true Passover Lamb whose body would be broken and whose blood would be shed (Mt. 26:27-29). Additionally, during this meal, Jesus would indicate that He would be betrayed by one of His own disciples (Jn. 13:21). This must have been one of the saddest announcements the Messiah would ever make.



On the night of His betrayal Jesus would institute new Passover symbols

After the meal, Jesus and His disciples, less Judas Iscariot, journeyed toward the garden of Gethsemanae. It is here that He would spend His last precious hours of freedom. As the Messiah agonizingly prayed over what was about to take place, His three closest friends, Peter, James, and John were sleeping just a stone's throw away (Lk. 22:41-46).

# The Arrest of the Messiah

The gospels indicate that as Jesus concluded praying, a contingent of armed soldiers representing the chief priests and the pharisees could be heard approaching. Leading this group was none other than His betrayer, Judas Iscariot. According to John's account, Jesus would then "go forth to meet them" (Jn. 18:4). At this point, an important but often overlooked fact takes place. Jesus went out to meet Judas and his party as opposed to waiting for them to come to Him. This extraordinary act of courage speaks volumes about the Messiah and reveals Him as one who was totally prepared to advance toward the enemy of the faith even if it would mean His death.

At this point, events would begin to accelerate. For the next several hours Jesus would be tried by the Jewish leadership under the direction of Caiaphas, the high priest, and his father-in-law, Annas. Annas had also served as high priest from 6 A.D. to 15 A.D. At that time he was removed from office by the Roman procurator, Valerius Gratus. Some authorities have suggested that Annas was involved in Jesus' trial because he may have been instrumental in formulating the actual charges against Him. However, despite their greatest effort, Annas and Caiaphas had to rely on the testimony of false witnesses in their attempt to secure a guilty verdict. Their hostility toward the Messiah became so warped that they would do anything to destroy Him.

Meanwhile, as Jesus was being slandered and condemned in a kangaroo court presided over by the great "moral leaders" of God's people, His most loyal disciple was publicly forsaking Him. The apostle Peter, who had once rebuked the Messiah for even thinking he would allow his Savior to be abandoned (Mt. 16:21-22; Lk. 22:33), was now denying that he even knew Him. Peter did this at three different times. So adamant was his third denial that he actually pronounced a curse on himself to prove he had never been one of Jesus' disciples (Mt. 26:72-74). In this moment of great weakness, Peter abandoned his Lord just as Jesus said he would (Mt. 26:75). Now, consumed with fear and guilt, he would depart in grief, leaving his Savior alone. However, for Jesus, things would only get worse.

After being formally condemned by the high court of the Jews, the Messiah was bound and brought before Pontus Pilate, the governor of Judea at that time. His accusers informed Pilate that Jesus was guilty of the highest crimes against Rome. These crimes included: 1) perverting the nation, 2) tax evasion, and 3) insurrection and treason (Lk. 23:2). John's gospel indicates that Jesus was also accused of being "an evil doer" (Jn. 18:30).



Pontius Pilate painted by Giotto in 1305

## NOTE:

Some have argued that Pontius Pilate was not a real historical figure. However, in 1961, archaeologists discovered a plaque fragment at Caesarea Maritima, an ancient Roman city along the Mediterranean coast of Israel. The plaque was written in Latin and embedded in a section of steps leading to Caesarea's Amphitheater. The inscription includes the following:

"Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judea, has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius."

Although Pilate did not have a reputation as a just man, even he could tell Jesus was innocent of the charges being leveled against Him (Lk. 23:14-16). The governor even understood the motivation these religious leaders had for trying to destroy the Messiah (Mt. 27:18). However, the pressure applied on him to execute Jesus was growing greater by the minute. While all his sensibilities told him to walk away from this situation, the fear of a public uprising told him he could not (Mt. 27:24).

After several maneuvers to absolve himself from having to pass judgment in this matter, Pilate found himself cornered by a growing crowd, crying out for Jesus' blood. The instigators of this pressure even challenged his loyalty to Caesar and Rome. They suggested that if Jesus was released, Pilate would be, for all intents and purposes, complicit in treason (Jn. 19:12).

With his options running out, Pilate made one final move. In a last ditch effort to spare Jesus' life, he presented a choice to the mob that was gathering outside. He would at this time invoke a Passover

custom in which a condemned man would be set free (Mt. 27:15). In accordance with this custom, he would allow the Jews outside his palace to choose who would be released.

At this point, Pilate sought out the most despicable criminal he could find, and his search led him to a man named Barabbas. Barabbas was sentenced to die for high crimes against Rome. He was convicted of insurrection, murder and robbery (Lk. 23:19, 25). Matthew's gospel refers to him as "notorious" (Mt. 27:16 NIV). By today's standard, Barabbas could easily be likened to a violent terrorist. He was a first century sociopath with no redeeming qualities.

Pilate then ordered that this vile man be brought before the crowd. With this final stroke, the governor places before his growing audience two men; Jesus of Nazareth and Barabbas. He then invites his audience to determine who should live and who should die.

To Pilate the choice seemed obvious. However, he was gravely mistaken. When he asked the crowd who should be released, Jesus or Barabbas, the crowd, in a near frenzy, cried out, "Give us Barabbas!" The irony of their appeal was unquestionably lost on them, but it was truly remarkable. The name Barabbas means "son of the father." Here at this precise moment, a pseudo "son of the father" would be released while the real "Son of the Father" would be put to death.

As the cry of the mob was still echoing through Pilate's courtyard, the fate of Jesus was sealed. The last appeal for clemency had been denied. Here, the Great God of the Old Testament is about to become the Lamb of New Testament. With a death sentence now passed, Pilate orders Jesus to be prepared for execution. What would take place next was truly sickening. Pilate ordered Jesus delivered up to be "scourged," a ritual that was totally devoid of mercy (Mt. 27:26).

Scourging was a form of beating in which the thongs of a whip were weighted with jagged pieces of bone or metal to make the blows more effective. This practice was used to wrest confessions and secrets from enemies. Unlike beatings that were performed by the Jews ("forty lashes"), the Roman practice left the number of blows up to the whim of the one commanding the affair.

During this gory ritual, victims were tied to a stake with back bare, and generally fainted from the blows if they didn't die outright. Furthermore, a special scourging was designed to prepare a person for crucifixion. Under this practice, the administrator would "artfully" bring his victim to the brink of death, then pause to allow him to gain some strength. He would then sadistically resume the beating which would nearly skin his victim alive. This scourging was appropriately referred to as the "half death," and is undoubtedly what Jesus was subjected to.

After being mercilessly beaten and bruised, an exhausted Messiah was marched to the site of His execution. As He limped toward Golgotha, He could hear the taunts and jeers of the crowds that followed Him. Then, at about 9:00 am the Savior of the world was nailed to a beam that would suspend His bloody body for the next six hours. The pain he was now suffering was unbearable.

#### A Torturous Death

Crucifixion was one of the most barbarous forms of punishment known to man. It was practiced in times of war by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Egyptians, and later by the Romans. It was unspeakably cruel and degrading. The agony of crucifixion was brought about by the painful character of the wounds inflicted, the great suffering caused by the position of the body, and the traumatic fever induced by hanging for such a long time. This is how God's beloved Son would spend the final hours of His life.

As Jesus' ravaged body was exposed for all to see, His love for mankind was not abated. The first words He spoke were "Father forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Imagine the enormity of love that inspired such words. Here hung a man more innocent than any child. Never once did He consider evil as an option. He never spoke a vile word nor pondered a wrong thought. The crucifixion of Jesus stands as the greatest act of injustice ever committed by man. And Jesus' response stands as

the most merciful utterance in history. So committed was this Great King to the forgiveness of sin that He offered His own life so that man would not have to suffer the eternal consequences of his actions.

#### To Die Alone

The scriptures reveal that as Jesus was suffering the final moments of His torturous execution, he would experience the greatest horror of His life. In order for Him to pay the price for the sins of all mankind, He would have to shoulder them on His own. All the evil ever perpetrated by the human family was now going to be conveyed to the Messiah.

At this moment, Jesus became sin. He now felt the ugliness of every act of depravity as well as every nuance of error. At this moment, Jesus was very imperfect. As He hung suspended in this state, His Father turned away, leaving Him to die alone. All the intimacy they had shared throughout eternity was, in a moment, gone. The horror the Messiah was going through is simply beyond belief. He had now become everything His Father despised. At this point, He cried out to His Father in heaven, "Eli, Eli, Iama sabachthani?" that is: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46). Noticeably absent was any answer.

#### NOTE:

The term "forsaken" comes from the Greek *egkataleipo* (Strong's G1459) and means to "totally abandon, desert, leave in straits, leave helpless, and to utterly forsake." The point here is that God didn't simply step back and observe Christ's final moments from a distance—He literally walked away and "TOTALLY ABANDONED His Son.

In essence, Jesus took upon Himself the penalty reserved for mankind. In other words, He accepted His Father's CONTEMPT in order that mankind would not have to. In that state our Savior was deprived of any mercy or compassion. His fate was ABSOLUTE REJECTION and TOTAL CONDEMNATION.

Moments after Jesus' cry of anguish, a soldier would drive a spear into his side causing massive hemorrhaging (Mt. 27:49, Moffatt Translation). As His blood poured forth from His body, Jesus was now only seconds away from becoming the Savior of the world. His final utterance before commending His spirit back to the Father was, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). With these words, the Messiah was declaring that he had accomplished what He purposed in His heart before the world was even formed. He had reconciled God's children back to the Father (Ro. 5:10). With this marvelous act of love a door to eternity was opened. Through it, God's human family would have an opportunity to become His spiritual Family and to share eternity with Him.

## The Great Sacrifice

The apostle Paul once revealed that Jesus Christ left an incorruptible world He had been a part of for all eternity and humbly entered into one that had been contaminated by four thousand years of human mismanagement. He did this in order to shed His blood for the sins of all mankind.

"Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, <u>He humbled Himself</u>, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:5-6)

#### Returning to Gethsemanae

When Jesus was in Gethsemanae appealing to His Father to restore to Him the glory He had from the beginning (Jn. 17:5), He was not seeking personal status. He was not pursuing power for the sake of power. What Jesus desired was that He and the Father would be reunited and once again govern

eternity together. It was a request that must have deeply moved His Father and it was one His Father would gladly grant. Notice the words of the apostle Paul.

"Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every other name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:9-11)

The Bible reveals that this same Jesus was "received up unto glory" (1Tim. 3:16). That glory was restored to Him by His Father after His ascension to heaven. It was the glory He had with the Father from the foundations of the world. Furthermore, the day is coming when all mankind will acknowledge that glory and will kneel before this Great King. They will recognize Him as their Lord and give Him profound deference. To illustrate this truth, consider the words of one of Jesus' closest friends.

#### Worthy of Glory

When recording the book of Revelation, the apostle John stated that at one point he saw a vision in which billions of angelic beings paid tribute to the Savior of the world. Furthermore, he indicated that virtually every created being in the universe would ultimately do the same.

"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:11-13)

The time is coming when the entire universe will understand how magnificent the Father and the Son truly are. That understanding will be proclaimed in the great honor it will bestow upon them. The praise that will be brought before these two Champions will be heartfelt, genuine and sincere. It will reflect the undying gratitude of an entire universe to its God and His Plan.

# Remembering the Saints

When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemanae, His petition to the Father did not end with His request to be returned to glory. He would also direct His attention to His disciples as well as those who would be touched by them. Jesus asked His Father to anoint their work and to preserve them in the truth (Jn. 17:17-19). He then appealed to the Father for the saints to be united in the faith (Jn. 17:20-21).

However, what would happen next was truly remarkable. Jesus would proclaim a special blessing He had bestowed on His disciples and those who would be called through their work. Notice His words to the Father.

"And the **glory** which you gave me I have given them; that they may be one even as we are one." (Jn. 17:22)

Here, Jesus is stating that He intends to share with His saints the glory He was given by the Father. Imagine the magnitude of that statement. If it is to be taken at face value, the saints are going to share in the very glory of God Almighty. As amazing as Jesus' words may sound, that is exactly what is going to happen.

The Bible reveals a great mystery concerning the incredible potential God has bestowed upon mankind. This potential reflects an extraordinary Destiny envisioned by the Creator before the universe ever existed. The apostle Paul revealed this mystery in a letter to the Church at Corinth.

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto **our glory**." (1Cor. 2:7)

Here, Paul reveals that those raised up at the last trump will share a common Destiny and a great glory. It is a glory that was envisioned by God before the world came into being. When it is fully realized, God's children will be born into His Family as literal sons and daughters. They will have His nature and His glory. In other words they will be just like Him. This is not the only time Paul spoke of the saints being glorified. In his letter to the Church at Colosse, he once again identified this truth as a mystery revealed.

"Even the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, *the hope of glory*." (Col. 1:26-27)

The glory that the resurrected saints are going to experience is nothing short of colossal. To better grasp this truth, consider the glory Jesus Christ possesses at this very moment. It is a glory He shared with His Father throughout eternity. That glory was described by the apostle John after he was taken in vision to the very throne of God the Father in the third heaven. Here, he paints a picture of a place that is truly breathtaking.

"After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, 'Come up hither, and I will show you things which must be hereafter.' And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." (Rev. 4:1-3)

As John continues to describe this extraordinary vision, the images become even more remarkable. He states that in addition to this great throne and the exquisite Being that sat upon it, there were twenty-four smaller thrones surrounding it. Sitting on these smaller thrones were royal counselors clothed in white and wearing crowns of gold. Additionally, John indicated that out of this GREAT THRONE came lightnings and thunderings and voices. But there was more.

John then proclaims that standing before this great throne were seven burning lamps that he identified as the seven spirits of God. In addition to that, there were four spectacular creatures, each having six wings. These creatures continually offered praises to the Infinite God who sat on the throne.

"And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night saying Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come." (Rev. 4:8)

John goes on to say that while these four beasts were singing praises to the Eternal, the twenty-four counselors were casting their crowns before Him and acknowledging Him as the Creator of all that exists.

"The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and <u>for your pleasure they are and were created</u>." (Rev. 4:10-11)

The glory that God the Father and Jesus Christ share is spectacular and is unique to them as infinite God Beings. But Jesus said He desired to share that glory. Furthermore, that desire is expressed throughout the New Testament. The apostle Paul stated that it would be realized when the saints are resurrected at the last trump.

"So is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is *raised in glory*: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." (1Cor. 15:42-43)

Later Paul would write that the saints would be changed into a glorified state just as Jesus was.

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2Cor. 3:18)

This is the Destiny that awaits the saints who endure to the end and are born into the Family of God. The physical world they lived in with all its suffering and trials will be no more. In its place will be an incorruptible Kingdom. And although the suffering of God's people down through the ages has been significant, it is not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with what lies at the end of their journey. Here is how Paul expresses this TRUTH.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Ro. 8:18)

The point that God's faithful servant was making is that trials are a part of every true believer's walk. In short, trials are inevitable. However, Paul also understood the role adversity plays in God's Plan, and even indicated that the suffering of the saints will actually be used by God to build their glory. In a sense, trials are a part of the training the saints must go through in order to be leaders in God's Kingdom.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2Cor. 4:17)

#### Resistance Builds Muscle

There is an expression in the sporting world that goes like this: "Resistance builds muscle." Not only is this principle true in the physical realm, but it is also true with respect to qualities of character and virtue. The point here is that the trials man faces have the potential to build great spiritual strength. It is true that adversity is never enjoyable, but it can be very profitable. Adversity build Holy Righteous Character. Trials can teach a variety of lessons about patience, determination, faith, and even humility. All of these traits of character will possess immense value in God's Kingdom. For this reason, James, the half brother of Jesus, said that the saints should actually rejoice when times get rough.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations (tests); Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience." (Jas. 1:2-3)

With these words, James was declaring that trials should actually be considered a source of Christian joy. This is because of what they can build in a true believer. Additionally, the scriptures declare that trials are not to be fled from, but rather are to be confronted and conquered. They should be met face-to-face and dealt with just as the Messiah did with the great test He faced at the end of His life.

At this point, it is important to understand that God is not looking for escape artists to inherit His Kingdom. He wants overcomers. Jesus Christ said precisely that when speaking to His disciples.

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne." (Rev. 3:21)

Consider the power of this verse. Here, Jesus is declaring that He will share His authority with those who fight against sin. These are not idle words. Jesus was not simply giving some motivational speech to the troops. This is an absolute promise by none other than the Savior of the world. Those who overcome will sit in the VERY THRONE of the Creator of the universe. They will share HIS GLORY and HIS AUTHORITY. This is the ultimate Destiny of all the saints who yield to Him. Furthermore, this Destiny which was envisioned by a Master Architect so very long ago will be fulfilled in an eternal city designed by none other than God Himself.

# An Eternal Kingdom

The twenty-first chapter of the book of Revelation reveals an exquisite Kingdom that will appear after a Great White Throne Judgment that represents the final dispensation of justice for the human family. At this time, all mankind will appear before their Creator and hear His sentence on them. Those

who have overcome and now acknowledge Him as the true Moral Authority of the universe will enter into life. Those who refuse will die. In other words, those whose names which are written in the *Book of Life* will receive life and be truly born again. They will, for the first time, be comprised of incorruptible spirit. They will become a part of God's eternal and infinite Family.

However, man's conversion from a corruptible state to an incorruptible one is not the only change to take place. The Bible reveals that the entire universe will also be changed. It, too, will become incorruptible. The apostle John describes it as being "new."

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." (Rev. 3:1)

The scriptures declare that at some point after all mankind has entered into eternity, Jesus Christ will reshape the entire universe. It will no longer be corruptible. It will experience the same change that God's human family will experience (Ro. 8:21). It will become eternal in form and composition.

In Chapter IV, we learned that the universe was created physical in order to accommodate physical beings, such as man and the animals. However, at this point, there will be no more physical creatures. Everything will be incorruptible. Nothing will die (1Cor. 15:26). This being the case, a new dimension will be constructed as the home of God's eternal Family.

#### The New Jerusalem

At this point, John sees a spectacular architectural wonder coming down out of heaven. It is a great city and its name is New Jerusalem. Furthermore, escorting it is none other than God the Father. Notice the words John uses when describing this moment.

"And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." (Rev. 21:2-3)

John goes into considerable detail when describing this magnificent structure. He indicates that the base of it is perfectly square. It is twelve thousand furlongs long, twelve thousand furlongs wide, and twelve thousand furlongs high (Rev. 21:15-16). This would make the surface of the city one hundred and forty-four million square furlongs, or approximately 1400 miles long and 1400 miles wide. To put this into perspective, the width as well as the length of this city would be the distance between Los Angeles and Dallas. This being the case, the New Jerusalem is larger than most countries on earth today. Suffice it to say there has never been anything like it.



John then explains that this great architectural wonder is surrounded by an immense wall that soars one-hundred and forty-four cubits into the sky (Rev. 21:17). This would make the wall surrounding this great city taller than a twenty story building. John also states that this wall has twelve foundations and that these foundations bear the names of the twelve apostles. Additionally, each is adorned with a collection of precious stones, with different stones for each foundation (Rev. 21:19-20).

John then states that entrance into the New Jerusalem is made through twelve gates, with three gates on each of the city's four sides. These gates, which are made of pearls, contain the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Additionally, each gate is attended by a great angelic sentry. At this point, it is easy to see that this city is very unique and is the product of considerable planning. The scriptures reveal that the blueprints for the New Jerusalem were crafted before the foundations of the world, and that this majestic place was actually envisioned by God in the vast expanse of eternity. It was this very city that God revealed to Abraham some four thousand years ago (He. 11:8-10). Here, He does so again to the apostle John at the end of the first century.

#### The Interior of the City

When describing the New Jerusalem, John reveals much more than the appearance of its exterior. He also paints a remarkable picture of what lies within its walls. In doing so, he reveals an exquisite place—a place of great dignity and splendor. He states that the main street in this city is made of pure gold so highly polished its appearance is "like transparent glass" (Rev. 21:21). Additionally, in the midst of the city is a pure river containing waters of life.

When describing the New Jerusalem, John indicated that it would be a place of great peace and eternal hope. It would not only be the seat of God's perfect Government, but also the home of His people—a home of infinite joy, where all things are new.

"And God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new." (Rev. 21:4-5)

In the world today it is hard to imagine such a place as New Jerusalem. This is because everything we see in this present age is so horribly broken. Throughout history, mankind has endeavored to create a world in his own image—a world that reflects his wisdom and his values. He began this journey in the Garden of Eden. There he decided that he could be his own moral authority. He would

decide on his own what was right and what was wrong, what was just and what was unjust, what was good and what was evil.

The result has been unspeakable suffering and has brought us to the world we see today. A world filled with discord and violence. A world where hate and contempt drive its politics. A world where crassness is at the cutting edge of its culture. A world that calls the perverse moral and the moral perverse. Let's face it, today we live in a perverse world shaped by valueless secularism.

#### A Matter of Choice

When man and woman were first placed in the Garden of Eden, God set before them a choice. It was a choice that would have profound implications on the New Jerusalem. On one side was a path that would lead to life. However, that path could only be traveled by obeying the Great Creator and Sustainer of the universe. In order to do so, Adam and Eve would have to accept God as the true Moral Authority of heaven and earth. If they did, their names would be written in a *Book of Life*.

However, in order to accept God's Moral Authority, they would have to reject the way of self-determination. That way was pictured by the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. The point here is that man must totally reject the source of death before he can embrace the source of Life. Furthermore, every human being that has ever lived must make that same decision. No one is exempt. In other words, in order to enter into God's spiritual Kingdom, all mankind must **totally** and **absolutely** reject the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. Throughout human history, mankind has failed to understand this vital point. As a result, he continues to reject the very CREATOR who made him. Tragically, in a very real sense, man continues to this very day to eat from a tree that can only kill.

#### The Curse of Death

The Bible reveals that as a result of Adam and Eve partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they brought upon themselves and their descendants the curse of death (1Cor. 15:22). However, as we learned earlier in this chapter, Jesus Christ offered Himself as a ransom for sin and by doing so made it possible for man to live in His Father's Kingdom. But there are conditions.

At this point, it is important to understand that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ does NOT atone for the sins of the unrepentant. Therefore, man must turn from his way and obey his Creator. It is simply not good enough to confess "Jesus is Lord" and then choose how you will HONOR HIM This is a lesson all humanity must learn in order to be a part of God's eternal Family. Nothing short of it will do.

The bottom line is this. Man must utterly destroy the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No part of it can be allowed to survive. Not a branch. Not a twig. Not its smallest particle. Every piece of moral self-will must die. In its place, man must accept and receive God's virtue and His will. This is why the process of conversion begins with repentance, not baptism. Repentance is the rejection of self-will. Baptism is the acceptance of God's mind and His will to live in you. Before that mind can be received, man must reject what he has become and the self-will that made him that way.

## A Tree in New Jerusalem

When describing the New Jerusalem, John indicates that in its midst is a very special tree. This tree has life-sustaining properties. It has the power to heal as well as to nourish. Notice the words that God inspired John to record when describing this amazing tree.

"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and His servants shall serve Him." (Rev. 22:2-3)

Here John states that the tree of life is once again made available to God's children. However, noticeably absent from this beautiful city is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. At this point, that tree will have been utterly destroyed. There will be no remnant of it. Everything it stood for will have been rejected by God's eternal Family. In its place will be a tree that pictures God's Moral Authority over the universe. That tree will proclaim His will. It will be a tree that embodies eternal hope—a hope that will radiate throughout the entire universe. That hope will be realized because at its very center is RIGHTEOUSNESS.

When Jesus gave what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, He taught His disciples to pray: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy **will** be done..." (Mt. 6:10). He did this because He knew that His Father's eternal Kingdom would be driven by God's moral purity, not man's. In order for man to be a part of that Kingdom, he must not only accept that fact, he must embrace it. Jesus of Nazareth certainly understood this truth and His entire life reflected that understanding. Consider one powerful example. On the eve of His crucifixion, He actually appealed to His Father in heaven to remove the cup containing the horror of His impending death. However, He concluded His prayer with the words, "Nevertheless not My will, but Your will be done" (Lk. 22:42). And the rest, as they say, is history.

The lesson from this great moral law is that self-will cannot co-exist with obedience to God. They are mortal enemies and polar opposites. In other words, man cannot be the moral authority over his life and still expect to receive the benefits that can only come from honoring the true Moral Authority of the universe. This is why God prohibited man access to the tree of life after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. He simply would not allow man to partake of both trees. God gave man a choice, but he could only chose one.

In a very real sense, Eden was a picture of man's Destiny. At the center of that Destiny could only be ONE tree. As the first man and woman on earth pondered their choice, eternity hung in the balance. The Bible reveals that they chose a tree whose destiny was death and by doing so, rejected the tree whose Destiny was – and is – eternal life. As a result, man was consigned to a temporal existence where eternity would have no part.

However, the scriptures also reveal that a Great and Merciful God would ultimately intervene and rescue man from the curse of death (Ga. 3:13). To do that, God Himself would have to die and take all the consequences of sin mankind has brought upon himsel. As a result of this infinite sacrifice, the hope of an eternal Kingdom moved forward, and with it, the hope of all mankind. This wonderful hope is reflected in the magnificent Destiny that awaits God's children. A glimpse into that very Destiny was once revealed by a majestic angelic being.

#### An Angel Speaks

The book of Revelation is filled with amazing images and wonderful lessons. But there is one image that stands alone as perhaps its most extraordinary. It is an image that reveals the fulfillment of a special Destiny reserved for those whom God has called during this life. This community of believers will be born into God's incorruptible Kingdom at the last trump. The scriptures refer to this moment as the "first resurrection" (Rev. 20:4).

Furthermore, the Bible calls this "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). Those who are a part of it will enjoy a unique position in God's Kingdom. They will be the very bride of Jesus Christ, the Lamb. They will share a common throne and rule at His side for all eternity.

When John saw the New Jerusalem coming down from God, he must have been awestruck. However, what he would see next was gripping beyond belief. He would be introduced to this vision by a great angelic being who served at the pleasure of God Almighty.

When recounting this extraordinary moment, John stated that he was approached by an angel who poured out the seven last plagues. This angel then invited him to see the bride of Christ. One almost

gets the impression that this magnificent angelic creature is whispering this invitation. Notice what John writes.

"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me saying, Come hither, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Re. 21:9)

At this point, John is shown an exquisite bride. Her beauty is nothing short of stunning. Her virtue is perfect. And her glory reflects that of God Himself.

"And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, *Having the glory of God*: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper, clear as crystal... " (Re. 21:10-11)

Here, John is describing God's eternal Government which is pictured as a great and high mountain. Resting on that mountain is the bride of the Lamb. That bride is pictured as the New Jerusalem, an exquisite city that will be the residence of God Almighty. The point the Creator is revealing through the pen of this apostle is that His Government will reign above all governments and that the bride of Christ will share rulership with her beloved husband and KING. This is the Destiny of God's Church and His saints. It is a remarkable Destiny that was envisioned by Him at the very beginning. It is a Destiny so great that God considered it worthy of the blood of His own Son. And He did it all for you. To truly grasp the scope of the Messiah's devotion to His sacrifice you owe it to yourself to read Appendix

## A Final Thought

A long time ago in the vast expanse of eternity, a Great and Loving God envisioned something so magnificent that only His mind could fashion it. Here, the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists actually pondered the idea of expanding His Family. As He considered this incredible Vision, God became convinced that His eternal spiritual Kingdom would be enriched by the fulfillment of this dream.

He then set in motion events that would make this wonderful idea come to pass. First, He shared this Vision with the angelic realm and explained their role in it. He then created a spectacular physical dimension in which His human family could learn and grow. At this point, God enlisted the support of the angelic realm under the leadership of His trusted servant Lucifer. He commissioned these great ministering spirits to prepare the earth for man.

However, at some point after this, Lucifer began to question God's wisdom and His Moral Authority. This once-great archangel somehow decided that he knew better than his Creator when it came to crafting the Destiny of the universe. As a result, he gave in to his own pride, and self-will was born.

From this point on, Lucifer, who had now become Satan the devil, would dedicate all his energy to destroying God's wonderful Plan for mankind. He started by trying to destroy the physical universe. However, God intervened and His Plan moved forward. Satan then deceived man into rejecting God's moral leadership. However, once again, God's Vision would not be extinguished. In order to reconcile man back to Him, the Great Creator of all that exists divested Himself of the infinite dignity He had possessed for all eternity, and came to earth as a man. It was in this state that the one called the Christ would offer Himself up to be crucified. By doing so He would atone for the sins of all mankind and restore the hope of His infinite Kingdom.

It is hard to imagine anything giving God more joy than His eternal Family and the Kingdom they will inherit. This is God's great passion. It was and is an eternal dream that drives this infinite King. For this reason, the Great Creator of heaven and earth has proclaimed it as the very core of His word. Every syllable in the scriptures points God's human family to this Kingdom and its majestic Leader.

Although man is weak, and even frail, God desires with all His heart to make him infinite. Furthermore, the Great Creator desires that His human family will become an integral part of His eternal Home, a place called the Holy City and New Jerusalem. Perhaps Jesus of Nazareth said it best: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 12:32).

It is virtually impossible for mankind to totally grasp the enormity of God's wisdom and love. But that fact makes these great virtues of the Creator no less real. God is love (1Jn. 4:8). And His great passion for His human family will stand as an eternal tribute to Him. The infinite gifts God has bestowed on man reflect the undying devotion He has for the joy of all His creation.

# A Great Pleasure

Over twenty-five-hundred years ago, the great prophet Isaiah was inspired to write words of extraordinary love and hope. This servant of God described the Father's view of the death of His Own Son. Consider what is being conveyed with these words

"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make his soul an offering for sin..." (Isa. 53:10)

When God the Father offered up the unblemished life of His Son, He did not do it because it felt good. What was taking place with this act was the key play in the fulfillment of His Plan for all mankind. That Plan was envisioned by Him not only before the first Adam, but before the first atom! In truth, God offered up His Son from eternity and that sacrifice will live on forever. The Great Creator and Sustainer of all that exists offered up the life of His Own Son in order that mankind could enter into His Divine Family. This was God's great joy from the beginning. It is what gives Him pleasure. Consider the words of the apostle Paul.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will..." (Eph. 1:3-5)

#### In the Arms of a Loving God

It is hard to imagine what man will do in God's eternal Kingdom. But here is an idea of how it might start. As man ponders the infinite possibilities that lay before him, his mind turns to the incredible sacrifice that made it all possible. At this point, he kneels before his Eternal Father. As he bows his head, he proclaims his unqualified devotion and offers words of great thanksgiving. He then reaches out to the ONE who made it all possible.

At this moment, the Great God and Father of all things reflects back through the vast expanse of eternity and ponders an incredible Vision, an extraordinary Plan, and a magnificent Destiny. He then reaches out to His child and says...

"It was my pleasure."

# Appendix

Appendix I: Man Made Religions

Appendix II: Man Made Christianity

Appendix III: God's Holy Days

Appendix IV: "The Day Christ Died"

Appendix V: "The Apprentice"

Appendix VI: "Count Fifty"

Appendix VII: "Forsaking the Messiah"

# Appendix I Man Made Religions

Ever since Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man has been convinced that he can decide for himself how he will worship his Creator. As a result, the human family has crafted an endless array of beliefs designed to proclaim the greatness of a god made in their own image. The following is a brief list of some of the leading religions and religious beliefs on the earth today. As you read it, ask yourself if this what God had in mind when He cautioned man to "learn not the way of the heathen (Jer. 10).

Aboriginal Dreamtime	Adidam
Agnosticism	Animism
Atheism	Aum Shinri Kyo
Baha'i Faith	Buddhism
Bon	Candomble
Cao Dai	Confucianism

Deism	Divination
Firewalking	Fourth Way
Gnosticism	Hinduism
Humanism	lfa
International Raelian	Islam
Jainism	Judaism
Mazdaznan	Messianic Judaism
Mithraism	New Age
Occult	Paganism
Pantheism	The Process
Rastafarian	Religious Science
Santera	Satanism
Scientology	Shamanism
Shinto	Sikhism
Spiritualism	Taoism
Tenrikyo	Theosophy
Umbanda	Unitarianism
Universal Life Church	Vedism
Voodoo	Wicca / Witchcraft
Yezidism	Zoroastrianism

# Appendix II Man Made Christianity

Although the Bible declares there is only one faith (Eph. 4:5), you wouldn't get that impression from those who profess to follow its teachings. In the world today there are virtually scores of denominations, with each possessing its own unique ideas regarding the scriptures. Below is a list of just some of the leading "Christian" Churches in the world today. Each of these faiths emphatically declares that it is a "Bible-believing Church." However, despite this claim they are separated by an endless stream of conflicting doctrines and traditions.

Although this great community of "believers" is convinced they are on a path led by God's holy spirit, woven throughout their practices and beliefs are the traditions of men. Most notable among these traditions are the festivals and holy days they keep. For the most part, these festivals can be traced to ancient pagan rites which God condemns in His word.

As you consider these denominations, ask yourself if the God of the Bible could possibly approve of His deciding for themselves how they will worship Him. If the answer is no, then how could these really be His Churches?

American Methodist Episcopal	AME Zion
African Orthodox	American Baptist
Amish	Anabaptist
Anglican	Anglican Catholic
Antiochian Orthodox	Armenian Evangelical Church
Armenian Orthodox	Assemblies of God
Associated Gospel Church	Association of Vineyard Church

Baptist	Baptist Bible Fellowship
Brethren in Christ	Bruderh of Communities
Byzantine Catholic Church	Calvinist
Catholic	Celtic Orthodox
Charismatic Episcopal Church	Christadelphian
Christian Reformed Church	Christian Science
Church of Christ	Church of the Nazarene
Church of Scotland	Church of South India
Church of the Brethren America	Church of the Nazarene
Church of the New Jerusalem	Church Universal & Triumphant
Congregational Christian	Coptic Orthodox
Cumberland Presbyterian	Disciples of Christ
Episcopal	Ethiopian Orthodox
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo	Evangelical Congregational
Evangelical Covenant	Evangelical Free Church
Evangelical Lutheran	Evangelical Methodist
Evangelical Presbyterian	Fellowship Christian Assemblies
Fellowship of Grace Brethren	Foursquare Gospel Church
Freemasonry	Free Methodists
Free Presbyterian	Free Will Baptist
Greek Orthodox	Hutterian Brethren
Indian Orthodox	International Churches of Christ
Fundamentalism	Jehovah's Witnesses
Lutheran	Lutheran Missouri Synod
Mar Thoma Syrian Church	Mennonite

Methodist	Moravian Church
Mormonism	Nation of Yahweh
Old Catholic Church	Orthodox Church of America
Orthodox Presbyterian	Pentecostal
Plymouth Brethren	Presbyterian
Primitive Baptist	Protestant Reformed Church
Reformed Baptist	Reformed Episcopal
Reformed Presbyterian	Reorganized Church (LDS)
Romanian Orthodox	Russian Orthodox
Serbian Orthodox	Shaker
Unification Church	Unitarian Universalism
Waldensian Church	Wesleyan

# Appendix III God's Holy Days

God's holy days reveal a great Plan of salvation crafted by Him before the foundations of the world. In a very real sense, they represent the architectural drawings of that Plan. Each day marks a critical step in a journey that will ultimately lead mankind to an eternal, incorruptible Kingdom.

Tragically, mankind and even most professing Christians have rejected these days and instead have embraced festivals that ignore God's purpose for His human family. Despite this defiance, God's holy days are still in effect and are honored by those who recognize Him as the true Moral Authority of the universe. The Great Creator calls them "HOLY CONVOCATIONS." (commanded assemblies). Furthermore, the One commanding them is none other than God Almighty. The Eternal even stated why His people must honor His feasts.

"When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God..." (Dt. 31:11-13)

The scriptures identify seven annual feasts in addition to God's weekly Sabbath. Consider the incredible path they follow as well as their ultimate destination.

#### Passover

The Passover pictures the death of Jesus Christ. This great sacrifice reconciles mankind back to the Father (Rom. 5:10) and makes possible man's journey toward God's eternal and incorruptible Kingdom.

#### Days of Unleavened Bread

This seven-day feast pictures the acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice as well as the rejection of sin. This act is called "REPENTANCE." When one truly repents, he is acknowledging God as the unimpeachable Moral Authority of the universe, and is committing himself to follow God's way.

## Pentecost

As a result of accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and repenting of sin, man can take the next step. Pentecost pictures man receiving God's Holy Spirit. This gift comes as a result of repentance and baptism. From this time on, the believer walks in a "newness of life."

#### Feast of Trumpets

This day pictures the "Day of the Lord" which the scriptures also refer to as "the day of God's wrath." It is a time that will see seven trumpet plagues unleashed with unimaginable force and conclude with seven vial plagues, the power of which will make absolutely clear that God is in charge of His creation. This period represents the last year of man's reign on this planet and is a time when all humanity will experience firsthand how serious God is about defiance to Him and His law.

The Feast of Trumpets not only pictures God's judgment on a world that for six thousand years has defied Him and His moral authority, it also pictures the triumphant return of Jesus Christ to subdue the nations. At that time He will make war with the governments of this world and restore order to a planet that refused to obey its Creator.

### Day of Atonement

Once the Messiah returns to earth to subdue the nations, He will order the imprisonment of Satan the devil (Rev. 20:1-3). The Day of Atonement pictures that moment. Once Satan is bound God's Kingdom will be formally established on earth.

#### Feast of Tabernacles

This seven-day festival pictures God's Millennial Kingdom—a period that all true believers today fervently pray for. When it comes, the earth will be filled with great peace and prosperity, and the knowledge of the true God will be everywhere. The scriptures reveal that this Kingdom will last one thousand years. However, it will ultimately be transformed into one that will be everlasting.

## Last Great Day (aka the eight day of the feast)

The Last Great Day pictures a time when the billions of people who never knew the True God will be raised to life again. At that time, they will be taught God's truth and be given an opportunity to claim the sacrifice of the Savior of the World. At the conclusion of this period God's final judgment of man will take place. This is referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment. In it, all mankind will appear before him. Those who have yielded themselves to the Great Moral Authority of the universe will have their names read from the Book of Life and will enter into an incorruptible dimension called the New Heavens and the New Earth. Those who rebelled will be cast into the lake of fire and perish (Rev. 20: 11-15).

\* \* \*

The following briefly examines each of God's weekly as well as annual holy days as well.

### The Sabbath

The Sabbath is a memorial to God's physical as well as His spiritual creation. On the seventh day, the Great Creator and Sustainer of the universe consecrated the Sabbath and made it HOLY (Gen. 2:2-3). He did so as a constant reminder to His children that He has set them apart for a holy purpose as well. That purpose is for them to be born into His Spiritual Family as literal sons and daughters (Ex. 31:13). The Sabbath pictures God's Kingdom being established on earth and the great abundance that Kingdom will bring. Those who honor the Sabbath as He commands declare their desire for God's Kingdom to come and for His will to be accomplished in them.

#### The Time of Observance

◆ The seventh day beginning at even (Friday sunset)

## Significant Events Associated with this Day

- God sanctified the day as holy (Gen. 2:2-3)
- ◆ God gave it to Israel as a formal command (Ex. 20:8)
- ◆ A specific Sabbath Covenant was established (Ex. 31: 13-18).
- ◆ Israel was indicted for breaking it (Ezk. 20; 22:26)
- ◆ Judah was also warned (Jer. 17:19-27)
- ◆ Judah punished for not honoring this day (Jer. 52:12-30)

#### **Old Testament Observance**

- God created it and set it apart (Gen. 2:2-3)
- The command existed before Sinai (Ex. 16)
- God identified it as a "sign" (Ex. 31:13-18)
- David dedicated a psalm to the Sabbath (Psa. 92)
- God personally wrote the command (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 32:16)
- It is to be a delight (Isa. 58:13-14)
- God's people are to consider the Sabbath honorable (Isa. 58:13)

#### **New Testament Observance**

- Jesus taught on the Sabbath (Mk. 1:21)
- Jesus called Himself the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27)
- The apostles kept the Sabbath (Acts 13:42)
- Paul kept it (Acts 13:42; 17:2; 18:4)
- Jesus said it would be kept at the end time (Mt. 24:20)

#### **Future Observance of the Sabbath**

• The Sabbath will be kept in the millennium (Isa. 66:23)

### **God Outlined Specific Prohibitions Regarding this Day**

- Man must cease from his weekly labor (Ex. 20:9-10)
- Man must not cause others to work on his behalf (Ex. 20:10)
- Man must refrain from engaging in any commerce on this day (Ne.10:31, 13:15-21)
- Man must not seek his own pleasure on the Sabbath (Isa. 58:13)

### Jesus Example Regarding How to Keep the Sabbath Holy

- He assembled in the synagogue (Mk. 1:21)
- He read from the scriptures (Lk. 4:16)
- He healed the sick (Mk. 1:29)
- He shared meals with brethren (Lk. 14:1-6)
- He took walks with friends (Mt. 12:1)
- He inspired hope in the weak (Lk. 13:15-16)
- He stayed in constant contact with His Father

## The Passover

Leviticus 23:5

The Passover represents one of the most powerful images in the scriptures. It pictures a time of great deliverance. In the Old Testament, the Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from the bondage they suffered while enslaved in Egypt. However, this very special day also looked forward to a greater deliverance—one that would take place fifteen hundred years after the time of the exodus.

In the New Testament, this observance pictures the death of Jesus Christ (1Cor. 5:7). This sacrifice frees those who claim it from the consequences of sin (Ro. 6:23). Sin is the great oppressor of mankind. It has held the world captive since Adam and Eve rejected God's Moral Authority in the garden

of Eden. But Jesus Christ came to redeem mankind from the power of this great enemy. He did so by bearing the sins of the world on the stake.

Down through the centuries, God's people around the world have kept the Passover *at its appointed time* (Lk. 22:14) and they continue to do so to this very day. This solemn observance commemorates the death of the Savior of the world. For just as the blood of the lamb made it possible for the Israelites in Egypt to escape God's judgment (Ex. 12:12-13), the blood of Jesus Christ, the true Lamb of God, makes it possible for man to be reconciled back to the Father (Ro. 5:10) and to escape eternal death (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 1:7; 1Pe. 1:19-20; 1Jn. 1:7)

#### The Time of Observance

- The fourteenth day of the first month at even (Lev. 23:5)
- It is to be kept in its appointed season (Nu. 9:2)
- A second Passover is to be observed if the first was missed (2Chr.30:2-4)

### Significant Events Associated with this Day

- Abraham offers up Isaac (Gen. 22:1-12)
- Israel kills the Passover lamb and is delivered (Ex.12)
- Jesus institutes the symbols of bread and wine which picture His broken body and shed blood (Mt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:17-20; 1Cor. 11:23-26)
- The Savior of the world is crucified (Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 19)

#### **Old Testament Observance**

- Kept by the children of Israel every year. (Ex. 13:10; Nu. 34:20)
- The same ordinance applied to "strangers" (Nu. 9:14)

#### **New Testament Observance**

- Jesus kept the Passover when He was a young boy. (Lk. 2:41-50)
- Jesus and His disciples kept the Passover. (Mt. 26; Mk.14; Lk.22)
- Jesus institutes the bread and wine (Mt. 27:26-27; 1Cor. 11:23-26)
- Jesus explained the purpose of the symbols. (Jn. 6:53-57)
- Paul and the New Testament Church observed it. (1Cor. 11:23)

# Days of Unleavened Bread

Leviticus 23:6-9

The Days of Unleavened Bread picture a time of freedom when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. However, this feast represented something much greater in God's Plan of salvation. In the New Testament, this feast pictures God's people coming out of sin (1Cor. 5:7-8). In the scriptures, Egypt is pictured as a type of sin.

This great spring festival commemorates the fight God's people wage against sin and the importance of overcoming. Down through the ages, God's people have honored this feast and they continue to do so to this very day. By keeping this feast, they not only obey the commandment to do so, but they also declare their commitment to God's way as well as their rejection of sin.

#### The Time of Observance

• Fifteenth day of the first month at even. (Lev. 23:6-9)

#### Significant Events Associated with this Day

- Abraham offered up his son Isaac
- Israel came out of Egypt and passed through the Red Sea. (Ex. 12-14)
- God's end-time Church will flee to a place He has prepared for them and be nourished there for three and a half years. (Rev. 12:13-16)

#### **Old Testament Observance**

- "Keep the feast... as I command you." (Ex. 23:15, 34:18; Nu. 28:17; Dt.16:3-8)
- "Keep the feast with joy" (Ezra 6:22)

#### **New Testament Observance**

- Jesus and His disciples kept the feast (Mt. 26:17; Mk. 14:12; Lk. 22:1)
- Paul kept the feast (Acts 20:6). "Therefore, let us keep the feast." (1Cor. 5:7)

## Pentecost

Leviticus 23:10-23

The day of Pentecost pictures the covenant God has entered into with His people. In the Old Testament, that covenant was made when the Creator gave the children of Israel His great moral code, the Ten Commandments. The scriptures suggest that He gave His law to Moses on Mount Sinai on this very day. However, this day also looked forward to the time when God would make a New Covenant with His people (Jer. 31:31-34). At that time, the Great Moral Authority of the universe would write His law on the hearts of those who repented and came out of sin. This New Covenant was established on the day of Pentecost, 30 or 31 A.D. It marked the birth of the New Testament Church which is the spiritual nation of Israel.

Furthermore, Pentecost, which takes place during the spring harvest (a small harvest), reveals that God is only calling a few at this time. These few are referred to as His "firstfruits" (Jas. 1:18). Their place in the history of God's Plan of salvation is significant. Those who keep Pentecost as God commands give honor to Him and His wonderful calling. The apostle Paul spoke of this as the moment when the dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible and meet the Messiah in the air (1Cor. 15:51-52; 1Th. 4:13-17)--followed by a great wedding. Shortly after that they prepare to make war with the earth and subdue all nations (Jude 14, 15; Rev. 19:11-21).

#### The Time of Observance

Fifty days after the Sabbath following the Passover (Lev. 23:10-23)

#### Significant Events Associated with this Day

- Abel offers up the firstfruits of his flock (Gen. 4:3-4)
- Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God and Israel becomes a nation. (Ex. 19:1-8; 20:1-26)
- The New Testament Church is born. God's spirit is given. (Acts 2)
- The resurrection of the saints takes place followed by their marriage to Christ

### **Old Testament Observance**

- Feast of Weeks (Ex. 34:22; Dt. 16:10)
- Feast of the Harvest (Ex. 23:16)

• Day of Firstfruits (Nu. 28:26)

#### **New Testament Observance**

- The New Testament Church was founded on this day (Acts 2)
- Pictures the resurrected Christ, who was the very first to be born again (1Cor. 15:20; Ro. 8:29; Col. 1:15)

# The Feast of Trumpets

Leviticus 23:24-25

The Feast of Trumpets pictures a time when Jesus Christ will return with His bride, his saints and subdue the nations.

#### The Time of Observance

• First day of the seventh month (Tishri) at even (Lev.23:24-25).

## Significant Events Associated with this Day

- Adam was created (Gen. 1 and 2)
- Jesus was born (Lk. 2:1-7)
- The "Day of the Lord" begins on Trumpets (Rev.8). It will last one year and consist of seven trumpet plagues and seven vial plagues and culminate with the return of Jesus Christ and His Saints one year later.

#### **Old Testament Observance**

- A day of rejoicing (Neh. 8:2, 9-12)
- A day of deliverance (Isa. 27:13; Zech. 14:4-5)

## **New Testament Observance**

- Pictures the triumphant return of Jesus Christ
- He will lead an indestructible army and subdue the nations ( (Joel 2; Rev. 19:11-21)

# The Day of Atonement

Leviticus 23:26-32

The Day of Atonement pictures a time when all the sins Satan has perpetrated on mankind will be conveyed back to him (Lev. 16). Once this takes place, he will be bound up and cast into a bottomless pit for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3).

Most importantly, this day commemorates the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and looks forward to a time when man will be reconciled back to God (Ro. 10:5) and finally be "at one" with Him.

#### The Time of Observance

Tenth day of the seventh month, Tishri (Lev. 23:27)

### Significant Events Associated with this Day

- Satan deceives Eve into eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3)
- Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1-10)
- Satan is bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3)
- Satan is ultimately cast into outer darkness and permanently removed from God's people

#### **Old Testament Observance**

- Instructions to the priests concerning this day (Lev. 16)
- A commanded assembly (Lev. 23: 23-26)
- A day to afflict your soul (Num. 29:7)
- It is called a solemn day (Psa. 81:1-3)

#### **New Testament Observance**

• Paul kept the "fast" (Acts 27:9)

# The Feast of Tabernacles

Leviticus 23:34

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures God's Kingdom being established on earth under the leadership of Jesus Christ and the saints (Dan. 7:18). At that time, the world will be at peace, and health and hope will spring forth everywhere. Those who keep this commanded festival proclaim their loyalty to that Kingdom and its King.

#### The Time of Observance

• The fifteenth day of the seventh month at even (Lev. 23:34)

## Significant Events Associated with this Day

God's Millennial Kingdom will commence (Rev. 20:14)

#### **Old Testament Observance**

- Called the "Feast of Ingathering" (Ex. 23:16; 34:22)
- "You shall observe the Feast" (Dt. 16:13)
- "You shall dwell in booths" (Neh. 8:14)
- God's people are to rejoice in it (Dt. 16:13-16)

#### **New Testament Observance**

- Jesus kept the Feast (Jn. 7:2,14)
- Paul kept it. "I must... keep this feast" (Acts 18:21)
- It will even be kept during the Millennium (Zech. 14:16-19)

# The Last Great Day

Leviticus 23:36

At the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles is the last of seven annual holy days. The Last Great Day takes place during the fall harvest (a GREAT harvest) and pictures a time when the billions of people who were never called will be resurrected and learn about the true God and His Plan for mankind. The Bible indicates that this resurrection will take place after the millennium (Rev. 20:5) and will be a physical resurrection (Ezk. 37). After learning about the True God, those who are a part of this resurrection will be given an opportunity to accept God's terms for entrance into His Kingdom.

This day also pictures the time of God's final judgment on mankind. It is here that the books (of the Bible) will be opened and everyone will be judged according to their works (Rev. 20:11-15). Once this judgment is concluded, the last phase of mankind will be born into God's Family as literal sons and daughters. Additionally, the entire universe will become incorruptible and the New Jerusalem will become the Capital of God's Eternal Kingdom.

When God's people observe this day, they not only obey His command to do so, they also honor His great sovereignty over the destiny of the universe. This day pictures the culmination of a Plan crafted by the Great Creator before the worlds were fashioned.

#### The Time of Observance

The eight day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:36)

### Significant Events Associated with this Day

- A great resurrection of the billions of people who were not called during this physical life. (Rev. 20:4-5, Ezk. 37)
- The Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20: 11-15)
- The creation of the New Heaven and Earth (Rev. 21)
- The establishment of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21and 22)

#### **Old Testament Observance**

- A commanded assembly (Lev. 23:30, Nu. 29:35)
- A solemn assembly (Neh. 8:18)

#### **New Testament Observance**

• Jesus taught on this day (Jn. 7:37)

# Appendix IV "The Day Christ Died"

The last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life stand as the most pivotal in human history. During this time, the Great Creator of all that exists offered Himself to atone for the sins of all mankind.

The words that follow trace what took place as the Lamb of God advanced toward His death. This period begins with Jesus and His disciples keeping His final Passover. Contrary to what many believe, this observance actually took place on a Tuesday evening, making Jesus' crucifixion occur on

Wednesday, the eve of the High Sabbath that began the Days of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6). The times assigned to each event are estimates based on the Biblical record.

# Jesus' Last Passover Tuesday evening, Nisan 14. 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Jesus and His disciples arrive at a home prepared for them to partake of the Passover. They will keep this feast in an upper room. Although the name of the homeowner is not mentioned in any of the gospels, many authorities believe he may have been the father of John Mark. (Mt. 26:20)

\*\*\*

As they enter the upper room, the disciples are arguing over power and status as well as who will be the greatest in the Kingdom (Lk. 22:14-30). Regrettably, this was a recurring dispute among them. A few weeks earlier, the mother of James and John actually lobbied for her sons to sit at Jesus' right and left side in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-28). Although their arguing is clearly a distraction, Jesus addresses this issue, and in doing so, offers a profound lesson about power and greatness in His Father's Kingdom.

\*\*\*

While teaching His disciples about true greatness and what it means to govern in God's Kingdom, Jesus gives a graphic example of how a King leads. He does so by kneeling before His disciples and washing their feet. So shocking is this act that Peter at first refuses to allow Jesus to perform it on him. However, he later consents. (Jn. 13:1-20)

\*\*\*

As the meal progresses, Jesus indicates that He will be betrayed by one of His disciples (Mt. 26:21-25). He later identifies that disciple by saying, "He it is for whom I shall dip the sop and give it to him."

Given the eating styles of the day, everyone present may have dipped their hands in the dish with Jesus. Therefore, His words may have been of little use to the disciples in determining who the betrayer was. The point the Messiah may very well have been making was that His betrayal would come from a friend, with whom He had shared His food just as it was prophesied (Psa. 41:9).

\*\*\*

Satan then enters into Judas Iscariot (Jn. 13:27), causing him to leave the upper room. However, the disciples are unaware of what he is about to do. They think he is going to purchase provisions for the feast or perhaps give something to the poor. (Jn. 13:27-30)

\*\*\*

The Messiah then makes a powerful statement regarding Judas and his act of treachery. Jesus says that although His betrayal was prophesied in the scriptures, this did not mean that the one who would betray Him was not responsible for this act. Jesus then reveals that it would actually have been better if Judas Iscariot had never been born. (Mt. 26:24)

Quoting from the book of Zechariah (Zech. 13:7), Jesus then informs the disciples that they will all desert Him. (Mt. 26:31-32)

\*\*\*

Peter rebukes Jesus for even thinking such a thing. He then declares that he is prepared to go to prison and even face death for the Messiah. (Lk. 22:33)

\*\*\*

Jesus responds by informing Peter that he (Peter) will deny his Lord three times before the cock crows the following morning (Lk. 22:34). Peter must have been genuinely mystified by these words. He was totally convinced that his loyalty to the Messiah was unwavering.

\*\*

At this point, Jesus introduces new elements to the Passover. He institutes the symbols of the bread and wine as types of His body which would be broken (1Cor. 11:24) and His blood which would be shed (Mt. 26:26-28; 1Cor. 11:25).

\*\*\*

After instituting the symbols of the New Covenant, Jesus teaches His disciples about their responsibilities as leaders in the New Testament Church. This is often referred to as His "Farewell Discourse." At this point, Jesus promises the disciples that He will send the holy spirit to guide them. He also speaks of the connection between obedience and love. The point He makes is that you cannot have one without the other (Jn. 14).

\*\*\*

Jesus and His disciples now prepare to leave the upper room. However, before they go, they sing a hymn (Mt. 26:30). The scriptures do not identify the specific song they sang; however, the one normally sung at the Passover was the last part of the "Hallel" (Psa. 114-118). During this song, the leader would sing the verses while the followers would respond with "Hallelujah."

\*\*\*

At some point during this period, Judas Iscariot is meeting with the chief priests and the Pharisees and plotting the capture of Jesus. Additionally, Judas has received thirty pieces of silver for his betrayal just as it was prophesied (Zech. 11:12).

# On the Way to Gethsemanae 8:00 PM – 9:00 PM

After leaving the upper room, Jesus and His disciples begin to walk toward the Mount of Olives. Little do the disciples know that their time with the Messiah can now be measured in hours. (Mk. 14:26).

\*\*\*

During this journey, the Messiah provides His disciples with instructions concerning their relationship to Him and His Father. He exhorts them to bear fruit and to keep His Commandments. He also warns them that they will be persecuted because of their loyalty to Him.

Jesus then speaks powerfully concerning the great sacrifice He will make in just a few short hours. His words are deep and very moving: "Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do the things I command you" (Jn. 15:1-27).

\*\*\*

As Jesus and His disciples continue to walk toward the mount of Olives, He informs them that after His death, He will return to the Father in Heaven. However, He will not leave his disciples alone. Jesus explains that He will send the holy spirit to guide and comfort them. The Messiah then emphasizes that although He will not be with them physically, He will always be connected to them and that they can count on His love and the love of the Father (Jn. 16:1-33).

\*\*\*

As the Messiah and His disciples approach the garden of Gethsemanae, He offers up a very moving intercessory prayer. In it, He acknowledges that His end is near. He then appeals to the Father to restore to Him the glory he had before the world began. Additionally, Jesus asks His Father to bless the disciples as well as those who will believe because of what the disciples will teach. He concludes this prayer with words of great hope: "O righteous Father, the world has not known You: but I have known You, and these (the disciples) have known that You have sent me. And I have declared unto them Your Name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith You have loved me may be in them and I in them" (Jn. 17:1-26).

\*\*\*

Jesus and His disciples then proceed to enter the garden of Gethsemanae.

# In the Garden of Gethsemanae 9:00 PM – Midnight

Upon their arrival at Gethsemanae, Jesus instructs eight of His disciples to wait and pray while He, as well as Peter, James, and John go further into the garden (Mt. 26:36-37).

\*\*\*

Jesus then reveals to these three men that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, "even unto death" (Mk. 14:34). With these words, Jesus is not suggesting that He wants to die, but rather that the great emotional stress He is experiencing at this time is so severe it is actually life threatening.

\*\*\*

Jesus then leaves these three very close friends and goes further into the garden by Himself. There He falls to the ground and pours out His heart to the Father. Jesus appeals to Him to remove the "cup" containing the horror of His impending death. However, the Messiah also acknowledges that the decision regarding what would happen

was up to the Father and that whatever His Father choose, He would honor it without hesitation (Mk. 24:35-36).

At this point, it is important to understand that never once did the Messiah consider abandoning the course He was on. There was not one ounce of doubt in Jesus concerning His commitment to His Father's will. To suggest otherwise is simply ignorant of God's great Plan and how it would play out. What Jesus was seeking was clarity. He would accept another course only IF it would achieve the same end (Mt. 26:39).

\*\*\*

As Jesus suffers in the garden, His perspiration becomes as it were "great drops of blood." In response to this incredible mental anguish, an angel is sent to strengthen Him (Lk. 22:44).

\*\*\*

The Messiah will offer up His appeal for the Father to intervene three different times. After each prayer, He will return to His disciples, only to find them sleeping (Mt. 26:39-46).

\*\*\*

Upon the conclusion of His third and final prayer in Gethsemanae, Jesus hears the sounds of soldiers approaching. He quickly gathers His disciples and goes out to meet them (Mt. 26:46).

# The Arrest of the Messiah Between midnight and 1:00 AM Wednesday Morning

While still in the garden of Gethsemanae, Jesus and His disciples meet up with Judas Iscariot and a contingent of soldiers dispatched by the chief priests and the Pharisees (Jn. 18:2).

\*\*\*

Jesus asks the arresting party whom they seek. When they inform Him they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah informs them "I am He" (Jn. 18:3).

\*\*\*

Upon hearing Jesus' words, the soldiers stagger backwards and fall to the ground (Jn. 18:6).

\*\*\*

Judas Iscariot then moves toward Jesus and kisses Him as a sign to the soldiers that this is, in fact, the one they seek (Mt.26:48).

\*\*\*

At this point, Jesus requests that His disciples be allowed to go because it is Him they are looking for. Furthermore, He will offer no resistance to those who had come to seize Him (Jn. 18:8-9).

As the soldiers begin to arrest the Messiah, Peter draws his sword and attempts to defend his Lord. During the commotion he cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. His name is Malchus (Mt. 26:50-51).

\*\*\*

Jesus rebukes Peter for his attack and informs him that He does not require the protection of His disciples. He explains to Peter that if He wished to be delivered from this situation, He could summon twelve legions of angels to come to His defense. However, this is not what the Messiah has in mind. He clearly knows what lies ahead and His heart is ready for it. (Mt 26:52-53).

\*\*\*

After this rebuke, Jesus touches the ear of Malchus and heals him of the wound he received by Peter. This is the last miracle Jesus will perform before His death (Lk. 22:51).

\*\*\*

The Messiah then questions the tactics used by the chief priests and the elders when arresting Him. He says, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?" (Mt. 25:55). The point the Messiah is making is that if He had been leading such a rebellion, this action might have made sense.

However, because Jesus openly taught in the temple, this clandestine arrest simply defied logic. Therefore, those who orchestrated it must have been motivated by something else, perhaps fear. In reality, taking the action they did revealed a great lack of moral courage on the part of these "spiritual leaders." Jesus was exposing this truth.

\*\*\*

At this point, the Messiah is bound and taken back to the city to be tried by the Jewish leadership under the direction of the high priests. As Jesus is being led away, all the disciples flee just as He had predicted they would (Mt. 26:31; Mk. 14:50-52).

As He proceeds toward the site of His trial, Jesus most assuredly pondered the events that were about to play out in the next several hours. This could not have been easy to do.

# The Interrogation of Jesus At the Home of Annas 1:00 AM – 2:00AM

Jesus is first taken to the home of Annas, where He will be briefly interrogated. Annas was the former high priest prior to Caiaphas. As such, he is regarded with great respect and seen as an expert in the religious matters of the Jews. Additionally, he is Caiaphas' father-in-law.

Annas begins his interrogation by asking Jesus about His doctrine as well as His disciples (Jn. 18:19). It is possible that he is attempting to ascertain Jesus' sphere of

influence. Perhaps the Jewish leadership was even considering taking action against loyalists to the Messiah. After all, they had even plotted to kill Lazarus after Jesus had raised him from the dead (Jn. 12:10). They may have considered doing the same to Jesus' inner circle of followers.

\*\*\*

Jesus explains to Annas that His message was no secret. It was, in fact, declared openly in the temple. He then goes on to say that if Annas is truly interested in what Jesus taught, all he would have to do is ask any of the numerous people who had heard His message (Jn. 18:20-21).

\*\*\*

At this point, a soldier strikes Jesus and rebukes Him for speaking to the high priest in such a disrespectful manner (Jn. 18:22). It is interesting to note that the act of striking a man who had not been condemned was illegal. However, this did not deter the guard.

The meeting with Annas is brief but speaks volumes concerning the legitimacy of the trial that awaits the Messiah. It is now clear that the Jewish leadership is interested in only one thing. They intend to condemn the Christ.

\*\*\*

At the conclusion of His interrogation by Annas, Jesus is bound and sent to the home of Caiaphas, the current high priest. It is here that He will be formally tried (Jn. 18:24).

# On the Way to the Palace of Caiaphas 2:00 AM – 2:30 AM

As Jesus is being led to the home of Caiaphas, Peter and a second disciple return and follow at a distance. Most authorities believe this second disciple is John, the son of Zebedee. (Jn. 18:15)

\*\*\*

Because John knows the high priest, he is allowed to enter into the court. He then requests that Peter also be allowed to enter. (Jn. 18:15-16). His request is granted.

\*\*\*

A young girl attending the gate at Caiaphas' palace asks Peter if he is one of Jesus' disciples. Peter responds, "I am not" (Jn. 18:17). This is his first denial of the Messiah. But it will not be the last.

\*\*\*

As Jesus' trial begins, Peter waits in an open courtyard with some officers who have just started a fire to warm themselves (Lk. 22:55). Although it is a spring evening, it is very

chilly. Jerusalem lies at an altitude of 2800 feet above sea level. This fact, along with the time (well after midnight), would explain why a fire would be started.

# The Trial before the Sanhedrin The Palace of Caiaphas, the High Priest

2:30 AM - 5:30 AM

As the trial begins, a group referred to as the scribes, elders, and chief priests gather at the palace of Caiaphas. This group, which most authorities believe comprises the Great Sanhedrin, seeks to bring charges against Jesus. They begin by presenting several witnesses accusing the Messiah of crimes worthy of death. This is done in an attempt to secure a quick verdict. However, although many witnesses speak, their testimony only conflicts with that given by other witnesses (Mk. 14:55-56). This frustrates the chief priest which only intensifies the emotionally charged atmosphere of the trial. In an attempt to recover from this legal blunder, Jesus' accusers are forced to bring forth still more testimony.

\*\*\*

Two additional witnesses come forth and testify that Jesus threatened to destroy the temple and then raise it up in three days. This appears to be the most compelling evidence of the trial thus far. The argument being advanced by the Jewish leadership at this point is that Jesus intends to desecrate the physical temple.

The temple was an exquisite building and stood as the most significant structure in Jewish life. Furthermore, any desecration of a sacred place was almost universally considered a capital offense in the ancient world. Even pagans agreed with the Jews on this point.

In reality, Jesus did make such a claim early in His ministry. But the temple He spoke of was the temple of His body (Jn. 2:19-21)

\*\*\*

Unfortunately for the Jewish leadership, their star witnesses are unable to agree with each other (Mk. 14:57-58). This clearly was not anticipated and only serves to exacerbate the situation.

\*\*\*

As the case against Jesus appears to be falling apart, the religious leadership turns to the high priest. Caiaphas is a highly skilled Jewish scholar and an expert interrogator. He begins his examination of the Messiah with a long pause. This strategy is employed in hopes that Jesus will explain His actions without Caiaphas having to utter a word.

\*\*\*

Unfortunately for the high priest, Jesus stays silent. It is possible this silence may have lasted several minutes. Additionally, it must have created a very unsettling atmosphere in the trial. However, the silence is broken when Caiaphas demands that the Messiah respond to the accusations being leveled against Him (Mk. 14:60-61).

The emotional pitch at this point is extremely high. The incredibly disciplined high priest was clearly outmatched by this young Galilean. Despite his talents, Caiaphas was being embarrassed by the Messiah – in his own home no less. As a result, he quickly abandons his earlier strategy. The high priest is not in any mood for games. Therefore, his questioning of Jesus becomes filled with intensity. He may even have been screaming at this point.

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, as the Messiah is being threatened in what can only be described as a kangaroo court, Peter is accused of being one of Jesus' disciples as he warms himself by the fire in Caiaphas' courtyard. Once again, Peter denies having any association with Jesus (Jn. 18:25). This is Peter's second denial of the Messiah. But there is another yet to come.

\*\*\*

Caiaphas now intensifies his interrogation of Jesus. The next question he asks is very direct and cuts through any doubt concerning his opinion of the Messiah. With all the intensity of a passionate prosecutor, Caiaphas says, "I adjure you by the living God that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!" (Mt. 26:63). The phrase "I adjure you by the living God" is a legal formula. Here Caiaphas is demanding an answer in the strongest language he can use. This is done by imposing an oath. If Jesus refuses to answer, He will be breaking a legally imposed order to testify. However, if he responds, Caiaphas is convinced Jesus will still be ruined. If Jesus denies He is the Christ, the crisis will be over, but so will His influence. If, on the other hand, Jesus affirms that He is the promised Messiah, then He must be considered a liar because He has not delivered the Jews from Roman tyranny.

Caiaphas' ploy is simple. Since the false testimony of witnesses had failed to prove Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, the high priest is hoping that Jesus will openly blaspheme when He responds to this question, and thus Jesus will condemn Himself with His own words.

\*\*\*

At this point, Jesus provides a very interesting response to Caiaphas' question. He says, "It is as you said" (Mt. 26:64). This answer is affirmative in nature but indirect in form. Essentially, what Jesus is doing is testifying to what Caiaphas has said. In essence, Jesus is agreeing with the assertion of Caiaphas. This response is an insult to the high priest, but the best is yet to come.

\*\*\*

Jesus then speaks words that are brazen with confidence and strength. He says, "Nevertheless, I say unto you, henceforth you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64). Once again, Jesus does not use the name of God in His testimony. Instead He uses the term "power."

\*\*\*

Upon hearing these words, Caiaphas is infuriated. He rips his clothes and shouts "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need have we of witnesses?" (Mt. 26:65). He then asks the council, "What do you think?" They respond, "He is worthy of death!" (Mt. 26:66).

It is now approaching dawn and Peter is still outside trying to gain a glimpse of his Lord. At this point, one of the servants of the high priest notices him. This servant reveals that Peter was in Gethsemanae with Jesus during the Messiah's arrest, and accuses him of being a disciple. Then someone else says that Peter's speech reveals that he is a Galilean. This is further evidence that links Peter to Jesus of Nazareth. However, Peter continues to deny any relationship with the Messiah. He even begins to "curse and sware" in an attempt to distance himself from his Master (Mk. 14:70-71, Jn.18:26).

The words "curse and sware" do not refer to obscene or profane language as it is thought of today. What Peter was doing was invoking a solemn oath in which he places a curse on himself if he is lying. He may also have appealed to something sacred in an attempt to persuade his accuser that he was telling the truth, which he wasn't.

\*\*\*

Immediately after Peter's third denial of the Messiah the cock crows (Mt. 26:74).

\*\*\*

Although Jesus does not hear Peter's denials of Him, He does hear the rooster crowing. This sound prompts Him to glance out a window and look upon Peter. As their eyes meet, Peter remembers what Jesus had predicted about his loyalty. Now devastated with guilt and shame, Peter leaves Caiaphas' courtyard and weeps bitterly (Lk. 22:61-62).

\*\*\*

As Jesus turns back toward His accusers, He is spit upon and then struck. At this point, the Messiah is blindfolded. His accusers then resume mocking Him and continue to strike Him. As this indignity continues, Jesus is silent. (Mt. 26:67-68, Mk. 14:65)

\*\*\*

Shortly after daybreak, the Messiah is formally condemned by the full council (Lk. 22:66-71).

\*\*\*

After being condemned by the high court of the Jews, the Messiah is bound and delivered to the palace of Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea (Mt. 27:2).

# The First Appearance of Jesus Before Pontus Pilate 6:00 AM – to 6:30 AM

Jesus is taken to appear before Pontius Pilate by the Jewish leadership who had just condemned Him (Lk. 23:1). However, these men refuse to enter into the governor's palace because they are afraid of being defiled and not being able to take the Passover. Therefore, as Jesus is brought into the palace, Pilate goes out to meet His accusers. He then inquires about the charges these Jewish leaders are bringing against the Messiah

(Jn. 18:28-29).

\*\*\*

The elders of the people advise Pilate that Jesus is an evil man deserving of death. His crimes include perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying He is Christ the King (Lk. 23:2; Jn. 18:30).

\*\*\*

Pilate sees this as a religious matter and tells those bringing this accusation to judge Jesus according to their law (Jn. 18:31).

\*\*\*

The Jewish leadership protests Pilate's suggestion. They inform the governor that they cannot preside over such a trial because Roman law prohibits them putting a man to death (Jn. 18:31). Noticeably absent was any admission that they had already tried Jesus.

\*\*\*

At this point, Pilate is undoubtedly taken aback by the blatant hostility these men have toward the Messiah. Therefore, he returns to his palace to question Jesus regarding the charges against Him. He begins by asking, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Jn. 18:33).

\*\*\*

Jesus responds by asking if Pilate had drawn this conclusion on his own or if he was told this by others (Jn. 18:34).

\*\*\*

Pilate is clearly puzzled by the open hostility these Jewish leaders have for someone who considers Himself a king. This ambivalence is reflected in his interrogation of Jesus. Here, the governor simply cannot understand why the Jews gathered outside his palace are clamoring for the death of their "leader". The idea of such a thing is totally foreign to him. In Rome, loyalty to Caesar was a given. Why wouldn't it be the same with these Jews and their king? (Jn. 18:35). Pilate may even have wondered why the crowd that was growing outside wasn't preparing to fight in defense of their leader.

\*\*\*

Jesus understood Pilate's confusion and informed him that looks can be deceiving. The fact of the matter was that the Messiah did have a kingdom that was very real. However, His Kingdom was no threat to Rome at all. If the truth be known, it was not even of this world. If it was of this world, then Jesus' servants would fight (Jn. 18:36).

\*\*\*

As a result of this interrogation, Pilate concludes that Jesus is innocent of the charges brought against Him. He then informs His accusers of this fact (Lk. 23:4).

\*\*\*

When the chief priests hear this, they start hollering out multiple accusations against Jesus. This prompts Pilate to ask the Messiah why he doesn't defend Himself against such brutal words (Mk. 15:3-4).

\*\*\*

At this point, Jesus continues to stay silent, causing Pilate to marvel greatly (Mt. 27:12-14).

\*\*\*

As the chief priests see their chance of getting rid of the Messiah slipping away, they become desperate. They passionately argue that Jesus was a genuine threat to the empire and that He was raising up pockets of rebellion from Galilee to Judea (Lk. 23:5).

\*\*\*

When Pilate hears this, he has what he now believes is a way to avoid getting involved in this matter. Because Jesus is a Galilean, Pilate concludes that this is a jurisdictional matter. Therefore, he will send the Messiah to Herod Antipas who presided over Galilee at this time (Lk. 23:6-7).

# Jesus' Interrogation before Herod 6:45 AM – 7:15 AM

While Jesus is being moved to appear before Herod, Judas Iscariot returns to the chief priests and elders. In an attempt to absolve himself of guilt, Judas brings back the thirty pieces of silver he received for betraying the Messiah. He then confesses, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood" (Mt. 27:3-4).

\*\*\*

Upon hearing Judas' confession, these spiritual leaders respond, "What is that to us?" (Mt. 27: 4). These words are an attempt to absolve themselves of any responsibility in Jesus' betrayal.

However, with their response they actually indict themselves, in that they did not dispute Judas' confession that Jesus was innocent: "I have betrayed **innocent** blood" (Mt. 27:4). With this in mind, Judas' confession should mean something to these men because, although he (Judas) betrayed innocent blood, they (the chief priests and elders) were responsible for condemning innocent blood. It is very possible they knew this truth.

\*\*\*

Judas then throws the betrayal money into the sanctuary and leaves. Shortly after that he commits suicide (Mt. 27:5-10).

\*\*\*

At this point, Jesus appears before Herod Antipas. Herod is the tetrarch over Galilee and as a Jew, is in Jerusalem to observe the Passover.

\*\*\*

During this interrogation, Herod asks the Messiah several questions. However, Jesus stays silent. This silence causes the chief priests and scribes to "vehemently accuse

Him." And although Herod finds Jesus "not guilty," He, along with his soldiers, mock Him before sending Him back to Pilate (Lk. 23:8-12).

# The Second Appearance of the Messiah Before Pontus Pilate

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM

Upon receiving Jesus from Herod, Pilate informs the chief priests that neither he nor Herod can find fault in the one they accuse. The governor then states that he will beat the Messiah and then release Him. However, Pilate can tell that this judgment is not setting well with the Jewish leaders who appear before him (Lk. 23:13-16).

\*\*\*

At this point, Pilate's wife strongly advises him to have nothing to do with condemning Jesus. She informs the governor that she has suffered many things in a dream that warn against taking any action. She appeals to her husband to walk away from this matter. (Mt. 27:19)

\*\*\*

Upon hearing her words, Pilate attempts to placate Jesus' accusers. He decides to invoke a Passover custom in which a condemned man receives a full pardon. However, according to the custom, the people must choose who is to be pardoned (Mk. 15:6).

\*\*\*

Pilate then orders that a man named Barabbas be brought forth and set before the crowd gathering outside. He then asks the crowd who should be released, Jesus or Barabbas (Mt. 27:17).

\*\*\*

The chief priests and the elders persuade the crowd to demand that Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be crucified (Mt. 27:20:21).

\*\*\*

Pilate orders that Jesus be beaten (Jn. 19:1). At this point, Jesus is scourged in a ritual called "the half death." This is not simply a beating. It is a vicious act of torture in which the Messiah is nearly skinned alive (Mt. 27:26). Additionally, the soldiers commanding the affair beat Him in the face with a stick and spit on Him. Once this is done, they prepare to lead Him away to His death (Mk. 15:16-20). However, before Jesus is marched to the site of His execution, He is returned to the governor one last time.

\*\*\*

Pilate then presents Jesus before the crowd and announces that he finds no fault in Him worthy of death (Jn. 19:4-5). The governor may be hoping that Jesus' bloody condition will satisfy the crowd's desire for Him to suffer. However, this overture fails.

\*\*\*

The crowd in a near frenzy cries out, "Crucify Him!" (Lk. 23:20-22).

\*\*\*

At this point, Pilate cannot grasp why the Jewish leadership so desperately wants Jesus to be executed. The Jews then inform him that Jesus "made Himself the Son of God" (Jn. 19:7-8).

\*\*\*

When Pilate hears this accusation, he becomes even more concerned. In reality, the governor may not be as afraid of the Messiah as much as he is impressed with Him. The point is that Pilate is witnessing firsthand the incredible poise and dignity Jesus maintains at a time when every other man in history would be falling apart (Jn. 19:8). The question Pilate may be considering at this point is: Could Jesus be more than just a man?

\*\*\*

Pilate then goes back into his palace and appeals to Jesus to put up a defense. At this point he tells the Messiah that he (Pilate) has the power to acquit Him and set Him free if Jesus would only stand up and fight to vindicate Himself (Jn. 19:9-10).

\*\*\*

Jesus informs the governor that the only power he (Pilate) enjoys is given to him by God. The Messiah then reveals that those who delivered Him into the hands of Pilate bear the greater sin (Jn. 19:11).

Here Jesus is explaining that although he (Pilate) may ultimately order the execution of the Messiah, the real guilt would rest with Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders who knew better than to accuse Him in the first place.

\*\*\*

The governor then presents Jesus to the crowd and asks one last time: "Shall I crucify your King?" (Jn. 19:15).

\*\*\*

The chief priests respond by declaring "We have no king but Caesar!" (Jn. 19:15). These words are nothing short of shocking and may very well be the first time these men ever uttered them. Imagine what they would have thought if Jesus had announced such a thing in the temple.

\*\*\*

Pilate then washes his hands in a basin and declares that if these Jewish leaders want Jesus crucified, he will fight it no longer. Pilate then states that he believes this is an unjust sentence and assumes responsibility for it (Mt. 27:24).

\*\*\*

The crowd responds, "His blood be on us and on our children (Mt. 27:25).

# On the Way to Golgotha 8:30 AM – 9:00 AM

As Jesus is being led away to be executed, He is forced to carry the beam on which His body will hang (Jn. 19:16).

\*\*\*

Because of the immense exhaustion He is suffering due to the brutality of His scourging, Jesus is struggling to carry the beam. Therefore, a man named Simon is conscripted to carry it the rest of the way (Lk. 23:26).

\*\*\*

Also being led away to be crucified with Jesus are two "malefactors" (Lk. 23:32). Although none of the gospels specifically indicate what crimes these two men have committed, it is possible they were convicted of insurrection. Matthew's gospel refers to them as "robbers" (Mt. 27:38).

At this point, it is important to note that neither theft nor robbery were capital offenses. This being the case, most authorities believe the Greek word (*lestai*) Matthew used when describing these two men is better translated "rebels," "guerrillas," or "insurrectionists."

It has also been suggested that these criminals may have been associated with Barabbas. This belief is based on the assumption that three stakes had been prepared, which suggests that Pontus Pilate had already ordered the execution of three rebels. Jesus took the place of Barabbas.

\*\*

As the execution party moves toward Golgotha, several women in the crowd are crying. Upon seeing this, Jesus tells them, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Lk. 23:27-28). He then reveals that the time is coming when the destruction will be so great that people will actually prefer death. He concludes His words by saying, "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Lk. 23:31).

The point Jesus is making is that if such a tragic end could come to someone who is righteous (Jesus Christ), how much more tragic would be the end that comes to those who are unrighteous? To further illustrate this point, consider the effects of a fire: although a fire can burn a forest whose leaves are green, the forest whose trees are dry will be utterly destroyed.

The Crucifixion of Jesus 9:00 AM – Noon Wednesday Morning

Jesus now arrives at Golgotha where He is nailed to the beam that will suspend His mangled body. Prior to this, His clothes are removed by the guards presiding over His execution. They divide His garments without much thought, with the exception of a tunic. Because of the extraordinary quality of this piece of clothing, the guards decide to cast lots to determine which of them would keep it. (Jn. 19: 23-24).

While Jesus begins the initial hours of His torturous execution, He is offered wine mingled with gall (Mt. 27:34). Mark's gospel says the wine was mingled with myrrh (Mk. 15:23). When Jesus tastes it, He refuses to drink. The scriptures do not reveal why Jesus refuses this mixture. However, some authorities believe the myrrh in the drink may have acted as a narcotic to ease pain. Jesus detected this and refused to drink it in order to go through His suffering with His senses intact.

\*\*\*

Jesus then utters the first of seven sayings He will make during His crucifixion. His words speak volumes about this great act and its purpose. "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Lk. 18:34).

\*\*\*

Suspended above Jesus' ravaged body is a sign identifying the offense for which He is being executed. It was ordered to be placed there by Pontus Pilate. The sign reads "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." Furthermore, it is written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (Jn. 19:19-20).

The chief priests protest the words Pilate has chosen to declare as the Messiah's crime. They want it to read that Jesus claims to be king of the Jews, not that he actually is their king. However, Pilate is not moved by this appeal and informs the Jewish leaders that the words above Jesus are there to stay, just as they were written (Jn. 19:21-22).

\*\*\*

As Jesus is hanging for all to see, several people begin to taunt Him. They repeatedly challenge Him to free Himself. Even the chief priests, scribes, and elders mock him. They cry out that they will accept Him as the Messiah if He will only come down from the beam that suspends His broken body. (Mt. 27:39-44)

\*\*\*

As Jesus is being mocked by those witnessing His execution, one of the malefactors being crucified with Him appeals to the Messiah to save Himself and also save them. However the other "thief" rebukes the malefactor for his words. He then appeals to Jesus for forgiveness and asks that the Messiah will remember him when He restores His Kingdom (Lk. 23:39-42).

\*\*\*

In response to this cry of repentance, Jesus utters His second saying. He informs the thief that he has been forgiven and that he will live again in paradise. His exact words are "Verily I say unto you today, you shall be with Me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43).

The word "verily" in this verse is "amen," and is used to introduce a shocking truth similar to the way a statement would be introduced today by saying, "You might find this difficult to believe, but it is true nevertheless." Jesus then goes on to assure the man that his request was granted.

\*\*\*

As it approaches midday, Jesus sees His mother and utters His third saying: "Mother, behold your son!" He then speaks to one of His disciples (probably John) and says to him, "Behold your mother!" With these words, Jesus is making provisions for Mary to be cared for upon His death (Jn. 19: 25-27).

# The Death of the Lamb

Noon - 3:00 PM

As Jesus moves closer to His final breath, darkness covers the whole land (Mk. 15:33).

\*\*\*

At some point during the final minutes of His life, the sins of all mankind are conveyed to the Messiah. Once this happens, God the Father turns away, leaving His Son to die alone. Feeling the enormous loss, Jesus utters His fourth saying. The Messiah cries out, "Eli, Eli, Iama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mk. 15:34).

\*\*\*

Those witnessing the crucifixion who hear His words think Jesus is calling out the name of Elijah (Mt. 27:47).

\*\*\*

Jesus is now utterly exhausted. The last fragment of His strength is depleted. As He hangs in this state, Jesus utters His fifth saying: "I thirst" (Jn. 19:28). In response, someone dips a sponge into a vessel and attempts to give it to Him (Mt. 27:48).

\*\*\*

At this point, a soldier thrusts a spear into Jesus' side causing massive bleeding. His death is now imminent (Mt. 27:49 *Moffatt translation*).

\*\*\*

Jesus cries out in agony from the wound (Mt. 27:50). He then utters his sixth saying on the stake: "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30).

\*\*\*

As Jesus is about to take his last breath, He utters His final words: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Lk. 23:46). He then bows His head and dies (Jn. 19:30).

\*\*\*

At this point, an earthquake shakes the region and the veil of the temple is torn from the top to the bottom. Additionally, many tombs of the saints are opened, resulting in the dead being raised to life. So moving are these events that a soldier at the site of Jesus' execution declares, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mt. 27:51-54).

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, certain Jews, not realizing what has just taken place, appear before Pilate and appeal to him to expedite the deaths of Jesus and the malefactors being crucified

with Him. They do this because the Jewish High Day (the first day of Unleavened Bread) is approaching and they do not want these men to be hanging during this special Sabbath. They realize that the deaths can be hastened by breaking the legs of the condemned men. By doing so they will be unable to suspend themselves. As a result, they will suffocate. However, this can only be accomplished by order of the governor. (Jn. 19:31)

\*\*\*

Pilate grants the request and sends word to the soldiers presiding over Jesus' execution to accelerate His death as well as the death of those with Him. However, as the soldiers prepare to break Jesus' legs, they notice He is already dead. (Jn. 19:32-37)

# The Burial of Jesus The Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea 3:00 PM – Sunset

As the Sabbath is rapidly approaching, a man named Joseph of Arimathea appears before Pilate and requests permission to take Jesus' body down from the stake and bury Him. After confirming that the Messiah was in fact dead, the governor grants Joseph's request (Mk. 15:42-45).

\*\*\*

Joseph returns to the execution site and claims the body of the Messiah. Once it is received it is brought to a nearby tomb and prepared for burial. Accompanying Joseph is a ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus. This is the same man who secretly met with Jesus a few years earlier (Jn. 3:1-8). Both of these men are prominent figures among the Jews. However, their respect for the Messiah is far greater than any concern they might have regarding how the chief priests might react. Both of these men knew Jesus was innocent. And although there was a degree of anxiety over how the Jewish leadership might view this gesture, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are committed to carrying it out. (Jn. 19:38-42)

\*\*\*

After quickly preparing the Messiah's body for interment, Joseph and Nicodemus place it in the tomb. They then secure the site by rolling a large stone over the entrance to the crypt. (Mt. 27:59)

\*\*\*

This marks the end of a perfect life offered up as a ransom for the sins of all mankind.

# Appendix V "The Apprentice"

One of the great mysteries mankind confronts is attempting to understand why God allows suffering. Some even see the Almighty's lack of direct intervention when tragedy strikes as "proof" that He isn't real. Some are even bitter toward those who suffer and still believe in a Loving Creator.

Below is a letter written by a person expressing great anger toward any Supreme Being who refuses to prevent injustice and calamity when He obviously has the power to intervene and prevent such tragedies. This letter and the answer illustrates a profound truth concerning the God of the Bible and His role as a WISE and LOVING Father. It was written in the aftermath of a great Tsunami that struck Southern Asia in December 2004 and was sent to me at *Blow the Trumpet. Org.* It is now included in this edition of *A Vision, A Plan,. and A Destiny.* Although some of its content is included In other chapters, it is presented in its entirety in this appendix as well as other literature. Read in its entirety its relevance should become obvious.

### To Whom It May Concern:

So now that Indonesia has suffered the worst natural disaster in decades, all the mindless double talk begins. I just love listening to people like you try to defend god (Notice the lower case) at times like this. You have more nerve than a wizard in the dark ages. At least the wizard was conjuring up something you can see. You and other christians of your ilk create your "potion of lies" out of nothing. I'm just amazed that anyone with even an ounce of gray matter would ever fall for anything you "men of the cloth" would say. I'm sure you think you have an "answer" for everything in life, but I would like to see you try your hand at some questions that have been bothering me lately.

- Why does a loving god allow children to get cancer? Go visit St. Jude's Hospital if you want to see all the suffering they go through.
- Why does the "almighty" permit AIDS to consume its victims? Oh yea, I forgot. He is sending it to rid the world of faggots.
- Why does your loving god allow people to starve to death in underdeveloped nations?
- Why does He permit war?
- Why does this "just" god of yours allow racism and bigotry? How do those thing fit into his divine plan?
- Why does god allow children to be molested? Where was he when catholic priests were raping (that's right, raping) choirboys in their parishes?
- Why does god allow all the filth and squalor in the world?
- Why all the murder? Why all the death? What is his thing with death anyway?

- Why does your god allow people to be destroyed by earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tidal waves, and tsunamis? Why doesn't he just rain down fire and finish the job, whatever that job is?
- Finally, if god is so loving and so powerful why doesn't he do something to prevent all the suffering, or is it he just doesn't care?

# The Response

## Dear Friend,

Thank you for your recent letter. We believe it poses some very interesting questions and despite the fact that many people, including professing Christians, struggle with making sense out of tragedy, there is an answer. Furthermore, that answer is clear and direct. It is not some theological mumbo jumbo. And it is most definitely not some "mindless double talk."

This might come as a surprise to many, but the God of the Bible actually hates human suffering. That's right! He absolutely abhors it! Furthermore, the scriptures make it absolutely clear that a time is coming when all suffering will end.

The Bible reveals that when Jesus Christ returns to earth, He will establish a Kingdom whose laws will be so perfect they will fill the entire planet with great peace (Isa. 2:4, 32:18, Micah 5:1-3), great prosperity (Isa. 27:6, 30:23; 33:15), great health, and great hope. It will be a Kingdom in which sight will be restored to the blind and strength to the lame (Isa. 35:5-7). Furthermore, the entire earth will be like a garden paradise (Isa. 35:1; 41:17-20). When describing this Kingdom, the great prophet Isaiah proclaimed that when it comes, God Himself shall "wipe away all tears" (Isa. 25:8). He went on to say that at this time, sorrow and sighing would actually take flight never to return again (Isa. 35:10).

Imagine what a wonderful place this will be. Imagine a world where you will never hear the sounds of grief and anguish. Imagine never having to witness the torment of fathers and mothers searching for children that were ripped from their arms and whisked to a torturous death? Imagine a place where hospitals are unnecessary and food banks irrelevant. Imagine a place where hope is everywhere and despair is a distant memory. That place is real and the Great God of hope has given His immutable promise that it is going to come. Furthermore, it will be presided over by a Great Deliverer—a wonderful God King. In this Kingdom there will be no international conflicts. There will be no acts of terrorism. There will be no political corruption or corporate scandals. The streets in this Kingdom will always be safe and children will be able to walk into the homes of strangers and be treated like family. It is a time when all people will worship the same God and have the same laws. Suffice it to say it is a world that is vastly different from the one we live in today.

With this said, many, like yourself may wonder why a God, who hates human suffering so much, would allow it to happen in such a great way. In other words, if God is so committed to mankind living in a world of peace and prosperity, why wouldn't He intervene to prevent a catastrophic killer such as that which took place less than two weeks ago? This is a fair question. Now brace yourself for a shocking answer. God didn't intervene because mankind doesn't want Him to. That's right! Man does not want God to meddle in this world. This may sound crazy but it is true nevertheless.

Down through the ages man has always asserted his right to do things his way. Whether it was Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden paradise, or the children of Israel demanding to have a King instead of God as their ruler, every human being who has ever lived has fought to do things his or her way.

The tragedy with this line of thinking is that man's way will only lead to failure—and there is a reason for this. The Bible states without ambiguity that man was never designed to be the moral authority in his own life. As difficult as this might be to believe, humanity simply does not have the proper equipment to navigate its own moral and ethical path. King Solomon, a man regarded by many as the

wisest person who ever lived, came to understand this eternal truth. When writing the book of Proverbs, Solomon made a profound observation about man and the moral choices he makes.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." (Pro. 14:12)

Virtually all mankind has witnessed Solomon's words in action. We have seen good intentions play out to catastrophic results. Even Solomon's own life and the choices he made reflect this great moral law.

Solomon was not the only one to draw the conclusion that man was incapable of successfully managing his ethical path. The great prophet Jeremiah also pondered man's qualifications to rightly preside over his moral decisions. He concluded that man would invariably fall victim to his own moral and ethical devices. Notice his words.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9)

Here, Jeremiah is stating that man cannot trust his own judgment because the seat of that judgment (the heart) is not trustworthy. But there is more. King David, who the Bible describes as "a man after God's heart" (Acts 13:22), expressed a profound truth about man's inability to grasp "right" and "wrong."

"Who can understand his own error?" (Psa. 19:12)

The question David asked in this verse is rhetorical. The truth of the matter is that no one can understand his own error. That is why man makes so many. The point here is that man's capacity to navigate his own moral path is nonexistent. Despite his assertions to the contrary, man was never designed to be the moral authority in his own life. The great prophet Jeremiah conveyed this absolute truth in words that couldn't be more clear.

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps." (Jer. 10:23)

The words of Jeremiah state a truth that this world has rejected since the Garden of Eden. Simply put, man left to his own moral devices will choose the wrong path. Jesus Christ himself understood this absolute moral law, and His life reflected this understanding. The Bible states that when Jesus walked as a man on the earth, He refused to do something that every other man has done without thinking since the days of Adam and Eve. Jesus refused to direct His own moral steps. That's right! Even the Messiah did not rely on his own wisdom. Notice His words.

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just: because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me." (Jn. 5:30)

The Bible categorically asserts that the Great God, who made the heavens and the earth and all things, stands as the one and only unimpeachable Moral Authority in the universe. It is He who decides what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust, what is good and what is evil. Jesus totally understood this principle, and because of this, He totally surrendered His moral will to the Father. He did so because He absolutely knew that His Father was the source of all that possesses virtue and goodness. The point for man to draw from this is that the God of the Bible is infinitely wise, infinitely just, infinitely powerful, infinitely loving, and most infinitely MORAL. Man in his current state doesn't come close to "infinite" in any of these areas. However, there is yet another reason for man to tether himself to God and His moral compass.

#### An Unchangeable God

The Bible also declares with great force that the Infinite Creator of all that exists never changes His moral positions. In other words, what He hated four thousand years ago He hates today. The apostle James once described Him as One in whom there is "no variableness nor shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17).

With these words, James is stating that there isn't even a hint of movement with respect to God's wisdom. He doesn't change with the times. He is eternal. Time has no effect on Him or His moral compass.

However, man's moral compass is always in a state of flux because his values are constantly being influenced by the world around him—a world that is always changing. To illustrate this point, consider how values have changed in the United States over the past 50 years. Our opinions regarding sex, marriage, and family would have astonished earlier generations. Today, these issues have been redefined by the proponents of a "new morality" – a morality that declares: "if it feels good, do it."

Additionally, our contemporary world demands that all moral standards constantly adjust their view to conform to society's conduct. As a result of this thinking, what we once thought was abhorrent moral behavior is now regarded as not only respectable, but even virtuous. The result of this thinking can be seen in every strata of society. Students now cheat in school without any sense of guilt. Adults now cheat in business because "that's the way it is." Marketing firms cheat and advertisers are brazen in their misrepresentation of products. Politicians cheat in an attempt to influence elections. Clergymen cheat to control their flocks.

The morality of today claims to all who would hear: cheating is ok as long as you have a "reason" for it and you don't get caught. This is the same logic used by psychopaths, rapists, extortioners, drug pushers, and every other kind of lowlife our world has ever produced—and it possesses about the same moral weight. Sadly, today this belief is embraced by an entire generation.

## "You Will Surely Die"

When God warned Adam and Eve about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He was identifying the very source of all human suffering. That source is man thinking he can decide for himself what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust, what is good and what is evil. Man has attempted to make these moral pronouncements for millennia and the result has always been untold suffering. The fact of the matter is that every tragic step man has ever taken has been guided by moral self-will. Every estrangement in human history is born out of self-will. Every divorce is born out of self-will. Every lie and every word of gossip is born out of self-will. Every obscenity and every profanity is born out of self-will. Every political debate is an argument over which man has the best solution to life's problems and is born out of self-will. Every crime that has ever been committed is born out of self-will. Every war that was ever fought has been provoked by self-will. The point here is that man might know "good" and "evil," but he will never be able to know good FROM evil. Six thousand years of human history has borne this out.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy to this thinking is that as a result man has lost access to his Creator. He has ostensibly rejected God and carved his own path. Therefore, when tragedy strikes, he calls on a host of deities to deliver him, but never the true God. This is because man has constructed his own religions. This sad truth even applies to Christianity. For the most part, people who claim to believe in the God of the Bible embrace an endless stream of man-made traditions in their worship. This, despite the fact that Jesus Himself said that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in TRUTH" (Jn. 4:24).

The story of man asserting his right to be the moral authority in his life is tragic to say the least. But there is good news. The Bible indicates that mankind will eventually learn his lesson and will ultimately turn to his Maker and yield to Him. When he does his Heavenly Father will shower down upon him great blessings and even invite him to rule with Him. Perhaps the best way to describe man's great potential is through the following short story.

There once was a great master carpenter who specialized in making exquisite furniture. His skill was legendary and his services were sought all over the globe. As you looked at his work you could see the love and patience he put into it. Every piece was absolutely flawless. This great artisan spent decades perfecting his craft and his dedication rewarded him with a skill that was unmatched in all the world.

One day this great master asked his young apprentice if he would like to complete a very important project. His student was thrilled and readily accepted the invitation. However, before he could start, his teacher cautioned him that to succeed in this project he would have to diligently follow very specific instructions. There could not be the slightest deviation from the specifications his teacher had laid out. The master even warned his pupil that any alteration of or deviation from his instructions would result in failure.

As the young apprentice began his work, he was mindful of his teacher's words. He painstakingly memorized all the notes and plans. He would also constantly review the many drawings of this wonderful piece of furniture. However, as the days turned into weeks, the young man became frustrated at how difficult the task had become. At this point he decided to make "slight" modifications to the plans. Unfortunately, each modification only served to compromise the project. When his master sought to help, the young man became angry and insisted that he could do it on his own. In the end, what started out to be a great masterpiece was ruined. Ruined because the young apprentice thought his skill, that was in its infant stages, could accomplish what his master had acquired over a lifetime.

Although this great master had every right to be angry with his pupil, he was more interested in knowing what his apprentice had learned. When he sought the answer to this query, the student told him: "I have learned to trust in you and to lean not on my own understanding." When the master heard these words he embraced his pupil and said: "What you have gained in failure is worth far more than anything made with hands. I rejoice in your success. I do so because now you are ready to be the master."

The story of this great master craftsman and his apprentice is very similar to one that is being played out every day. Only this time God is the Master and mankind is the pupil. With this in mind imagine what you would do if God gave you a chance to determine the destiny of the world. What an awesome task. What would you do? Would you accept this invitation? And what would you do to the world? Would you be willing to build its governments, craft its laws, define its values, and to inspire its faiths? Now imagine that when God extended this invitation He also informed you that He had already created a formula for total success in this endeavor. This formula was guaranteed to bring happiness to the human experience.

He now presents you with a choice. You may allow God to be your guide on this quest or you may forge your own path. At this point God cautions you to carefully consider your options. He then warns you that only His way will succeed. Furthermore, he explains that your way will only lead to destruction.

This is the same choice God presented to the first human family nearly 6000 years ago. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve thought they could manage this world without the aid of their Creator. It sounds unbelievable—but it is true none-the-less. As a result, mankind continues to walk a path that is only paved with misery. In the wake of this decision, governments continue to topple, laws continue to be mocked, values continue to degenerate while natural disasters continue to escalate. Mind you, it did not have to be this way (2Chron. 7:14). The scriptures are filled examples of God appealing to man to turn back to Him. Regrettably, man has essentially told Him to "butt out" of their business.

Where was God when the horrible tragedy that swept Southern Asia took place?--or 911?—or the massacre at Sandy Hook elementary school?--or countless other horrors that ravage this plane? The answer is really quite simple. The great God of the universe was right where He has always been—in the third Heaven where His will is performed continually. In that kingdom there is only peace and abundance. The real question is: Where were we? And why have we been persuaded to reject our only hope and in essence, go it alone? This road has been traveled before, and its streets are only paved with misery.

Furthermore, the reason God allows horrible events like that of a catastrophic killer inflicting its will on millions of lives, is the same reason He allows so many other tragedies. He does so because He wants man to know what the world would look like without Him as its guiding moral presence. This is not God's world. Man decided he did not need God's wisdom and virtue while living in a garden some 6000 years ago. There, man decided to determine for himself what was "good" and what was "evil." And he continues to assert that "right" to this very day.

As a result of man's judgment, the innocent will always suffer. There will always be poverty. Families will be ripped apart by divorce. Ignorance and superstition will corrupt man's great potential. Justice will be perverted. Terrorists will kill at random. Children will be abducted from their homes and murdered. Sickness and disease will attack the weak. Tyrants will rule the earth. And great natural disasters will continue to ravage the planet.

However, mankind will eventually understand this wonderful truth. And when that day comes the Great God of heaven, the Master architect of all things will declare to His human family: "What you have gained in failure is worth far more than anything made with hands. I rejoice in your success. I do so because now you are ready to be the master."

The time is coming when this world will be presided over by a Wonderful Deliverer, a Loving God King and the greatest leadership team ever assembled in history. And it is your Father's desire that you will be a part of it.

Appendix VI "Count Fifty"

#### A Pentecost Story

The following is a transcript of two sermons presented on the day of **Pentecost** May 24, 2015 to an audience attending a prominent Church of God association service honoring the High Sabbath. In keeping with the long held practice of the Church it contained meat in due season including some elements of speculation by the presenter. Like so many messages proffered by the Church this particular one focused on the significance of the day relative to its early history—offering an interesting theory concerning the first Pentecost in recorded history.

## Part I "Count Fifty"

**Salutation:** Good morning everyone—and a good Sabbath to you all. And to those who are joining us on line thank you for sharing this special day with us. We sincerely hope you find your visit a profitable one. With that said, let us begin.

**Introduction:** Brethren, the late Herbert W Armstrong once made a very interesting observation regarding the Bible. When asked to describe this remarkable book in one sentence Mr. Armstrong pondered the guery—then offered the following

## "The Bible is the story of Israel"

Now although simple in form Mr. Armstrong's observation is profoundly true—for in a very real sense the Bible is the story (or history) of Israel. The Old Testament tells the story of an ancient people—chosen by God and their quest for a land of promise. The New Testament tells the story of a spiritual body—called by God and their quest for an eternal Realm. Brethren, their stories are remarkably similar and possess a continuity that is unmistakable.

SPS: Today I would like to share with you each of their stories and the impact they had, and continue to have on God's Kingdom and His people down through the ages and on into eternity. And as amazing as it may seem each of their stories actually intersect on a day called **Pentecost.** 

Body: By way of introduction I would like to make a couple of observations about this day.

First, **Pentecost** is unique in that its exact timing within God's holy days is not provided in the scriptures but rather must be determined by calculus. In other words, unlike every other holy day in which God specifically identifies the precise month and the precise day within a month on which it falls, when it comes to **Pentecost** this is not the case at all. For this particular day God actually provides a specific formula for determining when it is to be kept. He does so because **Pentecost** doesn't fall on a precise day of a month like all His other annual festivals but rather on a precise day of the week. To illustrate this point go to Leviticus 23, Brethren, this particular chapter in the sacred writings identifies all of God's annual festivals—as a matter of fact it is the only chapter that does so.

#### Leviticus 23:1-2

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, 'Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, 'Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be <a href="https://example.convocations">holy convocations</a>, even these are My feasts..." (Lev. 23:1-2)

Brethren, the term "convocation" used by God in this verse comes from the Hebrew word "Miqra" and means: "A calling together," "A gathering," "An assembly"—and in this case "A sacred assembly."

Virtually all of God's Sabbaths, including His weekly Sabbath are "Miqras" Brethren, we are here by divine decree—to hear the words of a Divine God. And you can bet that if He has called you to appear before Him that He has a good reason for doing so

#### When to Assemble

We now come to the timing of these "HOLY CONVOCATIONS"--these "*Migras*"—Beginning with God's spring Holy days. Brethren, notice how the Almighty identifies the specific month and the specific day within the month they are to be observed—beginning with His spring Holy Days.

## The Spring Holy Days (Verse 4)

"4 These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.

5 In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S Passover.

6-8 and on the <u>fifteenth day of the same month</u> is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day (the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the first month) is a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein."

### Feast of Trumpets (Verse 24)

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, <u>In the seventh month</u>, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. "

## Atonement (verse 27)

"Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD."

## Feast of Tabernacles

(Verse 34)

- "34 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, <u>The fifteenth day of this seventh month</u> shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD.
- 35 On the first day shall be a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.
- 36 Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day (22nd day of the month) shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein."

#### Calculating Pentecost

I'm sure you noticed that I omitted one of God's Holy convocations—and of course I'm referring to **Pentecost.** This is because unlike all His other annual holy days God does **not** identify the timing of **Pentecost** by month or day but rather by a specific calculation

#### Verse 10

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when you come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:"

It is here Brethren, that God actually reveals the **benchmark** from which **Pentecost** is to be calculated. Now consider what happens to this sheaf when it is brought to the priest

#### Verse 11

"And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it."

Notice when this takes place—"On the morrow after the Sabbath." To better understand God's instructions, here is how they played out during the year the Messiah was crucified assuming occurred in 31 A.D. as the majority believes.

I'll be brief

#### Jesus and the Wave Sheaf

- ◆ On Tuesday evening, the fourteenth day of the first month Jesus partakes of His last **Passover** and introduces new symbols of this ordinance.
- During the meal Judas Iscariot leaves to betray Him.
- ◆ At some later point (perhaps between 8:00 and 9:00 PM Jesus and His remaining disciples travel to the garden of Gethsemane
- ◆ It is here that He will spend His last precious hours of freedom
- ◆ Then, at approximately midnight He is arrested in the Garden.
- ◆ For the next several hours He is subjected to a series of trials and interrogations beginning with:
  - Annas the former High Priest, then
  - Caiaphas the current High Priest, then
  - Pontus Pilate, then
  - Herod, then back to
  - Pilate when He is sentenced to death
- At 9:00 AM Wednesday morning (which is still the fourteenth day of the first month) His crucifixion begins
- ◆ At approximately 3:00 PM that afternoon Jesus dies
- ◆ For the next few hours He is prepared for burial and placed in a tomb
- ◆ As the tomb is sealed late Wednesday afternoon, the sun sets marking the beginning of the High Sabbath—the fifteenth day of the first month
- ◆ Then late on the weekly Sabbath (three days and three nights later), families gather in their fields at a place where a specific sheaf had already been selected and tied

- ◆ Then at the precise setting of the sun, exactly 72 hours from the sealing of the tomb, the blade of a cycle cuts the sheaf, separating it from the earth
- At the exact instant this occurred the Messiah awoke and was also separated from the earth
- ◆ The next morning (Sunday), the morrow after the Sabbath, the sheaf was brought to the priests, who presented it to God
- While this was being done a risen Christ was presenting Himself to the Father

The Calculation (Leviticus 23:15, 16)

This now brings us to the calculation of Pentecost

"15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete:

16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD."

Brethren, it would seem that this is a pretty simple formula for determining when **Pentecost** arrives. It is certainly is the one employed by the vast majority of God's Church today. However, not everyone agrees with this formula.

## A Dissenting View

Brethren, today there is an emerging debate within God's Church concerning how **Pentecost** should be calculated—and thus when it should fall.

There are some who sincerely believe it must always fall on the sixth day of the third month (Sivan 6). Those who hold this view believe that the calculation should begin from the day after the annual Sabbath—the first day of unleavened bread. Which in Jesus case would have been Friday—the High day being Thursday. The overwhelming number of Jews today embrace this formula. And because of this fact, a small but growing number of God's people do as well

In essence, they conclude that because the Jews are the final authority in matters pertaining to the calendar, it is their right to legitimately make the call.

#### Not a Calendar Issue

However, at this point it is important to understand that this is not a calendar issue. We are not attempting to determine on what day the weekly Sabbath falls or when the first day of unleavened bread arrives. Both of those are clearly defined in the scriptures. The Sabbath is on the seventh day of the week. The first day of unleavened bread occurs on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month just as the scriptures require.

The issue today involves how **Pentecost** it is to be calculated. In other words, what is the **benchmark** from which one begins to count?—the weekly Sabbath or the annual Sabbath?—and why does it make any difference?

## Defending the Church

At this point I would like to present the reason why the majority of God's leaders today, don't agree with a Sivan 6 **Pentecost**. For the sake of efficiency I will present three brief reasons.

First, if **Pentecost** always falls on Sivan 6, as some now believe, why didn't God simply say so like He did with every other annual High day. For example; why didn't He just say: "In the third month on the sixth day of the month at even is a holy convocation and you shall offer an offering before the Eternal?" Why would He have to be so complex when identifying the timing of **Pentecost** and so simple when identifying the timing of His other Holy convocations? Unless of course, because God wanted **Pentecost** to fall on a specific day of the week. On the morrow after the Sabbath. And the only way that could happen would be for its benchmark to also fall on a specific day of the week as opposed to a specific day of the month

The second rebuttal involves the 50th day.

According to God's instructions it will always fall on a Sunday—"the morrow after the Sabbath." Under a Sivan 6 rendering this is not the case. Under that reckoning the day is variable.

#### Lev 23: 15-16

"And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: Even **unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath** shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD"

Brethren, the seven Sabbaths here are **weekly Sabbaths** and the morrow after the seventh Sabbath would always fall on the first day of the week (Sunday). Under a Sivan 6 scenario this isn't the case at all.

This now brings us to a third rebuttal

This might come as a surprise but there was debate on this issue during the time of Christ. The principle characters were the **Pharisees** and the **Sadducee**. For the **Sadducees**, **Pentecost** always fell on Sunday, while the **Pharisees** had it on various days of the week but always Sivan 6. The difference was that the **Sadducees** started counting 50 days on the morrow after the first weekly Sabbath like the Church does today. The **Pharisees** however, started their count of 50 days on the morrow after the High Sabbath. Today, the **Pharisaical** view is embraced by the overwhelming majority of Jew

## The Tiebreaker

So the question for us is: how can one know what formula to accept? To determine the answer consider the following:

It is a well-established fact that during the time of Christ the **Sadducees** controlled Temple worship and the feast days. There is no indication that the Messiah ever disputed their ruling on this. It wasn't until decades later that the Pharisees came into power and prominence relative to this issue. Therefore, if there is no record of Christ ever disputing the judgment of the Sadducees why should we?

#### Pentecost from the Beginning

Brethren, today, Sunday, May 24, 2015 we honor **Pentecost** and in doing so continue a great journey taken by God's people down through the ages. And this particular High Sabbath—the one we

celebrate right now, has the distinction of being the very last Pentecost in human history—that is of course until next year when **it** will be the last Pentecost.

Now there is a reason I bring this up—and it isn't to be silly. For you see brethren, although the last **Pentecost** is new every year, the first Pentecost obviously never changes. In other words, it will always be the first.

With that said, I have a question. When was the first recorded **Pentecost**? Notice I'm not saying the FIRST Pentecost but rather the first one on record. Is it possible to know when it occurred? Well, brethren, if one wishes to examine Pentecost historically I believe it is possible to identify the oldest one identified in the scriptures and to do that we will need to go back to the very beginning.

So let's do just that. Mind you there is a little speculation here however, I believe you will find it plausible. Go to Genesis chapter

### A Message in the Heavens

It is here that God's word reveals that on the fourth day of creation (or, should I say re-creation), God fashioned the sun, moon, and stars. However, when describing this act, the scriptures also explain why He created these great astronomical wonders. Notice what the Creator says.

#### Genesis 1: 14

"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and for years: "(Gen. 1:14)

Brethren, the Hebrew word for "signs" in this verse is owth. This word can be translated as a "signal," "beacon," "evidence," or "mark." It is the same word God used when describing His Sabbath

#### "Seasons"

The word "seasons" in Genesis 1:14 is **moed**. This word means "appointed times." Throughout history, God's appointed times have always been His Holy Days, His Migras. The point here, is that God created the heavens as an instrument that would enable man to identify specific sacred assemblies created by the One who would later become the Savior of the world. And He did this before there ever was a human being. However, that was soon going to change.

#### **Enter Pentecost**

But what does this have to do with the first recorded Pentecost? The answer is found in chapter 4 This, of course is the story of Cain and Abel

## Cain and Abel Genesis 4:1-5

- "1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.
- 2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the
- 3 And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

- 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
- 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell."

Brethren, the description of **what** occurred in the story of Cain and Abel is universally accepted by God's Church as a real historical event—not an allegory or parable or a tradition passed on from generation to generation. In other words the Genesis account of Cain and Abel is a factual record—it really happened

However, the story tells more than simply **WHAT** occurred; it also reveals specifically **WHEN** it occurred. And I submit to you that armed with nothing more than what is easily **available** to us we can ascertain the **WHEN**. Consider what we know. I've identified ten salient facts

### The Facts

- First: it occurred during a harvest season as evidenced by Cain's offering
- Second: a key element had to do with firstfruits as evidenced by Abel's offering
- Third: God specifically indicated that it happened "in the process of time."
- Fourth: these words are universally regarded by scholars as the predicate for determining WHEN these sacrifices were presented to God. They were presented "in the process of time."
- **Fifth:** the fact that the Almighty specifically revealed this predicate demands that it must have been important to Him that His people be aware of the timing of this event.
- **Sixth:** based on this predicate, there is absolutely nothing random about **when** these offerings were presented. In other words, Cain and Able must have been specifically directed to present them at a particular time. On this point there is universal agreement among scholars
- Seventh: it is also universally accepted by the greatest theological minds on earth that
  this term "in the process of time" is more appropriately rendered, listen to this: "at the
  end of days" This view is attested to by such scholars as Matthew Henry, John Gill, JFB,
  John Wesley, and a host of others. Furthermore, this fact has never been disputed by
  God's Church.
- **Eighth:** most of these thinkers believe this rendering is referring to the weekly Sabbath because it occurs at the end of the days of the week although it has also been suggested that it could refer to an annual Sabbath.
- Ninth: those who subscribe to a weekly Sabbath theory make a critical error in their assessment in that they have neglected to consider an essential fact concerning offerings. Here it is.

According to scripture at no time have God's people ever presented offerings on a weekly Sabbath. Only the priests did and that was done in accordance with God's specific instructions. The Church has always understood this truth—which is why offerings in the COG today are never taken up on the weekly Sabbath However, when it comes to **Pentecost** (an annual Sabbath and a Harvest season no less), offerings are specifically mandated by God to be presented to Him. Notice this:

"Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in **the feast of weeks**, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:"

Tenth: the instructions in Leviticus 23 concerning God's annual festivals are totally
consistent with the belief that the offerings presented by Cain and Able occurred on the
day of Pentecost.

Notice His instructions.

As we read them I want you to know that I took the liberty to insert a parenthetical thought to illustrate a critical point. However, in no way does this parenthetical thought compromise the integrity of the text. It simply adds clarity to it—a fact I am confident you will easily be able to appreciate.

Please listen carefully.

Leviticus 23: 15-16

"And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and **[at the end of days]** ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD."

Pretty interesting don't you think?

Well Brethren, this concludes my AM presentation. This afternoon I hope to continue and in doing so elaborate on Mr. Armstrong's observation comparing the histories of ancient Israel and God's New Covenant Church including their remarkable connection to Pentecost. Until then enjoy the break and as always its been an honor.

## Part II "A Tale of Two People"

Salutation: Good afternoon everyone

**Introduction:** Brethren, this morning we were introduced to an observation proffered by Mr, Herbert W Armstrong regarding the Bible. In which he characterized it as a story of Israel.

SPS: Brethren, this afternoon I'd like to explore a comparison of Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. And I believe you will find the similarities quite striking. For example:

- God's people in the Old Testament are referred to as a "CONGREGATION" In the New Testament they are referred to as a "CHURCH"
- In the Old Testament God is likened to a "HUSBAND"
- In the New Testament the Messiah is likened to a "BRIDEGROOM"

But brethren, the similarities go much deeper and at this point I would like to share some with you. I've chosen seven other parallels: Because of time constraints I'll be brief

Parallel # I

## Both ancient Israel and the New Testament Church were founded on the day of Pentecost

In the Old Testament, and on this precise day, Israel received God's great moral law, the Ten Commandments, and as a result one nation under God was born. This fact is reflected in Exodus 19 & 20

The birth of the New Testament Church is recorded in Acts 2 when God's Spirit was made available. Brethren, on this precise day (**Pentecost**) a people called by God would begin a journey that would literally shape eternity as we will soon discover.

#### Parallel #2

## Both ancient Israel and the New Testament Church were founded by a Great Deliverer

When it comes to ancient Israel God actually identified Himself as such when introducing the Ten Commandments

#### Exodus 20:1-3

"And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which <u>brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage</u>. Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

#### Exodus 3:8

"And I am come down to **deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians**, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites".

#### A New Testament Deliverer

Brethren, in the New Testament God's people were also delivered from bondage—only this time that bondage was and is is sin. And our Deliverer was the Savior of the world a man named "Yashua." Here is what He did and how it turned out. And this miracle, my friends, is far greater than any Red Sea or ten plagues

#### Col. 1:21-22

"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he (CHRIST) reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you **holy** and **unblameable** and **unreproveable** in his sight:"

#### Parallel #3

God's Law was written on Tables of Stone for the nation of Ancient Israel and written on the Heart for the Spiritual Body of the New Covenant Church

God actually used the great prophet Jeremiah to reveal this truth

Jeremiah 31: 31-33

- "31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:
- 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the LORD:
- 33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Brethren, the first phase of this prophetic miracle (the New Covenant) took place on **Pentecost** when God's spirit was made available.

#### Parallel #4

## Both Ancient Israel and the New Testament Church were Commissioned to Preach the Gospel

Brethren, the scriptures reveal that the Almighty intended to use ancient Israel as an example for all the world to see how a people could be rightly governed. Here is how Moses explained it to them

#### Deut. 4:5-8

"Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.

Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding <u>in the sight of the nations</u>, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this <u>great nation</u> is a wise and understanding people.

For what nation is there so great, who has God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?

And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

Brethren, in short, Israel was to stand as a model of what it would truly be like to be "one nation under God."

#### The New Testament

When it comes to the New Covenant Church Jesus Himself prophesied that it would proclaim an end time warning—a gospel if you will—about a KINGDOM. And just as the Messiah had a work that bore witness of Him, His Church would have a work that bears witness of it.

#### Matthew 24:14

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

#### Parallel #5

## Both Ancient Israel and the New Testament Church have suffered great persecution and even captivity

Brethren, when it came to God's people in the ancient world, history as well as the scriptures reveal that both the nations of Israel and Judah were defeated and led away captive over twenty five hundred years ago.

Israel was crushed by the armies of Assyria in 721-718 B.C. Assyria was a war-like kingdom and their approach to the conquest of other lands has been characterized as "brutal" and "unmerciful." As a general rule, they would destroy the culture of a territory's prior inhabitants. When doing so, they would often resort to great acts of savagery in their treatment of the people they conquered. According to the early twentieth century scholar Dr. Henry Halley, the Assyrians would subject their captives to acts of unspeakable savagery.

"Assyrians were great warriors... They built their state on the loot of other peoples. They practiced cruelty. They skinned their prisoners alive, or cut off their hands, feet, noses, ears, or put out their eyes, or pulled out their tongues, and made mounds of human skulls, all to inspire terror." (Halley's *Bible Handbook*, p. 209)

God referred to Assyria as the rod of His correction"

As for **Judah**, their captivity, although less savage, was massively painful Here is how Jeremiah described the devastation inflicted on Jerusalem by the Chaldean empire Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar.

#### Jeremiah 52:12-14

"Now on the tenth day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, who was in the service of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every large house he burned with fire. So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem."

#### **New Covenant Persecution**

We now come to the New Covenant.

Brethren, when describing what the world would look like in the last days Jesus made reference to something He referred to as the "beginning of sorrows." He then explained that great horrors would consume the earth at an accelerated rate and would even bring massive persecution on God's people

#### Matthew 24: 9-10

"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another."

Brethren, the voices of these martyrs will be heard in the last days and are captured in a Fifth Seal

## Revelation 6:9-11 The Fifth Seal

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

Brethren, this seal has not yet been opened and the martyrdom it describes has not yet taken place but it grows closer.

#### Parallel #6

# The individual Histories of both Ancient Israel and the New Testament Church can be broken into seven distinct periods (ERAS)

Brethren, the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation contain seven letters written to seven Churches. For the most part God's people have understood these churches as representing seven chapters (Eras) in the history of the New Testament beginning with the apostles during the first century and ending during the last days with a very complacent community called Laodicea.

One of the most compelling proofs in support of church eras is the fact that the history of ancient Israel also contains seven distinct periods—with each having a striking resemblance to their New Testament counterpart. Consider just some of their similarities

### The First Era: Ephesus

**The first Old Testament era** emerged under the leadership of Moses, Aaron and the elders and took place while the children of Israel wandered in the Sinai desert. It began with them receiving God's Great Moral Code and concluded with the death of Moses prior to them entering into the land of Canaan (Ju. 2:6-7).

This era corresponds to the first century New Testament Church under the leadership of Peter to the Jews and Paul to the gentiles as well as all the apostles. The book of Revelation identifies this era as the **Church at Ephesus.** This particular era came to an end upon the death of one of its principle figures, the apostle John, the last of the original twelve and second most prolific New Testament author (Rev. 2:1-7). Consider the similarities these two specific eras shared:

- The Old Covenant nation of Israel was led by Moses Aaron, and the elders of the people.
- ◆ The New Testament Church was led by Peter, Paul and the disciples of the Messiah
- The Old Covenant nation of Israel was formally founded as a nation on the Day of Pentecost
- ◆ The New Testament Church was formally established on the same day—Pentecost\
- On that day the Old Covenant nation of Israel received God's Law written on tables of stone
- Meanwhile, on this day the New Testament Church received God's Spirit and with it His Law written on their heart
- The first era of the Old Covenant nation of Israel concluded with the death of God's friend Moses
- ◆ The first era of the New Testament Church concluded with the death of the apostle John the disciple Jesus loved.
- ◆ The Old Covenant nation of Israel prepared a trained successor to lead them into the promised land—Joshua a servant of Moses
- ◆ The New Testament Church prepared a trained successor to carry on the commission of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom—Polycarp a disciple of John.

Brethren, virtually every era of God's Church reveals striking similarities to its Old Covenant counterpart. Regrettably, time does not permit me to give them the attention they deserve. However, I would like to beg your indulgence to permit me to briefly invest just a few minutes to describe some. I ask this because one of the most significant things about what you are about hear is that there are people in this room who have actually experienced part of it—and continue to do so. Let's proceed.

### The Second Era: Smyrna

Brethren, *The second Old Covenant era* began when Israel entered into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Moses trusted protege and extended through the time of the judges (such as Samuel). This era corresponded to the New Testament Church under the leadership of **Polycarp**, a disciple of the apostle John and is referred to in the book of Revelation as the **Church at Smyrna** (Rev. 2:8-11).

Physically, God's people of this era were impoverished and persecuted. They were referred to by the name, "Ebionite" meaning "paupers" or "poor people." The name Smyrna means "bitter" They were rejected as heretics by a rapidly growing "Orthodox" movement among a newer brand of Christian and labeled as apostates by the Jews. Additionally, they were viewed with contempt and suspicion by Roman society in general.

Sadly, Polycarp witnessed a great apostasy within the Church in which the truth taught by the original apostles was replaced with fables. He lived to see God's Sabbath replaced with Sunday and the Passover replaced with Easter. History records that Polycarp's life would end violently when he was burned to death by a mob in his own city.

After his death, a man named **Polycrates**, a disciple of Polycarp, became the prominent figure in God's Church. **Polycrates** held fast to the truth that defined the early New Testament Church. The late John Ogwyn of the Global Church of God and a historian of first rank in my view described him this way.

"In the closing decades of the second century, Polycrates, a faithful church leader who had been personally trained by Polycarp, arose. He remained the only Christian leader of prominence who was faithful to the example of the Apostles of the [first century] Jerusalem Church. Polycrates taught among other things:

- the Gospel of a literal millennial Kingdom on earth,
- the unconscious state of the dead awaiting the resurrection (soul sleep), as opposed to immediately going to heaven
- the importance of keeping God's law and
- the observance of the biblical Festivals." (God's Church Through the Ages)

This era of the church would last for more than three hundred years.

## The Third Era: Pergamos

**The third Old Covenant era** occurred when Israel became a united monarchy and achieved its greatest prominence during the reign of King David and his son Solomon. It corresponds with the New Testament era referred to as the **Church at Pergamos.** History records that this Church era introduces a people called **Paulicians.** When it came to their theology a remarkable similarity to God's Church today is very apparent. For example:

• Paulician

	the
Passover on the 14 <sup>th</sup> day of the first month. They were referred to as "Quartodecimans"  •	they
rejected a belief in the trinity as well as the use of crosses and	, ,
practice of bentiam by antipuling	the
practice of baptism by sprinkling.	They
also refused to acknowledge pagan holidays as well as	,
the doctrine of the apostolic succession of popes.	rejected
the doctine of the apostolic succession of popes.	

After reading their writings the prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century Oxford theologian Fred Conybeare likened Paulicians to the original apostolic Church.

"We have before us a form of the church not very remote (distant) from the primitive Jewish Christianity of Palestine."

Tragically, the Paulicians eventually fell prey to external pressure and as a result began to conform to the practices of the church at Rome. They even christened their children and attended mass to avoid detection and subsequent persecution.

## The Fourth Era: Thyatira

**The fourth Old Testament era** occurred when the nation God raised up became a divided monarchy with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This era corresponds to the New Testament **Church of Thyatira** (Rev. 2:18-29). One of its premier figures of this New Testament era was a man named Peter Waldo. Waldo taught God's truth throughout France, Italy, Hungary, and even into Russia. His followers were called Waldensians.

## The Fifth Era: Sardis

The fifth era of the Old Testament took place when Israel and Judah were led into captivity. It corresponds to the New Testament era identified as the Church of Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6) which today is known as the Seventh Day Church of God. This particular era featured a man named Stephen Mumford who migrated to America from England. Upon his arrival he would raise up several small communities under a common faith noted for keeping God's commandments.

## The Sixth Era: Philadelphia

**The sixth Old Testament era** occurred during the restoration of the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah. At that time, a faith that had all but disappeared was restored and God's law as reflected in the Torah became prominent among His people.

A signature moment during this period occurred when Nehemiah rebuked the nobles of Judah over their profaning of the Sabbath—specifically doing business on this day—warning them of the connection between their current captivity and this particular sin.

This era corresponds to the New Testament era referred to as the Church at **Philadelphia** (Rev. 3:7-13) which is characterized in Revelation as having a zeal for God's law and His work. One of the signature moments of this era centered around the production of a work entitled *A Sabbath Test which* leveled a similar indictment against the leaders of the Church and remains a hotly contested issue in the Church. You all know my opinion on this.

The **Philadelphia era** of the New Testament Church gained prominence under the leadership of **Herbert W. Armstrong** who began to preach a powerful gospel message on radio. He would later

produce a telecast that would blanket the United States as well as publish several magazines with a circulation measuring in the millions. Mr. Armstrong taught that although salvation is a gift, obedience to God is an essential part of the Christian walk thus an emergence of God's law became a centerpiece of its theology. Today, the work raised up by Mr. Armstrong continues, albeit much smaller in scope.

### The Seventh Era: Laodicea

**The seventh and final Old Testament era** took place during the period of the **Pharisees**. The **Pharisees** believed that righteousness could be legislated and thus created virtually thousands of rules regarding obedience to God. This era corresponds with the **Church at Laodicea** described in Revelation 3:14-18 and whose story is still playing out to this day. Here is what is known about it

When Mr. Armstrong died in 1986, his successors repudiated everything he had taught and replaced God's truth with doctrines totally foreign to those held by the apostolic Church of the first century. These apostates embraced such heretical teachings as:

- the doctrine of the trinity
- that keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days was "optional." despite what the scriptures required
- They also adopted the belief in the immortality of the soul and
- that God's law was done away at the cross, and
- that the observance of holidays such as Christmas and Easter were positive expressions of faith despite having their origins in paganism.

Brethren, the apostle Paul once warned that at the time of the end, a great apostasy would take place within the Church (2Thes. 2:3). He referred to it as a great falling away and to be sure it is just that. But there's more. Shortly after the death of Mr. Armstrong God's people became scattered, with numerous fellowships arising. For the most part, these fellowships share a common theology; however they are vastly different in their approach to doing a work.

#### Judging the Brethren

Emerging within these fellowships is a highly judgmental attitude toward each other. This attitude is reflected with some believing they are superior to others and all believing that somehow they are God's chosen successor to Mr. Armstrong.

#### A Lukewarm Church

The **Church at Laodicean** is characterized in scripture as "lukewarm." They are self-righteous as well as self-sufficient, much the same as the pharisees of Jesus' day. As a result, many

- forsake the assembling of themselves together with their brethren.
- Others believe that the commission to preach the gospel is finished; therefore, the only duty of a Christian is to prepare for the return of Christ.
- Still others reject the organized Church as a viable institution because of issues involving government within it.

Perhaps the greatest characteristic of a **Laodicean** attitude is the belief that their fellowship is superior to others. When describing this era the book of Revelation declare: "they think they are rich, but they are naked" (Rev. 3:17).

#### Seven Characteristics of God's Church

Brethren, throughout the past twenty centuries, certain patterns have emerged within God's New Testament Church since its first Pentecost. These patterns help identify who His true believers are and the path they have taken. Consider seven prominent characteristics that identify each of them.

- God's Church has always been relatively small. Jesus Christ Himself referred to it as "a little flock."
- The Church has repeatedly experienced great persecution, inflicted for the most part by those who claim to be God's servants.

This persecution has taken the form of unspeakable violence in which God's people were tortured and even murdered for their belief. It has also taken the form of vicious verbal abuses in which God's people have been characterized as "extremists" and "fanatics" while His Church has been labeled an "apostate cult." At this point, it is important to note that Christ warned that there would be persecution on His people and throughout the scriptures, the Church is exhorted to endure this persecution. (Mt. 10:16-39).

- God's Church down through the ages has striven to obey His law, including His Sabbath and Holy Days. At the very end of man's rule on earth, they are characterized as those who keep His commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev. 12:17; 14:12)
- God's True Church has rejected pagan traditions which are always trying to creep into its teachings. (Mk. 7:7-9)
- God's people have constantly fought against false teachers who emerge within its own ranks. These fights have become so intense that God's true servants have often been driven out of the very Churches they founded. (1Jn. 4:1; 2Pe. 2:1; 3Jn. 9-10)
- God's true Church is repeatedly scattered but continues to survive. Jesus Christ declared that the gates of hell (the grave) would never prevail against it. (Mt. 16:18)
- God's true Church has proclaimed a gospel message as a witness and will continue proclaiming that gospel until the return of Jesus Christ. (Mt. 24:14)

## Three Signs

Today, God's Church can be identified with three signs.

- It bears His name.
- it keeps His commandments, and
- it does His work.

Despite relentless persecution from without as well as periods of great apostasy from within, God's true community of believers endures and will be in existence at the return of Jesus Christ.

Brethren, we now come to the seventh and final parallel between ancient Israel and the New Covenant Church

#### Parallel #7

Both Ancient Israel and God's New Testament Church

#### will Ultimately Experience Unbridled Joy and Hope

Brethren, Mr. Armstrong had an expression that he would often share

"I've read the book and in the end, we win."

Well brethren, I too have read the book and I am happy to report Mr. Armstrong was right. Here is what the Almighty has decreed regarding Israel and Judah and how their story will ultimately play out.. His words were recorded by the great prophet Jeremiah

#### Jeremiah 33: 7-8

"And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, **AS AT THE FIRST**. And I will cleanse them from **ALL** their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon **ALL** their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me."

Brethren, God's forgiveness is so complete that it will literally restore the one receiving it back to a state prior to the trespass—"as at the first."

The nations of Israel and Judah will ultimately experience this cleansing when God's Kingdom is restored to the earth which brings us to His **New Covenant Saints** whose destiny was also conveyed—by another prophet—a man named Daniel.

#### Daniel 7:18, 22

"But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.... and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom."

But alas my friends, this is only part of it

## **Sharing the Throne**

Brethren, the apostle John wrote that these saints would actually share the throne of a great God-King as His bride and rule with Him.

#### Revelation 19:6-8

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

#### Conclusion:

So my friends, let us hear the conclusion of the matter.

Brethren, the Church has long understood that God's holy days reveal a great Plan crafted by the Almighty before the foundations of the world. In a very real sense, that plan represents the architectural drawings of the Destiny of His family—our destiny.

And each sacred assembly (each "Migra" if you will) marks a critical step in a journey that two people (a NATION and a CHURCH) began on this precise day and will ultimately lead them to an eternal, incorruptible Kingdom—one ushered in at the sound of a final trumpet blast—when our change comes and our Kings returns and very possibly on the day of Pentecost.

Brethren, I sincerely hope this message has given you a greater sense of appreciation of this moment and especially of what it represents as it relates to your ultimate destination.

Thanks for listening everyone and once again, it's been an honor

Appendix VII "Forsaking the Messiah"

Question: Did God the Father actually forsake His only begotten Son during His torturous execution.

Answer: This is a question that has been on the lips of many believers—including some leaders of his Church. The good news is that there is an answer that leaves little doubt concerning this great puzzle. Read on...

Recently, a featured presenter during a Feast of Tabernacles hosted by a prominent Church of God Association gave a fiery sermon repudiating the idea that a loving God would ever "reject" a Son whose every breath was dedicated to honoring Him. This Church leader went so far as to challenge anyone to prove him wrong with "an honest application of the scriptures."

This is a fair challenge. What follows is the official Biblical record based on the totality of the events surrounding the particular sacrifice of our Savior and what was required of Him when offering it. This cannot be achieved without fully appreciating the Father's opinion of evil and how He will ultimately deal with it

### A King's Perspective

King David often wrote concerning how God viewed iniquity. On more than one occasion he proclaimed that His disgust of lawlessness can even extend to the perpetrator (law breaker). Notice his words.

"The foolish shall not stand in your sight: You HATE all <u>workers of iniquity</u>. You shall destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will ABHOR the bloody and deceitful man." (Psalm 5: 5-6)

In another psalm, David expressed it this way.

"The LORD tries the righteous: but the wicked and him that loves violence His soul HATES. Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." (Psalm 11:5-6)

It is not by accident that the term "cup" is used prolifically throughout the scriptures as a metaphor for Gods judgment (See: Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15, 49:12, Zechariah 12:2). Even Jesus employed this term at the end of His own life in an appeal to His Father to be spared from the condemnation He knew He would have to bear as the Savior of the world (See: Luke 22:42).

#### Returning to David

With these particular Psalms, David was putting a king's perspective on God's view of evil. Simply put, the Almighty will NEVER accommodate lawlessness, or those who commit it. It is true, that as an act of LOVE, HE offered the unblemished life of HIS Son as a ransom for the human family (1 Corinthians 15:3, Hebrews 9:28), but that sacrifice and the love that inspired it (John 3:16, See also: Psalm 103) does not extend to those who set their will against Him and refuse to repent (Hebrews 10:26). To believe otherwise is foolish

At this point, it is also interesting to note that the word "abhor" used by David in the first Psalm cited above, comes from the Hebrew term ta' ab (Strong's H8581) and means: "to detest", "to loathe", and "to regard as an abomination." This is how a A RIGHTEOUS GOD sees those who show utter contempt for His moral authority—including everyone consigned to the Lake of Fire.

#### God and the Sinner

#### A Lesson From the Messiah

To best understand God's perspective on sin and the sinner, consider how He viewed the sacrifice of His Own Son. The Scriptures reveal that as Jesus was suffering the final moments of His torturous execution, He would have to bear the sins of all mankind—taking them upon Himself. In other words, all the evil ever perpetrated by the human family would have to be conveyed to Him. In this state, Jesus BECAME SIN (II Corinthians 5:21). He now felt the ugliness of every act of depravity as well as every nuance of error. He also knew that in this state He would have to become everything His Father despised. The book of Hebrews actually reveals how Christ saw himself in this condition.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, DESPISING <u>THE SHAME</u>, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews12:2)

### **Defining Terms**

The word "shame" in this verse comes from the Greek *Aischyne* and means **"ignominy, disgrace and dishonor arising from guilt"** (See: *Strong's* G152). The source of this shame was sin—and Jesus ABHORRED every drop of it—He "DESPISED" it because He saw it the way His HOLY Father saw it.

The word "despise" is translated from the Greek *kataphroneō* (*Strong's* G2706) and means to "**condemn**", and to "**hold in disdain**." The point to this verse should be obvious. As the bearer of man's sin, Jesus knew what he would have to become in order to redeem the human family from the **guilt** and **consequence** that would be exacted on all those who were condemned to the second death—which, without a savior, would mean EVERY HUMAN BEING that has ever lived (See: Romans 3::23-24). He also understood how His Father would ultimately view Him in that role, and the thought of it was absolutely heartbreaking to Him because He loved His Father so much.

#### "Remove this CUP"

At this point, it is hard to imagine the enormity of stress our Savior was going through when He appealed for relief from His Father's impending condemnation and although the Scriptures do not say, in all likelihood His words were accompanied by copious tears during what may very well have been the most vulnerable moment of His life. It is interesting that just a few hours earlier Jesus informed His disciples that the burden of His emotional condition was so great that it actually reached a level of being LIFE THREATENING ("My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto DEATH." Mark 14:34). When describing this moment, the gospels indicate that the Messiah had become so depleted by this experience that His perspiration "became as it were like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). So intense was this moment that an angel from Heaven was actually dispatched to strengthen Him (verse 43).

## A Heartbreaking Reaction

The Scriptures reveal that as our Savior hung suspended in this sinful state, His Father turned away (IN DISGUST), leaving Him to die alone. This act prompted Jesus to cry out, "Eli, Eli, Iama sabachthani?" that is: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). The term "forsaken" comes from the Greek *egkataleipō* (*Strong's* G1459) and means "to totally abandon", "to desert", "to leave in straits", "to leave helpless", and "to utterly forsake." The point here is that God didn't simply step back and observe Christ's final moments from a distance—He literally walked away and "TOTALLY ABANDONED His Son—and there was a reason He reacted this way—one that relates directly to the fate of all those He condemns.

#### The Ultimate Reconciliation

As hard as this might be to comprehend, as the atoning sacrifice for humanity, Jesus actually became abhorrent to His Father. He was repulsive and THOROUGHLY disgusting to Him. As a result, all the intimacy they had experienced throughout eternity was completely severed. In essence, Jesus became TOTALLY estranged from the Father. With that said, it is ironic that while the Messiah had become estranged from His Father, God's human family was becoming reconciled back to Him (Romans 5:10).

In essence, Jesus took upon Himself the penalty reserved for mankind. This was the "Cup" He would have to bear. In other words, He accepted His Father's CONTEMPT in order that His human family would not have to. In that state our Savior was deprived of any mercy or compassion. His fate was <u>ABSOLUTE REJECTION</u> and <u>TOTAL CONDEMNATION</u>—which is the fate of all those who are cast into the Lake of Fire. In other words, those who are condemned receive **absolutely no mercy or compassion (Not ONE Speck)**.

## Something to Think About

The price Jesus paid to redeem the human family from the consequences of sin is far more remarkable than many may realize. Perhaps the following explanation will add some perspective to this extraordinary act of courage.

#### The Price of Love

Those who ultimately repent and claim their Savior's sacrifice, will one day be a part of God's Eternal Family. At that time they will celebrate their infinite DESTINY with the King of the Universe forever. At this point it is interesting to note that during their physical life God never TOTALLY abandoned them. Even in their wicked and sinful state He was mindful of their circumstance and weakness and His LOVE for them never completely abated. The scriptures tell us that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8), and that God so loved the world he offered the life of His beloved son as a ransom for sin (John 3:16, I Timothy 2:6).

The point here is that when God's Eternal Kingdom is finally established and everything made NEW (Revelation 21), Jesus Christ will be the only one in it to have ever experienced the full weight of His Father's judgment. For all eternity this one fact will set Him (and His sacrifice) apart from all others. This is the price He was willing to pay for the redemption of His Father's children and His bride, the Church (See: Ephesians 5:25).

At this point, it is important to understand that our SALVATION was not achieved through capitulation or compromise but rather purchased with blood—the FULL measure of our Savior's devotion to His Father and His PLAN. Furthermore, the Messiah NEVER flinched In the face of the enormous sacrifice required of Him before the foundation of the world (See: I Peter 1: 19-20 See also: Expositors Bible Commentary concerning the word *foreordained* recorded in this passage).

## A Great Tragedy

The real tragedy with respect to the Messiah's sacrifice is that some will actually refuse to claim it. As a result, the sin and subsequent condemnation that Jesus took upon Himself, on their behalf, will be conveyed back to them and they will have to pay the **full price** for their own transgressions. Hence, they will become TOTALLY estranged from the Father. In that state, God will completely REJECT them—and turn His back in disgust. Furthermore, the scriptures shout out this truth.

## A Prophet Speaks

The great prophet Daniel once wrote of God's final judgment on man. When doing so he revealed that there were two broad types of resurrections—one for those who are redeemed and another for those who are condemned.

Notice his words.

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2)

#### A Dark Pronouncement

This is indeed a dark pronouncement. However, it graphically conveys how God truly sees those who are cast into the Lake of Fire. Consider what is being said here. The word "shame" comes from the Hebrew term *cherpah* (*Strong's* H2781) and means "a **reproach**" and "disgrace." It pertains to the full weight of sin the defiant must bear in judgment. There isn't even the smallest measure of relief from the horror of this moment. They had their chance, but sadly rejected it. Now they are left with NO HOPE—ABSOLUTELY NONE.

But there's more.

## "Everlasting Contempt"

We now come to the state of "everlasting contempt" referred to by Daniel. The word "contempt" is translated from the Hebrew děra'own (Strong's H1860) and means "averse", "abhorrent", and "repulsive." The contempt spoken of by Daniel is GOD'S CONTEMPT. Contrary to what some believe God doesn't love those whom He has condemned. He ABHORS them. In their defiant, sinful state, they are vile and disgusting to Him—and so is everything and everyone who consciously sets their will toward EVIL (See: 1 Peter 1:12). For physical MORTAL human beings the result is a horrible death (Romans 6:23). For Satan and his demons, who were created IMMORTAL, it is total exile to a place of infinite darkness (See: Jude 13).

### God and the Sinner

A Lesson From the Messiah

To best understand God's perspective on sin and the sinner, consider how He viewed the sacrifice of His Own Son. The Scriptures reveal that as Jesus was suffering the final moments of His torturous execution, He would have to bear the sins of all mankind—taking them upon Himself. In other words, all the evil ever perpetrated by the human family would have to be conveyed to Him. In this state, Jesus BECAME SIN (II Corinthians 5:21). He now felt the ugliness of every act of depravity as well as every nuance of error. He also knew that in this state He would have to become everything His Father despised. The book of Hebrews actually reveals how Christ saw himself in this condition.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, DESPISING <u>THE SHAME</u>, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2)

## **Defining Terms**

The word "shame" in this verse comes from the Greek *Aischyne* and means **"ignominy, disgrace and dishonor arising from guilt"** (See: *Strong's* G152). The source of this shame was sin—and Jesus ABHORRED every drop of it—He "DESPISED" it because He saw it the way His HOLY Father saw it.

The word "despise" is translated from the Greek *kataphroneō* (*Strong's* G2706) and means to "condemn", and to "hold in disdain." The point to this verse should be obvious. As the bearer of man's sin, Jesus knew what he would have to become in order to redeem the human family from the guilt and consequence that would be exacted on all those who were condemned to the second death—which, without a savior, would mean EVERY HUMAN BEING that has ever lived (See: Romans 3::23-24). He

also understood how His Father would ultimately view Him in that role, and the thought of it was absolutely heartbreaking to Him because He loved His Father so much.

At this point, it is hard to imagine the enormity of stress our Savior was going through when He appealed for relief from His Father's impending condemnation and although the Scriptures do not say, in all likelihood His words were accompanied by copious tears during what may very well have been the most vulnerable moment of His life. It is interesting that just a few hours earlier Jesus informed His disciples that the burden of His emotional condition was so great that it actually reached a level of being LIFE THREATENING ("My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto DEATH." Mark 14:34). When describing this moment, the gospels indicate that the Messiah had become so depleted by this experience that His perspiration "became as it were like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). So intense was this moment that an angel from Heaven was actually dispatched to strengthen Him (verse 43).

### A Heartbreaking Reaction

The Scriptures reveal that as our Savior hung suspended in this sinful state, His Father turned away (IN DISGUST), leaving Him to die alone. This act prompted Jesus to cry out, "Eli, Eli, Iama sabachthani?" that is: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). The term "forsaken" comes from the Greek *egkataleipō* (*Strong's* G1459) and means "to totally abandon", "to desert", "to leave in straits", "to leave helpless", and "to utterly forsake." The point here is that God didn't simply step back and observe Christ's final moments from a distance—He literally walked away and "TOTALLY ABANDONED His Son—and there was a reason He reacted this way—one that relates directly to the fate of all those He condemns, including Satan himself.

#### The Ultimate Reconciliation

As hard as this might be to comprehend, as the atoning sacrifice for humanity, Jesus actually became abhorrent to His Father. He was repulsive and THOROUGHLY disgusting to Him. As a result, all the intimacy they had experienced throughout eternity was completely severed. In essence, Jesus became TOTALLY estranged from the Father. With that said, it is ironic that while the Messiah had become estranged from His Father, God's human family was becoming reconciled back to Him (Romans 5:10).

In essence, Jesus took upon Himself the penalty reserved for mankind. This was the "CUP" He would have to bear. In other words, He accepted His Father's CONTEMPT in order that His human family would not have to. In that state our Savior was deprived of any mercy or compassion. His fate was <u>ABSOLUTE REJECTION</u> and <u>TOTAL CONDEMNATION</u>—which is the fate of all those who are cast into the Lake of Fire.

## Something to Think About

The price Jesus paid to redeem the human family from the consequences of sin is far more remarkable than many may realize. Perhaps the following explanation will add some perspective to this extraordinary act of courage.

#### The Price of Love

Those who ultimately repent and claim their Savior's sacrifice, will one day be a part of God's Eternal Family. At that time they will celebrate their infinite DESTINY with the King of the Universe forever. At this point it is interesting to note that during their physical life God never TOTALLY abandoned them. Even in their wicked and sinful state He was mindful of their circumstance and weakness and His LOVE for them never completely abated. The scriptures tell us that Christ died for us

while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8), and that God so loved the world he offered the life of His beloved son as a ransom for sin (John 3:16, I Timothy 2:6).

The point here is that when God's Eternal Kingdom is finally established and everything made NEW (Revelation 21), Jesus Christ will be the only one in it to have ever experienced the full weight of His Father's judgment. For all eternity this one fact will set Him (and His sacrifice) apart from all others. This is the price He was willing to pay for the redemption of His Father's children and His bride, the Church (See: Ephesians 5:25).

At this point, it is important to understand that our SALVATION was not achieved through capitulation or compromise but rather purchased with blood—the ultimate measure of our Savior's devotion to His Father and His PLAN. Furthermore, the Messiah NEVER flinched In the face of the enormous sacrifice required of Him before the foundation of the world (See: I Peter 1: 19-20 See also: Expositors Bible Commentary concerning the word *foreordained* recorded in this passage).

## A Great Tragedy

The real tragedy with respect to the Messiah's sacrifice is that some will actually refuse to claim it. As a result, the sin and subsequent condemnation that Jesus took upon Himself, on their behalf, will be conveyed back to them and they will have to pay the full price for their own transgressions. Hence, they will become TOTALLY estranged from the Father. In that state, God will completely REJECT them—and turn His back in disgust. Furthermore, the scriptures shout out this truth.

### A Prophet Speaks

The great prophet Daniel once wrote of God's final judgment on man. When doing so he revealed that there were two broad types of resurrections—one for those who are redeemed and another for those who are condemned.

Notice his words.

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2)

This is indeed a dark pronouncement. However, it graphically conveys how God truly sees those who are cast into the Lake of Fire (human or spirit). Consider what is being said here. The word "shame" comes from the Hebrew term *cherpah* (*Strong's* H2781) and means "a **reproach**" and "disgrace." It pertains to the full weight of sin the defiant must bear in judgment. There isn't even the smallest measure of relief from the horror of this moment. They had their chance, but sadly rejected it. Now they are left with NO HOPE—ABSOLUTELY NONE.

But there's more.

## "Everlasting Contempt"

We now come to the state of "<u>everlasting contempt</u>" referred to by Daniel. The word "contempt" is translated from the Hebrew <u>děra'own (Strong's H1860)</u> and means "averse", "abhorrent", and "repulsive." The contempt spoken of by Daniel is GOD'S CONTEMPT. Contrary to what many believe, God doesn't love those whom He has condemned. He ABHORS them. In their defiant, sinful state, they are vile and disgusting to Him—and so is <u>everything</u> and <u>everyone</u> who consciously sets their will toward EVIL (See: 1 Peter 1:12). For physical MORTAL human beings the result is a horrible death (Romans 6:23). For Satan and his demons, who were created IMMORTAL, it is total exile to a place of infinite darkness (See: Jude 13).

# Appendix VIII "A Great White Throne"

The last four chapters of the book of Revelation describe some of the most consequential moments in the history of eternity. Its pages span a period covering the last year of man's reign on earth and conclude with the arrival of an incorruptible realm in which all things will be in a state of ETERNAL newness (Rev. 21:5). In short, they describe in striking detail how EVERYTHING will play out and reveal the Almighty to be the embodiment of PERFECTION and how He will accomplish His purpose for man and all of creation. It is no exaggeration to say it will result in the greatest "happily ever after" moment in eternity. However, its path will contain some tumultuous steps—some beautiful, some tragic—including such events as a spectacular wedding, two devastating wars, three resurrections, the end of death, the instillation of God's Eternal government under the leadership of Jesus Christ and the saints as well as the fate (Destiny) of both the righteous and the defiant—including the devil himself.

A critical component of this period involves the resurrection of the dead which occurs in phases. The first phase takes place at the last trump when those who are called in this life, also known as "the dead in Christ" and "firstfruits" are raised and take on immortality as fully born children of God (1 Cor. 15: 51-52, 1 Thes. 4: 16-17). The Scriptures refer to this as a "better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35)—and to be certain it most assuredly is. Those who are a part of it will be composed of incorruptible spirit (I Cor. 15: 42-44, 53-54) and rule with Christ throughout the millennium and on into eternity. In that capacity they will assume positions of great authority and distinction in God's ETERNAL KINGDOM (See: Rev. 5:10, 20:4, Dan. 7:18, 27).

One of the pivotal moments taking place after the resurrection of the saints is a Great Wedding. The book of Revelation records the actual proclamation from heaven itself announcing this event. Here. The apostle John is taken up in vision into the third heaven where he hears a great voluminous roar speaking in unison.

#### Here is how he describes it

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His bride has made herself ready.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. And he said unto me, "Write this, 'Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" (Rev. 19:6-9)

It is hard to imagine an event possessing greater beauty and majesty than the marriage of God's Son and His Saints. And although the scriptures do not specifically identify the precise location of this wedding, there are some who believe it will actually take place at the home of God the Father in the third heaven—which by the way, is an opinion I share. But wherever it occurs, one thing is for certain, it will be spectacular beyond imagination and its guest list will read like a "Who's Who" in the universe.

## The Wedding Psalm

In the Old Testament there is a **Psalm** with a powerful message that may very well be about the event being described in Revelation 19. It actually speaks of a great wedding between a King and a Queen and is appropriately called "The Wedding Psalm" Its words begin with a description of:

- A royal bridegroom
- ♦ His transcendent Excellency
- His bravery
- ◆ The glory of his victories
- His virtue
- ◆ The righteousness of his government
- ◆ The splendor of his court
- And the honor He rightfully receives from God Almighty.

#### It then transitions to:

- ◆ The royal bride
- Her consent gained
- Her wedding garments
- Her beauty
- Its impact on her King
- How she has captured the Kings heart

#### ◆ The solemnity of their love

There are some who believe that this Psalm will actually be recited at the wedding between Christ and His Church and may very well come from the lips of an angelic herald. It begins by addressing the King and is found in Psalm 45. When assembling this passage I employed several translations. This was done to capture the emotional impact of this event in words more familiar to our speech.

The primary text comes from the *Good news Translation*. Now imaging these words being uttered by a spectacular angelic creature. As he appears before a great company of witnesses He steps forth and begins to speak.

#### Psalm 45 Good News Translation

#### Verse 1

Beautiful words fill my mind, as I compose this song for the king. Like the pen of a good writer my tongue is ready with a poem.

<sup>2</sup>You are the most handsome of men; you are of eloquent voice.
God has always blessed you.
<sup>3</sup>Buckle on your sword, mighty king; you are glorious and majestic.

<sup>4</sup>Ride on in majesty to victory for the defense of truth and justice! Your strength will win you great victories! <sup>5</sup> Your arrows are sharp, they pierce the hearts of your enemies; nations fall down at your feet.

The kingdom that God has given you<sup>[</sup>
 will last forever and ever.
 You will rule over your people with justice;
 you love what is right and hate what is evil.
 That is why God, your God, has chosen you and has poured out more happiness on you than on any other king.

8The perfume of myrrh and aloes is on your clothes; musicians entertain you in palaces decorated with ivory.
 9 Among the women of your court are daughters of kings, and at the right hand of your throne stands the queen, wearing ornaments of the finest gold

#### The words now address the Queen

#### V. 10

10Bride of the king, listen to what I say—forget your people and your relatives.
11Your beauty will make the king desire you; he is your Lord now, honor him.
12The people of Tyre will bring you gifts; rich people will try to win your favor.

#### The Psalm then addresses the Guests

#### Verse 13

13The princess is in the palace—how beautiful she is. Her gown is made of gold thread.
 1In her colorful gown she is led to the king, followed by her bridesmaids, and they also are brought to him.
 15With joy and gladness they come and enter the king's palace.

#### The Psalm concludes by returning to the King

#### Verse 16

16 You, my king, will have many children and you will make them rulers over the whole earth.
17 My song will keep your fame alive forever, and everyone will praise you for all time to come.

It doesn't take allot of imagination to see the great splendor and drama in these words Now consider this: They may very well be speaking of you.

Following the wedding the Messiah mobilizes the forces of Heaven which will include including His bride and a great contingent of angels. This great invading force has been prepared to make war and subdue the nations (Rev. 19:11-18, Jude 14,15, Joel 2, Zech 14). Although the battle will be brief the victory will be overwhelming. It is very possible it will last only a matter of days, perhaps shorter. If it seems inconceivable for a war to be so brief consider the following: In the Persian Gulf War (Desert Storm) the ground invasion lasted only four days before an entire country (Iraq) regarded as the mightiest in the middle east was routed and its government toppled.

#### Satan is Bound

Once the earth is secure Satan will be bound in chains and confined in a great abyss where he will remain incarcerated for a thousand years denying him any access to God's millennial Kingdom. There are some who believe this incarceration is actually alluded to in the book of Enoch (See: Enoch 88:1)

#### A Second Resurrection

Then, approximately one thousand years later, the billions of people who never knew the true God, will be raised to life and given an opportunity to learn of Him and His way (Rev. 20: 4-5). At this time they will enter into a world that has enjoyed a thousand years of uninterrupted millennial peace and prosperity where the knowledge of the TRUE God will have literally covered the earth (See: Isaiah 11:9). Furthermore, that knowledge will continue to FLOURISH during this phase of His PLAN as well. When speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, God described this second resurrection like this: "And all will know that I am the ETERNAL." Included in this knowledge will be the value of repentance and redemption through the atoning sacrifice of His Son and their Savior. The point here is that God will not deprive anyone of knowing about Him and His way. This is done in order to ensure that all mankind will be treated with equity (fairness) and be given a real opportunity to receive God's gift of Salvation and have their names written in the "Book of Life" prior to their final judgment.

At this point, it is important to understand that those who are a part of this **second resurrection** are raised to a mortal fleshly existence. In other words, unlike those in the first resurrection who were judged in this life and received immortality, those in this second resurrection remain physical human beings (See: Ezk. 37). At this time, God will return their spirit to them in order to facilitate the acquisition and dissemination of information. That spirit will give them the capacity to LEARN as well as to grow in grace and KNOWLEDGE (2 Pe. 3:18) and **most importantly** will provide them with the best opportunity for citizenship in His Eternal Kingdom which will be bestowed at their FINAL judgment.

### Is Anyone Left?

Tragically, there are actually some who will remain in the grave throughout this period. This is because at some point during their earthly life they willfully forfeited any chance at redemption (See: Mat. 12:31-32, Mk. 3:29, Lk. 12:10, See also: Heb. 6:4, 10:26 & 1Jn. 5:16). The Scriptures do not indicate their number but it does reveal the gravity of their trespass and even goes so far as to identify some of those who will suffer the consequences for it. The Messiah once soberly warned that there are sins that are so egregious they cannot be forgiven even by God Himself and those who commit them must ultimately meet their final justice—but not yet.

#### Satan Released

God's Word reveals that at some time after the second resurrection commences, Satan will be released from his confinement in "a great abyss" for "a little season" (See: Rev. 20:3). At this point he will unleash unimaginable devastation on God's KINGDOM, His PEOPLE, and His PLAN. He will begin with the greatest campaign of deception in human history—one that will literally span the entire globe (See: Rev. 20:8). But it doesn't end there.

#### The Great Showdown

As the last chapter of human history begins to play out, the devil directs all his attention to the destruction of what the apostle John affectionately refers to as the "BELOVED CITY." He begins by mobilizing his forces in a vicious attack against it (Rev. 20: 7-9). At this point, the spectrum of destruction will be so massive that God Himself will be forced to intervene. He does so by launching a counter attack that will strike an overwhelming blow against mankind's greatest adversary and the forces of darkness who joined him in this final rebellion. During this counter attack the Almighty will literally rain down fire from heaven to repel the attackers. The scriptures do not reveal the number of casualties but they will unquestionably be significant. One thing is for certain, Satan's permanent defeat is now imminent. At this

point he will literally be hurled into a massive inferno (the Lake of Fire) where he will begin to serve a sentence of torment that will never end (verse 10). However, at this point one thing remains.

### A Great White Throne Judgment

As Satan languishes in this inferno prepared for him and his demons (See: Matt. 25: 41), a GREAT WHITE THRONE appears from which Christ will preside over the final judgment of God's CREATION (Rev. 20:11). At this point, a THIRD and FINAL RESURRECTION takes place in which every human being who has ever lived, will physically be brought appear before the GREAT JUDGE (verses 12-15). God's born again saints will certainly be in attendance but will not be subject to this SENTENCE because they were already judged (and REDEEMED) in this life (1 Pet; 4:17). In other words, this "third resurrection" pertains to everyone who has ever lived throughout human history, with the exception of the saints who will already have been installed as citizens and leaders in God's Eternal Government. (See: Daniel 7:18, 1 Cor. 15: 51-52, I Jn. 3:1-2). The great prophet Daniel once wrote of a time when all who have died will be raised and receive God's Eternal JUSTICE. This is that time and those who are a part of it consist of the following:

- Everyone who died in this life having committed the unpardonable sin (mentioned earlier). Tragically, their fate has already been sealed. Now it will be dispensed and their final sentence (the second death) will be administered by way of a GREAT INFERNO— LAKE OF FIRE (See: Rev. 20:14).
- Joining them in this final judgment will be those who lived during the millennium. During
  that thousand year period they will be introduced to God's law and invited to be a part of
  His FAMILY. Eventually, during this millennial period these citizens will pass away and
  sleep awaiting their resurrection to a final judgment (life or death). The third resurrection
  is that time and Christ will render that judgment.
- Finally, those who lived and subsequently perished during the second resurrection will appear before Christ as well (Rev. 20:7-10). They too will learn of His way after which they will be evaluated according to God's LAW with some entering into life in His Eternal Kingdom and some to eternal death in the Lake of Fire. (See: Daniel 12:2)

## A Brief Review The Third Resurrection

At this point a brief review may be helpful. During this Third (and FINAL) Resurrection literally tens of billions of people appear before Christ and hear their fate directly from the Supreme Lawgiver of the Universe (See: Rev. 20:11-13). Furthermore, they will be able to fully comprehend His judgment because their spirit (cognition) will have been returned to them. There will be no misunderstanding or confusion in the matter. Christ will speak with great clarity and there won't be one drop of uncertainty with respect to His judgment and the reason for it. At that time, those whose names which appear in the "Book of Life" will be invited to become incorruptible members of God's Eternal Realm. In that state they will no longer be comprised of flesh and blood, but rather of incorruptible spirit. In other words, they will be changed.

However, those whose names that are **not** written in the "Book of Life," because they defiantly refused to claim Christ's sacrifice through heartfelt repentance, will be sentenced to death (Romans 6:23). It is then that they will be cast into a Lake of Fire—only this time God will not retrieve their spirit. Like the spirit in animals it will perish with them (Rev. 20:14-15).

Why is Satan There?

Clearly, the Lake of Fire will utterly destroy all physical beings who refuse to yield to God's moral authority. But why would God put Satan there if he wasn't going to perish in its flames as well? Furthermore, why did Christ state that this PLACE was specifically "prepared" for him (Satan) and his demons (See: Matt. 25:41)? What purpose could this INFERNO possibly serve with respect to their judgment?

## There can be Only One Answer

Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire at the order of a RIGHTEOUS GOD in order for him to witness the utter destruction of every diabolical scheme he has ever orchestrated (1 Jn. 3:8). In essence, he will be compelled by **divine justice**, to watch as every fruit of his labor goes up in FLAMES. The result will be TOTAL humiliation and ABJECT defeat. Furthermore, his ultimate confinement in outer darkness (Jude 13) will be so overwhelming he will have nothing but his own depravity to keep him company. For all eternity, Satan and every evil spirit who joined in his rebellion will experience, first hand, **TOTAL ISOLATION** and all the ANGUISH (torment) that comes with it (Rev. 20:10). The real tragedy to this saga is that Satan, who once served as one of the most powerful instruments in God's government will ultimately be reduced to the most irrelevant being in existence. In essence, he will have nothing to show for his life. **Everything will all be gone**.

## Other Offerings by the Author

What is Satan's Fate?
Where Was God?
It Came without Warning
A Christian Passover Ceremony
Did Jesus Risk?
Play it Where it Lies
The Historical Jesus
Preparing the Bride
An American Epitaph

A Sabbath Test
Thirty Excuses
Can you Lose Part of your Reward?
Conditional Love
When Did God Create the Angels?