

Bible Basics: Essential Doctrines of the Bible

Part 2B

Eschatology: The Study of Last Things (also available on-line at www.ichthys.com) by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

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

Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon who the ends of the ages are come.

1st Corinthians 10:11 [KJV]

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Introduction: For too long, eschatology, "the study of last things", has been the property of fringe elements. The true significance of this crucial category of Biblical truth has been ignored or de-emphasized by most serious Christians of our day. Even those who pay it lip service do not seem to fully appreciate the critical importance of the doctrines of eschatology not only to

spiritual growth, but to spiritual safety as well. They are in fact fundamental. For it is a tenet of our faith that our generation is just as likely to be called upon to put them to practical use as any other generation of Christians has been in the past or may be in the future. The "Lord's Prayer", the model prayer given by Jesus to His disciples when asked "teach us how to pray as John taught his disciples", is predicated on a future event to which all of us as Christians are instructed to direct our gaze. After addressing our heavenly Father, both New Testament versions continue with the statement "Thy kingdom come!" (Matt.6:9-13; Lk.11:2-4). The Greek aorist imperative expresses a strong desire which should reflect the attitude of all believers. We should all earnestly hope for and daily express in our prayers our desire for the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on earth. It is only in this way that we shall truly see His "will done on earth as it is in heaven". What we are to look forward to with such intent, however, can only occur after nearly all of the prophecies of future events have first taken place. The great apostasy, the rise of the beast and false prophet, the terrible persecutions and cataclysmic events of the tribulational period must all precede the final establishment of the Kingdom of God, after the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ has finally "put all of his enemies beneath His feet" (1Cor.15:25). As believers, we need to ask ourselves, "are we ready to meet the challenges of the last times?"

I. Global Eschatology

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

1. God's Plan for Human History

God created the material universe (Gen.1:1). Therefore God controls the universe (Ps.33:6-9).

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

God is omniscient (Ps.139:1-4). Therefore God knew everything in advance (Is.46:10).

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

God desires the salvation of all of His creatures (Acts 17:27; Jn.3:16; Eph.3:11; 1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; Jn.12:47b). But God will be justified and vindicated over all who choose evil rather than good (Rom.3:4). "History" is the working out of the plan of God wherein His creatures demonstrate and confirm the fundamental choice they make for or against Jesus Christ (compare 1Pet.1:2 with Ex.9:16). Thus in all things, God is "in control" (Eph.2:1-10).

But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations. Psalm 33:11 NIV

A. Judgment, Restoration and Replacement I: Positional Victory (Progeny and Promise)

1. Judgment I: of Satan and the universe

a. The devil rebelled against God in eternity past (Is.14:4-20; Ezek.28:12-19).

b. God responded by devastating the earth and removing light from the universe (cf. the gap and disparity between Gen.1:1 and Gen.1:2; Is.45:18).

2. Restoration I: of Earth

a. God restored the earth to habitability and limited light to the universe in six literal days (Gen.1:3-31; Gen.2:4-5).

b. The “fossil record” dates not from the earth’s restoration but from the era of Satan’s rebellion at some indeterminate time in the past (Gen.1:1 compared with Gen.2:4-5).

3. Replacement I: Adam and the Last Adam for Satan

a. God created Man as a replacement for the devil and his rebellious angels (Gen.1:26-30; 2:4-25).

b. Without the temptation and fall, the human population of Eden would have rapidly expanded to the necessary replacement level (Gen.1:28).

4. Satan’s Reaction: The temptation and fall of Adam and Eve

a. The devil assumed that by luring Adam and Eve into sin he would destroy God’s plan to replace him (compare Gen.2:17 with Gen.3:4).

b. But the fall of Man merely opened the way for salvation through the saving work of the Son of Man, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Gen.3:21; 1Cor.15:22; 15:45).

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

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

2. The Two Phases of Human History: The Foreshadowing and Fulfillment of Jesus Christ: The Old and New Covenants: The cross divides history into two discrete phases, both referencing history's central Person, our Lord Jesus Christ.

a. The Old Covenant: Looking ahead to the cross through rituals and animal sacrifices, the Old Covenant was characterized by shadows (i.e., belief in and anticipation of the Messiah and His sacrifice: Col.2:17; Heb.8:5; 10:1).

b. The New Covenant: Looking back at the cross with the benefit of the entire canon of scripture, the New Covenant is characterized by reality (i.e., belief in and appreciation of the revelation of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice: Lk.2:32).

3. The Three Wilderness-Pilgrimage Eras of Human History: We believers are pilgrims and strangers in this world, walking the highway to Zion in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (Ps.84:5-7; Heb.11:13-16; cf. 1Chron.29:15; Ps.39:12; 63:1; 119:19; Heb.11:37-38; 13:13-14; 1Pet.1:1; 2:11), sojourning here in the devil's world (1Jn.5:19; cf. 1Cor.7:29-31), and experiencing God's grace provision in this desert during one of three pilgrimage eras:

a. The Gentile era: The first wilderness-pilgrimage era (Gentile) runs from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden until the call of Abraham. Its pilgrim-believers are exclusively gentiles. In this era, there is an *individual focus* to the pilgrimage (i.e., following God as separate persons).

b. The Jewish era: The second wilderness-pilgrimage era (Jewish) runs from the call of Abraham until the birth of Christ, when its completion is postponed till the commencement of the Tribulation. Its pilgrim-believers are primarily Jewish (along with gentiles in association with Israel). In this era, there is a *national focus* to the pilgrimage (i.e., following God as members or associates of a national community established by God and dedicated to Him, namely, Israel).

c. The Church era: The third wilderness-pilgrimage era (Church) runs from the day of Pentecost until the onset of the Tribulation. Its pilgrim-believers are both Jews (the original branch) and gentiles (grafted into Israel) combined into the single body of Christ. In this era, there is a *corporate focus* to the pilgrimage (i.e., following God as intimate members of His family, the body of Christ which is the Church universal).

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

a. Gentile Age: Christ promised to all humanity in general as Savior (Gen.3:15-16). From Adam to Abraham.

b. Jewish Age: Christ promised to Israel in particular as Messiah (Jer.23:5-6). From Abraham to Christ.

c. Church Age: Christ having been revealed in Person in the (virgin-born) flesh in humility as the suffering Servant (1Jn.1:1-3). From the First Advent to the Second Advent.

d. Millennial Age: Christ having been revealed in Person in the (resurrected) flesh in glory as the King (Is.2:1-4). From the Second Advent to the New Jerusalem.

5. The Five Dispensational Divisions of Human History: God's dispensations or "stewardships" are periods of time distinguished by the different grace means He uses in each one to "dispense" through various "stewards" the resources of truth necessary for seeking Him to all those who desire to do so (Eph.3:2).

a. Gentile Patriarchy: from Adam to Abraham God dispensed his truth and grace primarily through individuals like Enoch (Gen.5:21-24; Heb.11:5), Noah (Gen.6:9; 6:13-14; Heb.11:7) and Job (Job 1:8).

b. Jewish Patriarchy: from Abraham to Moses God dispensed his truth and grace primarily through Jewish patriarchs beginning with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen.15:12-16; 26:2-5; 28:13-15).

c. The Mosaic Law: from Moses to Christ God dispensed his truth and grace primarily through the nation Israel (Is.42:6; 43:21; 49:6; Acts 13:47).

d. The Church: from Christ's first advent to His Second Advent God is dispensing his truth and grace exclusively through the Church of Jesus Christ (Eph.1:9-10; 3:8-10; Col.1:25-27; 1Tim.1:4). God's dispensation of the truth at the present time is not now fixed or focused on any particular nation but has been handed over to all believers, namely, the Church at large (this shift in approach was signaled by our Lord in the parable of the tenants: Matt.21:33-46; Mk.12:1-11; Lk.20:6-19).

e. The Millennium: from Christ's return to the end of history God will dispense his truth and grace primarily through our Lord's direct rule of the world (Jer.31:33-34; Is.11:9; Rev.21-22).

6. The Six Chronological Periods of Human History: These six periods divide history from a secular point of view, listing in chronological order the significant divisions of human history rather than categorizing them on the basis of any spiritual significance (which is the basis for the five categories that precede and the one which follows). "Six" is the number of Man, and these six periods present history largely from the point of view of the devil's attacks on mankind.

- a. The Antediluvian Period: From the fall to the flood. Primary satanic target: true humanity.
- b. The Postdiluvian Gentile Period: From the flood to Abraham. Primary satanic target: freedom and law.
- c. The Jewish Period: From Abraham to Christ. Primary satanic target: the people and the nation of Israel.
- d. The Church Period: From Christ to the beginning of the Tribulation. Primary satanic target: the truth of the Word of God.
- e. The Tribulational Period: The seven years preceding the return of Christ. Primary satanic target: all of the above (humanity, freedom and law, Israel, truth) along with a particular emphasis on eradicating believers from the earth, as the devil employs any and all means available to him in the short time he has remaining.
- f. The Millennial Period: The thousand years following the return of Christ. Primary satanic target: the rule of Christ (attacked after Satan is released at the end of the period).

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

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

- a. The Antediluvian Civilization:
Time Frame: From Adam’s fall to circa Noah.
Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God while transitioning from perfect environment to the hardships of the present world.
- b. The Division of the Nations:
Time Frame: From circa Noah to Abraham.
Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God in the face of unprecedented satanic attacks (i.e., the genetic dilution of Genesis chapter six, and Satan’s post-flood attempt to establish one-world government).

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

- c. The Nation of Israel:
Time Frame: From Abraham to circa David.
Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God as His unique witnesses (and as primary targets of the devil) in the midst of a pagan world.
- d. The Kingdom of Israel:
Time Frame: From circa David to Christ.

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

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

e. Centralized Christianity:

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

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

f. Decentralized Christianity:

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

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

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

g. The Millennium:

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

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

8. Evidence for the "Seven Days" Interpretation

a. The construction of the ages: The ages of human history have been purposefully constructed by God for judging evil, restoring righteousness, and replacing evil-doers with faithful followers, all through the agency and saving work of His Son (Heb.11:3).

b. The Millennium: The Millennium, the final period of human history and the only period of human history specifically named in scripture, is most definitely described as a period of one thousand literal years (Rev.20:1-7), and as a period of rest directly analogous to Genesis day 7 (Is.61:2; 63:4).

c. Days and Millennia: While from the human perspective the difference between a day and a millennium is immense, to God, the Creator and Master of time, the difference between these two finite chronological periods is insignificant (Ps.90:4; 2Pet.3:8).

d. Biblical Usage: The Bible often uses relatively short periods of time (hours, days, weeks) to designate much longer chronological periods, reflecting God’s complete sovereignty over time:

- 1) The “year of redemption” in Isaiah 63:4 refers to the Millennium.
- 2) The “day of vengeance” in both Isaiah 34:8 and 63:4 refers to the Millennium.
- 3) The “day of salvation” in Isaiah 49:8 refers to the Church’s two thousand years in addition to the Millennium (cf. 2Cor.6:1-2).
- 4) The “seventy sevens” prophecy of Daniel chapter nine uses each day of the “week” to represent a one year period (Dan.9:25-27).
- 5) The “time, times and half a time” of Revelation 12:14 refers to the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation. (as in Dan.4:16 the seven “times” are seven years).

e. Biblical Chronology: The Bible records approximately 2000 years from Christ to Abraham and 2000 years from Abraham to Adam. With the Gentile and Jewish ages both covering ca. 2000 years, and that the Millennium, the final “day” in God’s plan for human history, covering 1000 years, we posit a comparable 2000 years for the Church age. This results in a total of 7000 years wherein each millennium is reckoned as “a day” in God’s system.

f. The Analogy of the Week: As the Sabbath age, the Millennium of its own accord invites us to posit six prior thousand year “days”. This is especially so when we consider that the original period of time wherein God began the process of restoration and replacement known as human history was the original week of seven days, also ending in a day of rest (Gen.1:3ff.).

g. The Seven Days of Re-Creation: The seven day week is a reflection of God’s overall design of human history. This can be seen by comparing the original week of re-creation with the millennial week it foreshadows. During the original seven days, God conducted a comprehensive restoration of the world which closely parallels His Plan for replacing Satan and his followers during the seven thousand years of human history.

The Seven Genesis Days compared with the Seven Millennial Days:

Genesis Days	Millennial Days
Day 1: <u>separated</u> : light from darkness (general)	<u>separated</u> : the truth from the lie
Day 2: <u>separated</u> : waters from waters yielding air	<u>separated</u> : freedom from the devil’s coercion
Day 3: <u>separated</u> : the dry land from water <u>filled</u> : vegetation	<u>separated</u> : a holy people from a pagan world <u>filled</u> : Israel the vine
Day 4: <u>filled</u> : regulating heavenly bodies <u>separated</u> : light from darkness (specific)	<u>filled</u> : Israel the standard-setting nation <u>separated</u> : right from wrong
Day 5: <u>filled</u> : fish and birds	<u>filled</u> : the Church’s evangelistic base
Day 6: <u>filled</u> : terrestrial animals and livestock <u>completion</u> : the First Adam by Eve	<u>filled</u> : the Church’s evangelistic expansion <u>completion</u> : the Last Adam by the Church
Day 7: <u>rest</u> : blessing on the re-created world	<u>rest</u> : blessing on the re-claimed world

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

i. The Testimony of Irenaeus: The writings of Irenaeus, perhaps our last extra-biblical witness to the original New Testament eschatological teachings (before such views were squelched by the increasingly secular church), clearly show that this was the way in which he understood the critical passages of Psalm 90:4 and 2nd Peter 3:8. For, in *Adversus Omnes Haereses* 5.28.3, the millennial day interpretation is put as fact.

j. The Problem of Science and the Bible: Differences between what the Bible teaches and the latest theories put forward by science about the construction of the universe need not cause believers concern, for the world was made by God in a manner and in a fashion which cannot be discerned through human skill (Heb.11:3; cf. 2Pet.3:3-7; 2Tim.3:7-9)

k. Chronology in the Bible:

- 1) As the Creator, God invented, created, and controls time and everything that takes place within it (Ps.56:8; 139:16; Jer.33:25; Rom.8:28-30; Eph.1:11; 1Pet.1:2).
- 2) It is not accidental that the Bible contains much chronological data.
- 3) To be useful to us, biblical chronological data must be correctly matched to the system of reckoning time we now use.
- 4) This process has a number of systemic problems, such as the A.D./B.C. shift, inclusive counting in biblical times, differences in the exact length of months and years as then reckoned, in the start times of years, and the use of multiple reckoning methods in the Bible.
- 5) Biblical chronological information, however, is not only absolutely accurate, but also extremely precise (cf. Ex.12:40-42).
- 6) We have been given this information in order to know and understand the chronological facts the Bible records (Matt.16:3; 24:32-35; 1Thes.5:1-3).
- 7) As the ruler of time, it is within God's authority both to establish any system He desires (such as the seven millennial day system), and to "change the times and the seasons" should He so desire (Dan.2:21). God is not bound to honor any human system of chronology.

9. Specific Chronology of the Seven Days of Human History

a. The Life of Christ: From God's perspective, time, history is about Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is the focus of history. Scripture calls the period of our Savior's earthly life the "conjunction of the Ages" (Heb.9:26; cf. Rom.5:6; Gal.4:4; 1Tim.2:6; Tit.1:3; Heb.1:1-2; 1Pet.1:20), and so it is, for His birth marks the postponement of the Jewish Age (cf. Matt.11:12; Mk.1:15; Lk.12:49ff.), while His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven signal the imminent commencement of the Church Age (Acts 1:4-5; cf. Matt. 27:51; Mk.7:27; Jn.2:4; 7:8; Heb.9:10). Therefore all systems of biblical chronology must begin and end with Jesus Christ.

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

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

3) The Date of the Crucifixion of Christ: Since John the baptist's ministry began sometime after August 19th of 28 A.D., the time-frame of September-October 28 A.D. has much to recommend it as the true start of John's ministry. This would fix Jesus' baptism and therefore the coincident start of Jesus' earthly ministry precisely at the point indicated by Luke (Lk.3:23), that is, at "approximately" (Greek *hosei*) the age of 30 years old in September-October of 30 A.D.(only weeks away from His thirtieth birthday assuming a December date). Following this reasoning, Passover of 33 A.D., three and one half years later, will be the correct date for the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. Christ's earthly life is the center-piece of God's chronological design of human history, "the fulness of times" (Gal.4:4), and "the conjunction of the ages" (Heb.9:26b; cf. Heb.1:2). It is a 33 year interlude in the progression of the seven millennial days, which, aside from the final seven years of the Tribulation (cf. Dan.9:20-27), marks the termination of the Jewish Age (Mk.1:15), and the commencement of the Church Age (Matt.21:43; Mk.12:9; Lk.20:16). This thirty-three year interval, the exact period of time that David (a type of His coming Son) reigned in Jerusalem, is a grace period around which the rest of human history pivots, for within it Jesus Christ was offered to the world (though the world rejected Him). Christ's birth in 2 B.C. is the critical departure point for calculating God's historical timetable backward, while the date of His death and resurrection, 33 A.D., is the basis from which to reckon the scheme of history that follows.

b. Days 4-3, and 2-1: Jewish and Gentile millennial days: Both the Age of the Gentiles and the Jewish Age comprise two millennial days each (as does the Church Age). Working backward from the birth of Christ in 2 B.C., biblical records reflect a four thousand year period from this date back to the fall of Adam when taking into consideration that: 1) The Age of Israel still has seven years to run (i.e., Daniel's 70th week, otherwise known as the Tribulation: Dan.9:27), thus reducing Israel's two millennial days to 1993 years; and 2) The Babylonian captivity (586-516 B.C.), wherein Israel's functioning as God's mechanism for the distribution of His divine truth was held in abeyance, does not count against the two thousand years of the Jewish Age (thus adding 70 years to the chronology).

1) The Jewish Age (2165 - 2 B.C.):

- to 1444 B.C. (the Exodus): retrogressing 1442 years (from 2 B.C.) to the Exodus in 1444 B.C., based upon 1st Kings 6:1 which states that the 4th year of King Solomon's reign (ca. 964 B.C.) occurred 480 years after the Exodus (i.e., ca. 1444 B.C.).
- to 1874 B.C. (Jacob in Egypt): retrogressing from 1444 B.C. a further 430 years to the time of Jacob's arrival in Egypt, based upon Exodus 12:40 (which states that Israel remained in Egypt after Jacob's arrival exactly 430 years), and thus taking us to 1874 B.C.
- to 2004 B.C. (Jacob's birth): retrogressing from 1874 B.C. a further 130 years to Jacob's birth, based upon Genesis 47:9 where Jacob tells Pharaoh on his arrival in Egypt that he is 130 years old.
- to 2064 B.C. (Isaac's birth): retrogressing from 2004 B.C. a further 60 years to the birth of Isaac, based upon Genesis 25:26, where we learn that Isaac was sixty when Jacob was born.
- to 2065 B.C. (Abraham's circumcision): retrogressing from 2064 B.C. one year to the circumcision of Abraham, the event which marks the beginning of the Jewish Age (Gen.17-18; cf. Rom.4:9-12). Subtracting from 2065 two years for the birth of Christ in 2 B.C. and seventy years for the Babylonian captivity, we are left with 1993 years, the entire two millennial days of the Jewish age (minus the 7 years of Daniel's 70th week, the yet future Tribulation).

2) The Age of the Gentiles (4065 - 2165 B.C.):

- to 2164 B.C. (Abraham's birth): retrogressing 99 years from 2065 to the birth of Abraham based upon Genesis 17:24.
- to 2456 B.C. (the flood): retrogressing 292 years from 2164 to the great flood by adding the intervals between generations from Abraham to Shem, based upon Genesis 11:10-26.
- to 3056 B.C. (Noah's birth): retrogressing 600 years to the birth of Noah by adding the intervals between generations from Shem to Noah, based upon Genesis 7:6 and 7:11 - 8:14.
- to 4112 B.C. (Adam's creation): retrogressing 1056 years to the creation of Adam by adding the intervals between generations from Noah to Adam, based upon Genesis 5:3-

29. Allowing exactly 2,000 years for the Age of the Gentiles from 2065 to 4065 and subtracting the latter figure from 4112, we posit that Adam sinned and was expelled from the garden at the chronological age of 47 (i.e., he was already mature when created, then fell 47 years after his mature creation).

c. Days 5 and 6: the two millennial days of the Church: The Church Age also comprises two millennial days. Working forward two complete thousand year periods from 33 A.D., the year of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, would bring us to the year 2033 A.D. as the date of our Lord's return and the beginning of His millennial reign. Subtracting seven years from this total, gives us the year 2026 A.D. as the time of the commencement of the seven year tribulational period. Although our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection occurred in the spring at the time of the Passover, the Tribulation will begin with the cycle of festivals occurring in the fall. The sixth month hiatus (between the spring and fall of 2026 A.D.) constitute the "half hour of silence" (Rev.8:1), the final grace period before the commencement of that great" hour of testing" begins (Rev.3:10).

d. The Break-points of the Three Pairs of Days: The occurrence of divinely significant events at the junctions of the ages is also a strong argument in favor of the millennial day interpretation advanced above. The Gentile, Jewish and Church Ages, though consisting of two millennial days each, are integral wholes or "pairs of days", with each divided from the other through the occurrence of the following unique events:

1) Gentile Age: Begins with **the fall of Adam:** The initial promise of the Messiah accompanies this event (Gen.3:15; 3:21).

2) Jewish Age: Begins with **the circumcision of Abraham:** The specific promise of the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, accompanies this event (Gen.17:1-27).

3) Jewish Age: Ends with **the birth of Christ:** The Word becomes flesh through this event (Jn.1:14; see above on the time of Christ's earthly life as the unique conjunction of the ages).

4) Church Age: Begins with **the death and resurrection of Christ:** The promise of salvation has now been fulfilled (2Cor.1:19-20), and the expansion of our Lord's Church begins.

5) Church Age: Ends with **the return of Christ:** The resurrection occurs and the kingdom commences at this time (Rev.20:4-6)

e. Day 7: The Millennium: The Millennium is in many ways the capstone of the seven days of human history, a time of blessing as close to perfection as yet sinful mankind can experience, with, Satan, the prime instigator of evil, temporarily removed from the world (Rev.21:1-3), and the Son of God Himself reigning upon the earth (Rev.11:15). The Millennium will commence almost immediately following Christ's return (following a short period of purification: Dan.12:11-12), and last for one thousand years (ca. 2033-3033). Following the elapse of the one thousand years, the devil will be released and a short period of human rebellion and swift divine judgment will ensue (Rev.21:3; 21:7-10). Scripture is silent as to the length of

this postscript to history (although it is “short”: Rev.21:3), but we do know that at its conclusion, the world as we know it will cease to exist, being subsumed forever by our eternal home, the New Heavens and the New Earth – a place where only righteousness will dwell (2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:1-4; cf. Is.60:21). This “new day” will have no end, as we who have chosen for God will have the inestimable privilege of living with Him and His Son forever (Rev.22:3-5). The shifting of the “Lord’s day” from the Saturday Sabbath (the seventh millennial day in history’s seven day structure) to Sunday, is indicative and evocative of this “new day” that will never come to an end (cf. Rev.1:10).

f. The Tribulational Overlap: The Tribulation’s seven years belong both to the Church Age (its final seven years) and to the Jewish Age (its final seven years: Daniel’s seventieth week; cf. Dan.9:24-27). Both the Jewish and Church Ages are initially divided by the life of Christ (His birth marking the temporary end of the former and the beginning of the latter), but are ultimately joined together in the period preceding His Second Advent. This is fitting, in that both Jews and gentiles together form the true Body of Christ. Other indications that the final seven years of the Church Age run concurrently with the Tribulation include:

1) the fact that the completion of the gentile complement of the Body of Christ is coterminous with Israel’s change of heart at the Second Advent (viz., at the end of the Tribulation: Rm.11:25-26).

2) the fact that this present era, described as “the *times* of the gentiles (that is to say, a time and a time [period] of 1,000 years each: Lk.21:24), will not come to an end as long as Jerusalem is “trodden under foot” (i.e., not until the return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation).

3) the fact that the current Church Age trend of antichrist-type deceivers will only reach its culmination with the unveiling of *the* antichrist during the Tribulation (1Jn.2:18).

4) the fact that the prophesied (and already observable) trend towards apostasy on the part of the Church will only reach its fulfillment in the Tribulation (compare Rev.3:14-20 with 2Thes.2:3).

5) the fact that the Church Age is in a very real and scriptural way part of the “end times” (1Cor.10:11; Heb.1:2; 1Pet.1:20; 1Jn.2:18), a principle that makes little sense if it is to be excluded from the conclusive period of the “last days”, the Tribulation.

6) the fact that much of our hope as Christians consists in our looking forward eagerly to the return of our Lord, an event that will take place at the *end* of the Great Tribulation (1Thes.4:13-18; Tit.2:13).

7) the fact that, in this way, the Church Age will end in the same miraculous fashion in which it was ushered in, with great satanic opposition, and surpassingly great divine provision and manifestation (cf. Joel 2:28-32, a passage equally applicable to Pentecost and the events preceding the Second Advent: compare with Acts 2:16-21; cf. Is.32:15; 44:3; Jer.31:33-34; Ezek.36:24-27; 37:9; Zech.12:10).

C. Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases I, II and III: The plan of God, as set forth here, can be seen as working in three distinct phases. This three phase process, consisting of Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, phases I, II, and III respectively, is God’s

plan for total victory in response to the rebellion of Satan, and is given here in overview (for details on Phase I, see above; for details on Phases II and III, see below):

1. Phase I: Constitution: Lays the foundation for the eternal victory (the "much" phase).

a. Judgment I: the Genesis Gap: Judgment is passed upon Satan and his angels while the devil's original headquarters, the pre-historic earth, is devastated and the original universe plunged into darkness. See section A.2 above.

b. Restoration I: the Seven Days of Re-creation: Earth is restored to a habitable environment (during the Seven Days of Re-creation). See section A.2 and section B.8.g above.

c. Replacement I: the First and the Last Adams: The creation of the first Adam begins the human race (the source of eventual replacement for Satan and his angels). The gift of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, provides the grace necessary for the salvation of the human race after the fall through the Messiah's work on the Cross. The Church can then be called out for replacement. See section A.3 above.

2. Phase II: Completion: Realizes eternal objectives with victory in time (the "more" phase)

a. Judgment II: the Tribulation: God's judgment upon the devil's kingdom and upon his earthly subjects. Satan and his angels are expelled from heaven and later imprisoned

b. Restoration II: the Millennium: Earth is restored to an environment of blessing.

c. Replacement II: Christ the King and His Church: Christ the King replaces Satan as the de facto ruler of the earth. The Church is resurrected in replacement.

3. Phase III: Consummation: Crowns the victory with surpassing blessing (the "most" phase)

a. Judgment III: the Final Judgment: Satan and his angels are removed to the lake of fire along with unbelieving humanity (following the Great White Throne judgment).

b. Restoration III: the New Heavens and the New Earth: The New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem provide an unparalleled and eternal environment of perfect blessing.

c. Replacement III: the Advent of the Father: Along with Christ, the Father will rule forever from earth. The Church is complemented by the double portion of millennial believers.

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

1. God's initial disposition of Satan:

a. God's First Best Will Rejected: Although created in perfection and inhabiting a perfect universe, Satan and his followers rejected God's perfect plan for them, choosing rebellion instead of obedience.

b. Judgment and Demotion: Having rejected God and mutinied against Him, Satan and his followers were judicially condemned by God for their rebellion and removed from their positions of service to Him (Jn.16:11; cf. Job 4:18; 15:15; 21:22; Matt.25:41; Rev.20:10).

c. Judgment on the Universe: The original heavens and earth, having been contaminated by the sinful actions of the devil and his followers (cf. Job 25:5), were summarily judged by God, and plunged into utter darkness (Gen.1:1-2).

d. The Delay of Execution: Having judged the universe, God nevertheless deferred execution of Satan's sentence pending the completion of an as yet unforeseen event: human history (cf. Gen.6:3; Rom.2:4; 3:25-26; 9:22; 2Pet.3:9; 3:15). This delay, which we call human history, accomplished the following:

1. The glorification of God through the successful completion of His plan (centered upon His Son, Jesus Christ) in all its particulars despite all opposition.
2. The vindication of God by demonstrating the devil's complete recalcitrance and unwillingness to repent in contrast to God's faithfulness toward His new creature, Man. God is thereby vindicated in His judgments (Ps.116:11; Rom.3:4), and justified by keeping all promises of salvation to mankind despite satanic opposition (Is.49:9; Jn.16:11).
3. The replacement of what was lost through Satan's rebellion in a manner that has ensured the free will choice of those who replace the devil and his followers.

e. First Parole: Satan was allowed the freedom to observe God's reconstruction of the world and His commencement of the process of replacement through the creation of mankind (Gen.3:1-7).

f. The Last Olive Branch: Rather than drawing the appropriate conclusions from the creation of Man (i.e., that God is invincible and therefore that the carrying out His sentence against the devil was inevitable), Satan rejected this last, tacit overture on God's part and used his freedom of action instead to recommence his rebellion, this time on the battlefield of human history (Gen.3:1-7).

2. God's interim disposition of Satan:

a. Imprisonment: With the 2nd Advent of Jesus Christ, the devil and his followers will be imprisoned in the Abyss for the duration of the Millennium so as to remove all satanic influence from the Messiah's Kingdom (Rev.20:1-3).

b. Second Parole: At the conclusion of the Millennium, Satan and his angels will be temporarily released and will stir up the peaceful world of that time for one final assault upon

God (Ps.2:1ff.; Rev.20:7-10). The willingness of so many human beings to reject the perfect reign of Christ and the willingness of the devil to lead them in this last futile attempt to oppose God provides the final incontrovertible proof that evil and the rejection of God is not circumstantial, but flows from the free will choice of creatures.

3. God's final disposition of Satan: At the conclusion of the Gog-Magog revolution and just prior to the creation of the pristine and holy New Heavens and New Earth, the sentence imposed upon the devil and his angels before human history began will finally be carried out (Is.14:3-23; 24:21-23; 27:1; 34:1-5; Ezek.28:11-19; Jer.10:11; Dan.4:35; Lk.10:18-20; 1Cor.6:3; Rev.20:7-10), and they will be consigned to the lake of fire at that point and forevermore (Rev.20:10). The lake of fire and his final disposition in it (along with all creatures who chose to follow him instead of God) will stand as an eternal memorial to the folly of rejecting God and His mercy (Rev.14:10; cf. Is.66:24; Rev.19:3). For by trying to replace God and His Son instead of serving them, Satan finds himself replaced by the Son who was born into the devil's world to refute and defeat him through the victory of the cross (Lk.10:18; Jn.12:31; Rom.16:20; Heb.2:14; 1Pet.3:22; 1Jn.3:8).

2. The Tribulation Defined

The Tribulation is the cataclysmic seven year period which precedes the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. It comprises the final seven years of the Church Age as well as the final seven years of the Jewish Age (Dan.9:24-27). As its primary name indicates, the Tribulation will be a period of intense judgment and severe trial – judgment from God against the unbelieving world, and persecution for believers at the hands of our adversary the devil and his earthly representative, antichrist (Is.24:1-6; 26:20-21; Jer.23:19-20; 30:23-24; Dan.8:19; 11:36; 2Pet.3:10).

A. The Tribulation: Derived from the root *thlib* (θλιβ), meaning “to exert pressure”, the Greek word *thlipsis* (θλιψις) is used commonly in secular Greek for discomfort, extreme difficulty, and, in general, physical and emotional pressures of every sort. In scripture too, the word is not restricted to being a technical term for the future time of distress we call the Tribulation, but often refers to personal tribulation here and now (cf. Jn.16:21; 16:33). However, *thlipsis* is the most common term employed to designate the final, intense trial of human history which we have come to call *the* Tribulation (Matt.24:21; 24:29; Mk.13:19; 13:24; cf. Dan.12:1).

B. The Great Tribulation: Scripture also distinguishes between the Tribulation as a whole (i.e., the entire seven year period of the apocalypse) and “the Great Tribulation”, a term which properly refers to the second half of this period (i.e., the final three and a half years before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ). The Great Tribulation will be the time of greatest pressure and intensity of persecution in human history as the Great Apostasy of the first half is replaced by the Great Persecution of the second half (Matt.24:21; Rev.7:14).

C. The Apocalypse: The book of Revelation is sometimes entitled “the Apocalypse” (Rev.1:1), since “apocalypse” is an English transliteration of the Greek word which means “revelation” or “unveiling” (i.e., *apokalypsis*, ἀποκαλυψις). However, the full Greek title of the book is “the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*”, and it is well to note that it is Jesus Christ who is unveiled to the world in all His glory when He returns at the end of the Tribulation (Lk.17:30; 1Cor.1:7; 2Thes.1:7; 1Pet.1:7; 1:13; 4:13; Rev.1:1). At that time, we, His bride, will be unveiled with Him (Rom.8:19; cf. Rom.16:25-26; Gal.3:23; Eph.3:5-6). The term “apocalypse” or “revelation”, therefore, is truly focused on the *end* of the Tribulation and our blessed hope of resurrection and reunion with our Lord (1Cor.1:7-8; 2Thes.1:7; 1Pet.1:7; Rev.1:1).

D. The Time of Jacob’s Trouble: This phrase in Jeremiah 30:7 is a clear reference to the Tribulation as the context indicates. It will be a time like no other (v.7), but one followed by liberation (v.8), the rule of the Messiah (v.9), and the regathering of the nation (v.10).

E. Daniel’s 70th Week: The final “seven” in the vision of the seventy sevens (or “weeks” of years) given to Daniel (Dan.9:20-27) is a clear reference to the Tribulation. In the middle of the final week of years, for example, the “abomination of desolation” is set up in the temple by antichrist (“the prince who is coming”, v.26; cf. Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14).

F. The Hour of Testing: Because of their faithful service, the Philadelphia generation of the Church would not pass through the Tribulation (Rev.3:10).

G. Other Passages: There are also many other places in scripture where the Tribulation is referenced without the use of specific terminology (e.g., Gen.49:18; Dan.8:17-19; Is.2:2; Acts 2:17; 1Tim.4:1; 2Tim.3:1; Jas.5:3; 2Pet.3:3-7; Jude 1:17-18).

3. The Seven Churches of Revelation

The seven churches of Revelation chapters 2-3, in addition to being seven literal and historical local churches existing in the apostle John’s day, are also prophesies that outline the trends and characteristics of the seven eras of our own Church Age, an interpretation evidenced as follows:

- John’s apostolic authority (especially as the last apostle) extended to the entire Church, not just these seven (1Cor.9:1-5; 12:28; Gal.2:7-9). This is not a message designed by him to address specific issues in particular churches (as 1-3 John), but a message given by God to *the* seven “churches” (Rev.1:10: the definite article is significant here, because there were clearly more than seven local churches at the time of writing).
- Our Lord Jesus Christ is and was concerned for His entire Church, not just for these seven local churches. This revelation of His Person is clearly meant to be for His entire bride, the whole Church universal, and not merely for a very small portion of it.

- The book of Revelation is the heritage of the entire Church. It is meant to bless all who read it (Rev.1:3), and meant to show all who consider it (Rev.22:6) what will happen in the end times.
- Revelation, after beginning with the messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three moves immediately to the history of the end times on the far side of the Church Age’s two millennial days. The book is indisputably focused on the conclusion of the Church Age, so that the preceding messages to the seven churches only make structural sense as an overview of the intervening two millennia.
- The seven lampstands cannot well be understood as only these seven local churches, for they are seen alone in the presence of Christ in chapter one (Rev.1:12-13), and again alone in the presence of the Father’s throne in chapter four (Rev.4:5). The lampstands, light-giving bodies which represent the role of the Church universal in reflecting the truth of Christ in this dark world, and doing so as a totality in both instances, must therefore represent more than seven local churches in the first century.
- The description of Jesus Christ as “in the midst” of the seven lampstands, holding the seven stars, the angels of these churches (Rev.1:12-16), is symbolism which strongly suggests His authority over the Church, and the entire Church at that, and would be very hard to apply exclusively to seven local churches. The number seven, the number of perfection in the Bible, also argues for these seven “churches” to be a symbolic representation of one complete Church (cf. the seven spirits of Is.11:1-2 and Rev.4:5 standing symbolically for the one and only Holy Spirit).
- The text of Revelation 4:1 “what must take place [i.e. the Tribulation and following] *after these things* [i.e., the “events” of the seven churches]” only makes good sense if the seven churches be taken as the aggregate period of time between John’s penning of these words and the commencement of the Tribulation.
- Finally, it is appropriate for the last book of the Bible to be addressed to Christ’s entire Church (rather than merely to seven local ones).

The composition of the seven eras represented by the seven churches may be summarized as follows:

1. <u>Ephesus</u> :	12 years	70 to 82 A.D.	“The Era of Transition”
2. <u>Smyrna</u> :	360 years	82 to 442 A.D.	“The Era of Persecution”
3. <u>Pergamum</u> :	360 years	442 to 802 A.D.	“The Era of Accommodation”
4. <u>Thyatira</u> :	360 years	802 to 1162 A.D.	“The Era of Compromise”
5. <u>Sardis</u> :	360 years	1162 to 1522 A.D.	“The Era of Corruption”
6. <u>Philadelphia</u> :	360 years	1522 to 1882 A.D.	“The Era of Revival”
7. <u>Laodicea</u> :	144 years	1882 to 2026 A.D.	“The Era of Degeneration”

The relationship of each Church era to false teaching and the infiltration of unbelieving elements into the Church-visible may be summarized as follows:

Ephesus: False apostles rejected; Nicolaitans hated [the false kept out of the Church].

Smyrna: Slandered by the Synagogue of Satan [the false attacking from outside the Church].

Pergamum: You have Balaam and Balak [the false accommodated within the Church].

Thyatira: Jezebel [the false compromised with and in turn compromising the Church from within].

Sardis: No group mentioned [the true excluded by the false from the visible, apparent “church”].

Philadelphia: Acknowledged by the Synagogue of Satan [the true has separated from the false].

Laodicea: No group mentioned [the false has infiltrated and blunted the true Church].

4. The Tribulation’s First Half

A. The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit: Before the Tribulation can begin, God’s restraint on the devil (carried out by the Holy Spirit) must be removed (2Thes.2:6-7). Before the removal of the Spirit’s restraining ministry, Satan is unable to set up antichrist’s kingdom (2Thes.2:8-12). The removal of this restraint is symbolized by the opening up of the seven seals of Revelation (Rev.6; cf. 2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), which restrain the Tribulation described in the scroll until the Lamb unseals the scroll.

1. Previous Restraining Ministries of the Holy Spirit:

a. Preventing satanic activity on the devastated earth until God’s seven-day reconstruction of it (Gen.1:1-2).

b. Preventing the satanic seed of the Nephilim from completely destroying true humanity until God’s judgment of that seed in the great flood (Gen.6:3).

c. Specific restraint of other satanic activities (Matt.16:19; 18:18; Jn.20:22-23; Acts 5:3; 5:9).

d. General restraint of evil (cf. Gen.11:6; Deut.32:8; Job 12:23; Ps.74:17; Jer.18:7-10; Acts 17:26-28).

2. Restraining the “Mystery of Lawlessness”: The mystery of lawlessness, that is, the growing satanic influence in the world, is already at work (2Thes.2:7; cf. 1Jn.2:18-22; 4:3; 2Jn.1:7).

However, during the Tribulation, an exponential expansion of the present “mystery of lawlessness” constituting an unprecedented unleashing of sin and evil world-wide will occur as a direct result of the removal of the barriers put up by the Spirit, and of the devil’s consequent exploitation of this opportunity (Matt.24:12; 1Tim.4:1-3; 2Tim.3:1-5; 2Pet.3:3-7; 1Jn.2:18; Jude 1:17-18).

3. Restraining the “Man of Lawlessness”: The rise to power of antichrist, the “man of lawlessness” and his “unveiling” to and acceptance by the unbelieving world as a god will only be allowed to occur once the Tribulation has begun, and only after the deliberate and purposeful removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in these seven seals (2Thes.2:1-8; cf. 1Jn.2:18-22; 4:3; 2Jn.1:7).

4. Protection of Believers to Continue during the Tribulation: Even after the removal of the Spirit’s restraint of lawlessness and of antichrist, believers will still enjoy the presence of the Spirit and all the divine protection which this sealing ensures. Instead of restraining the world and us in it, we will then be protected in the midst of an unrestrained world for as long as we are in it (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Ezek.9:1-11; Jn.6:27; 1Pet. 1:1-2).

B. The Sealing of the 144,000: Like the 12 and the 72 sent forth as representatives of our Lord to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the nearness of the Kingdom, the 144,000 are representatives of our Lord sent to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the coming of the Kingdom in its tangible reality (Rev.7:1-8; 14:1-5; cf. Matt.10:1-42; Mk.6:7-12; Lk.9:1-6; Lk.10:1-20). Thus, as Second Advent messengers, the 144,000 will have a similar role and similar function to that of the 12 and the 72. As the special representatives of Jesus Christ to the Jewish people, it is fitting that the 144,000 will not only adhere to the same mandates set down by our Lord for the 12 and the 72, but will also approximate His life and His walk (in so far as sinful human beings can do).

1. Characteristics of the 144,000 and their Ministry:

a. They are Jewish: Just as our Lord, in His humanity, is clearly Jewish (Lk.3:23-38; Rom.9:5), so His 144,000 special emissaries to Israel are very clearly described as belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel (12,000 from each tribe named). Just as clearly, they are also Christians, that is, Jewish believers and followers of Jesus Christ, “servants of our God” (Rev.7:3). The exclusion of gentiles from their number is a necessity. This will be a unique ministry with a unique purpose and will thus have correspondingly unique requirements, most especially the need to understand the Jewish point-of-view, and to avoid giving offense (Matt.27:18; Acts 13:43-45; 17:5; 22:21-22; Rom.10:2; cf. Lk.15:25-32).

b. They are male: Just as our Lord is male, and so these 144,000 who are chosen to spread the good news of His imminent return to the lost sheep of Israel are also male (viz., they are described in the Greek with masculine modifiers only). This is also a necessity to avoid giving offense in the Jewish tradition (cf. 1Cor.9:19-23).

c. They are virgins: Just as our Lord remained a virgin throughout His earthly life, so shall His 144,000 precursors who will begin to turn the hearts of Israel back to Him (Rev.14:4; cf. 1Cor.7:7-8; 9:5-6).

d. They are sent to evangelize Israel: Just as our Lord became a “Minister to the circumcision” (Rom.15:8; cf. Acts 3:26), sent “to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt.15:24; cf. the twelve: Matt.10:6), so the mission of the 144,000 will be directed to the Jewish people (Matt.10:5; 10:18; 10:23; Lk.10:1), although it will be a worldwide as opposed to a centralized ministry (cf. Rev.14:6-7).

e. They are given the authority to perform miracles: Just as our Lord performed miracles in part as a badge of His authority that clearly marked Him out as the true Son of God and the Messiah (Jn.5:36; 10:25; 10:38; 14:11; cf. Matt.11:1-6; Lk.7:18-23), so miracles will be given to the 144,000 to perform as a witness to the fact that they speak with the authority of God:

- Healing the sick (Matt.10:1; 10:8; Mk.6:7; Lk.9:1-2; Lk.10:9; compare Matt.4:24 *et passim* in the gospels; and Acts 5:15-16; 8:5-7; 28:8-9).
- Driving out demons (Matt.10:1; 10:8; Mk.6:7; 6:12; Lk.9:1; 10:17; 10:20; compare Lk.8:26-37 *et passim* in the gospels; and Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:11-13).
- Raising the dead (Matt.10:8; compare Mk.5:37-43; Lk.7:11-17; Jn.11:1-44; and Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12).
- Miraculous protection from dangers (Lk.10:19; compare Lk.4:28-30; Jn.7:30; 8:59; 10:39; and Acts 12:1-10; 28:3-6).

f. They are subject to a special code of conduct: Just as our Lord adopted a “servant lifestyle” throughout His earthly life (Phil.2:5-10; cf. Is.42; 49; 52-53; Matt.20:28; Lk.22:27; Jn.1:1 with 1:14; 5:18; 10:30; 14:9; 17:5; 20:28; 2Cor.8:9; Rm.8:3; 9:5; 1Tim.2:5-6; 3:16; Heb.2:9-18; 10:5-10), so the ministry of the 144,000 will require extreme commitment:

- They will remain celibate (Rev.14:4).
- Their help (healing, etc.) and their message will be offered on a grace basis, without charge (Matt.10:8).
- They will be entirely dependent upon God’s day by day provision (Matt.10:9-10; Lk.9:3; 10:4).
- Their ministry will be conducted in a serious and purposeful fashion (Lk.10:4).
- They will maintain an itinerant lifestyle (Lk.9:6; Matt.10:11; 10:23).
- They will maintain an overt and above-board dependence upon the charity of those they minister to (Matt.10:11-15; Lk.9:4; 10:5-7), but without any opportunity to amass surplus (i.e., only “room and board”, *trophes* in Matt.10:10).

- They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of seeking and accepting support, searching diligently for a “worthy” house (a policy which will entail many nights spent in the open in travel and prior to finding a “worthy” house: Matt.10:11-15; Lk.9:4; 10:5-7).
- They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of removing themselves from a particular mission field only 1) when the mission is completed (Matt.10:11; Lk.9:4; 10:7); 2) if the town proves unworthy (Lk.9:5; cf. 10:10-12); 3) if forced to leave by persecution (Matt.10:23).
- They will be careful and circumspect in every aspect of their manner of life, thereby not giving offense on their own behalf in any way, but keeping the focus on the gospel message (Matt.10:16-17).
- They will make their complete faith in God obvious to all from the total reliance they will display in His protection in times of trouble (Matt.10:16-20).
- They will conduct their ministries courageously, openly proclaiming the gospel in spite of any and all consequences (Matt.10:26-31).
- They will resolutely demonstrate uncommon perseverance in a variety of threatening circumstances (Matt.10:32-39).
- They will courageously continue their ministries despite threats and opposition, departing only at the point when persecution makes further work impossible (Matt.10:23).

g. They will face stiff opposition: The 144,000 will be spoken against vociferously not only by gentile unbelievers, but also by those of their fellow Jews who have determined in their hearts not to accept their witness and return to God through Jesus Christ (Matt.10:17; 10:21; cf. Is.6:9-10; 53:1; Jn.1:11; 12:37-41). They will be betrayed by their own family members (Matt.10:21; 10:35-37), hated by all men (Matt.10:22), slandered (Matt.10:24-25), imprisoned, tortured and falsely accused (Matt.10:17-20), persecuted (Matt.10:23), knowing no peace (Matt.10:34), running their course as did our Lord, as did his apostles among ravening “wolves” (Matt.10:16; Lk.10:3), faithful until the appointed end when they will give up their lives in the service of God’s gospel (Matt.10:39; Rev.14:1-5).

h. They will receive miraculous protection during the days of their ministry: The invisible seal on the foreheads of the 144,000 marks them out as special servants of God (Rev.7:1-8). The sealing of the 144,000 is an assurance from God to them of His special superintendence of their lives and ministries, invisible to men, but obvious and understood by all angelic creatures, elect and fallen (cf. Ezek.9:1-6). Although their ministry will involve incredible risks, they will receive miraculous protection (Lk.10:19; compare Lk.4:28-30; Jn.7:30; 8:59; 10:39; and Acts 12:1-10; 28:3-6).

i. They will be martyred at the conclusion of their ministry: The 144,000 will be the first martyrs of the Great Persecution of antichrist which takes place during the Tribulation’s second half (Rev.14:3-4; 17:6; cf. Matt.10:23; Lk.21:12-19).

2. The Course of the Ministry of the 144,000

a. Some particulars of their ministry: Just as the twelve, and the 72, and John's disciples did not operate in a vacuum, but were selected, commissioned, and sent out by Jesus and John respectively (cf. Matt.10:7; Mk.6:7; Lk.9:1), so the 144,000 will operate under the specific, earthly direction of the "two witnesses", Moses and Elijah, the prophetic counterparts of Jesus and John respectively. And just as the two witnesses are to conduct a ministry that will gain worldwide attention from its central location in Jerusalem (Zech.4:11-14; Rev.11:1-13), so the ministry of this famous pair will be projected, augmented and paralleled by the ministries of thousands of other pairs of the 144,000 serving around the globe under their supervision.

b. The content of their message: The content of the message preached by our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as by John, Moses and Elijah, the 12, the 72, and the 144,000 is all one and the same, namely the gospel of the kingdom, the call to repent and turn back to God through faith in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There is also, it must be said, an urgency to the message so given in all these cases, precisely because of the imminence of events (Mal.4:4-6; Matt.3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7; Mk.1:14; 6:12; Lk.9:2; 10:1; 10:9; 10:11; Acts 13:24; Rev.11:3; 11:6; 11:7; 14:1-6; 17:6).

c. The results of their ministry: Although in large part the ministry of the 144,000 will not come to fruition until Israel returns en masse to the Lord at the Second Advent (Joel 2:30-32; Zech.12:10; Matt.24:29-30; Rom.11:25-27; Rev.1:7), there is ample evidence from prophecy to show that a sizeable (though unspecified) number will respond directly to the message of the 144,000. In Revelation chapter twelve (and elsewhere: Matt.24:15-22; Mk.13:14-23; Lk.21:20-24), we find a large remnant of Jewish believers in Israel who are persecuted by antichrist immediately following the Tribulation's mid-point and are subsequently forced to flee into the desert for refuge.

d. Parallels to the ministry of Christ, and also of John, Moses, Elijah, and the Apostles: The ministry of the 144,000 bears many resemblances to the most impressive divine ministries which have preceded them. These parallels are important to take note of, because they emphasize both the importance and the nature of the ministry of the 144,000, both points which we have been stressing since the beginning of this section. For the 144,000 are all ...

- Jewish males: As are Christ, John, Moses, Elijah, and the apostles.
- Unmarried: As are Christ, John, Elijah, and Paul.
- Miraculously protected: As are Christ (Lk.4:28-30; Jn.7:30; 8:59; 10:39), Moses (Num.16-17), Elijah (2Ki.1), and the apostles (Acts 12:1-10; 28:3-6).
- Evangelists to Israel: As are Christ (Matt.15:24; Lk.2:34), John (Matt.3:7-10; Lk.1:67-80), Moses, Elijah, and Peter (Gal.2:7).
- Preachers of restoration to God: As are Christ (Lk.4:14-21), John (Lk.1:17; Jn.1:7), Elijah (Mal.4:4-6), and the apostles (Acts 3:17-21).
- Performers of exceptional miracles: As are Christ (Mk.5:37-43; Lk.7:11-17; Jn.11:1-44), Moses (Ex.4:1-17; Acts 7:36), Elijah (1Ki.17:17-24), and the apostles (Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12).

- Subject to a demanding “code of conduct”: As are Christ (Matt.4:1:11), John (Matt.3:4; Lk.1:80), Elijah (1Ki.17:1-16), and Paul (1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11).
- Confronted by fierce opposition: As are Christ (Lk.4:29; Jn.7:1; 8:40), John (Matt.14:1-5), Moses (Acts 7:39), Elijah (1Ki.18:16-17; 19:1-2), and the apostles (Acts 5:17-42).
- Consistent in flawless behavior (Rev.14:4-5): As is Christ (Jn.8:46; Acts 8:32-35; Heb.4:15; 1Pet.1:19).
- Serving a three and one half year ministry: As did Christ, Elijah (Jas.5:17), and John.
- Martyred at the conclusion of their ministry (Rev.14:3): As was Christ, John (Matt.14:6-12), and the apostles (cf. Jn.21:18-19).
- Standing as an offering of “first-fruits” to God (Rev.5:9): As does Christ (1Cor.15:23; cf. Lev.23:9ff.).

e. The omission of the tribe of Dan: The overarching reason for Dan’s non-inclusion within the ranks of the 144,000 is the fact that antichrist will be descended from this tribe (Gen.49:16-18; cf. Gen.3:15). This removal of one of the twelve tribes for betrayal and satanic allegiance parallels the removal of Judas from the number of the twelve apostles (replaced by Paul).

f. Their reward: The 144,000 will be granted the special status of “first-fruits”, a unique and preeminent martyrdom (Rev.14:1), a special, memorial anthem (Rev.14:3), and a unique place beside the King of Kings and Lord of Lords forevermore (Rev.14:4). So important is their ministry that those who support them, even in seemingly trivial ways, will be rewarded as well (Matt.10:13; 10:40-42).

C. The Lamb, the Scroll, and the Seven Seals: In Revelation chapter 5 the scroll which represents the Father’s bequest to His Son (i.e., His “revelation” to the world as its Lord and King), and therefore describes the events which lead up to His Kingdom (namely the Tribulation, Armageddon, the Second Advent, and the divine dispositions and judgments which follow) is opened by the Lamb who alone is worthy to do so. Jesus is “the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn.1:29; cf. Jn.1:36; 1Pet.1:19; Is.53:7), and by His death for us He has won the right to remove the seals of the scroll and bring in His glorious Kingdom. The seven seals on the scroll which must be opened before this process begins have a dual symbolism, individually representing events which are set in motion by their removal, and collectively representing the power which now restrains these trends, namely, God the Holy Spirit in His ministry as the Restrainer.

1. The first four seals: These represent four major trends related to antichrist and his kingdom which begin during the Tribulation’s first half (Rev.6:1-8):

- #1. **The White horse**: Antichrist’s Conquests: the trend of warfare and aggression.
- #2. **The Red horse**: Civil Discord: the trend of lawlessness and political destabilization.

#3. **The Black horse: Economic Constraint:** the trend of economic dislocation & famine.

#4. **The Pale-green horse: Accelerated Mortality:** the trend of plague and rampant death.

2. **The fifth and sixth seals:** These represent the two major events of the second half or Great Tribulation, namely the Great Persecution of the true Church by the beast, and the extraordinary judgments which precede the return of our Lord (Rev.6:9-17):

#5. **The Martyrs: the Great Persecution:** martyrdom of believers at the hands of the beast and his religion.

#6. **Judgments: the Second Advent:** both its preliminary and concomitant judgments.

3. **The seventh seal:** This represents removal of the final impediment to unleashing the Tribulation as well as the inevitable and blessed results on its farther side, namely, the coming Kingdom of our Lord.

#7. **The Commencement: the Tribulation Begins:** following a half hour of silence (six months), the final seven year period begins in the wake of the removal of the Spirit's restraining ministry.

D. The Great Apostasy: Coming about as a direct result of intensified satanic activity administered by antichrist and directed against believers, the Great Apostasy is a massive falling away from the faith by a third of Christians predicted to begin during the Tribulation's first half and destined to reach its culmination during the Great Persecution of the Tribulation's second half (Dan.8:10-12; 8:23; 11:29-35; Matt.24:3-14; 2Thes.2:1-4; 1Tim.4:1; Rev.12:4; cf. Rev.6:9-11; 7:9-17; 12:12-17; 13:10; 13:11-18; 14:13; 14:14-16; 15:1-4; 16:5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:1-2; 20:4).

1. **The Process of Apostasy:** Turning away from God and away from the Person of His Son is, in general, not an immediately obvious thing, and, rather than an event, is more often a process wherein the believer progressively violates his conscience, giving himself over to sin to such a degree that he is eventually forced to make a final choice between God and repentance on the one hand, or sin and reprobation on the other. For, at some point, continuing on the wrong road far enough and willfully enough will eventually and inevitably lead to the complete breakdown of the conscience and result in the "shipwreck" of faith (1Tim.1:18-19). When the believer stops believing altogether, then he/she is no longer a believer (Matt.24:10-13). The specific, biblical process involved here is the "hardening of the heart", that is a gradual loss of response and sensitivity to one's conscience, to the known will of God, and to one's commitment to following Jesus Christ as a true and faithful disciple (1Cor.10:11-12; Heb.3:12-19; Jas.1:14-15; 1Jn.5:16).

2. **The Situation of the Church and "church-visible" on the Eve of the Tribulation:** Two problems confront the contemporary Church which make it particularly vulnerable to the coming

Great Apostasy: 1) the fact that not all who represent themselves as Christians really are believers in and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the majority of the "church-visible" likely falling into this camp; and 2) the fact that in our current Church age of Laodicea complacency is the dominant trend.

a. The Hardness of Unbelieving Pseudo-Christianity (The Seven Woes): Organized Judaism of our Lord's day presents a close parallel to the situation described above. Controlled largely by the scribes and Pharisees, the religious establishment of that time had become every bit as divorced from the true grace and power of God as will be the case for organized "Christianity" in the Tribulation (cf. Matt.23:5). Jesus' characterization of the spiritually dead "church-visible" of His own day with "the seven woes" gives us a very clear picture of what true believers will be up against once the church-visible of that future day makes a similarly clean break from the truth.

- The Pseudo-Christian establishment hinders salvation for its members:

So woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock up the kingdom of heaven [right] in front of people. For you yourselves are not going in, nor do you allow those about to do so to [actually] go in. Matthew 23:13

- The Pseudo-Christian establishment reaches out to hinder salvation for others seeking God:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you scour land and sea to make a single convert, and when he becomes [one], you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Matthew 23:15

- The Pseudo-Christian establishment adds forms and rituals which obscure truth:

Woe to you, you blind guides who say, "Whoever swears by the temple has no obligation, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obliged". You fools and blind men! For what is greater, the gold or the temple which makes the gold holy? And you [also] say, "Whoever swears by the altar has no obligation, but whoever swears by the sacrifice which is on it is obliged". You blind men! For what is greater, the sacrifice or the altar which makes the sacrifice holy? Therefore whoever swears by the altar swears both by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by the One who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. Matthew 23:16-22

- The Pseudo-Christian establishment uses minor, partial obedience to obscure major truths:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you give a tenth of your mint and of your anise and of your cummin, but you have neglected the weightier parts of the Law, [namely], justice and mercy and faith. You ought to do the former – but not neglect the

latter! You blind guides! You [are careful to] filter out the gnat, but [then] you swallow down the camel! Matthew 23:23-24

- The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of holiness, but is not holy:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they teem with robbery and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup so that its outside may also be [truly] clean. Matthew 23:25-26

- The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of spiritual life, but is dead:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you resemble whitewashed tombs which, while they appear to be beautiful on the outside, on the inside are filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness. This is just how you are. On the outside you appear to men to be righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matthew 23:27-28

- The Pseudo-Christian establishment appears to be for God, but is really hostile to Him and His:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you restore the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and you say, "If we had been [alive] in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have participated in [shedding] the blood of the prophets". So then you are your own witnesses against yourselves that you are [indeed the] sons of those who murdered the prophets. Matthew 23:29-31

Dead pseudo-Christian organizations (of which there are plenty in our own day) may seem to pose no threat under present circumstances. However, just as soon as circumstances change (and change they will in the Tribulation, much for the worse), such organizations will be ready-made and willing co-conspirators both for the advancement of the process of the Great Apostasy and also for the implementation of the Great Persecution. The reason for the nature of such groups is not a matter of accident: these spiritually dead organizations reflect the hardened hearts of the individuals who make them up.

b. The Vulnerability of Lukewarm Believers (The Problem of Complacency): The overwhelming characteristic of believers in this current Church era of Laodicea is one of apathy when it comes to building faith, growing through the Word of God, drawing closer to Jesus Christ, and preparing for and putting into practice the gifts, ministries and effects that God has ordained for us (cf. 1Cor.12:4-7; Eph.2:10). One could go on at great length as to the causes of such indifference toward the Lord Jesus who bought us, but it is sufficient here to point out that in its essence this appalling attitude stems primarily from loving the world more than Jesus. Complacency is a serious problem for the Church at large and for individual Christians in particular precisely because of this "zero sum" opposition between the two alternatives. For

either you truly love Jesus Christ more than anything else, or the truth is that you love the world more than Him. And if you do love the world more than the Lord, then your faith is at the very least extremely fragile and vulnerable so that it may well not survive serious testing or tribulation, not to mention *the* Tribulation (Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:16-17; Lk.8:13). And, indeed, this dominant characteristic of our Laodicean era will make the Church as a whole highly vulnerable to the pressures of the Tribulation to come, thus explaining in large measure the Great Apostasy.

3. The Causes of the Great Apostasy:

a. The unleashing of the “mystery of lawlessness”: In 2nd Thessalonians 2:7, we are told that “the mystery of lawlessness”, that is, unseen satanic influence which leads to the active rejection of divine truth in all of its forms, is already at work in our day. Following the removal of the Holy Spirit’s restraint at the commencement of the Tribulation, however, lawlessness will explode, embittering human life to an unprecedented degree and leading to increased pressure upon the faith of us all (2Thes.2:6-7). While this circumstance will result in the refining of the remnant of dedicated believers, in the case of lukewarm believers it will greatly contribute to apostasy (Matt.24:10-13; 2Thes.2:11; 1Jn.4:3; 4:6).

b. The dearth of Bible teaching: This second major cause of the Great Apostasy is the exclusive concern of believers. While the unleashing of lawlessness and consequent degeneration of the behavior of unbelievers will only affect believers indirectly (by increasing the external pressures on faith), the coming dearth of genuine Bible teaching anticipated during the Tribulation will have a direct negative impact contributing to apostasy. As in the case of the former cause above, so in this case it will be almost exclusively the lukewarm members of the Body of Christ adversely affected by this coming famine of spiritual food. For having been complacent about solid spiritual nutrition in good times, they will find turning to substantive Bible teaching in hard times a difficult transition, both because it will be very hard to find (Amos 8:11; Hos.4:5-6; cf. 1Sam.3:1; 28:6; Prov.29:18; Mic.3:4-7), and because this very condition will have come about in no small part through their negative and complacent attitude in the first place (2Tim.4:1-4; cf. 2Chron.15:2-4; Is.6:9-10; 28:9-13; Ezek.20:3-4; 20:30-31; Matt.13:11-17; Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10).

c. The rise of false teaching: In addition to the pressure exerted by increased lawlessness and the difficulties created by the dearth of spiritual food, a third major cause for the massive apostasy among believers during the Tribulation will be the prevalence of persuasive false teaching. Our Lord’s teachings in particular are replete with warnings about the danger of deception and the need for alertness during this dark period ahead (Matt.24:5-6; 24:17; 24:24-25; 25:13; 25:42; Mk.13:5-9; 13:23; 13:33; 13:35-37; Lk.12:40; 17:23; 21:8; 21:36; cf. 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1-5; 2Tim.3:1-13; 2Pet.2:1-22; 3:1-17; 1Jn.2:22; 4:1-6; Rev.12:9; 13:14; 19:20; 20:3).

d. The persuasiveness of tribulational false signs: One particular aspect of tribulational false teaching that deserves special mention in regard to its contribution to promoting apostasy is the effective use to which false signs will be put by antichrist and his false prophet. For scripture is very clear that the signs performed by these two in the power of the devil will be unprecedented in human history, and will play no small part in winning over the majority of the world's population (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22; 2Thes.2:9-10; Rev.13:3-4; 16:13-14; 17:8; 17:11; 19:20; Rev.13:13-15), and any believer who is not absolutely firm in his or her faith will be vulnerable to the extreme persuasiveness of these unprecedented false miracles and portents.

e. The persuasiveness of coopted groups: When all the world begins to follow after the beast, even so-called Christian organizations and denominations, it will put serious pressure even on the faith of the elect (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). True believers in Jesus Christ must make up their minds ahead of time to put their entire allegiance in the Son of Man and not compromise their faith for the sake of tradition, sentimentality, herd-mentality, or peer-pressure (Ex.32:1-6; Deut.13:2-4; 2Pet.2:1-2; 2:20-22; 1Tim.4:1; 2Tim.4:1-4; 1Jn.4:1-3).

4. The Refining of the Remnant: If there is a silver lining in this terrible cloud of apostasy, it is to be found in the refining of the faith of all those who are truly God's people to be produced by the pressures of the Tribulation. It is true that the refining of the hearts of His people, the strengthening of faith and the testing of our commitment to Jesus Christ are givens in every era (Dan.11:35; 12:10; cf. Job 23:10; Ps.66:8-12; Prov.10:25; 17:3; Is.10:22-23; 48:10; Lk.3:16-17; Rom.11:1-6; Eph.5:25-27; Heb.11:13-16; 1Pet.1:6-7).

E. The Trumpet Judgments:

1. The Purpose of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: The seven trumpet judgments are literal "plagues" in the biblical sense (Rev.8:12; 9:20, 9:18), calamities visited by God upon the earth which are not confined to physical diseases (cf. the plagues of frogs, gnats, and flies in Exodus chapter 8). As in the case of the ten plagues the Lord inflicted upon Egypt some three and a half millennia ago (Ex.7:14 - 12:30), and also in the case of the seven bowl judgments (Rev.16:1-21), the seven trumpet judgments are instances of divine punishment leveled upon exceptional evil (cf. Lev.26:14-39; Deut.28:15-68; 1Ki.16:29 - 17:1). The primary purpose of these judgments is one of warning as indicated by the blowing the trumpet (Ezek.33:1-20; Joel 2:1; cf. Num.10:1-9; Josh.6:1-5; 6:20; Jer.4:19-21; 6:1; Hos.5:8-9; Amos 3:6; Zeph.1:15-17; 1Cor.14:8).

2. The Chronology of the Seven Trumpets: Like the plagues upon Egypt prior to the Exodus, each trumpet judgment lasts for a specific length of time and comes to an end before the next one in the sequence commences. The fact that judgment #5 lasts five months invites us likewise to assign a corresponding number of months to each of the first six trumpets (excluding the seventh trumpet which represents the Tribulation's entire second half, that is, the Great Tribulation). The net result of adding this ascending number of months (i.e., 1 month for trumpet #1, plus 2 months for trumpet #2, plus 3 months for trumpet #3, plus 4 months for trumpet #4, plus 5 months for trumpet #5, plus 6 months for trumpet #6) is a total of 21 months, exactly one half of the 42

month total of the Tribulation's first half). These six judgments should be understood to occur in immediate sequence directly prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation:

- The principle of acceleration and intensification of judgment argues for understanding things in this way.
- The parallel seven "bowl" judgments are arranged in this way (Rev.16).
- Only with this sequencing would these judgments provide maximum warning effect.
- The narrative of the seven trumpet judgments does in fact lead directly into the Great Tribulation with no discernible gap or interval (Rev.10:6-7; 11:1-14; cf. Rev.11:15-19 with chapters 12-13).

3. The Ascending Intensity of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: Not only do the trumpet judgments expand sequentially in terms of their duration (being 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 42 months long respectively), but they also exhibit a progressive intensification in terms of the painful effect they produce:

- Trumpet #1: Vegetation Stricken: A third of the earth is scorched and a third of its grass and trees are burned up, but *no* human fatalities are mentioned.
- Trumpet #2: The Sea Stricken: A third of the creatures in the sea are killed and a third of all ships destroyed, unquestionably resulting in *some* human fatalities.
- Trumpet #3: Fresh Water Stricken: A third of the world's fresh water is poisoned with the result that *many* human fatalities.
- Trumpet #4: The Heavenly Lights Stricken: While no fatalities are mentioned in conjunction with this one third reduction in the delivery of heavenly light, this is the first judgment wherein *all* human beings and *all* portions of the world are adversely affected. The suffering caused by this diminution of light should not be underestimated (cf. Rev.16:10-11).

The administrators of these first four trumpet judgments are the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, "to whom it had been given to harm *the earth* and *the sea*". For all four of the above judgments are targeted directly at either "the earth" (i.e., land), or at "the sea" (i.e., the waters of the earth), or, in the case of the fourth judgment, both (i.e., lack of deprivation of light affects all living things). In this they are different from the last three trumpet judgments where human beings are the objects of the judgments, and human suffering and death the main rather than merely ancillary results. Of further significance is the fact that the last three trumpet judgments, while decreed by God, are carried out by demonic forces. This is a further, clear indication of the progressive intensification of these judgments which are so much more severe in nature than the preceding four that they are given the name "the three woes" (compare Rev.8:13 with Rev.9:12; 11:14; 12:12).

- Trumpet #5: The First Woe: Demon Harassment: The entire unbelieving population of the earth is affected.

- Trumpet #6: The Second Woe: Demon Destruction: An entire third of the world's population is killed.
- Trumpet #7: The Third Woe: The Great Tribulation: The "third woe" is synonymous with the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev.12:12). While exact numbers are not provided, this three and one half year period will produce the most staggering loss of life in raw terms that has ever taken place (cf. Is.13:12). The slaughter that will take place at Armageddon alone boggles the mind (Rev.14:17-20; cf. Ezek.39:4-6; 39:11-20), and the bowl judgments of Revelation chapter 16 which precede it are clearly more dire in their effects than the trumpet judgments (which collectively claim the lives of over a third of the world's population). Finally, the fact that the Great Tribulation lasts for 42 months, exactly *seven times* as long as the sixth trumpet judgment which precedes, also does much to signal the incomparably more horrendous nature of this last judgment (cf. Matt.18:22). For as terrible as the first half of the Tribulation will be, in comparison to the Great Tribulation unleashed by the seventh trumpet it is only the "beginning of woes" (Matt.24:3-13).

4. The Effects of the Seven Trumpet Judgments on Believers: These judgments are divine punishment upon the world of *unbelievers*, and are not meant or intended to harm God's people. All of us who are believers in Jesus Christ are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30). Therefore, just as the 144,000 were sealed by God so as to be spared the plagues soon to be delivered by the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, so we may have every confidence that not only are these judgments not meant for the people of God, but also that we shall be spared the worst of their effects.

F. The Two Witnesses: The ministry of the two witnesses covers the entire first half of the Tribulation, but is terminated by antichrist on the eve of the Great Tribulation (Rev.11:1-2). Through them, God's witness to truth proceeds hand in hand with His judgments upon evil (demonstrating His grace and mercy even in the midst of severe judgment).

1. The 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3: 1,260 days is the length of the ministry of the two witnesses (i.e., the entire *first* half of the Tribulation). This should not be confused with the forty-two months cited in the preceding verse, Revelation 11:2 (wherein the gentiles will "trample" Jerusalem), which is a reference to the Great Tribulation, commencing with the seventh trumpet directly *after* the termination of the two-witness ministry (discussed in the rest of Revelation chapter eleven). Our Lord makes a similar reference to the trampling of Jerusalem by gentiles in Luke 21:24, and tells us that this situation of gentile intrusion and conquest will continue "until the gentiles' times have been fulfilled", that is, until His Second Advent brings antichrist's control of Israel and Jerusalem to a violent and immediate conclusion. Here is a summary of the various scriptural designations for the forty-two month time period covered by the Great Tribulation in contrast to the prior, preceding 1,260 days wherein the witnesses will minister:

- In Daniel 7:25, the saints of the Most High (i.e., believers) are said to be handed over into the power of the little horn (i.e., antichrist and the Great Persecution) for “a time, times, and half a time”, a biblical way of expressing the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation.
- In Daniel 9:27, “the prince of the people which is to come” (i.e., antichrist as the ruler of revived Rome) will make a treaty for one “seven” and break it in the middle of the “seven”, that is, during the middle of the seven years at the outset of the Great Tribulation.
- In Daniel 12:7, the angel speaking with Daniel declares that it will be “a time, times, and half a time” before the persecutions stop and everything comes to an end, that is, the Great Tribulation will last three and one half years.
- In Revelation 11:2, (discussed above), the gentiles (i.e., the army of antichrist) will control Jerusalem for 42 months, that is, during the entire three and a half year period of the Great Tribulation.
- In Revelation 12:6, the woman Israel is said to be protected for 1,260 days, that is, during the whole 42 months of the Great Tribulation (expressed in standard 30 day months).
- In Revelation 12:14, the woman Israel is said to be protected for a time, times, and half a time, that is, during this same period of the Great Tribulation’s three and a half years.
- In Revelation 13:5, the reign of antichrist is said to last for 42 months, that is, for the duration of the Great Tribulation.

2. The Tribulational Temple rebuilt by Moses and Elijah: While the “forty-two months” of Revelation 11:2 refer to the Great Tribulation, the remainder of chapter eleven (up until the seventh trumpet of verse fifteen) is a description of events which take place during the Tribulation’s first half. We see here for the first time in the book of Revelation that while the unbelieving population of the earth has been undergoing a series of horrific judgments, a significant revival has been taking place in Israel. As part of this revival, the temple has been reconstructed, and John is here invited to take precise measurements of all its dimensions. The temple rite has also been reinstated as we may conclude from the presence of the altar which meets the Mosaic specifications (implied by the command to measure it). And a considerable number of genuine worshipers (large enough that they will have to be counted with some effort) is present paying homage to God, a clear indication that by this point the revival associated with the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses has born significant fruit.

The description of the measuring rod given to John is purposely reminiscent of the scene in Ezekiel chapter 40 and following. In that passage, Ezekiel is brought to the millennial Jerusalem and sees a “man whose appearance was like bronze” (i.e., a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ).

Our Lord there holds a similar rod in His hands wherewith He likewise measures the millennial temple complex. It is no doubt for this reason that Revelation 11:1 has only the participle “saying” and does not identify the speaker, for, as we learn later in verse three, the speaker is also divine, and is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, whose servants the two witnesses are (i.e., they are “My servants” in Rev.11:3; cf. Matt.16:28 - 17:13). From this set of facts we may deduce that the rebuilding of the tribulational temple is divinely ordained and supervised, for it corresponds to divine specifications of measurement. It is given to John by our Lord to see for himself that this is true, for the process and concept of such measurement with rods and plumb lines often involves the idea of employing a divine standard, often one which results in judgment when these standards are violated (cf. Job 38:5; Is.28:17; 34:11; 44:13; Jer.31:39; Lam.2:8; Ezek.40:3; 47:3; Amos 7:7-9; Mic.2:5; Zech.1:16; 2:1; 4:10; cf. also 2Sam.8:2).

The restoration of the temple rite must also therefore have come at God’s behest (cf. the pattern of restoration recorded in Ezra chapter 3 and following), with the worshipers also legitimate followers of God, namely, those of Israel who have turned to Jesus Christ through the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses. The fact that these true, legitimate, and divinely ordained things (i.e., the temple, its rites, and the mass of worshipers) are here directly juxtaposed to and opposed by anti-God “gentiles” (i.e., antichrist and his followers) who will shortly defile the temple and thus of necessity interrupt its rites and scatter the worshipers is further evidence that the restored temple and worship of God therein has truly been of God, for God, and by God.

Inasmuch as the Tribulation is an era of restoration jointly shared by Israel and the Church in which Israel once again claims the leadership role, it should come as no surprise that we find here the reinstatement of the temple rites in a rebuilt temple. Coming as it will after so long a hiatus, and coming as it will as a direct result of two messengers sent from God, there will be no confusion about the meaning of the renewed sacrifices: rather than shadows of things to come, it will be clearly understood that these are memorials to the already accomplished work of Christ (i.e., different in purpose from the Mosaic sacrifices just the millennial sacrifices will be; cf. Ezek.45:13-25). This principle of the “restoration of Israel” (that is, a turning of their hearts back to God and a reinstatement of appropriate worship), is, as we have already seen in the case of the ministry of the 144,000, very closely associated with the two witnesses and their ministry:

Remember the Law of *Moses*, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] statutes and judgments – behold, I am about to send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the Day of the Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so that he may *restore* [to God] the hearts of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation. Malachi 4:4-6

And behold, *Moses* and *Elijah* appeared and were talking with Him (v.3). And His disciples questioned Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come

first (i.e., before the Kingdom)". And He answered, saying, "Elijah is coming, and he will *restore all things*". Matthew 17:3; 17:10-13 (cf. Mk.9:11-12)

So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that *times of refreshment* may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the times of *the restoration of all things* of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For *Moses* said, "The Lord God will raise up for you from among your brothers a Prophet like me". Acts 3:19-22a

These passages closely connect the future spiritual restoration of Israel to the two witnesses and their ministry. Given that in Revelation chapter eleven the two witnesses are also placed in close association with the rebuilt temple, the revived rites, and the reinvigorated worship, we may conclude that the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the godly worship associated with it is indeed directed by these two heralds of the Kingdom.

We would certainly be hard pressed to choose two other Old Testament figures more suited to spiritual revival and the reestablishment of the orthodox worship of the Lord. Moses was sent to a people far removed from the Lord and mediated to them the covenant written by God Himself (Gal.3:19). Elijah was sent to a people long in the grasp of pagan idolatry, and presided over a great and dramatic spiritual victory on Mount Carmel (1Ki.18:16-46). Elijah's rebuilding of the altar of the Lord on Mount Carmel foreshadows his leading role in rebuilding the temple during the Tribulation (1Ki.18:30-32), and Moses, of course, oversaw the construction of the original tabernacle, its furniture, and the rites ordained by God to serve it (so that there could be no better person to oversee its restoration: Ex.25:40).

The time required for the reconstruction of the (relatively small) temple itself need not be prohibitively time consuming. The massive structure of Herod's design (which took so long to build: Jn.2:20) was in fact an elaboration of the original second temple rather than the temple proper. Chapters 40-43 of Ezekiel which describe Ezekiel's vision of the massive millennial temple complex are also consistent with this interpretation. The temple structure itself (Ezek.40:48-49) is relatively modest, and, as in the case of the second temple set in the midst of Herod's massive complex, constitutes only a small part of the overall design. It is thus entirely consistent with the scriptures which deal with this subject to posit that Moses and Elijah rebuild the temple proper, leaving its elaboration (as described in Ezekiel and elsewhere) for the millennial reign of our Lord as indicated by the following passages:

The entire flock of Kedar will be gathered for you. The rams of Nebaioth will serve you. They will be sacrificed as acceptable offerings on My altar. And as for My glorious house (i.e., the temple), *I shall glorify it*. Isaiah 60:7

The entire glory of Lebanon will come to you, the fir, the pine, and the cedar together, to beautify My holy place (i.e., the temple), the place of My feet. And ***I shall glorify it.***
Isaiah 60:13

And He said to me, “Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – ‘Branch’ is His name (i.e., the Messiah; cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Zech.3:8). And He will branch out from His place and ***will build [up]*** the temple of the Lord”. Zechariah 6:12-13

Behold, I am about to send [forth] My messenger, and ***he will prepare*** the way before Me. Then the Lord whom you are seeking will suddenly ***come to His temple*** (i.e., it is already built in “preparation” for that great day). Malachi 3:1

Moses and Elijah will possess all the divine authority necessary to complete this third and final temple in the correct, godly and sanctified fashion just as God has ordained it. All problems of time, placement, politics, and logistics will dissolve under the leadership of these two divinely appointed, divinely inspired, and divinely empowered heralds of the Kingdom of our coming Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The two olive trees and the two lampstands: The fact that the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven occur in context with the reconstructed (third) temple also leads us to connect them to the detailed description of “the two anointed ones” of Zechariah chapter four (who are likewise prophetically associated with the second temple’s reconstruction). In Zechariah’s vision of a single, solid gold lampstand with seven lamps, there are two olive trees standing by the lampstand on the left and on the right (Zech.4:3). When he asks the meaning of this vision, Zechariah is first told “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit” (Zech.4:6). This part of the answer explains not the details of the vision’s symbolism, but rather the overall principle that it will be God’s Spirit which empowers the rebuilding of the temple. Inasmuch as the second temple was not reconstructed without divine help, and given that the two witnesses are a prophecy connected to a future rebuilding (i.e., there is no further mention of them in the rebuilding of the second temple), we may conclude that the rebuilding of the third temple seen in Revelation chapter eleven will also be accomplished by God’s Spirit, and that its reconstruction will be overseen by the two witnesses of Zechariah four (who *are* mentioned as being present after its construction in Revelation chapter eleven). This is clearly the main reason for the Spirit’s inclusion of the “two anointed” in Zechariah’s vision.

The name given to these two in Zechariah, generally translated “anoint-*ed* ones”, is actually “sons of oil”. While usually understood *passively*, the phrase should be taken *actively*, for it is the translation “anoint-*ing* ones” which gives the correct sense: like the word “witness” used in Revelation eleven, “anoint-*ing* ones” indicates that they are *conduits* of God’s power and God’s light rather than merely being recipients. This is the point behind the symbolism in Zechariah 4:12 where the two olive trees pour out their oil into the lampstand’s golden bowl. The lampstand has seven lamps which are “the seven eyes of the Lord” which range throughout the earth. These “eyes” are often mistaken to have a purely investigative purpose, but, just as the human eye can sparkle and reflect light, so the Hebrew word ‘*ayin* (אֵינ) sometimes refers to an

object's appearance as a reflector of light as well (Num.11:7; 22:5; 22:11; Lev.13:5; 13:37; 13:55; 1Sam.16:7; Ezek.1:4; 1:7; 1:16; 1:22; 1:27; 8:2; 10:9; Dan.10:6; cf. Prov.23:31). Similarly, these two witnesses will be the primary "reflectors" of the light of God's truth during the gathering darkness of the Tribulation.

Zechariah's seven lamps which are also seven eyes are identical in symbolism to the seven Spirits of Revelation chapters four (where lamps = spirits) and chapter five (where eyes = spirits). In all three cases, we have to do with the perfect seven-fold witness of the Holy Spirit, shedding forth God's light to illuminate the darkness of this world, making use of human agencies, but always in behalf of Him who is the true Light, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ("Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit": Zech.4:6).

And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, **which are** the seven spirits of God. Revelation 4:5 (cf. Rev.1:4; 3:1)

And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes **which are** the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth. Revelation 5:6 (cf. Rev.1:4; 3:1)

In the context of Zechariah chapter four, the lampstand and its lights are clearly speaking of just such a witness of God's light in the world during the dark time to come (cf. the seven eras of the Church represented as a series of lampstands giving forth God's witness of light to the world: Rev.1:20). Empowering this tribulational witness of light, therefore, are the "two anoint-*ing* ones", the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. During the dark days of the Tribulation, they and the ministry of the 144,000 directed by them, will constitute the major witness of God's light (and His Light, Jesus Christ) in the world, just as in our own day that witness is provided by the Church.

4. The two pillars: In the portico or entrance porch of the first temple, Solomon placed two massive bronze pillars, one on the north side, and one on the south. These pillars, flanking the threshold of the temple like two giant guardians, would doubtless have been in the mind of anyone hearing Zechariah's vision of the olive trees and the lampstands, especially had they lived long enough to have seen that first temple before its destruction (as some of the older people indeed had: Ezra 3:12; Hag.2:3; cf. Zech.4:10). Columns are, in any case, originally architectural representations of trees and the same was true of the lampstand (i.e., with its "flower-like cups, buds, blossoms, and branches"; cf. Ex.25:31-32). Moreover, when one considers that the lampstand within the holy place was not far removed from these two pillars, the connection between it and the pillars on the one hand and the lampstand in Zechariah's vision with its two olive trees on the other is hard to ignore. We may add to this picture that the unique and unparalleled verbal phrasing used in both Zechariah 4:14 and Revelation 11:4, "who are standing by/before the Lord of the earth", suggests a permanent and stable positioning, exactly in the manner of pillars.

The Hebrew word for pillar, *‘amudth* (dvmi; viz., “a standing thing”), is derived and virtually indistinguishable from the verb used in Zechariah 4:14 of the anointing olive trees who are “**standing** by the Lord”, making the connection between these pillars and our two witnesses even more certain. Just as the two witnesses, the anointing ones, the two lampstands, and the two olive trees all “stand [solidly like pillars] by/before the Lord of the earth”, so these two pillars stood solidly on either side of the entrance to the first temple (which contained the lampstand). The one on the north side was named *Boaz*, while the one on the south was called *Jachin* (1Ki.7:21). *Jachin* is to be translated “He (i.e., the Lord) establishes”, while *Boaz* means “strength in Him”. Both of these names sum up the careers of the two witnesses Moses and Elijah respectively. *Jachin* is erected first and *Boaz* second (just as Moses’ first earthly ministry preceded that of Elijah), and *Jachin* takes the first place of honor on the south (i.e., the “right hand” as the temple faced east with the ark or chariot throne oriented in that direction), while *Boaz* stood on the north, the second most honorable place. In a similar way, while Elijah’s ministry was remarkable in every way, Moses’ was superior (compare Paul’s use of Moses’ ministry as the closest parallel to that of the ministry of our Lord in Hebrews chapter three). Their ministries, after all, served somewhat different purposes. Moses was the Lord’s instrument for effectively “establishing” the spiritual groundwork for Israel through his mediation of the Law (“He establishes”), while Elijah presided a significant overture from the Lord for spiritual revival (renewed “strength in Him”). From the divine viewpoint, history has always been supported by these twin pillars of original establishment *of* the truth and restoration *to* the truth, with both pillars ever looking to Him who is the truth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the “Lord of all the earth”. At His right and left hand these two witnesses stand as solidly as columns of bronze. To serve directly by the Lord’s side is clearly a preeminent honor. When the mother of James and John requested this privilege for her sons, our Lord’s response was “... to sit at my right or left is not for Me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared” (Mk.10:40; cf. Lk.14:8-11). For even though the twelve apostles of our Lord will indeed occupy unique positions (“judging the twelve tribes of Israel”, i.e., to be heads of the twelve divisions of the family of God: Matt.19:28; Lk.22:30), it is to Moses and Elijah that this most prestigious honor will fall. Being so close to our dear Lord for all eternity is indeed an exceptional and sublime reward, earned in the case of these two by exceptional earthly service on not one, but two occasions.

But I, [in contrast to the wicked,] will be like an olive tree flourishing in the house of My Lord, for I have trusted in the mercy of God forever and ever. Psalm 52:8

5. Their restoration ministries: During the Tribulation, two main areas of restoration will need to be addressed for the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 to be effective: 1) the temple and its rites will need to be restored as a focus for renewed Jewish worship; and 2) the hearts of a large number of their countrymen will need to be won back to their Lord and ours, Jesus Christ the only Messiah. As God’s instrument in founding, constructing and instituting the original tabernacle along with its statutes and ceremonies, no more authoritative person than Moses can be imagined. As God’s instrument in His most dramatic offer of spiritual revival in Israel’s history, one, we might add, which took place in spite of the most severe opposition from

a pagan government which had wedded satanic worship to the governance of the state (reminiscent of antichrist and his false prophet), no more highly qualified person than Elijah can be found. The future ministries of both of these great men of God in restoring and multiplying the remnant of Israel during the Tribulation's first half is documented in scripture:

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

Elijah's future return is more generally accepted and understood because in Old Testament prophecy the antitype of our Lord is stressed rather than the type (i.e., the Messiah instead of Moses), but in the case of His herald, it is the type who is set in the forefront of prophecy rather than the antitype (i.e., Elijah instead of John the baptist). So while the passage above does have a general application for all of the true prophets of God (cf. the following verses 20-22), it is also clear from the emphasis it places upon a single prophet that we have to do here with a future coming of a single Person who would proclaim the Word in a way so preeminent that only Moses' ministry is worthy of comparison (cf. Lk.9:8; Jn.1:21; 1:25; 1:45; 6:14; 7:20; Heb.3:1-16). The sublime fulfillment of these verses is therefore in the first coming of our Savior (cf. Acts 3:22-26; 7:37). This fact, however, does not preclude a final application of the passage to Moses' return. For while the salvation of Israel has indeed been accomplished by our Lord's first advent, present and prophetic circumstances still require just such a preeminent prophet to resurrect the true worship of God, and, other than our Lord whose return must await the Tribulation's conclusion, no one is more “like Moses” than Moses himself. In John 1:25 we find both sets of types and antitypes linked where, speaking to the Messiah's herald, John the baptist, the type of Elijah, the Pharisee's disciples ask, “So why are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”. It is generally accepted that one half of this pair of types will precede Jesus' return (i.e., Elijah). Given the consistent linkage of the two in scripture, there is no more likely candidate to be identified as the second witness than Moses.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] **statutes and judgments** – behold, I am about to send you **Elijah** the prophet before the coming of the Day of the Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so **that he may restore [to God] the hearts** of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation. Malachi 4:4-6

The first thing to note about the passage above, a fact usually overlooked in interpretation, is that Moses also figures prominently in this prophecy. The specific mention of Moses in connection with “remembering” the Law with all its “statutes and judgments” foreshadows the reinstatement of the temple rite in the reconstructed temple. “Remembering the Law”, in fact, comes first, and is followed by the heart-restoration said to be mediated by Elijah. As in our other parallels, Moses is first, then Elijah, indicating that the rebuilding of the temple and the reinitiating of the sacrifices will be instrumental in and fundamental to the spiritual revival (Elijah’s area of expertise) and the ministry of the 144,000. Incidentally, in both passages quoted above, Sinai is called by its alternative name, “Horeb”, which means “devastation” in Hebrew. This appellation brings to mind the desolate spirituality of Israel which will obtain when the two witnesses begin their ministry, and the concomitant need for complete restoration not only in terms of spiritual response, but also of the main concrete features of the Law (namely, the rebuilding of the temple and the reconstitution of its rites, Moses’ area of expertise; cf. also Ex.32-34).

So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that *times of revival* may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., “whom heaven must receive”) until the *times of the restoration* of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For *Moses* said “The Lord Your God will raise up for you *a Prophet* like me”. Acts 3:19-22

In the context above, Peter is referring to our Lord Jesus Christ when he mentions the Prophet who was to come in order to explain to his contemporaries that Jesus was that Prophet in the most direct fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. But it is significant that in this context of *future* revival that precedes our Lord’s return (i.e., “so that times of revival *may* come” and “Jesus, who must remain in heaven *until* the times of the restoration”), that Moses is mentioned, once again the inseparable type to our Lord’s antitype whenever the issue of the future revival and restoration of Israel comes up. Also present in the passage above is the dual focus of the two witnesses’ ministry, both revival (the spiritual aspect represented by Elijah) and restoration (the visible aspect represented by Moses). That both aspects of preparation for Jesus’ Second Advent should be so mentioned is not surprising, for it is through the persons of both of these two witnesses that God will prepare His people for His return.

For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the baptist]. And if you are willing to accept [this], he himself (i.e., John) is [typical of] Elijah who is destined to come [in the future]. Matthew 11:13-14

And He answered and said, “Elijah *is* coming [in the future] and will [then] *restore* all things. And I tell you that Elijah has [also] already come [in true type] and they did not acknowledge him, but did to him such [terrible] things as they desired. In the same way the Son of Man is also going to suffer at their hands”. Matthew 17:11-13 (cf. Mk.9:11-13)

In both of the above passages, our Lord confirms to His contemporaries the still future coming of the actual Elijah. His true type, however, had already come (i.e., John the baptist), just as Moses' true type was standing there among them (i.e., our Lord Himself, *the* Prophet about whom Moses spoke). The return of Elijah, the type of John, will be accompanied by the return of Moses, the type of Christ.

To help illustrate this point, a few words are in order here concerning some of the similarities between this dual set of types and antitypes .

- The two witnesses minister for three and one half years (Rev.11:3), as did John and our Lord Jesus Christ.
- John ministered “in the spirit and power of Elijah”(Lk.1:17), while Christ spoke of Moses' testimony about Himself (Jn.5:45-46; cf. Lk.24:44), and typicality to Himself (Jn.3:14).
- Elijah's extensive exile in the wilderness (1Ki.17:1-9) provides the type for John's ministry in the wilderness (Is.40:3-5), while Moses' forty days on Mount Sinai (Ex.24:15-18) is a type of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness of testing and communion with God (Matt.4:1-11).
- Elijah's persecution by Jezebel and Ahab (1Ki.19) is typical of John's persecution by Herod and execution at Herodias' behest (Matt.14:1-12), while Moses' disappearance and reappearance to His rebellious congregation (Ex.32:1) is typical of Christ's death and resurrection appearances to His doubting disciples (Jn.20:9; 20:25).
- Both John and Jesus were martyred (although this word hardly does justice to our Lord's unique sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world), just as the two witnesses will be.
- Both Jesus and Moses are mediators of the New and Old Covenants respectively, wherein they represent man to God and God to man (Gal.3:19-20; 1Tim.2:5; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), while both John and Elijah called their countrymen to repent and adhere to these covenants (1Ki.18:21; Matt.3:1-2).
- Only Moses spoke with the Lord face to face (Ex.33:11), and only Christ has seen the Father (Jn.1:18), while both John and Elijah received special communication from our Lord Himself when they faltered in their faith (1Ki.19:9-18; Lk.7:18-28).

6. Their miracles: Besides Moses, no other Old Testament believer was responsible for administering more numerous and more impressive miracles than Elijah (e.g., the bottomless jars of oil and flour, the raising of the widow's son, the heavenly fire which consumed the altar sacrifice, etc.). Only Elisha comes close, and his miracles were performed through the granting of a double portion of *Elijah's* special unction of the Spirit, before the receipt of which Elisha did no miracles (2Ki.2:9-10; cf. Lk.1:17). Apropos of our point here is that supernatural blood was the crucial third “sign” given to Moses by the Lord to validate his authority (Ex.4:9 with Rev.11:5-6), the precise supernaturally validating sign of the first two trumpet judgments (Rev.8:6-9), and that by Elijah's word and through his prayer, no rain fell for three and one half years, the precise period of the two witnesses' ministry, that is, the first half of the Tribulation (Lk.4:25; Jas.5:16-18; cf. Rev.11:5-6).

7. The Transfiguration: One of the clearest proofs of the identity of the two witnesses is their appearance with our Lord at His transfiguration (Matt.16:28-17:13; Mk.9:1-13; Lk.9:27-36). That event is expressly stated to have been a prophetic foretaste of our Lord's Second Advent and the coming of His kingdom (cf. Matt.16:28; Mk.9:1; Lk.9:27). Given that the passages dealing with the transfiguration mention both Moses and Elijah, the literal Moses and Elijah, in connection with this preview of Christ's return, it is natural and necessary to connect them with the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven who herald that very return. After the event, Jesus' disciples asked Him only about Elijah and He responded in kind. But our Lord's response, that Elijah would come "first" (i.e., before the Second Advent which His recent transfiguration had previewed), gave them (and give us) no reason to suppose that *both* of His famous interlocutors on the mountain would not precede Him. Moses' presence on the mountain *with* Elijah serves to demonstrate that, following our Lord's death and resurrection (also represented in the transfiguration: cf. respectively Lk.9:31 and Jesus' glorified, resurrection-like appearance on the mountain), *both* will precede His return (as the two witnesses to and heralds of that return).

8. The bodies of Moses and Elijah: The return of Moses and Elijah will not be a case of *resurrection*, but of *resuscitation*. The ruler's daughter, the widow's son, and Lazarus, all brought back by Jesus (Matt.9:18-26; Lk.7:11-17; Jn.11:1-44), Tabitha brought back by Peter (Acts 9:36-42), and the boy brought back by Paul (Acts 20:7-12), the young boys brought back by Elijah and Elisha respectively (1Ki.17:17-24; 2Ki.4:8-37), the dead who rose following the crucifixion (Matt.27:52-53), and all of the other examples of this miracle whether recorded in the scriptures or not are without exception examples of what we are calling here "resuscitation" rather than "resurrection", because in all of these cases the individuals later died again physically (in contrast to Christ who has been truly "resurrected" and is no longer subject to death in His humanity for He is "destined to see corruption *no longer*", Acts 13:34). Since Moses and Elijah reappear physically *before* the Second Advent, and since they are in fact killed by antichrist at the end of their ministry, we may say of a certainty that what we have here is indeed a case of resuscitation rather than of resurrection (cf. Rev.11:3-12).

In the cases of both Moses and Elijah, their departure from this life the first time was absolutely unique (as indeed it will also be the next time: Rev.11:11-12). Elijah's departure in the heavenly chariot needs no great elaboration (2Ki.2:1-18). Elisha's extensive search after the fact (at the request of the company of prophets) demonstrates that no physical trace of his body was left behind. In Moses' case, we are told that he was "buried" in the valley opposite Beth Peor (Deut.34:5-6). However, we are also told in the same verse that "to this day no one knows where his grave is". Deuteronomy 34:6 actually attributes the burial to God Himself, and Jude clarifies the situation: the "burial" was only temporary (thus explaining why the site could not be known). Jude 1:9 explains that, like Elijah's physical body, Moses' body too was uniquely taken to heaven by angelic agency, an operation which was carried out by the archangel Michael and contested by the devil. Thus, the physical bodies of both of these two extraordinary servants of

our Lord left earth in an extraordinary way, precisely so that they might later return via resuscitation after so many years in an equally remarkable and unprecedented way.

9. Their unfinished business: It is also significant that the ministries of both of these great believers were cut short. Moses did not enter the promised land and it was left for Joshua to settle the Israelites in Canaan. Elijah did not complete his ministry of revival and miraculous witness, but was succeeded in his work by Elisha. Neither man enjoyed great spiritual response from the congregation to whom each ministered so exceptionally, and both men were, in effect, “replaced” by God on account of momentary lapses in their otherwise magnificent service to the Lord (each of which was motivated in no small part by their reaction to this lack of response). In anger at the abuse heaped upon him by his stubborn charges, Moses violated God’s specific instructions at Kadesh (i.e., Meribah: Num.20:2-13; Ps.95:8). In fear for his life from the pagan government which the people did not overturn after the miracles on Mount Carmel, Elijah temporarily abandoned his ministry and retreated to the desert (1Ki.19:1-4). In both cases, each was temporarily acting contrary to his own character (Moses, normally the most humble of men [cf. Num.12:3], reacting in arrogant anger, and Elijah, normally so courageous [cf. 1Ki.18:8-16], reacting in self-pity and fear). Both men recovered swiftly from what may seem to us understandable and perhaps even minor transgressions, but the termination of these great ministries as a result of their failings shows us an important biblical principle: to whom much has been given, much is expected (Lk.12:48). Perhaps only a handful of believers in the history of the world have attained anything like the spirituality of these two men, and even fewer have been entrusted with ministries of the magnitude they enjoyed. With such great privilege comes great responsibility. Scripture is very clear about the fact that both men’s ministries were prematurely terminated (Num.20:12; Deut.1:37; 3:23-26; 32:48-52; Ps.106:32-33; 1Ki.19:15-18; 2Ki.2:9-10).

In the return of Moses and Elijah, therefore, we once again see the awesome grace of God at work. For both men are going to be given a “second chance”, so to speak (although, in comparative terms, the rewards they have earned even without this new opportunity will be surpassed by few if any). This observation helps to explain the symbolism of the posture of the two witnesses. Along with the olive trees, lampstands, and columns, they are standing rather than sitting. Just as the Lamb stands up to receive the scroll from the Father’s hand to begin the Tribulation which terminates with His glorious return (Rev.5:6; cf. Ps.110:1), so the standing posture of Moses and Elijah in all of the citations and analogies given above indicates that their work is not yet done. They will return to earth once more to set the capstone on two of the most spectacular performances in history of believers in the service of our Lord.

The main duties of Moses and Elijah during their forty-two month ministry have in the main been adumbrated above. They will

- 1) bring about the reconstruction of the temple.
- 2) reconstitute the temple worship.
- 3) direct the ministry of the 144,000.

4) be involved in the earthly direction of the trumpet judgment plagues, as well many other similar plagues of more limited scope (Rev.11:5-6).

10. The war against Moses and Elijah: The Greek phraseology of Revelation 11:7 specifically the use of the words “war” (*polemos*) and “conquer” (*nikao*), strongly suggest that the beast’s elimination of Moses and Elijah will be far from an easy or instantaneous matter. It will be, as the context intimates, a genuine battle. The God-given ability of the two witnesses to unleash blasts of fire from their mouths proved an effective deterrent during the three and a half years of their ministry (Rev.11:5), and we may expect that, just as Elijah’s prayers were answered with the result that several large detachments of soldiers were similarly destroyed, so here as well a large number of antichrist’s henchmen will meet their doom. We are not told the precise means used by antichrist to overcome the two prophets, and it is possible that part of antichrist’s approach will be to “fight fire with fire”, making maximum use of the satanic power given to him and his key lieutenant, the false prophet (who likewise has a similar ability to bring fire down from the sky: Rev.13:13). However, we may safely say that no means available to antichrist would have been capable of removing Moses and Elijah from the scene had it not been the will of God for their ministry to conclude in this dramatic fashion (cf. Is.54:15-17).

11. The three and a half days: Days frequently represent longer periods of time in biblical symbolism. Here the three and a half days during which the bodies of Moses and Elijah will lie lifeless in the center of Jerusalem represent the three and a half years of spiritual desolation and persecution which are about to commence (i.e., the Great Tribulation). The two witnesses will be, in effect, precursors of the martyrs of the Great Persecution which is about to break out upon believers all over the world (with the 144,000 being the first to fall in it). The deaths of the two witnesses will serve to alert those faithful to Jesus Christ of that coming storm of unequalled tribulation and persecution (cf. Lk.23:31).

The deaths of Moses and Elijah will be met with great joy on the part of the majority of the earth’s inhabitants. Rather than being grateful to God for His gracious warnings and turning to Him, the unbelieving world will be all too pleased to see these two great men of God destroyed. The world is now ripe for dominance by antichrist, and in choosing to support him in his “war” against the two witnesses, and by rejoicing in his victory over the servants of the Lord, the world will not only be openly and unreservedly choosing for the beast, but will also be handing him the ultimate opportunity to establish his own alternative religion, and thus impose a large measure of religious dominance over the entire globe by its establishment (a development which will in turn cement the political, economic, and social control he will gain at the Tribulation’s midpoint with the defeat of the last coalition to oppose him). The reviving of Moses and Elijah, on the other hand, will be a matter of great encouragement for all God’s people, reminding us of His complete power, even over death. For their resuscitation at the end of the three and a half days will symbolize the resurrection of all believers three and a half years from this point at the end of the Great Tribulation (cf. 1Cor.15:23; 1Thes.4:16-17).

12. The Third Woe: The termination of the joint ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 marks the conclusion of the second woe, because at this point the first six trumpet judgments as well as all the localized plagues administered by the two witnesses in support of the 144,000 have come to an end. The third woe, said to be "coming soon" in Revelation 11:14, begins immediately after the ascending of the two witnesses when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet (Rev.11:15). For the third woe, the seventh trumpet judgment, and the Great Tribulation all refer to the same period of time, the horrific final three and a half years that precede our Lord's return. That period will be a period of woe, because the earth has never and will never again see darker days (Dan.12:1; Joel 2:2; Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). That period will be a warning period (symbolized by the trumpet), because its terrifying nature warns of the day of judgment soon to come (Matt.3:10-12; 2Pet.3:10-13). And that period will be a period of unparalleled tribulation, because within it the greatest persecution in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ will take place, when Satan and his fallen angels are cast down to earth (Rev.12:7-9), and through his minion antichrist he vents his wrath on the Body of Christ.

5. Antichrist and his Kingdom

A. Sources for and Prophetic Types of Antichrist and his Kingdom

Scripture assigns several names to the individual who will rise to power and control of the entire earth during the Tribulation:

1. "The beast" (Rev.11:7; 13:1-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 16:10; 16:13; 17:7-17; 19:20; 20:4; 20:10) – because he is the devil's seed (Gen.3:15).
2. "The man of lawlessness" (2Thess.2:3) – because he will oppose all divine and human law, destroying the divine framework of nationalism (Acts 17:26-27), and changing "the times and the laws" (Dan.7:25).
3. "Antichrist" (1Jn.2:18; 2:22; 4:3; 2Jn.1:7). This title is perhaps the most illuminating in regard to the beast's true character and also to the devil's strategy in opposing Christ through this his most intense offensive against the people of God. The Greek preposition *anti* (*αντι*), when used in compounds of this sort, often bears two senses: first, *anti* means something "opposed to" the thing to which it is prefixed; secondly, it can also mean a "substitute for" that thing. And, truly, the beast, Satan's "anointed one" or false "Messiah" (*Christos*, *Χριστός*, being the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *Meshiach*, *משיח*), will be both: a pseudo, substitute Christ who will at the same time directly and violently oppose our Lord and His holy people, Israel and the Church.

B. The Origin, Character and Rise of Antichrist:

1. The Origin of Antichrist

And I shall place hostility between you and the woman, that is, between your seed and her Seed. He (i.e., Christ) will attack you head[-on], but you will attack Him from behind" (lit., "His heel").

Genesis 3:15

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] (9) whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-10

These passages demonstrate the satanic paternity of antichrist, sired by the devil (in the manner of the Nephilim). As to the beast's human origin, scripture indicates that a relationship to the tribe of Dan, the only tribe not mentioned in the list of the 144,000 witnesses in Revelation 7:5-8, and prophesied in the book of Genesis as being the tribe of antichrist's origin (compare Deut.33:22):

(16) Dan [in the person of antichrist] will judge his people as if he were [of] one of the tribes of Israel. (17) [But] Dan (i.e., antichrist) will be a serpent beside the road, a viper beside the path, one who strikes at a horse's heels, so that its rider falls [off] backwards.

(18) I wait [in hope] for your deliverance, O Lord!

Genesis 49:16-18

As to national origin, antichrist will come from Babylon – not the historical, middle eastern Babylon, but rather "mystery Babylon", the powerful nation which, at the outset of the Tribulation, "reigns over the kingdoms of the earth" (Rev.17:18).

2. The Character of Antichrist

(23) And at the end of their kingdom (i.e., during the Tribulation), when rebels are being confirmed [in their apostasy], there will arise a stern-faced king (i.e., antichrist), well-versed in deception. (24) And he will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power. And he will be astoundingly successful in his corrupting [activities]. And he will even undertake to corrupt the mighty men (i.e., believers) and [a part of] the holy people (i.e., Israel). (25) And on account of his cunning, [his] conspiracy will prosper under his direction. And he will [greatly] magnify himself in his own thinking, and by his seductive ways he will corrupt many. He will even take his stand against the Prince of princes, and will be shattered apart from human agency.

Daniel 8:23-25

The passage above, speaking about antichrist by comparison to Antiochus Epiphanes (as exegetes as long ago as Jerome have generally recognized), says much about the beast's essential character. He is said to be "stern-faced" (referring to his unequaled brazenness and audacity; cf. Deut.28:50; Prov.7:13; 21:29), "well-versed in deception" (the beast will be a consummate actor and a practiced conspirator, with the phrase which literally means "understanding riddles" capturing his satanically empowered evil intelligence and the exceptionally deceptive uses to which he will apply it; cf. Dan.11:27), "astoundingly successful in his corrupting [activities]" (referring to the beast's success in deceiving and enlisting both unbelievers and apostate believers to his cause) and "will even undertake to corrupt the mighty men and [a part of] the holy people". These essential attributes and abilities are said to flow directly into antichrist's other tribulational activities, which are likewise revealing of his character: "on account of his cunning (the beast's animal-like craftiness), [his] conspiracy will prosper" to the point that "he will [greatly] magnify himself in his own thinking" (the arrogance of antichrist outstripping the bounds of normal human restraint; cf. 2Thes.2:4), so that "by his seductive ways he will corrupt many" (the beast's politico-religious movement undermining godly thinking and behavior), and will finally "even take his stand against the Prince of princes" (i.e., in his arrogance, antichrist will even think himself capable of opposing Christ).

And the beast which I saw resembled a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth was like that of lions.

Revelation 13:2a

Antichrist is, after all, "the beast", a title which calls attention to the inhuman nature of this halfling, sired by the devil. The comparison to the leopard as the main point of analogy in this passage from Revelation paints antichrist as a terrifying, decisive, dangerous, violent, treacherous, wily individual, restless in a cat-like way in his desire to further his evil schemes (cf. Hab.2:5), while the bear-like feet and lion-like mouth refer to the unprecedented "tearing" and "biting" power of the beast once in control of his empire. In matters of both politics and war, therefore, antichrist will be exceptionally effective, blending guile and force in a potent and irresistible mix – just as Daniel also predicts:

And there will arise in his place a [man of] contempt upon whom they will not bestow the honor of the kingship [in a normal fashion]; rather, he will come [to power] through seductive [methods], and will take control of his kingdom by means of duplicity.

Daniel 11:21

3. The Rise of Antichrist

(21) And there will arise in his place a [man of] contempt upon whom they will not bestow the honor of the kingship (i.e., he will not come to power in a legal, conventional way). Rather, he will come [to power] through seductive [methods], and will take control of his kingdom (i.e., mystery Babylon) by means of duplicity. (22) Now it is from him that the flood waters (i.e., armies: Dan.9:26; 11:40; cf. Is.8:7-8; 28:15-22; Nah.1:8;

Rev.12:15) will pour forth and be shattered (i.e., at Armageddon), for he is even "the prince of the covenant" (i.e., the author of the pseudo-Messianic peace treaty with Israel: Dan.9:27). (23) After men have leagued themselves to him, he will set his conspiracy in motion and will grow [in power] and become [very] strong, even though his faction is small.

Daniel 11:21-23

This passage sets forth all the key elements in the beast's rise to power:

- a) the leader: antichrist's plan for gaining power in Babylon will entail "seductive means" (v.21), "duplicity" (v.21), and "a conspiracy" (v.23).
- b) the movement: through a subtle blend of religion and politics, antichrist will come closer than anyone before him in history to offering all things to all people, combining the deepest desires of each group and faction into one policy designed to "change the world".
- c) the party: even though antichrist's "inner party" is small, it will be dedicated and effective in promoting the propaganda the beast will require to exploit upheaval, build a mass movement, and thus come to absolute power.
- d) the crusade: the key to fulfilling the program of the pseudo-Messiah and his party will be the prophetic and apocalyptic crusade for the destruction of "antichrist" and the enrichment of the true beast's party, country and allies thereby (though of course the beast is not Christ, nor will the "king of the south" be truly antichrist – albeit this is the way the beast will portray things).
- e) the seizure of power: while scripture does not present a specific triggering event for antichrist's taking over of Babylon, our passage above, Daniel 11:21-23, indicates that it will be an illegal move rather than accomplished through constitutional means.

C. The Kingdom of the Beast (Babylon and the Revived Roman Empire)

(7) After this, I was watching in the vision of the night and, behold, a fourth beast (i.e., Rome/revived Rome), terrible and fearsome and exceedingly powerful. And it had huge iron teeth. It devoured [all the others], crushing [them] to bits and trampling under foot whatever was left. Now this beast was different from those which preceded it, and it had ten horns. (8) I was considering these [ten] horns when, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them. And three of the previous horns were rooted up from before it. And, behold, this horn had eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking presumptuous things (i.e., against God).

Daniel 7:7-8

(19) Then I wished to know the details about the fourth beast (i.e., Rome/revived Rome) which was different from all the others. It had iron teeth which were exceedingly terrible, and claws made of bronze. It devoured [all the others], crushing [them] to bits and trampling under foot whatever was left. (20) And [I also desired to know the details] about the ten horns on its head, and the other one (i.e., antichrist) which came up later, and before which three of the former ones fell (i.e., the southern alliance)

Daniel 7:19-20a

And as to the ten horns, from that kingdom (i.e., Rome, the fourth beast) ten kings will arise, and another one (i.e., antichrist) will arise after them. And he will be different from the former ones, and he will cast down three kingdoms.

Daniel 7:24

In the book of Revelation, the term "beast" is used both for a person (the son of Satan) and also for the empire he personifies (the revived Roman empire). As the verses above demonstrate, antichrist, who begins his political career by rising to power in Babylon, will soon move from that power base to gain control of the territory which in John's day belonged to the Roman empire. In our day as well as in that near future day, these states will not yet be part of a powerful whole as in the case of historical Rome. That empire "has died" (Rev.17:8-10; cf. Dan.2:39-43; 9:26-27; and compare Dan.7:24 with Rev.17:12). The beast will revive the empire by taking control of the "seven kingdoms" (the seven "horns", a series of alliances or "power-blocs" by the time of the Tribulation) through conspiratorial rather than strictly military means. In this effort the "seven kings" (likely also nephilim as is the case with antichrist) will support him greatly so that the process will be concluded in an amazingly short period of time not long after the commencement of the Tribulation. The bulk of the first half of the seven years will be taken up with antichrist's reduction of the one other major pan-state empire, the three kingdoms of "the south" (called in this study "the southern alliance"). These three are also likely minions of antichrist in secret (explaining the conspiracy against the king of the south described in Daniel 11:26). Once antichrist consolidates his power worldwide, the seven and three together will constitute the "ten horns" and "ten kings" described in Revelation 17:12 (cf. Dan.7:24). For our purposes here it is important to understand that revived Rome, described as "the beast" (as is also antichrist, its ruler), is the resuscitated Roman empire, consisting of roughly the same geographical and ethnic extent as the original at the height of its power during John's day. But this political beast (not to be confused with the personal "beast", antichrist, who rules it) is different from Babylon, the original power base of antichrist. In terms of biblical geography, the seven kingdoms of initially revived Rome constitute the "north", and these will under antichrist's leadership defeat "the south", the other three areas of the historical Roman empire, in no small part through the power of Babylon, the biblical "west", whence antichrist arises. After this series of campaigns, the biblical "east" will also fall under antichrist's control, at least nominally (cf. Rev.13:3-4 and Rev.16:12-14), leaving the entire world under his dominion.

D. The First Campaign against the South

[After his conquest of revived Rome, antichrist] will distribute plunder, spoils and riches to his [followers] and will afterwards plot against the [three remaining] powers (i.e., the three sub-coalitions of the southern alliance), but [will wait] for an opportune time.

Daniel 11:24b

Having secured his control of revived Rome in the fall of 2028, antichrist will, shortly thereafter, begin military operations against the Mahdi's three kingdom military alliance of the south (essentially consisting of the entire Muslim world). Any military campaign in the Mideast on the scale and of the scope of this massive invasion would be well advised to have concluded major

combat operations before the heat and storms of mid-summer begin. A six month time-frame beginning at this point and ending roughly in the summer of 2029 is thus the most likely scenario for the marshaling of forces, transit to theater, combat operations, consolidation of gains, and return of the military assets necessary for this first campaign – not an implausibly short length of time when we recall that all of the beast's operations will be characterized by just such exceptional rapidity (cf. the winged leopard of Rev.13:2). This time-line also has the virtue of allowing a comparable and parallel time period for the second campaign the following year (i.e., commencing fall of 2029), whose termination point (i.e., summer of 2030) would then coincide perfectly with the commencement of the Great Tribulation, exactly as scripture predicts (cf. especially Dan.11:29-31).

And from one of the [four horns] came forth another horn, a small one (i.e., antichrist), but it grew great towards the south and towards the east and towards the Beautiful Land (i.e., Israel).
Daniel 8:9

Since antichrist already dominates the north (and arose in the west, Babylon), only the south, east, and Israel are outside of his complete control at this point of the Tribulation (for while he has the secular ruler of Israel in his camp, the ministry of Moses and Elijah will still be in place and flourishing at this point). The expansion towards the south mentioned in Daniel 8:9 refers to the conquest of the southern alliance in the two campaigns of Daniel chapter 11, while the eastward expansion is a reference to the progressive occupation and domination of the one other remaining quadrant of the world not as yet under the beast's direct rule. By the time of Armageddon, we see the east also under antichrist's command (Rev.16:12-14; cf. the temporary disruption of that control occasioned by the bowl judgments: Dan.11:44). The final place on earth to succumb to the beast's direct authority will be the land of Israel, and we can see in the pattern of Daniel 8:9 not only a strategy for world domination, but also the primary purpose behind it, replacement of the worship of the One true God with the worship of the devil and his son antichrist, and the concomitant destruction of God's holy people, Israel.

The southern alliance will therefore represent the last major military impediment to antichrist's domination of the world. The combination of economic, political, and military power projected by Babylon, revived Rome, and the growing coalition of the world's nations falling like dominos at the feet of the beast will remove all other major resistance by the Tribulation's mid-point. The two campaigns against the south, through their scale, rapidity, and success will in particular no doubt also produce a bandwagon effect for joining with rather than opposing the beast until the whole unbelieving world shouts with one accord "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev.13:4).

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people. (6) And you are going to hear about [actual] wars and impending wars. Make sure

you do not become [overly] alarmed [by such things]. For [these things] must happen, but this is not yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For [before that end] a nation will rise against a nation (i.e., in general terms, the Japhetic pan-nation against the Semitic pan-nation), even a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., Babylon and revived Rome versus the southern alliance; cf. Dan.11:25-30; 11:40), and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. (8) But all these things are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation).

Matthew 24:3-8

We can see in our Lord's words above the significance of the conflict between north and south that will dominate the secular political events of the Tribulation's first half (made parallel here to the "famines and earthquakes" which, as we have seen, are shorthand for the divine warning "trumpet judgments" which will also characterize this period). The "wars and impending wars" that will occupy the secular world's attention at this time are significant enough to rate special mention by our Lord, and so we may glean from this combination of remarks that the scale of the warfare between the beast's coalition and the Mahdi's alliance, the two most significant "nations" and "kingdoms" on earth, will be enormous.

Then he (i.e., the king of the north, antichrist) will rouse up his power and desire against the king of the south with a great force, but the king of the south will mobilize for war with an equally great force which will also be very powerful.

Daniel 11:25a

Rarely in the history of warfare have two coalitions mobilized such exceptional and comparably powerful armies for a particular confrontation. Although August of 1914 may provide a rough parallel, in terms of the numbers deployed, the distances involved, the firepower available, the ideological fervor motivating the conflict, and the overall scale involved here (i.e., with roughly two entire quadrants of the world engaged in this titanic struggle), this campaign is likely only to be eclipsed by the ones which follow (i.e., the second campaign of Dan.11:29-30; 11:40-43, and the Armageddon campaign).

In addition to all of the other issues involved in these campaigns, both coalitions will also have to contend with the trumpet judgments which, as we have seen, will be taking place during this entire later period of the Tribulation's first half. On the political front, it is at least conceivable that, for the consumption of the unbelieving world, antichrist in his capacity of pseudo-Messiah will "spin" these trumpet judgments as divine displeasure for the world's failure to support Israel (though he himself, of course, has in mind her eventual destruction), thus adding emotional impetus and added justification to his "crusade". The people who know their God will not be fooled by this false interpretation, and we can be sure that the truth will be made clear by Moses and Elijah along with the 144,000 – for all who are willing to receive the truth. On the operational front, the events of the trumpet judgments will clearly cause complications for daily life in general, and all the more so for military operations. The chart below which compares the probable time-line for these two campaigns with these judgments of divine warning indicates a

coincidence of trumpet judgments three and four with the first campaign, and of trumpet judgment six with the second:

*for all charts: http://ichthys.com/Bible_charts_and_illustrations.htm

As the juxtaposition of events in the chart above makes clear, the initial phase of the first campaign will be conducted in the aftermath of the smiting of the world's fresh water by the "Wormwood" asteroid (while the world is still suffering under its effects), then, at roughly the campaign's mid-point, the world's heavenly lights will be stricken (with these effects lasting throughout the rest of the campaign). Just as king Ahab went to great lengths to preserve his military assets during a comparable water shortage occasioned by divine judgment, and no doubt did so at the expense of his suffering population (1Ki.18:2-6), so we may expect that whatever difficulties the population of the earth experiences from the third trumpet judgment (which we are told will result in many fatalities: Rev.8:11), both antichrist and the leader of the southern alliance will ensure that their vast armies are not seriously inconvenienced, no matter how much more difficult this may make things for their subject populations. Aside from the logistical problems of transporting additional fresh water over vast distances into terrain that is inhospitable under the best of circumstances, it is probable that the third trumpet will not otherwise seriously affect the course of this campaign (and, indeed, there is no indication from Daniel chapter 11 that it does). The fourth trumpet judgment, the significant diminution of light which will occur during the four month period that coincides with the middle and the end of this campaign, may actually have an enabling effect, for it will virtually ensure that the heat which might otherwise prove an impediment to the unprecedented marches this expedition will entail on both sides will be significantly less than would otherwise be the case. In any event, we may conclude from the scriptural testimony about the fact of this campaign and its successful conclusion on the part of the beast that at the very worst the negative effects of these two judgments will likely affect both sides equally, and will not, in any case, prevent its successful conclusion by the forces of Babylon and revived Rome.

One of the main differences between the two campaigns which antichrist will launch against the triple coalition of the south will be that while the second campaign will be characterized by the decisive intervention of an overwhelmingly superior navy (cf. the Hebrew of Num.24:23-24; Dan.11:30; 11:40; covered below), this first expedition will apparently consist, as intimated above, entirely of a ground invasion. Several reasons may be adduced for this. First, much of what still remains semi-independent in the world will still be in the process of being consolidated under antichrist's control at this time. The concentration of the southern hemisphere's population and power on the litoral of the world's great oceans will require a significant application of naval power to secure, and it is likely that the combined navies and amphibious forces of Babylon and revived Rome will be too preoccupied in this task to have much of an impact in this first campaign. Secondly, it is also likely, given the essential geography of revived Rome versus the southern alliance, that antichrist will need two campaigns to complete the task, and that this first, primarily ground operation, will have as its strategic objective an initial degradation of the south's armed forces and the seizure of key terrain for the establishment of bases and staging of

resources that will ultimately be necessary to deliver a knock-out blow in the follow-on campaign. Additionally, the conduct of the first campaign as an entirely overland operation proceeding from north to south will also serve to create an opportunity for strategic surprise by making the massive naval operations of the second campaign a less anticipated development.

Nevertheless, he (i.e., the king of the south) will not be able to stand [against the king of the north], for they (i.e., the three subordinate southern kings) shall devise plots against [the king of the south]. (26) For those who eat his choice food (i.e., his inner circle) will break him, and [this is why] his force will flood away, and many will fall slain. (27) And though these two kings (i.e., antichrist and the Mahdi) set their hearts on evil and speak lies at the same table (i.e., a peace conference), it will not prosper, for there will yet be an end to the period [of the Great Tribulation].

Daniel 11:25b-27

All tactical considerations aside, the verses above clearly indicate that the primary reason for the failure of the south and the victory of the north in this first confrontation will be the treachery against the southern leader or Mahdi on the part of antichrist's agents (i.e., the three subordinate kings of the south who are themselves part of the ten horns). All this suggests that the south's forces will actually be significantly stronger than antichrist's numerically inferior (if perhaps somewhat technologically superior) army, and that, had the battle taken place on a level playing field, the result would have been much different. We are not told the specifics of how this inner circle of the three kings will undermine the Mahdi's hopes in this first encounter, but it is not difficult to guess. Through a combination of bad advice (i.e., encouraging the decisive action too far north, thus making the logistical situation easier for the beast and more difficult for the south), undermining morale, spreading false rumors, keeping the beast informed of all the Mahdi's movements and plans, and deliberately failing to carry out necessary operations with appropriate vigor, these three will be in a position to bestow upon the beast a decisive advantage.

It should be noted at this point that as a result of his strategic pull-back and the peace treaty with the south, there will therefore probably be no large scale movement of the beast's troops into the state of Israel at this time (that development will apparently await the conclusion of the second campaign when antichrist will shift his world headquarters to Jerusalem; cf. Dan.11:41). As the relatively vulnerable casus belli, we may theorize that Israel's primary role during this first campaign will merely be to defend herself, and possibly also to act as a blocking force against the direct intervention by the forces of the alliances' southernmost kingdom (i.e., Egypt and its coalition partners). This does not mean, however, that the beast will not take advantage of this opportunity to begin to apply the screws to Israel while he still has significant forces in the vicinity. The political state of affairs within the state of Israel at this time is likely to be extraordinarily tense. On the one hand, the secular Jewish majority will have placed a very strong leader in power (one of the "ten kings" in fact). On the other hand, however, the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the worldwide evangelism of the 144,000 directed by them will be reaching its zenith at this point, producing a sizeable minority of believers.

The defeat of the southern alliance will be a turn of events which will leave even many of the most ardent supporters of the "worthless shepherd" (i.e., the Israeli premier) somewhat less enthusiastic about the beast and his empire, while at the same time antichrist will also feel less constrained in regard to his dealings with Israel. For with the south "set up" for defeat, the entire world will be only one step away from falling completely into his hands, and the need for a great cause, that is, the "crusade" to protect Israel, will soon be obsolete. At this point, then, the beast will feel secure enough to take preliminary steps towards Israel which will leave objective observers in little doubt about his ultimate designs for that state and for the Jewish people. For while he had based his worldwide political campaign upon the need to protect Israel, in reality it had always been his father Satan's plan to destroy her.

Now as he (i.e., antichrist) returns to his own land with great booty, his heart will be set against the holy covenant, so that he will take action [against it] and [then] return to his own land.
Daniel 11:28

The words "holy covenant" used here refer both to the administration of God's grace and truth to the Jewish people through the restoration ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, and to the heart and hand response of those in Israel who accept the message (cf. Dan.11:30; 11:32). All of antichrist's long-distance efforts to hinder the ministry itself will prove unsuccessful at this time (as the Lord will provide the two witnesses with ample ability to ward off any direct threats: Rev.11:5-6; cf. 2Ki.1:9-15). But this verse does represent the beginning of the persecution that will break forth with a vengeance after the conclusion of the second campaign. We can only imagine what sort of intimidating measures the beast and the worthless shepherd will impose upon true believers at this time (though they will likely include activities of the sort intimidated by Dan.8:10; 8:23-25; 11:32-35), but one can safely assume that particular pressure will be brought to bear upon all those who have not openly accepted the message of salvation. Such a strategy has the advantage of creating a widening rift between "the people who know their God" and those who, while they may have a varying degree of emotional attachment to the restored ritual of the temple, will be unwilling to abandon their worldly security for a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. Still, the reduction in personal freedoms and alteration/restriction of traditional rituals which the actions of antichrist referred to here in Daniel 11:28 will no doubt entail (especially coming at a time when the threat from the south has now been reduced) will not be well received by many in Israel and will have repercussions as we shall see below.

E. The Second Campaign against the South

(29) During this period he will return and attack the south [again], but the circumstances of this [second] campaign will not be like those of the first one. (30a) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack with him [so that he will be victorious].
Daniel 11:29-30a

Now at the time of the end, the king of the south (i.e., the Mahdi) will make a thrust at him (i.e., the beast), with the result that the king of the north will come against him like a whirlwind with chariots, and with cavalry, and with many ships.

Daniel 11:40a

In our consideration of this second and final campaign against the south, the reference in Daniel to the naval forces of antichrist in both of these passages is very important to note. In the first passage above, "Kittim", literally the people of the island of Cyprus, is most often used in scripture as a generic term to refer to all of "the islands", that is, the nations of the world's western quadrant (Is.23:1; 23:12; Jer.2:10; Ezek.27:6; i.e., as representative of all of the western sons of Japheth from whom "the islands of the gentiles divided", Gen.10:4-5). What this means is that these "ships of Kittim" are the ships of Babylon and its western allies. What we have here, therefore, is a reference to the beast's *own* navy rather than to some extraneous force opposing him (as is often erroneously supposed). Once this point is understood, it is clear to see that in Daniel 11:30 these ships are the reason why "circumstances are different" in this second campaign, for it is just this naval superiority which proves to be the decisive element in the beast's victory, attacking "with him". In the second passage we see that antichrist's navy is not only the ultimate element named in the threefold list of his combat arms (stressing its importance), but is also the only one marked out as exceptional in terms of its quantity (i.e., his ships are "many", even in comparison to his certainly numerous "chariots and cavalry"). Together, these two scriptures confirm that the second campaign will be won by antichrist through the decisive use of seapower, and the precise manner in which he will employ that power has also been given to us in prophecy, specifically in the last oracle of Balaam son of Besor:

(23) Then [Balaam] pronounced his oracle, and said, "Alas! Who can survive once God unleashes it (i.e., the Great Tribulation)? (24) For ships will come from the direction of Kittim, and they will afflict Ashur, and they will afflict Eber. For this is even the one (i.e., antichrist) . . . until he perishes."

Numbers 24:23-24

It is not unexpected that Balaam, who sought to curse Israel, should be given this prophecy about the persecution emanating from the all-time nemesis of Israel, antichrist. However the context of Balaam's last oracles (Num.24:14-24) have the stated purpose of conveying information about "the days to come" (Num.24:14). In addition to this statement and to the other eschatological elements in these prophecies (cf. the irrefutably Messianic "star" and "scepter" of Num.24:17), the phraseology of the Hebrew words used in verse twenty-four above to identify the "mystery man" who will be responsible for the future "affliction of Eber" (*ve-gam hu'i*: "for this is even the one") is reminiscent of that used in the key passage in Daniel which likewise identifies antichrist (i.e., Dan.11:22b: *ve-gam naghidh berith*: "for he is even the prince of the covenant", cf. Dan.9:27). Together, these facts make the connection between these "ships of Kittim" and the "ships of Kittim" in Daniel chapter 11 virtually certain. Balaam's prophecy also provides us with the crucial information which details the precise place of this invasion, namely, through present-day Lebanon-Syria and Israel. For Ashur, of course, is the original ancestor of Assyria

just as Eber is of Israel (cf. respectively Gen.10:22 and Gen.11:10-31), making it clear that the entire eastern coastline of the Mediterranean will be the focus of this unprecedented invasion.

The purpose for the massive amphibious assault suggested by these scriptures is plain enough when one considers the actions of the king of the south described in Daniel 11:40a above. In that verse, the king of the south is said to "make a thrust" against the king of the north in what would have to be a south to north direction, a maneuver which would entail the large-scale movement of most if not all of his forces toward the upper reaches of his realm, close to his border with antichrist's kingdom. We may surmise that this has been antichrist's expectation and plan from the very start, even from before the opening of the first campaign. By this time the Mahdi has no doubt mobilized an even larger army, confident of victory based upon the previous campaign and the improved ratio of forces that must now be even more heavily in his favor (when only those forces deployed on the ground are considered). After the king of the south thrusts to the north, Daniel 11:40 characterizes the beast's response as swift and furious (furious as a whirlwind, according to the Hebrew text), and we are again reminded of the leopard-like swiftness which characterizes all of antichrist's operations (Rev.13:2). Once the forces of the south have advanced into his trap, the beast will spring it by launching the largest amphibious invasion in history with the objective of cutting off his enemies from the rear, thus surrounding and then annihilating them. In this way, the last major independent military force outside of antichrist's direct control will be eliminated with a single blow.

Since this seaborne invasion will be directed at Syria-Lebanon-Israel, the general location of the final battle of this campaign is thus most likely somewhere in northern Iraq-Syria and southern Turkey-Iran. This too is consistent with what we find elsewhere in scripture. As we have seen above, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is a scriptural type of antichrist, the prophetic king of Babylon. Within the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (esp. Is.19-20; Jer.46; and Ezek.29-32), we also see the conflict between the historical Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt's Pharaoh functioning as a prophetic analogy to the end times with its conflict between Babylon's antichrist and the Mahdi of the southern alliance (whose political center of gravity is also Egypt; cf. Dan.11:42). Therefore we can say that the conduct of antichrist's campaigns against the Mahdi and his southern alliance will be similar in general terms to the scriptural representations found in these prophecies.

Egypt will rise up like the Nile, and her waters (i.e., the forces of the southern alliance) will surge forth like the [Nile's] streams. And she will say, "I will rise up. I will inundate the world. I will destroy [its] cities and their inhabitants".

Jeremiah 46:8

Jeremiah places the decisive battle which will ensue as a result of the king of the south's "thrust" and the king of the north's "whirlwind" response (cf. Dan.11:40) in the northern reaches of southern alliance territory "by the river Euphrates", making the most likely focal point of the decisive engagement, as mentioned immediately above, somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Syria, Iraq, and southern Turkey (cf. Jer.46:2; 46:10):

(3) "Muster [your troops] with buckler and shield, and advance to the battle. (4) Harness your horses and order your cavalry to mount up. Assemble with your helmets. Polish your spears. Put on your armor. (5) But why do I see them [all] terrified and falling back to the rear? [It is because] their picked troops have been smashed and are in headlong flight. They do not even look back, for there is terror all around [them]". (6) The Lord declares, "Let the swift not flee [to safety] nor the strong escape. In the north, by the river Euphrates, they shall stumble and fall".
Jeremiah 46:3-6

Following this massive defeat, little will be left for the forces of the beast other than to exploit this victory:

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e., Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon (i.e., the southern half of historical Ammon contiguous to Edom and Moab). (42) And [antichrist] will extend his control over the lands (of the southern alliance), so that even the land of Egypt will not escape. (43) Thus he will take control of all the repositories of gold and silver, even over all of Egypt's treasures, with Libya (i.e., representing North Africa) and Cush (i.e., Sudan-Ethiopia) following her [in submission].
Daniel 11:40b-43

Egypt is emphasized here because it is the main pillar upon which the southern alliance will be based. We may understand Libya to represent the entirety of North Africa, whereas Cush stands for East Africa. The northern, eastern, and southeastern reaches of the south's three kingdoms, while not mentioned by name, fall into the category of the "many lands" of verse forty-one, so that here we see the fulfillment of the prophecy of the fall of the "three horns". We should also recall in this respect that the three kings of these sub-kingdoms who were so instrumental in the beast's victory during the first campaign will certainly be exceptionally useful to him in his consolidation of power over their respective realms. Furthermore, the "bandwagon effect" of the astonishing defeat of this impressive army will not be lost on the rest of the world. It will serve to deflate the hopes of any and all who are even remotely considering opposition on the basis of secular means, especially when one considers the exponential increase in power that antichrist will experience after capturing "Egypt's treasures", namely, all the natural resources of all of the southern alliance territories. The aftermath of defeat for Egypt and by extension for all of the nations of the triple coalition that threw in with her under the Mahdi's leadership is voluminously covered in scripture, and the combination of passages which treat this subject paint a picture of abject defeat, a situation which will no doubt be all the more difficult to bear since the hopes of the south will have been thrown down from such a lofty height (see esp. Ezek.30; cf. Is.19-20; Jer.46; Ezek.29-32):

(2) "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord, "Wail! Woe for the day! (3) For a day [of judgment] is close, [yes], the day of the Lord is close. It will be a day of clouds

and time [of judgment] for the nations. (4) For a sword will come against Egypt, and writhing will come upon Cush. When the slain fall in Egypt, they will take away her treasures and her foundations will be trampled. (5) Cush, and Put, and Lydia, and all Arabia, Lybia and all the peoples in league with the land [of Egypt] (i.e., all the allies of the king of the south) will fall by the sword."

Ezekiel 30:2-5 (cf. Ezek.20:45-48)

Egypt's complete undoing at the hands of the beast will, in the end, be a benefit. For it will cause the Egyptians along with many people of the lands of the south to see the impotence of their modern day "Pharaoh", the Mahdi (cf. Jer.46:17; Ezek.32:2-15), and bring them instead to cry to the Lord for help, a prayer to be answered both at and after the return of our glorious Lord (Is.19:4-25). Ultimately, the south's defeat in this second, decisive campaign will again be largely attributable to the treason of the three horns and the massive infighting that will ensue within her own ranks in the wake of the beast's springing of his trap (cf. Dan.11:26):

(2) For I will spur on Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight one against his brother and another against his friend, a city against a city and a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the splintering of the triple coalition). (3) And Egypt's spirit will be emptied from the midst of her, for I will confound her plans, although they consult their idols and mediums and oracles and familiar spirits. (4) And I will hand Egypt over into the hand of a cruel master (i.e., antichrist), even a stern king (cf. Dan.8:23) [who] will rule over them, says the Lord God of hosts."

Isaiah 19:2-4

As was the case during the first campaign, so here too we may expect some complication of military maneuvers on account of the trumpet judgments, specifically for this second campaign the sixth judgment or "second woe". The havoc wreaked upon the world by the bands of marauding demons is sure to affect this campaign at least to some degree, but, as was the case in the first campaign, we may expect that the worst case analysis for the army of the beast would be an equal share of disruption, and it is fair to ask whether his forces would not be largely exempted from such an assault (for otherwise one would have, in effect, a case of "Satan casting out Satan"; cf. Matt.12:26). In any case, the result of the second campaign will be an overwhelming victory on the part of antichrist, and the removal of the last major impediment to his worldwide rule (Ezek.31:16-18):

(3b) And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. (4) And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?"

Revelation 13:3b-4

F. The Jewish Coup Attempt and the Apparent Assassination and Resuscitation of Antichrist

Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices).
Daniel 11:30b

Immediately upon the heels of his dramatic victory over the south, the beast will be the object of an attempted assassination plot, the event that gives him the "fatal wound" that is nonetheless miraculously "healed" (Rev.13:3). The wounding and seemingly miraculous recovery of antichrist described in Daniel 11:30 is thus the Old Testament parallel for the similar information given in Revelation chapters 13 and 17. While we will continue our method of covering these verses seriatim in their proper places (in accordance with the generally chronological progression of the book of Revelation we have noted before), it will be of use to consider the four pertinent passages of scripture here:

And one of its (i.e., the beast's) heads [looked] as if it had been stricken unto death, and [yet] its mortal wound had been healed.
Revelation 13:3a

And he (i.e., the beast's false prophet) [will] act with all the authority of the first beast [while] in his presence, and he will make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.
Revelation 13:12

And he (i.e., the beast's false prophet) [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life.
Revelation 13:14

The beast, which you saw, was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and is going to rise from the Abyss (i.e., the revival of Rome on the one hand and apparent resuscitation of antichrist on the other), and is going to its destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, [those] whose names have not remained written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, will be in awe when they see the beast, because he was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and will again be present on the scene (i.e., seem to return to life in the case of antichrist, and be reestablished in respect to the empire).
Revelation 17:8

Whatever one makes of these passages, we can say with authority that antichrist is most certainly not being "resurrected" here – only our risen Lord currently possesses an eternal body, and no one else will do so until the resurrection of His Church at His return (at which point the beast will be deposited in the lake of fire: Rev.19:20). The question of "resuscitation" is a more

difficult one. On the one hand, it is impossible that the devil would be able to engineer even the temporary return to life of his son, that is, a true "resuscitation", without divine permission for something so entirely unprecedented (i.e., the revival to life from death of an arch-enemy of God and his people), and of such consent we have no specific indication from scripture. On the other hand, the four passages from Revelation quoted above do suggest at the very least a physical revival which will be extraordinary in the extreme, with the final passage, Revelation 17:8, presenting the most difficult case to explain away. For even though that passage has its primary application to revived Rome, applying to the beast by extension (as opposed to Revelation 13 where this relationship of primary and secondary application is reversed), what is true of one should also be true of the other, and the words "was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and will again be present on the scene" are most emphatic, and hard to take in any other way than as a literal return from the dead (that is, the definite departure and return of the spirit).

Whether this assassination attempt results in antichrist's actual death or, alternatively, a near-death experience so dramatic and traumatic that it will be nearly indistinguishable from actual death and resuscitation, it is clear from the reaction of the general public to the beast's recovery from this "mortal wound" that the genuineness of his death and the miraculous nature of his return to life will be taken as true and factual by the unbelieving world (cf., the amazement and resultant worship of the world: Rev.13:3b-4). It is also relatively easy to see how trauma unquestionably fatal in the case of any other normal human being might not necessarily be so for the beast – for he will not be fully human after all. The angelic paternity of antichrist will doubtless give him the physical resiliency to endure wounds to which any mere man would certainly succumb. We know from our previous study of the nephilim that prodigious physical attributes are the norm for such creatures, and it is probable that their ability to tolerate conditions which would kill normal human beings is at least part of the reason why God caused the great flood to cover the earth to such a depth and for so long a time. So it is certainly possible that while to the world antichrist may appear to have received an unavoidably fatal injury and may seem to have been "stricken unto death", this wound, mortal in every other case, may only be near-fatal in his case.

From the following context of the passages in both Daniel and Revelation, there is no evidence that the beast will suffer any chronic after-effects of this wounding (beyond the permanent scar visible upon his head left by the blow from the sword which strikes him). Quite to the contrary, rather than a setback this incident will actually be a boon to the beast, for it will do much to further the idea that he really is "the true Christ", having thus "risen from the dead" in such a seemingly irrefutable way. It is therefore no accident that it will be directly in the wake of this incident that antichrist's new religion will be transformed into outright devil worship and swiftly come to dominate the world (cf. Rev.13:3-17). Unbelievers all over the earth will take this "resurrection" to be genuine and to be legitimate proof of the beast's status as the Messiah. However, believers who know their God and continue to hold firm to the testimony of Jesus will remember our Lord's warning to beware of all such false signs, no matter how persuasive, waiting instead on their own resurrection at the return of our truly resurrected Lord:

(23) At that time if someone says to you "Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. (24) For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. (25) Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. (26) So if they say to you all, "Look, He is in the desert!", do not go out [there]. [Or] "Look, He is in the inner-rooms (i.e., in hiding in the city)", do not believe [it]. (27) For as lightning [though it] comes forth from the east is visible all the way to the west, this is just how the return of the Son of Man (i.e., the Second Advent) will be. (28) For wherever the body is (i.e., the Lord), there the eagles will gather (i.e., believers rising in resurrection).
Matthew 24:23-28

Beyond the details from Daniel and Revelation provided above, we can say a few things further about this critical event. Having conquered the king of the south, the beast will be at the height of his power, with no possible alliance of the remaining independent powers on earth capable of resisting the combined might of Babylon, revived Rome, and the now occupied and cooperating territories of the southern kingdom. At this point, with the world, for all practical purposes, lying prostrate at his feet, antichrist's plan, soon to be successfully carried out, will be to move his headquarters to Jerusalem, intending to rule the world from there as if he were God (cf. 2Thes.2:4). It should be observed in regard to his treatment of the Jews, moreover, that, in addition to the measures "against the covenant" already taken at the conclusion of the first campaign (Dan.11:28), the land of Israel will be very roughly handled during the second campaign, with the invading amphibious forces treating her and her population as anything but allies (i.e., "they will afflict Eber": Num.24:24; cf. Is.33:1-8, especially v.8, and Lam.1:2, 10, 19, 21). The beast's horrendous plans to completely annul his agreement with the state of Israel and to thoroughly abrogate the revival of temple rite will doubtless not be totally secret, even before the fact (at least not to his inner circle, a group which we may expect will contain representatives from Israel, one of the seven original kingdoms of revived Rome). It is more than likely, therefore, that the agents of this assassination attempt will be Jewish (assuming, that is, that the entire affair is not in actuality an elaborate ruse on antichrist's part; see below). This would seem to be the best explanation for the close connection given in Daniel 11:30 between the "striking down" of antichrist and the fury released immediately thereafter against the legitimately revived worship of God in Jerusalem and those who are involved therein:

(30b) Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices).
Daniel 11:30b

It should not escape our attention here that this "rage" and retaliation are an indication of antichrist's core antisemitism, for it will be technically misplaced. Those who are truly following Jesus Christ in response to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 will be focused upon divine solutions, and will certainly not be misled into thinking that any act of violence of

this sort, no matter how apparently justifiable, will in any way ward off the Great Tribulation to come.

At this time in Israel, there will essentially be three major factions into which the body-politic is split: 1) dedicated followers of antichrist; 2) dedicated followers of our Lord; 3) patriots (or "zealots"), most of whom were ardent supporters of the beast when he appeared to be the only worldly hope of help against the Mahdi and his hordes. As the Tribulation progresses, we can expect more and more of the first group to migrate into the third group (cf. Zech.12:3-8 with Zech.12:10). Those who truly know their God, moreover, will flee into the wilderness in accordance with the commands of our Lord just as soon as antichrist sets up the "abomination of desolation" as a putative part of his reaction to this assault on his person (though his plan all along has been to take this action). In addition to supporting his argument to be the true "Messiah", therefore, this assassination attempt will also supply the beast with a certain measure of justification for the harsh treatment of Israel to follow, and specifically for his war against Moses and Elijah and the subsequent termination of the revived temple worship (an action that will in itself enjoy a measure of worldwide popularity because of their direction of the trumpet judgments: Rev.11:7-13). For antichrist will opportunistically, though falsely, lay this deed at their feet. Finally, it is likely that the assassination attempt will take place while antichrist is involved in directing the plundering of Egypt, the heartland of the Mahdi's power (cf. Ezek.30:9 with Dan.11:30a), for he is said to "return" to Israel after the event in order to vent his anger "against the covenant".

G. The "Abomination of Desolation" and the "Session" of Antichrist

Upon his return to Israel following his defeat of the south and his subsequent recovery from the attempt on his life, antichrist will act swiftly to annul the treaty made with Israel (cf. Is.33:7-8). Using the assault upon his person as an excuse and the true believers who follow the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 as scapegoats, the beast will commence his "war" against the two prophets with the intention of bringing a halt to the newly revived worship of the one true God, and replacing it with the overt worship of the devil and of himself (Rev.11:7-13).

Then he (i.e., antichrist) will confirm an agreement (or "covenant"; Hebrew, תּוּרַב, beriyyth) with the powerful [in Israel] during [that] one [remaining] week (i.e., the 70th week, the Tribulation), but in the middle of the week (i.e., just prior to the Tribulation's mid-point) **he will put a halt to sacrifice and offering** (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and interrupting the temple rites).

Daniel 9:27a

Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant.

Daniel 11:30b-c

Now that the two prophets with their miraculous powers have been removed, antichrist will waste no time in putting an end to all semblance of the worship of God on the temple mount (as the verses above indicate). Worse to tell, he will now implement his plan for replacing the worship of God with the worship of himself as God in conjunction with the worship of his father the devil. The first irrefutable sign of this will be the setting up in front of the temple of an abominable idol known in scripture as "the abomination of desolation".

1. The Abomination of Desolation

The placement of this idol by antichrist is well-documented in scripture, being referred to both by Daniel and by our Lord as one of the critical events whereby the beast may be known (Matt.24:15-18; Mk.13:14-16):

For it is from him (i.e., the coming evil one) that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation.

Daniel 11:31

Daniel's combining of the pollution of the sanctuary and halting of the offerings to God with the setting up of this idol indicates that the place of its erection will indeed be within the temple court:

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Mark 13:14

Matthew goes further and overtly connects this idol with the "abomination" mentioned in Daniel (i.e., Dan.11:31 and 12:11), so as to leave no doubt about the identification of these prophecies: from Daniel's words, to our Lord's words, to the description of the idol in Revelation chapter 13, all of these passages are clearly referring to one and the same thing, the idol of antichrist which is set up in the temple court at the Tribulation's mid-point:

(15) "So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Matthew 24:15-16

It should be noted that in the Greek text of Matthew 24:15 there is no definite article preceding the words "holy place", so that translations which render this phrase "the holy place" are technically incorrect. This is important because, in translation, the words "the holy place" generally refer to the outermost of the temple's two spaces which contained the table of the bread of presence, the golden altar of incense, and the golden lampstand or menorah (in the LXX: Ex.26:33; 28:29; Lev.16:2; etc.; cf. Heb.9:1-5; in Greek in all these cases, moreover, the word

"place" is left out). The omission of the article thus serves as an emphatic sign that the words "holy place" most definitely do not refer to the temple, but rather to the inner court or "priest's court" (as in Dan.8:11; Rev.11:2; cf. Acts 6:13; 21:28). The idol will be visible to all inhabitants of Jerusalem, for it will not be necessary to enter into the temple proper to view it. In fact, during the 42 months of antichrist's reign in Jerusalem, the world will make pilgrimage to the temple mount to do obeisance before the statue of the beast, thronging into the outer court from where the idol, no doubt of substantial size, will be visible from its place in the inner court before the temple (cf. Ezek.8:3-5):

(13) And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. (14) And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. (15) And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:13-15

As is clear from this description, this idol will be most impressive to the unbelievers who view it and come to worship it. In our age of skepticism and worldliness, that is saying quite a lot. We may therefore expect this idol to be both mammoth in its proportions, incredibly and persuasively life-like in its functioning, and awe-inspiring in its verbal pronouncements. It will strike fear and reverence into the hardened hearts of the unbelievers who come to Jerusalem to worship the beast, confirming their confidence in him and strengthening their support of him. The impression made by this idol in conjunction with the miracles performed by the false prophet and the prior apparent "resurrection" of the beast in conjunction with his military conquest of the world will be more than enough for all those who have rejected the one true God to convince them of the divinity of the devil's son.

The translation, "the abomination of desolation", while understandable, is a bit misleading, for even in the Greek translation of the original Hebrew phrase, "desolation" is a verbal noun which ought rather to mean something like "process of desolating", a fact even more difficult to ignore in the case of the corresponding participles of Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. Since these words are all really calling attention to the action produced by the "abominable thing" (i.e., the idol), we would have been better served had this phrase been traditionally translated "the abomination which causes desolation". In applying the exact same terminology to antichrist himself, Daniel 9:27 spells out the precise significance of these words in respect to this capacity of the "abomination" idol to produce "desolation" in a spiritual sense, namely, an appalling isolation and separation from God resulting from horrendous idolatry and in turn resulting in devastation in both spiritual and material terms.

And on account of the extreme [nature] of [his] (i.e., antichrist's) abominations, he [will] be causing desolations (i.e., desertion and estrangement from God), even until the end when what has been determined will be poured out upon the one characterized by [this] desolation (i.e., the beast as archetype and cause of the alienation and rebellion from God which he fosters).

Daniel 9:27b

Unfortunately, the setting up of idols even in the very presence of the Lord God is not unprecedented in Israel's history (2Ki.23:6; cf. Ezek.8:3-5). What makes this particular "abomination" distinctive is that, rather than being a mere symptom of apostasy, this particular idol will be instrumental in producing a spiritual "desolation" within Israel whence it will spread to the entire world (cf. Dan.8:13, where the apostasy or "rebellion" is said to be instrumental in the "desolation"). For it is the obeisance paid to this idol which will be central to the new religion of beast-and-Satan worship established by antichrist at the Tribulation's mid-point, and it is the acquiescence and willing participation in this worship that will both energize the Great Persecution which follows and at the same time doom the world in general and Israel in particular to the "desolating horrors" of the Great Tribulation itself, the final intense period of judgment that precedes our Lord's return.

"And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is near."

Luke 21:20

In Luke's account of our Lord's words above, a second sign (i.e., the mustering of the beast's armies in Israel following the defeat of the south) is given as a warning for believers to flee Jerusalem in addition to the sign of the "abomination". The Greek word used here is precisely the same word for "desolation" as the one used for the idol in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14. Thus in the case of Luke we are also given to see the resulting "desolation" which proceeds from the establishment of the system of worldwide idolatry in the very center of Jerusalem focused on the worship of antichrist and the idol which represents him, "the abomination [which causes] desolation".

2. The Session of Antichrist in the Temple of God

The elimination of Moses and Elijah and subsequent desecration of the sanctuary through the establishment of the talking idol are preliminary steps to the purpose most dear to antichrist's cold, half-human heart, namely, taking his seat in God's temple and thereby blasphemously proclaiming to the world that he is the true God and the true Messiah (cf. Dan.8:11-14).

(3) For [the Second Advent cannot come] unless the [Great] Apostasy has first occurred and the man of lawlessness, [antichrist,] has [first] been revealed, that "son of destruction" (cf. Jn.17:12 of Judas), (4) the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that ***he will [even] take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God.***

The scope and duration of this false "session" are also discussed by Daniel:

(10) And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with evil leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:19; Rev.11:2). (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. (13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the rebellion which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified."

Daniel 8:10-14

The beast will thus occupy the temple of God for the better part of the Great Tribulation, removing from Jerusalem only when the events which precede the Second Advent necessitate it (Dan.11:44-45). Indeed, this prolonged "session" of antichrist is a deliberate attempt to mimic the present heavenly and coming earthly true session of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also take up residence in the temple during His thousand year millennial reign. Believers who know their God will not be fooled by the false parallels engineered by the beast (i.e., of a false Messiah ensconced in a false New Jerusalem ruling a false "kingdom come"). Just as the ark did not come to rest until Solomon, the "son of David", built a new and glorious home for it (i.e., the first temple), so our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the ark is a type (1Chron.17:1-6), will be the one to "build up" the third temple in a manner and to a degree which will allow of no misinterpretation as to the true divine glory of its Builder and Inhabitant (cf. Zech.6:12-15). On the other hand, just as his father the devil profaned the original mountain of God (Ezek.28:18), so antichrist will profane and pollute the sanctuary until the 42 months of the Great Tribulation run their course and the glorious day of our Lord's return draws nigh.

3. The Revelation of Antichrist

With the termination of the warning ministries of the Tribulation's first half (directed by Moses and Elijah and carried out by the 144,000), the setting up of the abomination of desolation, and the session of antichrist in the very temple of God, blasphemously proclaiming himself to be God, not even the most skeptical nor the most ignorant will be able to doubt the identification of this individual as the beast prophesied in scripture. With these events, antichrist will have been

fully "revealed" (2Thes.2:3-8), and the "number of his name" associated with the ensuing worship of him and his father the devil central to his new religion (Rev.13:16-18) will be the final and incontrovertible proof that he is not the Son of God but rather the son of Satan. From this point forward, antichrist will be, for all practical purposes, the ruler of the world (Rev.13:3-10), and from his new headquarters on Jerusalem's temple mount he will seek to solidify that rule through the institution of his worldwide religion. Then there will begin a time of persecution unprecedented since the beginning of the world, there will begin the Great Tribulation.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth."

Jeremiah 25:32 NIV

6. The Great Tribulation

The establishment of the beast as the effective ruler of this world under the guidance and support of his father the devil and his session in God's temple in Jerusalem representing himself as God (2Thes.2:4) marks the end of the Tribulation's first phase. With this "revelation" of antichrist, we are brought to the threshold of the most terrible time in world history, the Great Tribulation.

And it shall be a time of distress such as has never occurred since people first existed on the earth until that time.

Daniel 12:1b

For at that time there will be a Great Tribulation such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:21 (cf. Mk.13:19)

The Great Tribulation will unquestionably be a devastating experience for all the inhabitants of the earth, but it will fall especially hard upon believers in Jesus Christ. For the principal and truly eponymous event of that period, that is, the intense tribulation that will characterize those three and a half years, will be the unprecedented persecution of the Church and the martyrdom that accompanies that persecution. Key to the solidification of his world kingdom will be the beast's pseudo-religion. As was the case to a somewhat lesser degree in historical Rome, adherence to the cult worship of the ruler will be the litmus test of loyalty to the state. But while Roman emperors made use of this admittedly evil device primarily for pragmatic reasons relating to the solidification of their power, antichrist and his father the devil will also be intent upon eradicating faith from the earth through the elimination of the faithful. This has always been a central design of Satan's plans, for if all to whom the promises of God have been made could be removed (either through death or apostasy), then God's promises would have to fail. If there is no one left for Christ to return to, then the devil wins. Such, at any rate, runs Satan's twisted thinking. With the whole world under antichrist's control, the forcible conversion of all of the inhabitants of the earth to the beast's devil worshiping religion becomes not only theoretically possible, but is also the perfect satanic final solution: all who refuse to convert will be put to

death so that, either way, faith will perish from the earth. And such would be our fate, except for the mercy, the goodness, and the power of our God, who is coming to rescue us through the return of His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And they will say on that day, "Behold! This is our God! We waited in hope for Him to deliver us. This is our Lord. We waited in hope for Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. Say to those with anxious hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you".

Isaiah 35:3-4

We must ever look forward to that ultimate deliverance. But we must also remember that the Great Tribulation is aptly named, and that just as many fell through apostasy during the Tribulation's first half, many will fall in martyrdom during those final three and a half years. We must remember, learn well the lessons the Bible has – not without good reason – stored up for us in advance, and make every effort to prepare spiritually for whatever may betide.

A. The Seventh Trumpet

(15) Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, "The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come, and He will rule forever and ever. Amen". (16) And the twenty-four elders were sitting in front of the throne, and they fell on their faces and worshiped God, (17) saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and the One who was, even because you have taken up your great power and begun to reign! (18) Although the nations thronged together in their wrath, your wrath has come, even the time for the dead to be judged, for giving to your servants the prophets and to the holy ones, even to those who fear your Name both great and small, the reward [that is due them], and for destroying those who are destroying the earth!". (19) And the temple of God which is in heaven above opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple. And there occurred flashes of lightning and thunderous voices and an earthquake, and large hail [fell].

Revelation 11:15-19

With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the Great Tribulation begins. Seven is the number of perfection and completion (cf. Ps.12:6; 119:164; Prov.6:16; 9:1), and while the first six trumpets announce and commence warning judgments of ascending intensity and longevity during the Tribulation's first half, the seventh trumpet opens the longest and most intensive warning judgment of all, namely, the Great Tribulation itself. For the Great Tribulation is the ultimate admonition to prepare to meet with God, for He is coming at the end of that final three and a half years in the Person of the conquering Messiah who will mete out vengeance to His adversaries even as He brings deliverance to His people (cf. 2Thes.1:3-12). That is why all of the other

events and proclamations in this paragraph, Revelation 11:15-19, directly connect the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the Great Tribulation's commencement to that glorious future day. For the Tribulation as a whole is the opening twilight of the Great Day of the Lord whose dawn will come in blazing glory with the Second Advent of the Morning Star, the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the true Light of the World (Num.24:17; Matt.2:2-10; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 22:16; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:36; 12:46).

B. War in Heaven

(7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now our God's deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]."

Revelation 12:7-12

The fight described here between Michael and Satan and their respective forces, resulting in the expulsion from heaven of Satan and his angels, is the first event of the Great Tribulation proper. The way in which the outbreak of the "war" is described in this verse indicates that "Michael and his angels" are the initiators of this attack, and we may be certain that they commence these hostilities on divine authority. It may seem strange to some that up until this point in human history God has allowed the devil to present himself in the heavenly assembly and to continue to bring accusations against the elect (1Ki.22:19-22; 2:1; Job 1:6-19; 2:1-7; 15:8; 38:7; Ps.29:1ff.; 89:5-7; Jer.23:18 & 22; Zech.3:1; 1Pet.5:8; Rev.12:10). Clearly, God has always had the power to cast the devil out of heaven, whether by immediate means or, as here, through the agency of his elect angels. But everything which has yet transpired in heaven and on earth has all been according to the ineluctable plan of God "whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are beyond finding out" (Rom.11:33). God's plan to repair the breach in the moral fabric of the universe rent by creature rebellion has always involved the allowance of true creature free will on the one hand together with an irrefutable demonstration of the justice and rightness of God and His perfectly holy, good and loving character on the other.

Satan's ejection from heaven along with his followers at the commencement of the Tribulation's second half will be a crucial turning point in the history of his rebellion against God. From that point forward, the dynamics of the conflict will change so radically and fundamentally that no other period in human history will be comparable. That is in no small part why, from the divine

point of view, the Great Tribulation is largely inseparable from "the Day of the Lord" which brings it to a close at our Lord's return. For once Satan has devoted all of his resources to this final furious assault upon the people of God, God's wrath, God's judgment, and God's deliverance cannot be long delayed.

Thus the period of Great Tribulation which starts immediately following the sounding of the 7th trumpet and at the same time as Satan's expulsion from heaven is in essence theologically indistinguishable from the Day of the Lord which follows hard upon its heels. For this is the beginning of the judgment that is answered by restoration and replacement through Christ's millennial kingdom and reign. In the casting down of Satan and his angels we see the process of judgment beginning, immediately after the concluding sign of warning, the 7th trumpet, has been given. All of the trends of the Great Tribulation which follow are either part of the process of judgment (i.e., the seven bowl judgments of wrath and the remaining sequence of seven major judgments on Babylon, at Armageddon, and etc.) or provocations thereto (i.e., the blasphemous rule of antichrist and the Great Persecution), and are essentially inextricable from the blessed restoration and replacement that is to follow immediately when the powerful and cleansing wind of judgment has swept away all that is fetid and foul and ushered in the crisp and bright new day of righteousness in the Messiah's kingdom of a thousand years.

The last three and a half years of Satan's reign thus constitute the final darkness before the dawn when the Morning Star rises and bathes the earth in the glorious light of His presence and His truth. What we have here in Revelation 12:7-12 is the first step in this process of judgment, restoration and replacement in the exclusion of Satan and his fallen angels from heaven and their consignment to the earth for this last, terrible period of human testing and suffering.

It is surely in no small part the devil's restriction to planet earth for the remainder of the time allotted to him that makes the Great Tribulation so horrific, a time like no other in the history of the human race (Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21-22). No longer will Satan split his time between heaven and earth, accusing our brothers and sisters before the Lord even as his minions assault us on earth. From this point forward, all of the devil's efforts will be focused upon the earth – if only because this is where he and his followers will have been confined until the Great Day of the Lord sweeps them away. So while a number of factors contribute to the "greatness" of the Great Tribulation such as the removal of Holy Spirit restraint and the subsequent unleashing of lawlessness, and such as the one world rule of antichrist and the subsequent breakdown of all human restraint, the confinement of Satan and his minions to the earth is, nevertheless, not the least of the reasons why the Great Tribulation will be so consummately horrific.

[But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!"

Revelation 12:12

Michael's victory and the devil's expulsion is nonetheless cause for great rejoicing as well (Rev.12:12a), for it marks a tangible beginning of the end of the reign of evil and the devil's reign

of terror, made possible through the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross and now entering into the phase of final glorious fulfillment.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:15 (cf. Rom.16:20; Heb.2:14; 1Jn.3:8b)

Satan's casting out of heaven is a first visible step in the eventual exclusion of all evil from the coming eternal kingdom wherein righteousness dwells, and one which is well documented elsewhere in prophetic scripture at that:

(12) How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit.
Isaiah 14:12-15

In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings.
Ezekiel 28:15-17

The seventy-two returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star".
Luke 10:17-18

A brief aside is perhaps necessary at this point concerning Michael and his angels and the battle fought with Satan and his angels. While scripture does have much to say about the angelic realm, it says less than we may perhaps desire to know and yet everything we need to know. Lacking physically material bodies such as we possess, angels apparently cannot be wounded or killed (though they may be incarcerated). So the exact nature and detail of the combat that will transpire when the 7th trumpet sounds is beyond our ability to know. We are given only the result, that is, the total defeat of the devil and his forces and their complete exclusion from the heavenly realm. We have posited before that the ultimate tally of saved humanity will eventually equal twice that of the fallen angels (the first half constituting the Church, and the second the echelon of millennial believers). Therefore such massive numbers and the completeness of the victory and defeat certainly indicate that the struggle will be a monumental one, especially given the extraordinary power of angelic kind. Furthermore, the significance of the expulsion of the fallen angels from heaven, an "estate" which they have held since before the re-creation of the

heavens and the earth and the creation of mankind, is immense. This event will be real, and the mere fact that we are unable to see it and can barely imagine its specifics in no way diminishes that significance. For the world of angels, the change will be profound for both victors and vanquished, and will also of course not be without serious consequence for the earth and for humanity.

One thing that we can surmise about this decisive battle between elect and fallen angels is that, while the numbers involved will be immense, not all of angelic kind will participate. Michael, by rank an archangel, is one of a college of seven such "general officers". Positing an equal share of the total elect "host" under the command of each officer would leave Michael in charge of a force less than one third the size of Satan's entire command (i.e., one seventh of two thirds versus a full third for the devil). This means that instead of the elect angels fighting an easy battle with overwhelming numbers on their side, Michael's victory will require extraordinary strategy and tactics, and exceptional courage and bravery. Even though this victory has been prophesied for nearly two millennia here at Revelation 12:7-9, the brazenness of the attack with such inferior numbers and the astounding nature of the defeat still seems to come as a surprise to the devil and his cohorts, and this humiliation will be no small contributing factor to the "wrath" Satan will subsequently vent upon the world in the short time remaining to him (Rev.12:12b). Although we are not privy to the details, a clear principle does emerge from Michael's most impressive victory. Armed with this prophecy, Michael and his forces are even now using the time allotted to prepare for the unequal fight to come, and will as a direct result of this diligence be astoundingly successful in conquering a complacent foe who has clearly drawn false confidence from superior numbers.

Finally in this regard it is very likely that Michael's forces are the elite of the elect warrior angels (we may think of them as the "Marines" or the "Rangers" among angelic kind). For as we have seen previously, the number of the elect angelic clans totals six, not seven. It certainly fits the context and everything else we may discern about angelic organization, therefore, to posit that while each clan possesses an archangel (in addition to four elders; see the previous note), Michael holds a special command composed of elite warriors who have distinguished themselves in the fight against the rebellion thus far by their martial valor, courage, integrity, and zeal for the Lord (compare David's cadre of heroes marked out for special mention: 2Sam.23:8-39; 1Chron.11:10-37; cf. 1Sam.22:1-2). It certainly behooves us as loyal followers of Jesus Christ to remember that in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged what we do for the Lord is not only of critical importance – it certainly does not go unnoticed now, nor will it be unrecognized on that great day to come. Let us therefore continue to encourage one another with the truth that, like David's mighty men and like Michael's elite, we too have a great opportunity to likewise write our names on the Lord's scroll of valor for exceptional conduct in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged. And let us remember as well that, although the darkest of times may lie ahead, the battlefield of the Great Persecution will also offer those who fight upon it unprecedented opportunities for glorifying Jesus Christ and winning in the bargain an undying crown of glory (1Pet.5:4; cf. Rev.12:11).

C. The Dragon's Persecution of Believing Israel

(15) So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down to pick up his things out of his house, (18) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (19) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (20) And [so] pray that your flight may not take place during a storm or on a Sabbath. (21) For at that time there will be a great tribulation such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:15-21 (cf. Lk.17:31-32)

(14) But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, (15) and let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down, neither let him enter [back] into his house to pick up anything out of it, (16) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (17) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (18) And [so] pray that it might not take place during a storm. (19) For those days will see a tribulation the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.

Mark 13:14-19

Having disposed of Moses and Elijah, one of the first things antichrist will do upon establishing himself as a pseudo-god in Jerusalem will be to attempt to destroy all of their followers within the borders of Israel. The first to die will be the 144,000 Jewish evangelists. Their mission was and will be to the end to bring the gospel to their fellow Jews, and their deaths will serve to give these converts to the true Messiah time to escape the evil designs of the beast and his father the devil. For while believers within Israel are told to escape without so much as returning home for a coat, the 144,000 will stand their ground wherever they may be in fulfillment of this last act of courage which the Lord has ordained for them: martyrdom.

(1) And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from heaven like a sound of many waters and a sound of thunder, and the sound which I heard was like that of lyre-players playing on their lyres. (3) And they (i.e., the 144,000) are singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders, and no one was able to learn the song except the 144,000 [singing] in unison, they who had been purchased from the earth.

Revelation 14:1-3

The rewards that accompany such wonderful and sacrificial service to the Lord which the 144,000 will achieve, a ministry crowned with martyrdom that not only glorifies the Lord directly but allows the escape of those they have ministered to, will be profound indeed. When the

Church in resurrection is reorganized into the twelve tribes whose names are on the gates of New Jerusalem, we will not be surprised to see the 144,000 formed into the otherwise unassigned tribe of Levi, a special tribe whose "portion is the Lord", and whose eternal status will be one of special closeness to Him – there can be no greater reward.

(13) And when the dragon saw that he had been cast down to the earth, he gave chase to the woman who had born the male [child]. (14) And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly into the desert to a place [prepared] for her where she is [going to be] sustained there away from the presence of the serpent for a time and times and half a time. (15) And the serpent spewed [forth] from his mouth after the woman water like a river in order to sweep her away. (16) And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon had spewed [forth] from his mouth. (17) And the dragon was enraged at the woman, and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:13-17

Even with the 144,000 acting as a rearguard at the cost of their lives, those Jewish believers who heed the warning to flee as soon as they see the "abomination" set up in the temple court will nevertheless be pursued by antichrist. As the passage above makes clear, however, they will be granted a successful escape through divine, supernatural means. Moreover, they will be granted a special place of comfort and protection somewhere in the middle of the desert wherein like the Israelites of old they will be protected and provided for by the Lord for the duration of the Tribulation, "for a time and times and half a time".

D. The Beast's Prophet and the Worldwide Anti-Christian Religion

(4) And they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast. And they [also] worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?" (5) And a mouth was given to [the beast] to speak presumptuous things and blasphemies [against God]. And it was [also] given to him to do what he wished for forty-two months. (6) And he opened his mouth for [the purpose of] blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His Name and His dwelling and those who dwell in heaven (i.e., the family of God). (7) And it was given to [the beast] to make war on the holy ones (e.g., believers) and to conquer them (i.e., the Great Persecution). And authority was given to him over every tribe and people and language and race. (8) And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship [the beast], [that is, all] whose names are not [still] written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain. (9) "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. (10) If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones."

Revelation 13:4-10

1. The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion

The amazement the world will manifest at the beast's pseudo-resurrection (Rev.13:3) along with his military successes (being now the effective ruler of the world as a result) spills forth at this point not only in the worship of antichrist himself, but also in the worship of his father, the dragon (i.e., the devil). It is to some extent a moot point whether or not these worshipers who will constitute the vast majority of the world's population really understand that it is Satan and his antichrist they are worshipping and not the one true God and His true Messiah. For the beast will certainly represent himself as the latter so that there will also be no doubt about the representation in this worldwide religion of Satan as "true God" (cf. Ezek.31:11; Jn.12:31; 2Cor.4:4). Clearly, however, the world ought to know, inasmuch as antichrist's reign in Jerusalem from the temple of God itself will be pursuant to his prior eviction of the two servants of God, Moses and Elijah, who, it will be recalled, mediated the trumpet judgments of warning (Rev.11:1-13; cf. Zech.4:14).

Following his consolidation of power worldwide, the first item on antichrist's agenda, and the most effective, most dramatic, and most abhorrent means that the dragon and his antichrist will employ to consolidate their kingdom, will be the establishment of a mandatory, worldwide religion designed to replace all genuine worship of the one true God with the worship of the beast and his father the devil instead. As Revelation 13:4 demonstrates, the population of the world at large, awed by recent events, will easily and readily put aside whatever scruples and reservations they may have had before and will enthusiastically embrace the worship of Satan and antichrist. Their reasoning and motivation is simple enough and is made crystal clear in our context: the dragon will be considered a legitimate object of worship "because he gave his authority to the beast", and antichrist in turn will be regarded as such 1) because of his extraordinary person (exemplified in particular by his pseudo resurrection: "Who is like the beast?"), and 2) because of his extraordinary deeds (exemplified in particular by his conquest of the world, including his "defeat" of the two witnesses: "And who is able to make war with him?").

The world's new-found reverence for the devil and their acceptance of him as "God" is a result of their prior conviction that antichrist is God's divine representative on earth. While this may perhaps seem a somewhat unbelievable development to followers of the true Christ before the fact, we would do well to remember the words of our Lord:

(10) And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:10-13

At that time if someone says to you "Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the

elect, if [that were] possible. Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time.

Matthew 24:23-25

The parallels between the beast and the true Messiah will be both deliberate and numerous. If, as Jesus tells us in the verse above, even the elect will be tempted to interpret the signs and wonders of antichrist as proof of his Messiahship, it is small wonder that those who have rejected the truth of Jesus Christ will be easily ensnared by the satanic lies of the beast and the dragon. In addition to the signs and wonders mentioned above, antichrist will have now defeated the "unbelieving nations" of the southern alliance in a "holy crusade" to deliver "Christendom and Israel" from Islamic tyranny; he will have defeated the "forces of evil" in the persons of Moses and Elijah who had for many months been "tormenting" the unbelieving population of the world (Rev.11:10); and he will have (to the eyes of the world) even risen from the dead. Following these unprecedented signs, he will take up residence in the temple of God in Jerusalem proclaiming himself to be God (2Thes.2:4), and setting about to begin the millennium of blessing prophesied in scripture as he rules from Jerusalem a united world without war. Not only will it be no wonder that unbelievers, attributing his feats to the supernatural authority of his father (which is indeed true enough), will accept him as divine, but it also follows logically for those viewing the circumstances in such a way that the imposition of a mandatory form of worship upon the entire world will seem reasonable and good in every way. Only those who know their God will be able to resist the incredible pressures to take part in the new phase of antichrist's religion about to be unveiled and proclaimed worldwide. And it is likewise understandable that the satanic propaganda which has been around since pagan days and which seeks to paint the true God as "a bad god" and Satan as "the good god" bent on replacing him will find a ready audience in all those whose names are no longer written in the book of life. Therefore one of the chilling ironies of the Great Persecution about to be unleashed against all who are determined to preserve their faith in Jesus even until death is that believers are going to be charged with "devil worship" by the very people who have in fact sold themselves to Satan. Our Lord's words on the subject are important to remember in this regard, for they accused Him, the Son of God Himself, of being in league with the devil (Jn.8:48-59; cf. Mk.3:22-30), and He has assured us of the world's hatred and persecution, because it hated and persecuted Him first (Jn.15:18-25).

Before the accomplishment of the two primary deceptions of the Tribulation's first half (i.e., antichrist's pseudo "resurrection" and pseudo-Armageddon) and the domination of the world which followed, it was neither feasible from the standpoint of persuasion nor possible from the standpoint of political power either to reveal fully the nature of the new religion or to make it mandatory worldwide. The constellation of the events at the Tribulation's mid-point are what make possible (in company "with the help of [his] foreign god") antichrist's transformation of his rule from regional to global. That transition will be both horizontal (i.e., geographic expansion until the entire surface of the globe renders him effective allegiance), and vertical (i.e., an increasing measure of loyalty and control within all political entities as well as all other power-nodes), with a corresponding degree of increased intensity in the demands he will make of those controlled. Immediately after his initial consolidation of power we can expect a greater requirement for allegiance to and participation in his cause and in his religion which will

manifest itself most significantly in the Great Persecution about to be unleashed upon all who refuse such allegiance and participation.

(3) Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For [the 2nd Advent cannot come] unless the Apostasy [the great falling away of the faithful in the first half of the Tribulation] has already occurred, and the man of lawlessness [antichrist] has been revealed, that "son of destruction" (cf. Jn.17:12 of Judas), (4) the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God. (5) Don't you remember that I was telling you these things while I was still with you?

2nd Thessalonians 2:3-5

Despite the inherent horrors of antichrist's universal religion of Satanism prophesied to be revealed and expanded at the Tribulation's mid-point and the terrors it will hold for all who refuse to bow down to it, we should not think that it will be for those reasons a system of worship that most people find oppressive and abhorrent but are only embracing out of necessity. As in the case of many cults, beyond the obvious mind-control and group coercion, there is always also an element that appeals to and even legitimizes the secret desires of many if not most of its members. Just as we would be mistaken to imagine the devil as some horrible looking creature when in fact he was made beautiful (Ezek.28:12-13) and even now masquerades as "a messenger of light" (2Cor.11:14), so in the case of this worldwide cult designed to worship him, rather than imaging some repulsive collection of odd and onerous rituals, we would do better to understand this new religion as something that most people will find incredibly appealing (cf. Nah.3:4 and the harlot analogy generally: Rev.17:1-5; 17:15-16; 19:2). Cults often attract new adherents by promising them a welcoming and friendly society, and by offering them a "deeper" spiritual relationship through initiation into "secret doctrines and mysteries" unavailable elsewhere. And if in the process they also appeal to the hidden desires of the new initiate (be they of either an ascetic or licentious nature), then their appeal can seem irresistible. The unique feature of the beast's religion will be a syncretism of all such elements, allowing virtually every human being to clothe his or her base desires in the mantle of religion in a friendly and welcoming environment and with the conviction that the "truth" is thus being sought, and the "true God" thus being served, to the end that "true eternal life" may be earned (such as antichrist seems to exhibit in his feigned rise from the dead).

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. With their own consciences seared away and speaking with the hypocrisy of men [who peddle] lies, they will [instruct their victims] to refrain from marriage, and to keep away from certain foods . . .

1st Timothy 4:1-3a

Perspicuous in the verses above is the perverse reversal of God's natural order of things as marriage is discouraged – but not sexual practice of all sorts, both natural and unnatural. Inhabitants of urban 21st century America may well wonder what great change this will represent

from contemporary practices. Nevertheless, there will be a decided change for the worse as the incipient trends now visible burst into full flood, are blessed by the state and the state religion, and become mandatory for all loyal citizens of antichrist's world state. And while believers will have as much trouble accepting this degraded and degrading behavior as they do accepting antichrist, the partisans of antichrist will be disposed by the darkness of their minds to embrace his religious strictures even as they have been drawn to embrace him – a phenomenon which cannot be disentangled from the prior rejection of the truth of God:

I have come in My Father's Name, and you do not accept Me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.

John 5:43

In general terms, the religion of the beast will stress the material and the visible over against invisible spirituality of which, of course, it will be completely bereft. And in all of its worldly manifestations it will attempt to mimic the outward appearance of Christian forms (although this will be more in terms of the "traditional" forms of the church visible as opposed to genuine Christian faith and practice). One thing that will be noticeably missing from antichrist's "church" will be the Bible. For while false religions often have some doctrinal focal point or other, it behooves any organization that is in truth no part of the truth to maintain "flexibility" about the actual truth. In other words, when an organization or movement is built upon lies, the freedom to continue lying without restraint or fear of contradiction is crucial. For this reason, we may expect that with his "revelation" as the Son of God, antichrist will expect the world to accept his words as fully sufficient and authoritative since they come from "God". What need will the world then have for an outdated, outmoded written Bible when they now have the purported author to worship in person? It is worth noting in this regard that, in effect, this is where we find much of contemporary Christianity in our present Laodicean age of spiritual lukewarmness. For while many so-called Christian churches and organizations pay lip service to the Bible (and we imagine that the beast and his religion will do so as well), in terms of practice and application the scriptures often take a distant second place to entertainment, self-help, motivational speaking, emotional appeals, pop-psychology, and "worship". For many groups, therefore, the adoption of the beast's religion in both name and practice will sadly mean very little change in either outward appearance or inward effect.

Characteristics of the religion of antichrist:

a. Its Ultimate Object of Worship: "The dragon and the beast" will be the ultimate objects of worship in this new religion. So while there will be other foci of worship and veneration as well (e.g., the idolatrous cult statue in the temple court and the false prophet), the world will have no excuse – Satan and his antichrist will replace the Lord God Almighty and His true Christ in the active worship in which the unbelieving world will now orgiastically indulge. The prior apostasy of one third of the Church, coupled with the removal of Holy Spirit restraint, and the empowerment of error spoken of in 2nd Thessalonians 2:11, will contribute mightily to the rapidity and the totality of the world's rush to embrace the devil and the beast (Dan.8:10-12; 11:36-39).

b. Its Ultimate Place of Worship: Just as antichrist proclaims himself to be the true Messiah and makes every attempt to support that claim in ways that would, "if possible", deceive even the elect (Matt.24:24), so Jerusalem and the temple of God are not accidently chosen as the supreme place of worship. The idea of substitution is clear in everything that the beast and his father Satan will do in this regard, for it has ever been the devil's desire to replace God, so that the installing of his son on the throne of God with himself enshrined as the ultimate object of creature worship is in many respects the fulfillment of a dream which has been millennia in the making. Indeed, Satan will take pains during this entire period to represent this time as the beginning of "the Millennium". For, after all, the true Millennium begins following the revelation of Jesus Christ, the defeat of His enemies at Armageddon, and His installment in the temple at Jerusalem as the Ruler of the world. To the unbelieving world, antichrist's pseudo-resurrection, conquest of the southern alliance, and usurpation of the temple and Jerusalem for his own use will fit this bill. Needless to say, the ensuing three and half years, the time of greatest tribulation in world history, will hardly seem "millennial", but the selection of Jerusalem as the supreme place of worship will contribute to the persuasiveness of the beast's claims and to the acceptance by the unbelieving world of his new universal religion. Not since the tower of Babel will the world be so completely "united" in a political sense, or have a single unifying religious center and motivation as it will have at that time as antichrist begins his rule from Jerusalem with the intent of putting all of his enemies under his feet – if they refuse to worship him.

c. Its Ultimate Priest: As with all of the other supreme foci of the beast's religion, so in the case of the "clergy" we can expect to see a deliberate usurpation of both true and traditional Christianity in antichrist's system. There is, of course, nothing biblical about Roman Catholicism's "pope", but the false prophet will indeed be a true "vicar" or substitute for antichrist, serving him in a way that falsely parallels the true Christ but in reality models antichrist and the devil (e.g. the false prophet has "two horns like a *lamb*", but "speaks like a *dragon*": Rev.13:11). We may expect this to be the case with the other lesser "clergy" as well, especially considering that in all probability antichrist will make use of already existing clergy who are co-opted into his new universal religion, so that any distinction as seen by the world between the beast's church and the "Christian church" will be difficult to draw (since in most cases it will be a question of the same people in the same buildings employing many of the same rituals only now committed to worshipping the beast "as Christ"). In general terms, we can expect antichrist's new clergy to be extremely persuasive (cf. Matt.24:23-24; Col.2:16-23; 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1-8; 2Tim.3:1-13; 2Pet.2:1 - 3:18; Jude 1:4-16).

d. Its Ultimate Sign of Membership: Believers in Jesus Christ have as their sign and as their seal of divine ownership the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Rom.8:9-17; Rev.7:1-3). Antichrist's substitute for this true yet invisible sign is, once again in keeping with the pattern above, a false, visible sign, the "mark of the beast".

e. Its Ultimate Promise: Given that the beast has been "restored to life", it is likely that the promise of a similar reward will be given to those who embrace his religion, especially in the

context of antichrist's claim to be the true Messiah. It should be noted in this connection, however, that rather than being a universal good promised to all, as in the case of the true resurrection of the righteous, we may instead expect this false promise of resurrection to be qualified, offered only to the few who distinguish themselves in loyalty, and thus used as a goad to spur the "faithful" on to ever greater degeneracy and fanaticism. Moreover, the type of "eternal life" being offered will be along the same lines of materiality we see in every other aspect of the beast's religion, namely, the continuation (or revivification) of the sordid and (apart from God) pointless temporal life that is humanity's lot, rather than any true transformation. That so many around the world will find this offer appealing is almost a cause for pity, especially considering that antichrist will be incapable of making good on this promise in even a single instance.

f. Its Ultimate Sacrifice: It is a common-place in literature to portray those who make a "deal with the devil" as having "sold their souls". And it is true that the unbelieving world of that future time, by their embracing of the beast's religion, will have likewise embraced their own condemnation, willfully rejecting through the worship of antichrist and his father Satan the grace and mercy in Jesus Christ that God was eager to give them freely (cf. Jonah 2:8). However, the true nature of the "bargain" is this: they have forsaken eternal life and spiritual riches beyond calculation for the sake of some trifling and, in many cases, totally disgusting short-lived material benefits. In other words, like Esau, the unbelieving world of that time will sell en masse "their birthright for a mess of pottage" (Heb.12:16). To those concerned, the bargain will actually seem reasonable, for it will involve substituting present persecution endured for the sake of intangible advantages (which their hearts blinded by unbelief find incredible) for tangible "benefits" in the here and now (cf. the pattern of Is.57:1ff.).

g. Its Ultimate Service: As in the case of its ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate service for believers in antichrist and his religion will reflect a sick parallelism to genuine Christianity. After the pattern of our Savior (e.g., Jn.13:1-17), true Christians are committed to service for the sake and the benefit of their fellow believers, seeking their spiritual growth and welfare above all else (Rom.14:19-21). For adherents of the religion of the beast, however, "the ultimate service" will not be edification but destruction, namely, the betrayal of all who refuse to accept antichrist in preference for the true Christ.

2. The False Prophet

(11) And I saw another beast (i.e., the false prophet: cf. Rev.16:13; 19:20; 20:10) rising up from the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. (12) And he [will] act with all the authority of the first beast [while] in his presence, and he [will] make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. (13) And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. (14) And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even

commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. (15) And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:11-15

The fact that this second beast will rise up "from the earth" shows that he will be completely human (as opposed to antichrist's satanic parentage). Antichrist, the first beast, received his power and authority from the devil (Rev.13:2; 19:20), and here we see the second beast receiving his power and authority from antichrist as a clear subordinate of the first beast. In this respect we see another deliberate (though false) parallel between the high priest and the head of state in the original Jewish monarchy. As believers in the only true God, we understand very well that Jesus is both the ultimate King and the ultimate High Priest "in the order of Melchizedek", having offered Himself on the cross as the only sacrifice sufficient to cleanse us from our sins (Ps.110:4; Heb.4:14; 5:5-10; 6:19; 7:1-3; 8:1-2). Antichrist, however, will ignore the true Savior's redemptive work and will instead stress the regal aspects of the Messiah who is destined to institute the worldwide "kingdom of heaven". For those who reject Jesus and His work on the cross (i.e., the true functioning of His priesthood) and choose instead to accept antichrist's claim to be the legitimate ruler of the world, it will seem reasonable that there should be a new high priest to conduct the worship of the first beast and his father (the devil). In possessing "two horns like a lamb" while he speaks "like a dragon" we see the false prophet seeking to establish and support antichrist's claim of Messiahship (hence the horns of the lamb) furthering Satan's plan in the process (i.e., speaking like a dragon).

The false prophet will take the lead in the administering of antichrist's religion, both in terms of its expansion and also in the implementation of the compulsory aspects of it, including the Great Persecution which mandatory conversion will occasion in the case of all who refuse. The administrative and cultic center of this new religion will not be Rome, as many have surmised, but Jerusalem. For it is in Jerusalem that the beast will take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God, and it is in the temple court that the statue of the beast, the "abomination which causes [spiritual] desolation" will be erected (Dan.11:31; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14). Thus the temple and the idol then associated with it will be the new religion's focal point from the middle of the Tribulation onward. And it will be in front of the temple and its idol that the false prophet will perform his miracles, acting with antichrist's authority "in his presence" (Rev.13:12; 13:13). In his implementation of the first beast's false religion, we see the second beast following the pattern of counterfeiting true forms and practices, and, specifically now that the focus of worship has moved to the temple in Jerusalem, of paralleling the Mosaic Law with a series of practices designed to resemble the truth even as they propagate satanic lies:

a. False Pilgrimage: In the law, all males in Israel are commanded to present themselves before the Lord on three occasions every year, i.e., at the Passover, the festival of first fruits, and the

feast of Tabernacles (Ex.23:14-17). We may infer from the testimony given in our context to the effect that the false prophet will "deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast" that many individuals, especially those of any sort of prominence, will be expected to make what amounts to a similar "pilgrimage" to Jerusalem during those 42 months in order to worship at the feet of the beast, paying homage to him and to his idol under the watchful eye of the false prophet (compare the behavior of Nebuchadnezzar vis-à-vis the idol of gold which he had erected on the plain of Dura in Babylon: Dan.3:1-12).

b. False Worship: It is likely that the false prophet will represent himself as the high priest of Israel (though scripture does not give him that title possibly for the very good reason that he is not so in fact), and that much of the ritual carried on in and around Jerusalem at this time, illegitimate though it is, will closely parallel the historical temple rite (i.e., the appointment of divisions of priests, the reconstruction of all the trappings and paraphernalia of the Aaronic priesthood, and the continuation of various rules and regulations; although apparently not sacrifices per se: cf. Dan.9:27). It is the case that this show of historicity will in truth have nothing to do with the original temple worship, or the worship re-instituted by Moses and Elijah, or the millennial temple worship soon to be reestablished by the true Messiah. But to those who have been deceived to the point of accepting antichrist as the Christ, restoration of the temple rite at least in some form or other far from being surprising will indeed be expected of this pseudo-Messiah who has now come to Jerusalem to begin his "millennial reign".

c. False Dietary Regime: Dietary regulations play a significant role in the Mosaic Law for the purpose of "distinguishing between the holy and the profane" (Lev.10:10). That is to say, Israel's separation from the practices of the world in diet were to be representative of their far more important spiritual separation (Rom.4:13). Reversing this relationship, that is, claiming holiness or righteousness on the basis of "keeping the Law" in any of its aspect is, as any reader of the New Testament should know, diametrically opposed to the true purpose of the Law and the true meaning of grace. Yet a key feature of antichrist's religion as administered by his high priest, the false prophet, will be to take traditional legalism a step farther, instituting a system of aggressive vegetarianism that will give its practitioners a feeling of "holiness" and "purity" on the basis of diet (i.e., physical, substituting for spiritual, purity), despite whatever truly sinful behavior in which they may be engaged (1Tim.4:1-5; cf. Col.2:16-23; 2Tim.3:5; Heb.13:9).

d. False Communion: Closely tied to these everyday dietary restraints will be the practice of a false "communion" which will follow closely after the pattern of historical pagan practices (cf. Zech.9:7):

Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.
Isaiah 66:17

The context of this verse (both preceding and following, but see especially Is.66:18-24) shows clearly that while the behavior described is not unprecedented in Israel's past (cf. Is.65:3-5), the disgusting communal meal described above will be the one in vogue during the Tribulation. Therefore the "one with violence", clearly an individual acting as a sort of priest officiating over the proceedings, is best taken to be the false prophet, antichrist's own "high priest" and the one responsible for directing his false religion. The fact that meat will be eaten in this "communion" whereas vegetarianism will be the rule otherwise is not contradictory, for this eating of abominations will represent a "sacrifice" and for that reason necessarily includes behavior not otherwise sought out or condoned.

e. False Piety: The "sanctified" behavior of antichrist's religion will go beyond diet including in particular a general prohibition against normal marriage (1Tim.4:3). Genuine Christianity does indeed forbid sexual conduct outside of marriage (e.g., 1Thes.4:3-8), but never forbids legitimate marriage (1Cor.7:8-9). Here once again, therefore, we see the beast's religion turning the truth on its head. While preaching and encouraging sexual licentiousness (cf. 2Pet.2:17-22), the false prophet will lead the charge to forbid the only valid forum for sexual behavior. We may expect many such instances of making virtue out of sin and vice versa. One particularly well-documented form of counterfeit piety will be the tattooing of the beast's name (or number) on the forehead and/or right hand of his worshipers (see below), wherein we see a clear attempt to mimic legitimate biblical practices past and present (Is.44:5; Rev.3:12; cf. Ex.13:9-16; Is.62:2; 65:15; Rev.2:17), even while violating the express commands of scripture (Lev.19:28; Rev.14:9-11; cf. Rev.16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

f. False Millennial Program: During the Great Tribulation, antichrist will represent himself as the Messiah. Therefore it should not be surprising that his religion will attempt to counterfeit and play off of the prophecies regarding Christ's true Millennial Kingdom. One of the key thematic characteristics of the genuine Millennium will be justice, divinely defined and directly administered by the Lord worldwide for the first time in human history since the garden (cf. Ps.2; 9; 24; 45-48; 50; 68; 72; Is.11; 24-27; 32; 34-35; 49-52; 62-66). Instead of true justice stemming from divine administration of the world (an under-appreciated blessing that is worth far more than many material blessings with which the Millennium will be replete), the beast's religion will offer unprecedented "freedom" from innumerable legal and societal restraints (Dan.7:25; 2Pet.2:17-22; cf. Is.24:5), but this "freedom" will in fact help to produce the most outrageous violations of the most basic human rights as well as of the most important freedom we as a species possess, namely, the right to choose for Jesus Christ and to follow and serve Him in this life without persecution. From the believer's perspective, the beast's false millennium is best understood by its divinely assigned name, "The Great Tribulation". Instead of a time of justice and safety, these final forty-two months will be a time of trampling down of all that is just and right and decent in the name of "freedom". For whatever good one may find in anti-materialistic, new age, vegetarian, libertarian anti-commercialism, in the context of antichrist's pseudo-millennium all such things will be mere fig leaves employed solely for the purpose of covering a campaign of crime, lawlessness, licentiousness, and the judicial murder of all who find themselves in opposition to the beast for whatever reason, and especially those who have

determined to stay faithful to Jesus Christ regardless of the consequences. One category of "freedom-blessings" scripture does spell out for this period is a general redistribution of wealth by antichrist on behalf of his supporters (Dan.11:24b; 11:39). Presented no doubt as a "jubilee" along Old Testament lines (Lev.25; 27), this action will instead be motivated out of the beast's desire to firm up his own support rather than any desire to help the poor.

g. False Service: Finally, the "righteous works" required of the adherents of antichrist's religion as led by his high priest, the false prophet, will entail first and foremost participation in the satanic attempt at universal conversion to the beast. In addition to all the other depravities required of those who choose to serve the beast, this final "crusade" will involve the active destruction of the free will opportunities of others to choose for Christ, even to the point of betraying those they ought to love the most (Matt.10:36; Lk.21:16).

More persuasive than any of the lies the false prophet will spout will be the exceptional "miracles" he is permitted to perform in the name of the beast and in the power of the devil. Scripture is very clear here and elsewhere that these signs and wonders will be most impressive, "deceiving those who live upon the earth" (Rev.13:14; cf. 2Thes.2:9-10), and even capable of deceiving even the elect, "if that were possible" (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). In the production of these miraculous signs once again we see Satan's familiar pattern of aping the wonders of God in order to appear a god in the eyes of the world (2Cor.11:14). Moreover, the specific false miracles given to the second beast to perform are particularly deceptive in that they so directly parallel demonstrations of genuine divine power. Moses and Elijah, both historically and even more importantly during their recent return to earth to direct the missionary activities of the 144,000, performed similar signs and miracles (Rev.11:5; cf. 1Ki.18:38; 2Ki.1:9-14). Just as Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres, were able to produce counterfeit signs and miracles that nevertheless fell short of what God gave Moses to perform (Ex.7:11; 7:22; cf. 2Tim.3:8-9), and just as the devil was able to manipulate the pre-historic creation and yet fell pitifully short of the power of God, so the false prophet's signs and miracles will in fact be pathetically lacking compared to true divine power. However, we must not underestimate their persuasive effect upon the unbelieving world. As believers contemplating these events before the fact, we need to realize that these signs and wonders will appear to the human eye as indeed being the "real thing", so that only through our understanding of the truth of scripture will we be able to resist being impressed to the point of misguided belief as the rest of the world will be. Believers in Jesus, therefore, must take pains to remember at all times (and especially at that time) that what we know to be so from the Bible is always of much greater import than anything our eyes may happen to see – it is by faith in God's truth that we navigate this world, not by how we may feel or by what we may experience or by what our eyes behold (2Cor.4:18; 5:7; cf. Heb.11:1ff.). However impressive and persuasive the signs and wonders we may see, the true "test" lies in whether or not those who perform them contradict the truth and seek to lead us astray (Deut.13:2-4).

The fact that the world's entire unbelieving population is said to be involved in the construction of the idol, the "abomination which brings [spiritual] desolation" (Rev.13:14), indicates that this statue will be of massive size and probably constructed of extremely valuable materials. Given the close relation between many aspects of this occurrence and Nebuchadnezzar's similar construction of the huge, ninety foot tall golden idol in the plains of Babylon (Dan.3:1ff), we would be justified in assuming that this statue is made of gold as well. We may posit that the false prophet in his role as high priest of the beast's religion will supervise a worldwide campaign of contributions for the construction, for this is most likely what is to be understood from the phrase "commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast" (cf. Ex.35:4 - 36:7). Once the idol is in place, the false prophet will animate it through satanic power (i.e., v.15: "it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak"). This ability to animate a statue so large and impressively appointed will play no small role in the deception of the world, and we may anticipate that many who come to Jerusalem unconvinced will be awed into "belief" by this unprecedented sight (cf. Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to impart a similar sense of awe through ornate and extensive musical accompaniment: Dan.3:5; 3:7; 3:10; 3:15).

It stands to reason that only those in the presence of the image of the beast will be capable of being put to the test as to whether or not they are willing to worship it. Thus Revelation 13:15 indicates that all whose allegiance to antichrist is suspect will be brought to Jerusalem and made to stand before the colossal idol, with those who refuse to give their obeisance in its presence being put immediately to death. The means of execution is not given, but it would certainly continue the parallel with Nebuchadnezzar's statue if the imminent demise for all who refuse was a horrifying death by fire in a furnace akin to that into which Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were thrown upon their similar refusal (cf. Dan.11:33). The terrifying sight of this monstrous, animated colossus, and the prospect of being cast alive into the flames for refusing to worship it, will no doubt prove too much for anyone to bear – except for those who are solidly grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ, and ready to follow Him even unto a fiery death rather than prove unfaithful in this life.

3. The Mark of the Beast

(16) And he (i.e., the false prophet) compelled everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to allow [his clergy] to place a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, (17) so that no one would be able to buy or sell except those with the mark, [consisting of] either the name of the [first] beast or the number of his name.
Revelation 13:16-17

Although the text here is very straightforward, there are all manner of false and misleading theories about the mark in common currency today. As can be seen easily enough from the words above, the mark is a physical one, a visible tattoo placed upon the willing recipient by some official in antichrist's pseudo-Christian religion. Postulating signs and symbols occurring elsewhere (such as in corporate logos), or invisible alterations to DNA, or anything to do with microchips, or any other such speculative nonsense merely advances the beast's cause by making

the actual mark and its process of reception seem less threatening. But just as we cannot afford to be confused about what the mark actually is, neither can any believer afford to forget that taking the mark is tantamount to denying Christ . . . and forfeiting eternal salvation.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

Several other important points about the mark itself need to be considered before proceeding to the discussion of the "number of the beast":

- a. The beast's universal religion results in universal compulsion to receive the mark: Whatever civil rights and benefits of citizenship obtain under antichrist's worldwide state, we are right to expect that these will all be closely tied to membership and participation in his universal religion because it is through this religion that his "majesty" will be worshiped and revered. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that at this juncture the false prophet will administer the placement of a visible sign of obeisance upon all of the beast's followers with the objective of "marking" the entire world. Given the dire consequences the reception of this mark will have, we may posit that, in addition to true believers, there will be an indeterminate number of unbelievers who will avoid it as well. We should not, however, underestimate the short-term negative consequences which resisting this mark will entail.
- b. The placing of the mark is most likely carried out by the clergy of the beast's religion. Since antichrist's religion is a purposefully syncretic mixture of all other religions distinguished mainly by its universal acknowledgment of the beast as God, we do not have to find in this policy of marking its adherents any fundamental reconstruction or reorganization of its parts. More than likely, the same priests, pastors, imams, etc. of all religions and cults previously co-opted into antichrist's universal religion will be at the forefront of the process of marking all of the world's "believers" in antichrist, and that this process will be essentially religious rather than civil in nature (though it will have definite civil consequences).
- c. The pressure to receive the mark: The mark will accomplish a melding together of church and state such as the world has not seen since the tower of Babel. For while the taking of the mark will have a putative religious purpose and be imprinted in a religious setting, its consequences for every other sphere of life can hardly be underestimated. In addition to the economic hardships of a posture of refusal spelled out in Revelation 13:16-17 (i.e., essentially banning the unmarked from commerce of any sort), we may expect all such persons to become what amounts to "unpersons", bereft of any rights, legal recourse, or any consideration of any kind whatsoever under the beast's system of governance. The beast's focus upon economic activity as related in

verse seventeen is entirely understandable since that is obviously the most effective stimulus to the progress of this universal conscription of humanity into the official ranks of evil. For while legal matters, voting, various registrations and the like might all be of use in the process of coercing the world to enroll, "buying and selling" are weekly if not daily activities in which all but those engaged in the most independent of agricultural operations must necessarily engage.

As one of the most important functional and practical spheres of daily life, therefore, commerce, and specifically the exclusion of the unmarked from commerce, will be an ideal vehicle for the universal enrollment of mankind into antichrist's religion. In addition to the necessities of life, commerce is also the entrepot into all of the key aspects of the devil's worldwide system of lust generally:

1. Money: If currency, cash, gold, money and fungible assets of every sort were "important" in the eyes of the world in the past, during the Tribulation, a time of such intense insecurity, we can expect the twin desires for financial security and opportunity based upon a large store of liquid assets to be more intense than ever. Clearly, under the new mandate of the mark, everyone needing or desiring financial assets will feel the pressure to be marked all the more intensely according to the degree of their wants, desires, lusts, and needs for them. For without the mark, not only will they be unable to acquire monetary assets, but they will also be largely unable to make use of what they have previously accumulated.

2. Possessions: A large part of the beast's system will entail the redistribution of wealth, real estate in particular. We can well imagine that gaining new lands and holdings will be virtually impossible for those who lack the mark, and that without it retaining what substantial possessions one may have will also be difficult in the short run and essentially impossible in the long run. Most large, hard assets, moreover, require various types and degrees of maintenance, a process that also requires engaging in commerce on some level (paying taxes and insurance bills, for example). Therefore it will be very difficult for those who are rich in any sense in which this world defines it to maintain that wealth and those possessions during this period without receiving the mark.

3. Pleasure: Whether large or small, illicit or legitimate, the gratification of non-essential pleasures makes up a large part of the current world economy. Inevitably, in order to gratify most pleasures one must engage in commercial activity. Therefore even those who might for other reasons be willing and able to resist the process of marking – and be stubborn and bold enough to do so – will be sorely tested on this count, for they will find themselves largely shut out of this particular aspect of the devil's world system if they do.

4. Fame: Glory, celebrity, reputation, fame of every sort, large and small, is an important area of lust in Satan's world system. For those whose self-image and ultimate desires are bound up in this area, the prospect of becoming an "unperson" and being shut out of all commercial activity and the essential things that often attend that activity will be difficult even to contemplate. However defined or derived, antichrist will have a virtual monopoly on "fame"

during the Great Tribulation, so that failure to take the mark will necessarily turn any good reputation to "infamy", a hard road to take for any one who does not value God's opinion over the opinions of mankind.

5. Power: The ultimate lust in the devil's world system is that of power (on whatever level), the myth of having some sort of control over others by virtue of position or other means. Generally this also has a base in commercial activity on some level (if only indirectly). But in any case, it is virtually certain that, during the Great Tribulation, the powerful will owe continuation in their positions of power to antichrist, making it a near certainty that they will be among the first to receive the mark.

Since everything that human beings lust after and desire apart from God will be put at risk by refusing to accept the mark of the beast, it is a mistaken notion to assume that the taking of the mark will be something easily avoidable by merely refraining from direct "legal" commercial transactions. The end result will thus be that many who would rather not take the mark, even if they would be otherwise willing to go underground or seek to skirt the system not out of any love for God but just on general principles (i.e., the taking on to one's body of a large tattoo not even of one's choosing is bound to rub many people the wrong way, not only Christians), will ultimately do so. For, otherwise, they will find themselves entirely deprived of or at least seriously hindered from seeking and enjoying the things that, for a large part of the secular world, "make life worth living".

For those who know their God, the loss of the things of this world, culminating for many in the loss of their very lives, will constitute a true blessing, the privilege of persecution and martyrdom for the Lord who died for us (though the world will not realize it as such). But for those who do not believe, the down side of refusing to take the mark will be so horrific without any apparent appreciable benefit that only the most irascibly independent are likely to try. One thing is certain: anyone at this point who "has anything" as defined by the five areas delimited above will certainly think twice before refusing the mark and losing everything, even though accepting it is a guarantee of divine judgment (Rev.14:9-11; cf. Rev.16:2; 19:20; 20:4). For during the Great Tribulation, at the center of the spider's web of these five main cross-fertilizing and intersecting lusts of Satan's world system will be the beast himself and his religion, Satanism, the worship of the devil in preference to the worship of God. And this is the devil's strategy and objective: to present to God a world inhabited only by those who of their own "free will" have taken upon themselves the mark as a proof of their choice of Satan over God.

d. The mark will take the form of a permanent, visible tattoo: The Greek word used here for the "mark" is *charagma* (χάραγμα), meaning something that has been permanently marked, generally through inscription or carving or other permanent imprinting (cf. our derived word "character"). The context and its logic certainly suggest the same, for there would be little purpose to antichrist's requiring an easily removable mark. The whole point is to make the world choose for him in a visible and irremediable way, and requiring a permanent, highly visible tattoo certainly accomplishes this purpose. But the beast's "sealing" of his faithful is so dramatically at odds with

our Lord's sealing of us that it bears comment. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit, an act of God on our behalf with positive and invisible spiritual consequences for good in every way (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), while those who choose for antichrist and for Satan are physically sealed for short-term material benefit without any positive spiritual consequences whatsoever. Indeed, receiving the mark is guarantee of condemnation (Rev.14:9-11; cf. 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

e. The significance of the two places for the mark: Why two places for the mark? The answer most likely has to do with a hierarchy of marking, that is, we may assume that the mark received on the forehead will be considered "better" than merely marking the hand. While it is possible that this distinction will be one of choice with each person deciding where to receive it, the more likely scenario is that only the elite will be "allowed" to receive a mark on the forehead, and this will constitute a badge of honor showing that those who have it are not merely responding to universal coercion but are instead enthusiastic communicants of antichrist's religion. The danger in this two-track system for those under pressure to receive the mark is that they may make the mistake of assuming (in the face of divine warning to the contrary) that only the mark on the forehead is spiritually dangerous (i.e., since the mark on the hand will represent more of an attitude of acquiescence than of enthusiasm). But in fact receiving the mark in either place will be a cause for "drinking of the wrath of God" (Rev.14:9-11).

f. The significance of the two variations of the mark: An additional "choice" is afforded those who respond to the false prophet's demand that the whole world be marked for antichrist, namely of receiving the "number of his name" in place of the name itself. The fact that the number comes second in the sequence in verse seventeen (just as the forehead marking comes second) suggests that this is the "better" choice signifying a deeper commitment to the beast. The fact that verse eighteen is taken up with explaining the significance of the number of the beast confirms this analysis. Inasmuch as the name or the number can be placed on either the forehead or the hand, we see in this system a hierarchy of four levels of dedication to antichrist as follows:

Highest: Number on the forehead

Second Highest: Name on the forehead

Third Highest: Number on the hand

Lowest: Name on the hand

As noted above, scripture is quite clear that in God's eyes there will be no distinction between the highest and lowest in this hierarchy, for by taking the mark in any of its four manifestations the individual in question is willfully throwing his lot in with antichrist and his father the devil, and so by definition and of necessity has in the process deliberately turned his back on God the Father and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. One further monitory note here. Since in every way possible

he attempts to counterfeit the true Messiah, it is very possible that the beast's "name" will in some way mimic one of Jesus' names or titles. We cannot know the precise "name" before the fact, but it is worth noting that several divine names come very close to the requisite "six hundred and sixty six" when computed via the Greek numbering system wherein letters of the alphabet represent numerals (n.b., the system of Arabic numerals which we use today is a much later development). For example, Messiah in Greek, *Messias* (Μεσσίας), is short by only one letter, an iota, of 666 (a deficit easily made up by any number of initials that would equal ten in the Greek system). If this word or any number of other legitimate divine titles variously calculated should turn out to be antichrist's name, there is at least the danger that some believers under coercion may rationalize the taking of the mark as really being a name of the Lord, since it may well be, at least in some form. But scripture is adamant about the fact that the mark, however innocuous it may seem and whatever alternative meaning it may be made to bear, will constitute an act of ultimate unfaithfulness so extreme that any and all who may have been believers before the fact will by that act become believers no more – taking of the mark by any brother or sister will put faith to death (Rev.14:9-11; cf. 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

4. The Number of the Beast

Here is wisdom: let everyone who is alert [at that time] calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man[’s name]. And his (i.e., the beast’s) number is six hundred and sixty six (i.e., 666 "ways").

Revelation 13:18

Since in the verse just prior (Rev.13:17) we are told specifically that the alternative form of the mark is "the number of his (i.e., the beast's) name", said number here must be the numerical equivalent of antichrist's name referenced in that previous verse. That is to say, "six hundred and sixty six" is the number which both constitutes a numerical value for the beast's name and which also functions as the alternative (and superior) form of the mark.

Before considering the number of the beast per se, we need to say a few words about his "name" as it will occur in the other versions of the mark along with its numerical value. The "wisdom" given here is not in any way mysterious. If at that future time one is paying any attention to what scripture says about this issue, the formula provided will easily dispel all doubt about what the true "mark of the beast" is, so that believers will have no trouble whatsoever identifying it (and no excuse for failing to avoid it). As part of the New Testament, this book of the Bible is written in Greek, and for that reason it is the Greek system of numerals which must be employed to calculate the "name" for its numerical value, certainly not Arabic numerals (whose use in the west was not even widespread until the 15th century). In the Greek system, each letter of the alphabet (and some symbols as well) has a numerical value, with alpha, the first letter equaling one, and omega, the last letter equaling eight hundred. For example, the Greek transliteration mentioned above for the Hebrew word Messiah (meaning, "anointed one"), is as follows:

Μεσσίας: M = 40 + ε = 5 + σ = 200 + σ = 200 + ί = 10 + α = 1 + ζ = 200 > = 656

By adding "*tha*" the Aramaic imperative meaning "come!" (cf. *Marana tha!*, "O our Lord, come!"), we create a phrase equaling the requisite number of six hundred and sixty six (because the letters theta and alpha equal nine and one respectively so that *tha*, $\theta\alpha$, = +10). Before the reader gets too excited about all this, let me point out what should be readily obvious, namely that in such a system the number of possibilities for constructing names that add up to 666 is incalculably large (if not literally infinite). For this reason, the information given us in Revelation 13:18 cannot possibly be used to figure out antichrist's name *before* the fact. Even if a person were fortunate enough to hit upon the precise sequence of letters for his actual name, there would be absolutely no way to determine before his revelation that said sequence was the uniquely correct one. What we are given in Revelation 13:18 is thus not a key to figuring out the identity of antichrist before the fact. On the contrary, it is an analytical tool or "litmus test" for evaluating the putative name of the beast to see if the person in question is indeed antichrist *after* we have a name to work from. With a simple transliteration of any name into the Greek system, we can with relative ease examine any name and discover fairly easily whether it might have the numerical value of 666. This was a fairly common sort of cipher in antiquity (often called a "gematria"), and one finds, for example, graffiti recovered from Pompeii where the names of lovers were concealed in this manner, as well as riddles on funeral monuments in the Greek speaking areas of the Mediterranean which substitute a sum of letters for the name of the deceased and invite the onlooker to solve the puzzle. Without clues, such riddles are impossible to solve, since, as mentioned above, the number of names that can be made to fit into any large sum is, for all practical purposes, endless. The relatively small number "10", for instance, could be represented by a lone iota, an alpha plus a theta, or a beta plus an eta, etc., etc. And the possibilities grow geometrically the larger the numbers become.

One should also note that once the universal marking begins, decoding the precise mark of the beast as it occurs at that time will be a fairly simple matter despite issues of transliteration. Before the precise form of his name as it is to be used for the mark comes to light, however, this test is unlikely to be the best litmus test for uncovering antichrist. For example, will the mark contain only his last name? Will it include his first name or merely his initials, and which ones? More to the point, will antichrist change his name in some way at the point when he takes his seat in the temple of God in Jerusalem and proclaims himself to be God? The point is that until the exact form of the name as it occurs in this alternative version of the mark becomes generally known, there is little point in making the calculation recommended here. And Bible believing Christians should take careful note that scripture only gives us this information at the point when the actual marking begins, indicating very clearly that any attempt to identify antichrist in this way before the process of universal marking is pointless. In any case, by the middle of the Tribulation it is difficult to comprehend how any genuine believer in Jesus Christ who has the least bit of spiritual discernment could not know that the dictator who has come to control the world and has invaded God's very temple is antichrist. The real danger here is that believers in the early days of the Tribulation will fail to recognize the beast because his name as it occurs at that time may not seem to fit the formula given in verse eighteen.

As to the significance of 666, the first thing to emphasize here is that we do not necessarily have to do with three consecutive numeral "sixes", that is, some precise variant of 6-6-6. In our system of Arabic numerals, a system that does not greatly antedate the printing press here in the west, it is true that there is no distinction between the number six hundred and sixty six and its representation by three consecutive sixes: 666. In the Greek system, however, this is not at all the case. In Greek, the language of Revelation and therefore the basis for the system that must be employed to understand this issue correctly, six hundred and sixty six would be represented by two letters and a symbol, namely, chi, xi, and stigma. What this means for our purposes here is that much popular theorizing that makes the "sign of the beast" a series of three sixes may be entirely wrong. And while it is certainly possible that three Arabic numeral sixes will indeed constitute the essential mark that stands for the name of antichrist, there is no convincing reason why this should be so. Just as the Arabic numeral representation 666 would appear different in the Greek system (i.e., as χξς), so it is also fair to point out that the contemporaneous Roman system (i.e., "Roman numerals" wherein 666 = DCLXVI) and Hebrew system (an alphabetic system similar to Greek wherein 666 = וסרט) certainly have as much claim to be considered as the much later, non-contemporaneous western version of the Arabic system. Moreover there is no way that we can say before the fact that antichrist might not adopt, say, a base two system (stressing technology), or a base twelve system (stressing Babylonian mysticism), or any other system of mathematical, geometrical, or mystical symbolism to represent the integer 666, perhaps even one of his own devising not yet extant. The point is that discerning Christians cannot afford to assume that any mark that does not have three Arabic numeral sixes (i.e., 666) could not possibly be "the mark of the beast".

The significance of the number itself has also long been a matter of as much speculation as its appearance. Like "pi", a repeating system of sixes may have some significance for the mythology that antichrist creates around himself and his system of devil worship. As Christians, we would rather choose to note that whether 666 is seen as single integer, a series of sixes, or a repeating decimal, at all points it falls short of perfection by "one" (i.e., of the perfect number seven), namely, through rejection of the "One" who is the way, the truth and the life, our true Savior Jesus Christ. One thing that is generally not appreciated in such discussions is that, unlike English, Greek numerals are at times declinable, and such is the case in this instance. Specifically, "six hundred and sixty six" in this instance at Revelation 13:18 is feminine, so that what the text here is really saying is "six hundred and sixty six" feminine somethings, and it is left to the reader to fill in the blank from the context as to what those "somethings" are. This is a not unfamiliar situation in Greek where one often understands the occurrence or repetition of a particular noun which can be easily guessed (by context and usage) from the information contained in the ending of an adjective (in contrast to English where adjectives are unchangeable). Of course there is no feminine noun in this context, a situation which no doubt explains why various other versions switched the ending to masculine, neuter, or eliminated the problem entirely by using symbolic notation (i.e., the Greek equivalent of 666 mentioned above: χξς). But in fact the case of a feminine adjective with no noun expressed is far from unprecedented in Greek, there being a generally understood short list of common nouns to be supplied in such circumstances. By far the most common noun to supply in such situations is the

Greek word for "road" or "way", *hodos* (ὁδός; cf. "odometer" = "road-measurer"), and that is indeed the noun to be supplied here. Since 666 represents an infinitely repeating cipher, the "six hundred and sixty six *ways*" may be understood as the all inclusive and virtually infinite number of "paths to salvation" in the beast's religious system. Provided only that one worship antichrist and his father the devil as god, all other religious, traditional, or cultic practices will be pronounced acceptable and deemed effective in "saving" the individual worshiper. But in fact, this cipher leaves out the "one" that would end its pointless repetition and instead produce completion and fulfillment, the "One" who is truly the one and only true "Way" to salvation, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14; 24:22; 2Pet.2:2;):

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

E. The Great Persecution: Revelation 14:1-20

1. Introduction: The Great Persecution is what makes the Tribulation's second half "Great". This "distress" and "tribulation" which characterize the final seven years of human history before Christ's return are seen in scripture first and foremost from the standpoint of believers (cf. Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21; 24:29; Mk.13:19; 13:24). It is true that many of the events of that terrible time to come will weigh heavily on the people of God, but believers will be protected to a large extent from much of the worst of it (viz. the judgments of God which are directed toward the reprobate). The Great Persecution is the preminent exception, for it will be a period of the greatest testing wherein because of widespread martyrdom believers in unprecedented numbers will have to put into practice what we should all understand in principle, namely that our true security consists in our eternal relationship with Jesus Christ rather than in clinging to this temporary physical life (Matt.16:25; Mk.8:35; Lk.17:33; Jn.12:25; Rev.12:11).

The uniting of the globe under the banner of antichrist and the one-world "peace" which results will be the worst thing that has yet happened in human history by virtue of its elimination of any countervailing power to check the machinations of the beast and of his father the devil. This will be particularly true for believers in regard to the Great Persecution, an event which will begin not long after antichrist's consolidation of power. For with the world united in evil, there will be no place to hide, no place to run. Those who in the will of God are destined for martyrdom will be martyred, while those who are destined to survive must endure persecution until the return of our Lord (Rev.13:10; cf. Jer.43:11).

The Great Persecution will begin not long after the beginning of the Tribulation's second half, the Great Tribulation. Following his total defeat of the southern alliance, antichrist will quickly turn his attention to the establishment of his capital in Jerusalem. The beast will be the target of an assassination attempt at this time, and his remarkable recovery coupled with his victory will do much to swing the great majority of the world's population in his favor. Using this attempt on his life as a pretext, antichrist will make war on Moses and Elijah, killing them and then occupying the temple of God, even proclaiming himself to be God, erecting the "abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation" in the temple court. Those in Israel who have responded to the ministry of

the two witnesses and the 144,000 will flee to the wilderness at this time, evading through divine intervention the beast's attempts to catch and destroy them. His frustration in this attempt will result in the commencement of the Great Persecution, a reign of terror directed against all true believers in Jesus Christ, the implementation of which will be part and parcel of the establishment of antichrist's worldwide system of religion:

And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:17

This scapegoating of believers in the matter of the assassination attempt will have the dual effect of provoking a violent reaction both in Israel and worldwide against all believers on the one hand, and on the other hand will also contribute to an environment of great suspicion wherein unbelievers will be eager to show by their acceptance of the mark that they are without blame in the matter, and even more eager and willing to "smoke out the traitors" by way of this litmus test. Thus will the stage be set from the very early days of antichrist's worldwide reign for the event that more than any other defines and characterizes the coming Tribulation, namely, the Great Persecution.

2. Key Passages:

(9) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened *the fifth seal*, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. (10) And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?" (11) And a white robe was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course].

Revelation 6:9-11

Comment: Only two seals, the fifth and sixth, deal with the trends of the last three and a half years of the Tribulation (the seventh serving to "open the book" and begin the seven year period itself), with the sixth seal referring to Armageddon and related events. Therefore the fact that this fifth seal serves as the sole agent of characterization for the bulk of the Tribulation's second half demonstrates that the Great Persecution is the decisive event of that period.

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. (10) And they were shouting in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God, the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (11) And all the angels had taken their stand around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, (12) saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and

wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!" (13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".

Revelation 7:9-17

Comment: There are so many who have been martyred that they can not be counted, showing clearly the scope of the Great Persecution. Moreover, the fact that these martyrs come "from every nation and tribe and people and tongue" demonstrates the worldwide nature of the persecution. Finally, this passage definitely fixes the time of the Great Persecution, for as the angel says in verse fourteen, these martyrs are "about to come forth from the Great Tribulation", that is, the second half of the seven year period.

(7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now our God's deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!"

Revelation 12:7-12

Comment: In verse eleven the martyrs are described as virtually synonymous with all believers alive at this time, indicating the breadth of the Great Persecution. The casting down of Satan at the midpoint of the Tribulation (verse nine) and the proclamation that his remaining time is short (verse twelve) further serves to fix the time of the Great Persecution as the final three and a half years. Finally, in this synopsis of the Great Tribulation, we see that from the standpoint of believers the Great Persecution is the event which dominates this period.

And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:17

Comment: Just as the dragon, Satan, attempted to use his newfound mastery of the world's political systems united under his son, the beast, for the destruction of Jewish believers in Israel, so now, at the Tribulation's midpoint, he will turn his attention to the destruction of "the rest of her seed", namely, gentile and Jewish believers worldwide. This passage likewise fixes the time of the Great Persecution (i.e., it follows the escape of believing Jews from Israel immediately after the beast's victory and shift of headquarters to Jerusalem), demonstrates the universal sweep of the persecution (i.e., the target is all the rest of "her seed", that is, all other believers not removed to the special place of protection), and characterizes its horrible nature (i.e., it will be a "war" whose object is the annihilation of the faithful).

"If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones."

Revelation 13:10

Comment: This caveat from our Lord removes all doubt about either the intensity of the Great Persecution to come or the possibility of avoiding it. Only two outcomes are contemplated, death or prison cell. While other outcomes are not necessarily ruled out, this passage suggests that they will be the exception rather than the rule, and thus encourages us to steel ourselves to these grim realities before the fact.

And it was given to him (i.e., the false prophet) to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:15

Comment: Here we see that the Great Persecution is central to the institution of the beast's worldwide religion, for it will be by means of the litmus test of willingness to worship antichrist that true believers will be winnowed out. This passage also makes it clear that the number of those martyred will be significant, for refusal to worship, once a believer has been "processed" to that point, will apparently result in a sentence of death in every case.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

Comment: This verse, coming immediately after the most stringent of warnings to refrain from the beast's religion in any form (i.e., the third angel's proclamation of Revelation 14:9-12), encourages believers to face martyrdom with confidence and a sense of peace, since the end will be rest and reward. The need for such comfort is a sure indication that the Great Persecution will be a horrendous experience which is near universal in its scope and impossible to survive apart from a close walk with the Lord.

(14) And, behold, a white cloud. And sitting on the white cloud was what looked like a man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) And another angel came out of His temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, "Send [forth] your sickle and reap, because the hour of the harvest has come, and the harvest [crop] is ripe" (lit., "dry"). (16) And the one sitting on the cloud set his sickle to the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Revelation 14:14-16

Comment: The reaper represents Jesus Christ, and the believers martyred during the Great Persecution are the harvest. This passage shows that, far from being an accident, the Great Persecution is an integral part of the plan of God designed for the glory of God, reflected in the faithfulness of His witnesses, and the ultimate good of the martyred, who, like a ripe crop, are removed at precisely the right time, being spared the time of final judgments of the Great Tribulation while yet receiving all the rewards that accrue to those genuinely martyred for Jesus Christ. The dramatic and worldwide nature of the Great Persecution is also evident from the above.

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb, saying . . .

Revelation 15:2-3a

Comment: While this passage is often taken to represent the victorious martyrs who have come out of the Great Tribulation, the fact that they are seen here actually *standing on* the glass sea, the "viewing port", so to speak, whereby earthly events are visible from heaven, gives us instead a picture of faithful believers enduring the Great Persecution while still on earth. The glass sea is described as being "mixed with fire", a clear and hardly subtle symbol of the intensity of the trial that the believers of that time will experience (1Pet.1:7; 4:12; cf. Dan.11:33; Heb.11:34). This continued endurance of the faithful, those "who were [in the process of] winning the victory", demonstrates that they are still in the midst of the fiery trial. The implication is that no one who maintains faith in Jesus Christ at that time will be exempt from the fire or the fight (nor, blessedly, from the exaltation of victorious struggle on behalf of the Lord who bought us).

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax")

because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4

Comment: We know from a number of important and specific New Testament passages (1Cor.15:50-55 and 1Thes.4:13-17 in particular) that a significant number of believers do survive the Great Persecution and are resurrected while yet alive at Christ's return. The fact that this verse equates refusal to worship the beast with execution demonstrates unequivocally the widespread (though not total) martyrdom of the Church and the intensity of the Great Persecution.

(21) I was watching, and this horn (i.e., antichrist) was waging war with the holy ones (i.e., believers). And he was prevailing over them (i.e., "conquering them"), (22) until the Ancient of Days came (i.e., our Lord's second advent) and rendered judgment on behalf of the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came when the holy ones took possession of the Kingdom.

Daniel 7:21-22

Comment: As in Revelation 12:17, the Great Persecution is here described as a "war", with antichrist continuing to "conquer" (i.e., execute) believers until our Lord's return. The implication is that no believers will be "neutral", that is, immune from the effects of the Great Persecution. Further, the casualties (i.e., martyrs) will likely be horrific since the beast will continue to "prevail" until the second advent.

And he (antichrist) will speak words against the Most High, and he will persecute the saints of the Most High God. And he will plot to change times and law. And they (i.e., believers, "the saints") will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (i.e., for the duration of the Great Tribulation).

Daniel 7:25

Comment: This passage also fixes the period of time during which antichrist will persecute (lit., "wear down", "consume") believers as lasting throughout the entire Great Tribulation (the "time and times and half a time", or three and a half years). The Great Persecution is here also connected directly to the implementation of the beast's religion and his not unconnected radical social "reforms", the net effect of which places all believers "into his hand" (i.e., subject to persecution) until our Lord returns.

(10) And [the little horn] magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot. (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice,

the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. (13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the rebellion which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified." Daniel 8:10-14

Comment: This passage and its broader context (cf. Dan.8:23-25) deal primarily with the Tribulation's first half when seduction will be the primary means of leading believers away from Jesus Christ. But also clearly foreshadowed in the verses above is the near future time when seduction gives way to compulsion (i.e., in verse 12 "the host fell into his power", and in verse 13 "the trampling down of the host") which is only terminated by our Lord's second advent.

(32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) And even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time. Daniel 11:32-35

Comment: These verses are some of the most explicit in detailing the harrowing time that those who continue to "hold fast" to Jesus Christ will have. Set in the context of antichrist's establishment of the abomination (v.31), and indicating that the ordeal will continue "until the final end", this passage likewise establishes the time period for the Great Persecution as essentially extending over the entire final 42 months of the Great Tribulation, and likewise apportions the suffering, "sword, and flame, and captivity, and plunder", to everyone subject to it.

(8) But all these things (of vs. 3-7) are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation). (9) Then (i.e., the beginning of the Great Tribulation) men will betray you [bringing you] into tribulation (i.e., the Great Persecution), and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all of the nations on account of My Name. Matthew 24:8-9 (cf. Matt.10:16-33; Mk.13:9-13; Lk.21:12-24)

Comment: Our Lord's words here anchor the previous prophecies of Daniel and later prophecies of Revelation, and demonstrate with certainty the reality of a coming persecution during the second, final phase of the Tribulation of such unprecedented scope and intensity that it can only be described as "great".

The above are only the major passages which directly describe the Great Persecution in some detail, but they are sufficient to show that this widely underappreciated teaching is both heavily stressed in scripture and of absolute importance to us all "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Cor.10:11). Nor are these the only passages where one finds reference to the Great Persecution (cf. also Is.24:16; Jer.31:2; Mic.7:1-7; Jn.16:1-4; 2Thes.1:6-10; cf. Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; 31:2). For example, the attribution of the divine wrath that will come upon the earth at the end of the Tribulation is consistently characterized by scripture as a direct divine response to the "blood of the saints", that is, divine judgment descending upon antichrist, his kingdom, and his minions as a direct result of the Great Persecution (e.g., Is.26:20-21; 2Pet.3:10b; Rev.16:5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). In conclusion, it may also be mentioned that there have always been persecutions of believers in every age of world history, so that the many biblical passages which deal with this subject in general will be, if anything, even more important and applicable during the quintessential persecution to come, the Great Persecution (cf. Jer.45:1-4; Mic.7:1-7; Matt.13:21; Jn.15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1Thes.1:6-10; 3:3; 2Tim.3:12; Heb.11:32-40; 1Pet.4:12-19).(46)

3. The Precedence of the 144,000: Immediately following the description of the false prophet, of his administration of the Great Persecution, and of the mark and number of the beast in Revelation chapter thirteen, chapter fourteen turns directly to the 144,000. The appearance of these unique Jewish witnesses at this point, following the inception of the Great Persecution in the chronological sequence (yet preceding the angelic blessing upon those about to be martyred and the symbolic description of the general course of the Great Persecution in Revelation 14:14-16), is highly significant. This juxtaposition of passages definitively establishes the martyrdom of the 144,000 as the inaugural event of the Great Persecution. Scripture describes them here as being "purchased *first* from among men for God [the Father] and for the Lamb" (Rev.14:4), an explicit representation of these witnesses as having been delivered from the crucible of tribulation through martyrdom.

We should not let it go unnoticed here that this precedence of the 144,000 in martyrdom is an exceptional honor which in turn teaches us how we should view the prospect of our own potential martyrdom during that most difficult of times to come. Instead of seeing the possibility of literally giving up our lives for Jesus Christ as a terrible tragedy to be endured, we need to learn to see it for what it truly is, namely, a deliverance which is both a great honor and a great blessing, honoring the One we love, while guaranteeing great reward for us through all eternity. This does not mean that we seek martyrdom (the choice is God's, not ours), nor that the experience is likely to be easy or painless, only that if so wills the will of God we need to be ready to accept the eventuality of martyrdom not with sullen resignation but with confidence, faith, and joy that God is accomplishing His will for our lives in a special way that brings special honor to our dear Savior and ultimate benefit to us (if only we comport ourselves honorably in the process – and this we shall do, God helping us).

Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.(47)
Revelation 2:10b

4. The Number of the Martyred:

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands.

Revelation 7:9

As we have already seen, many of the passages dealing with the Great Persecution present the possibility of martyrdom for those who would remain faithful to Jesus Christ as a near certainty. This passage which describes them as "a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue" removes all doubt about the magnitude of their number, while at the same time emphasizing the worldwide nature of the Great Persecution. The actual number is withheld in Revelation 7:9, a significant fact in and of itself inasmuch as the Book of Revelation does often provide specific numbers, even when they are extremely large (e.g., Rev.9:16). Nor are we given a ratio, another form of specification found on more than one occasion in the book (e.g., Rev.8:7-12). Yet we know, even given the unprecedented magnitude of the number of these martyrs, that even so there will apparently be a sizeable host of believers still alive when our Lord returns at the end of the Great Tribulation (1Cor.15:50-54; cf. Matt.24:36-51; 25:1-13; 1Cor.15:23; 1Thes.5:1-11; 2Thes.1:3-12):

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17 (cf. 1Cor.15:51-52).

It is worth noting in this regard therefore that the fact that those martyred will be an innumerable multitude does not necessarily mean that they will constitute the majority of those still faithful to Jesus Christ when the Great Persecution begins (although that may be the case). Based upon the passages covered above all we can say of a certainty is that virtually all believers will be subject to persecution during that time, and that an extremely large number will be martyred while a sizeable number will be spared in order to be resurrected while still alive at our Lord's return. It is therefore probably best to estimate the ratio at approximately "50/50". This proportion of the martyred to those who survive until the coming of the Lord is supported indirectly by the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. In that parable the light of the lamp represents faith so that the five virgins whose lamps are extinguished before the bridegroom arrives stand for those who fall away in the Great Apostasy. Thus the five wise virgins whose lamps continue to shine represent those who maintain their faith until the end of the Tribulation (in contrast with those who fall away). Since we do know that those who fall away constitute one third of the Church (see part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy"), and since in this parable they are complemented by an equal number of believers who survive until the second advent, the only way that the one third proportion can thus be preserved is by positing an equal number who neither fall away nor

abide until the end, namely, the martyrs who will quite possibly be commensurate in number with both of the two groups described in the parable.

5. General Persecution and Imprisonment: The refusal of believers to accept the mark of the beast will, from the very start, bring upon them general persecution including but not limited to social ostracism and economic hardship (Matt.10:17-20; 24:9; Mk.13:9; Lk.21:12-15; Jn.15:20-21; 16:2). As the Great Persecution gathers momentum, moreover, we may expect the faithful to come under ever greater pressures and more intense forms of persecution, not the least of which will be imprisonment (and possibly torture) as a transitional stage preceding eventual martyrdom.

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plunder (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time.
Daniel 11:33

In fact so many passages of scripture allude to the widespread incarceration of believers during the Great Persecution either directly or by application that it seems the most prudent course on the basis of Revelation 13:10 for us to assume our imprisonment as a matter of course, even if it should be God's will for some believers to be spared this particular ordeal (Is.14:16-17; 42:7; 49:9; 51:14; 61:1; Dan.11:33; Hab.1:9; Zech.9:11-12; Matt.10:17-20; Mk.13:9; Lk.4:18-19; cf. Ps.79:11; 102:13-20; Is.14:2; Matt.14:3; 18:30; 25:36-44; Acts 5:19; 8:3; 12:4; 16:23; Heb.10:34; 13:3).

But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the disruptions of the Tribulation's first half), they will lay hands upon them (i.e., believers during the Great Persecution), betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name.
Luke 21:12

Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days.
Revelation 2:10a

6. Betrayal: Notwithstanding the difficulties for believers in sustaining life, and the dangers involved in collective worship that will attend the Great Persecution, it is still questionable whether such a large number as prophesied would or could ever be rounded up for imprisonment and execution without an efficient method for actively hunting them down. But the Bible leaves us in no doubt about the fact that many of the "candidates" for persecution will be secured in a most disheartening way, namely, by betrayal, often by those most near and dear to them (see also Dan.11:34; Mic.7:5-7; Mk.13:9-13; Lk.21:12; cf. Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; Matt.24:23-26).

(16) And you will be betrayed even by parents and siblings and friends. And they will put some of you to death, (17) and you will be hated by everyone because of my Name.

Luke 21:16-17

(10) And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:10-13

(34) Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword [of divisiveness]. (35) For I have come to divide, [so that] "a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; (36) [with the result that] a man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (cf. Micah 7:6). (37) Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 10:34-39

In these passages we can also see the close connection between the Great Persecution and the Great Apostasy, as the pressures of persecution serve to intensify the trend of abandoning Christ. For those believers determined to stay loyal to Jesus no matter what, the example of Daniel comes to mind: he was thrown into the lions' den precisely because he refused to alter his behavior of prayerful worship to God in spite of the fact that his enemies in the Persian government had managed to make it illegal (Dan.6:1 ff.). Confronted with the suspicious eyes of nearly all of our prior acquaintances who are now hostile towards us no matter how close the prior relationship, it will be nigh on impossible to live and worship as true believers in Jesus Christ without exposing ourselves to similar charges of illegality and without inviting similar persecution. But just as God was able to deliver Daniel contrary to all human expectation, we need to be confident of the same potential deliverance (cf. the "help" promised in Dan.11:34), even as we accept the very real possibility outlined throughout this section that it may well be God's will for us to die as witnesses for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. 2Tim.2:11-13). We must be prepared to show the world that we truly do love Him more than our very lives.

But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] because of the blood of the Lamb and their word of witness (lit., "martyrdom"). For they did not love their lives, even to the point of death.

Revelation 12:11

7. The Mechanics of Martyrdom: In his famous exchange of letters with the Roman emperor Trajan (no. 96-97), Pliny the younger in his capacity as governor of Bithynia was told that the government should not initiate investigations to determine who might or might not be a member of this new "sect", Christianity, but that once someone was denounced as a Christian, failure to sacrifice to the emperor must be considered a capital offense. Harsh as this "don't ask, don't tell"

policy was, it will appear mild in contrast to the regime of persecution that will obtain during the Great Persecution. For the elimination of faith from the earth has always been an objective near and dear to the devil's heart, and with the entire world now under the thumb of his son antichrist, the process of actively hunting down Christians in order to extirpate Christianity stock and stem will have no equal in world history. The combination of the economic prohibitions directed at those who lack the mark of the beast, the (seemingly certain) prohibitions upon Christian worship et al. (along with the infiltration of true Christian groups: Dan.11:34; cf. Matt.24:23-26; Mk.13:21-23; Lk.21:8), and the pressures placed upon friends and family to betray their kindred who are still faithful to Christ (no doubt out of a persuasive mix of penalties for inaction and rewards for cooperation) will all combine to produce a flood of captive believers into the hands of the beast's politico-religious apparatus. Those who do not immediately acquiesce by renouncing Christ while proclaiming antichrist's divinity will become the grist for the mill of the Great Persecution. Although the scale of the Great Persecution will dwarf anything of the like in the past, in individual terms such has often been the lot of those who truly do choose Jesus over this world (cf. Rev.2:10; 2:13).

Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Ps.63:3). Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth. And through their faith, all of them became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred") . . . Hebrews 11:35b-39a

Although individual experiences will no doubt differ somewhat, scripture gives us enough information to establish a basic schematic of the typical stages of the process to be endured by a believer during the Great Persecution once betrayed and arrested upon initial refusal to "repent". It should be noted that the three stages delineated below parallel exactly the sort of ordeal to be faced by a person wrongly accused of some heinous crime for which the penalty is death.

a. Imprisonment: We have covered above the Bible's frequent references to the imprisonment of believers during this period. The wide-scale incarceration of so many believers at this time on the basis of "religious crimes" would no doubt be impossible without the cooperative efforts of clergy and authorities in a world-state where there is effectively now no separation between "church" and state, and it is further likely that only logistical issues will prevent the immediate imprisoning of the entire believing population of the world. Indeed, it is a blessed encouragement to remember that God's limitation of the devil's logistical reach, great though it will be at this time, will stymie Satan's efforts to achieve his goal of removing faith from the earth (cf. Mk.13:20). But, as noted above, a large percentage of believers will indeed be cast into prison, and, given the emphasis that scripture places upon their release at the hands of the returning Messiah, we can expect that once arrested, most of those who are not executed will not see freedom again until the second advent (cf. Is.14:17; 42:7; 49:9; 51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; Lk.4:18-19). This prospect will undoubtedly add to the pressure to apostatize on the part of those

whose faith is weak. Finally, the atmosphere in which these mass arrests will take place will probably be ugly in the extreme. Just as Nero blamed the Christians for destroying Rome in order to deflect attention from himself, antichrist will in an analogous way blame believers for the assassination attempt on his person, so that we should not underestimate the zeal and vitriol with which the followers of the beast, many of them nominal "Christians", will turn to rounding up these "enemies of the state" who refuse to swear allegiance to antichrist, and, in doing so, will actually feel that they are doing God a favor:

But a time will come when everyone who kills you will think that he is making an offering in worship to God.

John 16:2

b. Quasi-Judicial Scrutiny: Just as our Lord's false arrest, imprisonment and trial was carried out on the basis of pretext alone (cf. Is.53:7-9; Matt.26:55; Mk.14:55-56; Lk.22:37; 22:52-53; Acts 3:13-15; 8:33; 1Pet.2:22), so those who are called to "walk in His footsteps" (Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21-25; 1Jn.2:6; cf. Matt.11:29; 16:24; Mk.10:38-39; Phil2:5) and "share in His sufferings" (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13; cf. Gal.6:17) in this special way will be subjected to a severe process of interrogation, pressure, and abuse, along with judicial and quasi-judicial inquisition. Anyone who has been through any sort of trial will understand immediately how a string of illegal and abusive ordeals will bring enormous emotional pressures to bear on those so accused. When we add to this the concomitant physical abuse, scourging, ostracism, humiliation, and plundering of all that we have (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; cf. Dan.11:34), it should be obvious that this gauntlet of opposition will constitute an enormous test of faith, and one for which those so tested will be extremely grateful for every bit of prior preparation in the Word and its application. Clearly, what we may have to endure, no matter how stressful or terrible, will be nothing like what our Lord did endure. Yet we must in any case avoid underestimating either the difficulties of this process so as to lose heart, or the great honor it bestows in God's eyes so as to fail to count it the great joy amid the tears that it can and should be. Many of the greatest believers of all time endured similar extreme tests of their faith (and it is very much worth studying in this regard the examples of Daniel and his friends: Dan.3:1ff.; 6:1ff.; Stephen: Acts 6:8-7:59; Peter: Acts 5:17-42; 12:1-19; and Paul: Acts chapters 21-28). Further, in that time of testing we will receive divine "help" (Dan.11:34), so that even the words we shall speak will not be ours, but will be graciously given to us through the Holy Spirit with the result that even those among us who are not gifted in public speaking need not worry in the least about this ahead of time:

(17) Beware of [all] men. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and will scourge you in their assemblies. (18) And you will be haled before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them (i.e., the pseudo-Christian leaders) and to the gentiles (i.e., generic unbelievers). (19) But when they betray you, do not worry how you will speak or what you will say. For it will be given to you in that [very] hour what you will say. (20) For you will not be the ones speaking, but your Father's [Holy] Spirit will be the One speaking in you.

Matthew 10:17-20

(9) Take care for yourselves. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and you will be beaten in their assemblies. And you will stand before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them. (10) For the gospel must first (i.e., before "the end"; cf. Matt.24:14) be proclaimed to all the nations. (11) And when they betray and hale you [in before them], do not worry about what you will say, but whatever is given to you in that [very] hour, say that. For you are not the ones speaking but the Holy Spirit. Mark 13:9-11

(11) And when they bring you into their assemblies and rulers and authorities, do not worry how or what defense you shall make or what you shall say. (12) For the Holy Spirit will instruct you in that very hour [as to] the things which must be said. Luke 12:11-12

(12) But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the events of vv.8-11), they will lay hands upon them, betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name. (13) For this will result for you in an act of witnessing [for Me]. (14) So set it [firmly] in your hearts not to prepare ahead of time to make a defense. (15) For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your enemies will be able to oppose or refute. Luke 21:12-15

c. Trial by Fire: As these martyrs follow in the footsteps of our Lord, if their betrayal by their friends and loved ones and consequent imprisonment is roughly analogous to His betrayal by Judas and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt.26:48-49), and if the inquisition they undergo is roughly analogous to His series of trials by Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish religious leaders, then their subsequent trial by fire will be roughly analogous to His condemnation and ordeal in crucifixion (excepting, of course, His death for our sins). Please understand, what our Lord did for us at the cross is not to be compared with any other earthly event. But as we are called to walk in imitation of Him (Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21-25; 1Jn.2:6; cf. Matt.11:29; 16:24; Phil.2:5), and to share His sufferings (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13; cf. Gal.6:17), the parallels which scripture points out in general terms between His experience and that of these martyrs does need to be considered. Indeed, our Lord Himself drew a clear parallel between His imminent death for us and the high calling of those who choose to follow Him (i.e., we too are to "pick up our cross" and follow Him: Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23). So while we would never wish to make an exact comparison between martyrdom and our Lord's unique sacrifice (for only His death could suffice to accomplish our salvation), it is nonetheless true that these martyrs for our Lord by their similar experience will be His unique witnesses, calling attention to His unique sacrifice through the absolute faith they will demonstrate in it and in Him, when they give up their lives rather than denouncing the One who bought them with His life's blood.

And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained.

In the preceding section, the verses in the gospels which detail the process of the inquisition that these believers will undergo mention first "tribunals" and "assemblies" (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; cf. Lk.21:12). The second word is a translation of the Greek word *synagoge*, often transliterated as *synagogue*. This is somewhat misleading in that it suggests a solely Jewish setting whereas in truth what we should understand in terms of the true context being studied here is indeed a religious venue but one which is much more likely to be pseudo-Christian than Jewish. For what is being described in respect to the quasi-judicial examination process of believers incarcerated during the Great Persecution is part and parcel of the pressure placed upon them by antichrist's religious establishment. These believers will be commanded to "repent" of their "misplaced" faith in that "other Messiah" (i.e., our true Lord and Savior Jesus Christ), and to declare instead their acceptance of antichrist as the true Christ by taking the mark of the beast. As in the case of our Lord who was called upon to deny Himself, and who was tried numerous times in the hours before His crucifixion, this process may involve numerous "trials" before various tribunals, but in every case those doing the examination will be adherents of the beast's political and religious apparatus. In particular, as has been suggested above, it is likely that many main line religious organizations completely co-opted at that time by antichrist to serve and worship him will take the lead, at least initially, in the process of pressuring those who still have true faith to abandon it in order to save their lives. That is what is meant by the "tribunals" (*synedria*), namely, smaller screening bodies of religious officials analogous to Jesus' first trial before Annas and the Sanhedrin (derived from *synedrion*, the singular form of the same word: Jn.18:12-24), whereas "assemblies" (*synagogai*) will refer to more public meetings presided over by larger numbers of religious officials with a larger audience, analogous to our Lord's second trial before Caiaphas (compare Jn.18:24 with Matt.26:57-68; Mk.14:53-65).

In this regard we should recall that the apostle John identified "many antichrists" at work during the Church age (1Jn.2:18-22; cf. 2Jn.1:7), and gave as the means for that identification the fact that "they went out from us". Applied to our present discussion, this gives us a clear indication that both antichrist and many of his key followers will be erstwhile "Christian leaders". We have already noted here a consistent parallel between our Lord's trial by fire prior to the cross and the experience of the martyrs of the Great Persecution. In this respect we may anticipate present-day equivalents among the beast's co-opted "Christian leaders" which likewise parallel the various religious sects of our Lord's day, groups which in prior years and centuries had no doubt included genuine believers, but which by the time of Jesus' multiple trials had similarly been co-opted into doing the devil's work. For the "scribes" who consistently put tradition over truth, the similarly traditionalist denominations of the Orthodox and Catholic persuasions are the best fit. For the secularist Sadducees, the old line now quite liberal Protestant denominations who have come to prefer "reason" to scripture along with other related groups (e.g., Unitarians and Christian Scientists) are a good match. The legalistic Pharisees who used judgmental applications of the Law to eliminate mercy and faith bring to mind the trends now found in many conservative Protestant denominations such as various Baptists and other spin-off independent denominations (and one may wish to place the Mormons here as well). The other-worldly Essenes are somewhat analogous to the various "charismatic" groups who worship experience over scripture,

while we may find in the Zealots a parallel for any of the many fringe groups, left or right, which embrace violence, setting their extreme efforts in place of God and His plan. Apologies ahead of time to any and all who are partial to any of the groups mentioned above, but the reader is asked to remember that we are talking here about future events that will take place only after the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraining influence in the crucible of the Tribulation. This set of parallels is thus not meant to indict any present group (and indulgence is also asked for any which may have been inadvertently left out), but merely to illustrate how the various tendencies of all the major Christian (not to mention pseudo-Christian) organizations could very well result in their being employed in the service of evil once they no longer contain any true believers, that is, the very situation which obtained in our Lord's day and the very one which we are contemplating during the Tribulation after antichrist co-opts the church-visible for his own ends.

Before final approval is given for the execution of those who refuse to repent despite such pressures, the political authorities will also have to weigh in. These are the "governors and kings" mentioned in the pertinent scriptures above (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; Lk.21:12), and are analogous to our Lord's trials before Herod and Pilate. Just as religious officials are co-opted in antichrist's kingdom, so of course will all of the world's political officials be, for the beast's rule will be a worldwide one (Rev.13:1-9). For those being persecuted, it is very important to understand that being alone and having been subjected to extreme physical and verbal abuse, these trials will constitute an inordinate amount of pressure the degree of which is difficult to grasp before the fact, even by those among us who may have been subjected to a lengthy legal process. It is therefore imperative as we study these things to appreciate ahead of time the importance of prior spiritual preparation to the successful endurance of such trials, even as we gain a better appreciation for the gauntlet our Lord ran for us even before He got to the cross and died for our sins.

Revelation 6:9 quoted above tells us that those put to death in the Great Persecution will be executed "because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained". We have also seen that the false prophet will be given the authority "to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death." (Rev.13:15). Further, the resurrected martyrs seen in Revelation chapter twenty who reign with Christ for a thousand years are said not to have worshiped "the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand" (Rev.20:4). The litmus test then for execution and martyrdom will be the two-sided coin of refusing to reject the true Christ on the one hand and of refusing to worship the pseudo-Christ beast and his image in conjunction with the reception of his mark on the other.

This brings up the question of whether or not a person can be said to refuse to worship the image of the beast in any place other than Jerusalem. For clearly the false prophet who forces obeisance and administers capital punishment on all who refuse will be in Jerusalem, as will antichrist and antichrist's abominable image. Given the vast numbers of those put to death for the Lord and their geographical diversity, "a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue" (Rev.7:9), it is likely that, when Jesus tells us in

Matthew 24:9 "and [they] will put some of you to death", He is talking about the local "governors and kings" mentioned above. Therefore just as the mark of the beast is discussed in a manner that seems to connect it with worshiping the statue in person (i.e., Rev.14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4), and yet it seems improbable that everyone who agrees to take the mark will have to go to Jerusalem to do so, so in this case it seems preferable to understand some sort of satellite process, possibly enhanced through technology, whereby many of the martyrs will be put to death locally.

As to the timing, we can expect persecution to go hand in hand with the ceremonial placing of the mark of the beast, with the coercion, compulsion, and execution of some believers beginning from the start. It stands to reason, however, that the process of denouncing, arresting, examining, and executing those who refuse to acknowledge the beast will have to gather speed and momentum over time. Human limitations being what they are, a period of transition into the new, harsh economic reality that accompanies the mark (Rev.13:7) will thus be unavoidable despite the devil's best efforts, so that not all believers will be identified immediately (indeed, as we have seen, fully half of those who remain at that time will most likely survive until the coming of the Lord). Nevertheless, we can be sure that the beast will do everything in his power to make that time of transition as short as possible so that we may expect to see a rapid implementation of this policy and subsequent ensnaring of the faithful. Given the desire for speed, sheer logistics would seem to indicate that, while there will be a certain amount of celebrity worship and marking done in Jerusalem itself (and the conspicuous execution of prominent Christians there too, for that matter), this process will take place mainly on the local level. Whether or not the local venues will have smaller replicas of the "abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation" or be fitted out with large viewing screens or some other such substitute, we cannot say for certain. What is certain, however, is that worshiping the beast and his image, in person or remotely, and taking the mark, whether from the second beast himself or one of antichrist's clergy far from Jerusalem, will just as surely guarantee condemnation. Finally, inasmuch as Revelation 13:15 shows that the false prophet will be engaged in personal direction of some of these inquisitions which result in the execution of those who refuse to worship the beast and his image and take his mark, it is therefore also the case that some of the martyrs will indeed be killed in Jerusalem – and perhaps a large number of them at that. For those so "selected", it will certainly mean the necessity not only of being strong under the initial pressures following imprisonment, but of staying strong in faith for what is likely to be a long and arduous process. Gaining a temporary reprieve on the local level merely for the purpose of being transported to the headquarters of evil for "special treatment" will no doubt be very much like facing a firing-squad twice.

As to the manner of execution, scripture does not provide any basis for dogmatically singling out a preferred method (although see Rev.20:4 where the martyrs are described as having been beheaded). The "sword" in Revelation 13:10 is a common biblical metaphor for capital punishment (cf. Matt.26:52; Rom.13:4). Crucifixion as well as more traditional modern modes of execution are certainly possible (cf. Jn.21:19). However, given that fire is closely connected with antichrist and his false prophet (Rev.13:13), and the close analogy already noted between the refusal by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar in

Daniel chapter 3, it is more than likely that a similar death by fire will be the end result of this "trial by fire" for the tribulational martyrs (cf. the "fiery sea" of Rev.15:2). Just as those three great men of God were not intimidated into forsaking Him despite the terror before them and were vindicated in a most miraculous way, so we need to commit ourselves to trust and obey God in spite of the commands of the world's authorities to reject Him, in spite of the confidence of the beast's followers that they are "doing good" in putting us to death (cf. Jn.16:2), and in spite of every terrifying eventuality with which we may be threatened. For while it will not be the fate of the tribulational martyrs to walk out of the fiery furnace the way Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did, it will be their lot to rise first in the ranks of the redeemed (1Thes.4:16b), and to reign with Jesus a thousand years:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4

8. The Great Persecution in Israel: The vast majority of believers within Israel will respond to the divine command to flee into the desert and will thus be shielded from the otherwise universal persecution of the faithful. However, Daniel chapter eleven, a passage already covered above in some detail, does seem to indicate that, along with Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, a certain number of believers will remain in the land of Israel at this time (as is also indicated by a number of other passages which suggest continued problems for believers in Israel despite the flight of the faithful: e.g., Jer.30:7; Dan.8:12; 12:7; Zech.10:11).

(30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack with him (i.e., antichrist) [so that he will be victorious]. Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. And he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., ending the sacrifices, setting up the abomination, taking his seat in the temple). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. (31) For it is from him that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. (32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the [holy] covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) For even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.

Daniel 11:30-35

Whether it is the case that those described in the above persecution in Israel following the Tribulation's mid-point failed to depart at the proper time, or were led by the Spirit to remain, or became believers after the fact, it is certainly true that what is being described here is applicable to the Church as a whole and to the pattern of the Great Persecution as a whole everywhere else in the world as well (and that is undoubtedly an important connection we are meant to make). One thing is certain: all those who remain in the land during this period, believers and unbelievers both, are in for a very difficult time (e.g., Is.8:14-15).

9. The Role of Babylon: The book of Revelation very emphatically makes Babylon responsible for the Great Persecution, both directly (Rev.17:6; 18:20; 18:24; 19:2; cf. Rev.16:6), and also in terms of the beast's religion of "prostitution and witchcraft" which lies behind it and for which she is the primary source (Rev.17:1-5; 18:3-4; cf. Rev.14:8-9; 16:19). In fact, Babylon the great prostitute is said in Revelation 17:6 to be "drunk with the blood of the holy ones, even from [the blood of] the witnesses for Jesus", providing us with a clear linkage between the Great Persecution and Babylon in her capacity as the original headquarters of antichrist's religious and political base. Babylon, of course, is also the wealthiest state in the world (cf. the descriptions in Rev.17:1-6 and in all of chapter 18), so that the commercial restrictions upon those who lack the mark (whereby so many believers will be identified, incarcerated and martyred) are doubtless to be understood as intimately connected with her role in this regard as well. Since the Great Persecution is thus largely indistinguishable from Babylon in scripture, showing that she will thus be the chief agent of that persecution through the amalgamated world-system of religious, economic and political power she represents, we are further correct to conclude that the new pseudo-Christianity developed by antichrist in Babylon will be instrumental in conducting the Great Persecution itself. Just as our Lord was haled before a series of Jewish religious councils which ought to have worshiped Him, the Messiah of the Jews, so believers during the Great Persecution will find themselves being accused, berated, and condemned by erstwhile fellow "Christians", a fact that will make the burden of martyrdom all that much more difficult to bear.

10. A Brief Christian "Code of Conduct" for the Great Persecution: It is hoped that the following list of guiding principles, though not meant to be exhaustive, will prove to be some help to those facing the trying circumstance of that future time (or indeed similar pressures in the present):

a. Don't hide your light of faith under a bushel (Matt.5:15-16): Be courageous in continuing to carry out the ministries and Christian witness to which Christ has called you (Matt.10:28). Many contemporary Christians seem to believe that once the Tribulation arrives we are to go into "survivalist mode". This seems to run counter to everything the Bible has to say. When the apostles were told to stop speaking and teaching in the Name of Jesus, they refused on pain of scourging, imprisonment and death (all three of which fates lay in wait for many of them because of their determination to serve Jesus no matter what the cost; cf. Acts 5:29). Certainly, we are told to be wise as well as innocent in the way we conduct ourselves in the world (Matt.10:16; cf. Rom.16:19; 1Cor.14:20), and no one is suggesting that we volunteer to be executed, that we "dare" the authorities to martyr us, or that we deliberately go out of our way to run afoul of those

who are administering the Great Persecution, calling attention to ourselves rather than to Christ (cf. Matt.6:2). This extreme is clearly not what God would have us to do any more than He expects us to run for cover rather than confess our faith in His Son. Daniel and his three friends give us the perfect examples of how we should behave in this regard. Daniel did not immediately go into the presence of the king and protest the wicked decree forged against him, daring him to make him a martyr for the Lord; but neither did he run and hide as he well might have done for just a day, or even change in any way his normal walk with the Lord, but continued in exactly the same way as he had before the harsh decree was passed. Likewise, Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) did not make a point of identifying themselves to the king, daring him to throw them into the fiery furnace so that they might be martyrs for the Lord; but neither did they run and hide as they well might have done for just that day, or even change their normal manner of faithful service to the king as a reflection of their duty to God, but were present on the plain of Dura at the king's command. In each case, continuation of faithfulness in normal spiritual and secular behavior led these men to be martyred – but in each case God delivered them in a miraculous way. It is well for us to consider, should it so be that we face such circumstances ourselves, that God is completely capable of delivering us as well, so that if we should be caught in the process of living our lives as God would have us to do and then be martyred as a result, it can only be because this is the will of God for us, and it is only through our response to His will that He is glorified through us (Is.43:7; Eph.1:5-14). Everyone will have to make his or her own applications of this principle during that time and it may very well be that some measure of greater circumspection will be appropriate in some things (such as avoiding commercial venues where the lack of the mark will be an issue; cf. Is.26:20; Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9), while more boldness will be appropriate in others (such as visiting those who have been imprisoned for their faith: Matt.25:39; Heb.13:3; cf. Rev.2:10). The point is that, just as we should do today, during the Great Persecution we ought to be consulting our Lord and His Word of truth in prayer and in the power of the Spirit in order to know the right thing to do in trying circumstances, rather than consulting the world and our circumstances in it first and foremost, making God merely an afterthought.

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or worship the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus (viz., even though it may cost them their lives).

Revelation 14:12

b. Don't fall asleep spiritually (Mk.13:32-37): Stay alert through continued spiritual growth and ministry. As we mentioned above, one of the most disturbing ironies of the Great Tribulation is that true believers in Christ will be persecuted as at no other time in history for being unwilling to accept this pseudo-Messiah. Therefore we should not underestimate the degree to which antichrist and his pseudo-Christianity will resemble the real thing at least on the surface, nor the degree to which the pressures to conform and join-in arising both from putative fellow "Christians" and also especially from friends and family will be persuasive (as they were in the case of Jewish believers in Israel during the first century: cf. Hebrews 10:23-39). For the comforting aspects of "belonging" to the pseudo-church of that day will be even more deadly to

faith in truth than it was in the situation described throughout the book of Hebrews or than it is today (where what we are experiencing is in most cases merely rank superficiality and lukewarmness to the truth of scripture rather than outright worship of the devil). Embracing apostasy out of pressure, even the extreme pressure of persecution, is the one sure way to put faith to death and thereby lose out on all the blessings of eternity so very close at any time, but especially during the waning days of the Tribulation (Heb.11:26; 11:37; cf. Rev.14:9-11).

c. Don't let your light of faith go out (Matt.25:1-13): Keep fighting the good fight of faith in spite of the many difficult challenges to faith that will arise during the Great Persecution. Holding onto faith will require the correct mental perspective informed by scripture regarding the true situation at that time. Even Moses became distraught at Pharaoh's lack of positive response amid the increased pressures on the children of Israel (Ex.5:22-23), but we have the advantage of hindsight so that we know from the Bible what the Lord's plan was all along. We know from scripture how it was that the Lord would work everything out for good in spite of repeated trouble and testing. And we know too, unfortunately, that the people continually failed to trust the Lord in spite of the many extraordinary miracles they witnessed. As believers who may experience the things to come, we need to remember this example (cf. 1Cor.10:1-13). We need to prepare ourselves, not with canned goods in the basement but with Bible truth in the heart, to endure what the Lord has told us about through scripture ahead of time, remembering not to take these terrible times and events personally, but rather to appreciate the inner workings of the overall plan of God upon these final events of history before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The believers of that time who do survive with faith intact will be those who were prepared to stand against their country (cf. Rev.18:4), family (cf. Matt.10:36; Jn.16:1-4), church (cf. Jn.16:2), and economic well-being (Rev.13:17). For as bad as the Great Persecution will be from the very start, we may expect it to grow progressively worse before our Lord returns.

d. Don't value your life over your faith (Matt.16:24-27): Love the Lord with all your heart. Don't put physical things, even those essential for minimal survival, over the truly more important spiritual ones. If it comes to it, it is far better to lose one's life for His sake than to gain the world without Him at the price of forfeiting the eternal life that is in Him (Matt.10:37-39). The Tribulation in general and the Great Persecution in particular will be a refining process (Dan.11:35; cf. Dan.7:18-27), whereby the Lord will not only demonstrate who are truly His but will also glorify Himself through what those who prove faithful in this trial are willing to suffer for His Name. The entirety of human history is "God's threshing floor" (Matt.3:12), used by Him to demonstrate beyond any doubt what we really do choose, and how emphatically we choose it (the basis for rewards on the part of believers). At no time will this be more true than during the Great Persecution. If we really are thinking like God is thinking, instead of becoming disconsolate under the pressures, inconveniences, trials, tribulations, and loss of the Great Persecution, we will see beyond the veil that shrouds this life from the next and realize that the rewards we are earning through patient endurance and joyous acceptance of our Lord's will for us are not to be compared to any of the troubles we are presently suffering, even if they cost us a few short years of our physical lives, lives which would be completely pointless in any case apart

from our faith in and faithfulness to our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died for us (Rom.8:18; 2Cor.4:17).

e. Don't be afraid (Lk.12:32-34): Let hope and joy rule your heart as you continue to look forward in eager anticipation to the glories of the Kingdom to come rather than focusing upon the miseries of the present. The beast and his father the devil along with all their followers can only kill the body, not the spirit (Matt.10:26-31), and can only do that if the Lord allows – our deaths are always precious in His sight and we can expect that to be doubly true during this unprecedented period of martyrdom (Ps.116:15). Given that as we have seen above the likelihood is for fully one half of those whose faith survives the Great Apostasy to perish in glory as martyrs for our Lord during the Great Persecution, our hope of eternal life and joy in our eternal reward ought always to temper any prospect of earthly survival in light of the very real possibility of martyrdom (cf. Zeph.2:3; Jer.45), ever making it our first priority to demonstrate faithfulness to the One who is ever faithful to us.

Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives (while doing what is good) to a Creator who is faithful.

1st Peter 4:19

Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10b

In all of this, then, we need to keep in mind that the Tribulation is an essential part of the Plan of God and could never happen in the first place apart from His specific will (2Thes.2:6-8; Rev.5:1-5). That is true both on the worldwide level and in the case of every individual believer, no matter what the Lord has in store for us personally. As we have seen in our comparison of the competing tribulational trends, the Tribulation constitutes a key part of God's demonstration of Satan's complete evil and ultimate powerlessness on the one hand, and of His own righteousness and faithfulness on the other (with the Millennium which follows providing the ultimate counterpoint to a world ruled by the devil in contrast to a world ruled by God). The Tribulation thus has an important role to play in the overall Plan of God and in His refutation of Satan. For it will be seen more clearly than ever before during those final seven years that the devil is in no way "for" mankind as he seeks to destroy the world, while at the same time we will observe God's miraculous protection of a holy remnant in the world in spite of otherwise complete satanic control. And not only that, but the Tribulation will also demonstrate that in spite of the greatest pressures of human history, there will indeed be those who continue to remain faithful to the Lord, notwithstanding the incredible enticements of its first half (which is destined to sweep so many away in the Great Apostasy), and the unprecedented pressures of its second half (wherein half of the faithful will be subjected to martyrdom). In short, though we may be forced during those dark days ahead to "make bricks without straw" for what seems a never-ending stretch of time, we should recall that in the analogy of the days preceding the Exodus, Pharaoh, a type of antichrist, was really making the Lord the issue in this persecution (cf. Ex.5:17). Those abused during the Great Persecution will likewise and most assuredly be persecuted because of Jesus Christ, and this is at once the greatest compliment to a believer's faith and the greatest

opportunity to demonstrate that faithfulness, separating for all the world to see the seed in good soil from that which fell upon the rock.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.
2nd Timothy 2:11-13

7. Armageddon and the Second Advent

A. The Bowl Judgments

As to the precise placement of the bowl judgments in the chronology of the Great Tribulation, scripture provides a number of clues which give us the ability to project a plausible time-line for their occurrence. As is made clear throughout chapter sixteen of Revelation, the exact terminus for the bowl judgments is Armageddon and the Second Advent (see esp. Rev.16:16-17), since both of these events and the build-up to them are part and parcel of bowls six and seven. Further, the start-point for these seven judgments must occur at some point during the Tribulation's final three and a half years (obviously, in that, along with everything else which follows Revelation 11:15-19 and precedes Christ's return in chapter 19, they are part of the seventh trumpet which represents the Great Tribulation). So although there is clearly a relationship (and many obvious parallels) between the seven judgments of warning (trumpets – first half of the Tribulation) and the seven judgments of punishment (bowls – second half of the Tribulation), at first glance it may seem impossible for the bowls to parallel the trumpets in terms of raw time since the total number of months of warning comprised by the trumpet judgments is 63 (when the 42 months of the seventh trumpet, the Great Tribulation, are included in the count). On the other hand, the termini provided by the start and stop points of the Great Tribulation can provide us with only 42 months at most. In actuality, of course, the linear total has to be far fewer than 42, since a good deal of time before their commencement must be allowed at the beginning of the Great Tribulation in order for the Great Persecution to first get underway (because it is to this offence that the bowls constitute a divine response; cf. Rev.16:5-7). The correct solution lies in positing an overlap in the effects of the bowl judgments (i.e., a continuation of the effects of each judgment even as the next in sequence begins, with the effects of all seven continuing until Christ's return). In this way it is possible to telescope these seven in a manner that will both yield a total of 63 total (partially overlapping) months of judgment parallel to the 63 (sequential) months of warning represented by the Trumpet Judgments, while at the same time allowing the Bowl Judgments to fit into the Great Tribulation's second half in a reasonable and workable way.

insert bowl judgments chart

The Seven Bowl Judgments: Revelation 15:1 - 16:21

The above schema is certainly in keeping with the rising crescendo of punishment designed to be unbearable in contrast to the sequential and (relatively) endurable hardships of the warning judgments (cf. Is.30:32). Bowls six and seven, which comprise the entire Armageddon campaign

along with all of the other events which precede the Second Advent, form the anchor for this system. Since, as we have already seen, Armageddon and our Lord's return occur in the fall (as symbolized by the Day of Atonement), and since the events of bowls six and seven will almost certainly require the bulk of the preceding summer and spring (the summoning and transporting of the beast's armies to Israel from throughout the world likely being a particularly time-consuming logistical task), the positing of six and seven months for the seventh and six bowl judgments respectively fits the evidence. This schema also has in its favor the fact that the supplying of a further month for each additional bowl judgment working backward (i.e., totals of 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and, finally, 12 months for each bowl judgment from the seventh to the first respectively) yields the desired total of 63 months reckoned in overlapping total, yet manages to do so in only 12 months of overall, linear chronological time (as can be seen from the diagram above).

This modeling of the likely chronology of the bowl judgments also has in its favor:

- 1) It allows for the fact that just as the seven trumpets constituted a build up to the Great Tribulation, so the seven bowls constitute a rising crescendo of judgment in anticipation of the return of our Lord and His judgment of the beast, the devil, and all their minions at the battle of Armageddon (cf. Is.30:32).
- 2) It allows for the fact that, inasmuch as these judgments are in no small part the divine response to the Great Persecution (chap.14-15 plus 16:5-7; cf. Is.35:4; Rev.19:15), sufficient time must first pass for that persecution to take place before the bowl judgments begin (and, as we have seen, the persecution is allowed to take its course for quite some time).
- 3) It allows for the bowl judgments to fit into the gap between the Great Persecution and Armageddon (and it is difficult to see how this could extend much past the suggested chronology of the Tribulation's final year).
- 4) It allows for the time required for all of the armies of the world to gather for Armageddon, the subject of the fifth and sixth bowl judgments, with this assembly taking place during the spring and summer of the final tribulation year, and with Armageddon itself taking place in the fall (i.e., lining up with the Day of Atonement), as well as allowing for sufficient time for the prophesied war between the beast's invading forces and Israel.
- 5) It allows for sufficient time for the other events which are prophesied to take place in this final year or so, including the plunging of the beast's kingdom into darkness (the event that dislodges him temporarily from Jerusalem), the revolt of Babylon and Israel, the destruction and pillaging of Babylon, and the invasion of Israel preparatory to Armageddon.

For the Lord has a day of vengeance, even a year of retribution for Zion's cause.
Isaiah 34:8 (cf. Is.63:4)

Although the overall length of time for this punitive period of judgment is only twelve months from beginning to end, we are not to draw from this fact the notion that the bowl judgments will for that reason be less intense. Quite the contrary. Such an idea is easily refuted by the nature and effect of this second set of judgments as should be obvious even from a cursory reading of Revelation chapter sixteen. Moreover it is also the case that, in contrast to the trumpet judgments which are sequential and non-overlapping, the effects of each bowl judgment continue from their inception right down to the end of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon and the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. This build up of “blow upon unremitting blow” is characteristic of the pattern of divine punishment where the objects of God's wrath have emphatically and categorically rejected His mercy (cf. Deut.28:16-68; 2Thes.1:9). Thus the manner in which these final seven judgments are administered reflects their *punitive* nature (in contrast to the *monitory* nature of the trumpet judgments; see Rev.15:1; 15:8; 16:1).

Bowls: The Greek *phiale* (φιάλη), equivalent to the Latin *patera* (the diminutive of which is *patella*), is a large, deep saucer (about the size of a medium deep-dish pizza pan). This deep-dish plate was commonly used in antiquity for libations so that it had a general sacrificial use. It was chosen for libations instead of what might seem to us more practical utensils such as true bowls, cups or jars no doubt because of its suitability for dispersing the liquid libation in a way so as to maximize the emission of fragrance, the visibility of the outpouring, and the area moistened. So in our analogy here, the widespread and tangible nature of the judgment produced is the picture we are meant to receive through the use of this particular ceremonial device: the consequences of the bowl judgments will be even more emphatic, wide-ranging and viscerally felt than was the even case with the trumpet judgments.

The Seven Angels: The number seven suggests that, as in the case of the trumpet judgments, the archangels are once again in charge of administering this series of judgments. As with the blowing of the trumpets, the pouring out of the bowls constitutes the command to begin. Upon receiving this command, we may understand that the large number of elect angels under each archangel's command will then be responsible for carrying out the particulars of each judgment. One additional important difference between the trumpet and the bowl judgments is that while in the case of the former each angel received individual, sequential orders to blow his trumpet, here we see all seven archangels commanded at the same time to “pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God” (a fact which further argues for the overlapping duration of the bowl judgments as explained above).

1. Sores

(1) And I heard a loud voice from the [heavenly] temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God”. (2) And the first [angel] went out and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and dreadful and terrible sores arose upon the people who had the mark of the beast and upon those who were worshiping his image.

Revelation 16:1-2

Beyond the physical pain involved, afflictions of the skin are particularly psychologically wearing because they are at once difficult to put out of mind and at the same time obvious to others. When given the opportunity to attack Job physically, the devil, a shrewd judge of human nature, chose to smite Job “with painful sores from head to foot” no doubt as much because of the anticipated effect upon his morale as anything else (Job 2:4-8). The sores in question here, recalling the “boils” that afflict the Egyptians during the sixth Exodus plague (Ex.9:8-12), “arise” upon the followers of the beast immediately after the first bowl is poured out, and we can take heart that the scripture here names these reprobates as the recipients, thereby indicating that believers will be exempt (as in the case of many of the effects of the trumpet judgments as we have seen; cf. Ex.15:26). The sores themselves are described as “dreadful and terrible”. The Greek words here are generic (*kakos/κακός* and *poneros/πονηρός* respectively), with the former most likely referring to their ugly appearance and the latter to their unpleasant quality. Suffice it to say that they will serve as a constant reminder to everyone who worships the beast of God's displeasure, right up until the point of our Lord's return in glory.

2. Sea Turned to Blood

And the second [angel] poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like the blood of a dead [person], and every living thing in contact with the sea died.
Revelation 16:3

This second bowl judgment also represents a clear intensification over the similar second trumpet judgment wherein only a third of the creatures in the sea perish as a result of a third of the sea being turned into blood (Rev.8:8-9). Human fatalities are also to be understood here as well (cf. Rev.8:9b), since it is not only “everything in the sea” which perishes but everything (and everyone) “in contact” with the sea at the instant this judgment comes down. As with the sores which appear on all of the beast's followers, so this plague upon the earth's seas is deliberately reminiscent of the plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians in response to his persecution of the Israelites (compare Ex.9:8-12 with Ex.7:14-24). And just as Pharaoh and his armies were destroyed soon after the end of that cycle of judgment, so it will be with antichrist and his hordes when our Lord annihilates them at the battle of Armageddon. But until that time, this judgment of blood and the deprivation of the sea as a source of food will, like the sores of the first bowl judgment, continue to weigh heavily upon the anti-God population of the world until that blessed end comes to pass. Finally it should be noted that in all three instances the blood in question is literal blood, making the reality of the divine source of this judgment impossible to refute – except by hearts that have been hardened past the point of any return to reality or repentance (the universal state of affairs for antichrist and his followers). Therefore here we clearly see God's power and righteousness underscored by this judgment: in spite of undeniable proof of its evil, the world nevertheless stubbornly refuses to repent.

3. Waters Turned to Blood

(4) And the third [angel] poured out his bowl onto the rivers and the springs of waters, and it (i.e., all fresh water) became blood. (5) Then I heard the angel of the waters (i.e.,

the third angel) saying, “O You who are and [always] were, the Holy One, You are justified in rendering these [seven bowl] judgments. (6) For [the inhabitants of the earth] have poured out the blood of [Your] saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. The very thing which they deserve.” (7) And I heard the altar saying “Yes, [O] Lord, God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

Revelation 16:4-7

Just as the previous bowl judgment affected all bodies of salt water on the earth, so this third judgment will affect all bodies of fresh water. Just as the Israelites were protected during the similar cursing of the river Nile (cf. Ex.7:18 and 7:21: “the *Egyptians* will not be/were not able to drink the water”), so we may expect that believers still alive at this time will be provided some respite. For although the method and manner of the relief for those who have not succumbed to the worship of the beast are not specified, it is very clear from the verses above that the punishment involved here is specifically directed at antichrist's followers (and verse 5b applies this principle to all seven of the bowl judgments). Water, lest we forget, is symbolic of the life-giving truth of the Word of God (Is.55:1; Jn.3:5; 3:8 [Greek]; Jn.4:10; 4:13-14; 7:37-39; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Heb.10:22; 1Jn.5:8; Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17; cf. Ex 17:5-6; Num. 20:8; Ps.36:8-9; 42:1-2; 63:1; 84:5-7; Is.8:6; 12:3; 41:17; 44:3; 55:10-11; Jer.2:13; 17:13; 1Cor.3:6-7; Heb.6:7). The appropriateness of this judgment, therefore, whereby the world's fresh water is turned into a symbol of judgment not fit to drink should be evident: just as the worshipers of the beast have rejected the sweet water of truth and spilled the blood of those who love it instead, so their access to the fresh water which symbolizes that truth has now been taken away and replaced with undrinkable blood. A word should be said here about the justice of God. Despite what might seem to be terrible and unthinkable judgments falling upon countless people the world around, the third angel is given here to sing a hymn praising God precisely for the justice of what He is doing in holding the world to account for its evil in following and worshiping the beast and thus facilitating the massive persecution of the true Church, believers in Jesus Christ. Indeed, in verse six, it is “the inhabitants of the earth” who are charged with spilling the blood of the “saints and prophets”. Even though the moral ambiguity which reigns in our day would no doubt find great fault in the destruction of all sea-life, the pollution of all fresh water, and the severe smiting of so many people with painful sores, God is completely “justified in rendering these judgments”. They are pure, and good, and righteous according to the angel's hymn, and this evaluation is seconded by none other than the Son of Man Himself who died on behalf of all mankind on the altar of the cross (a sacrifice now memorialized by the heavenly altar of incense represented here), our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: “Yes, [O] Lord, God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

4. Scorching Heat

(8) And the fourth angel poured out his bowl onto the sun. And it was given to it to burn men with [its] fire. (9) And men were burned with a great scorching, and they blasphemed the Name of God, the One who holds the authority over these plagues, but they did not repent [so as] to give Him glory.

Revelation 16:8-9

As with the sores of the first judgment, this plague also affects primarily the skin (a place of visible and intensive suffering as we have pointed out above) of those who worship the beast, and with even greater apparent immediacy and intensity than was the case in the plague of the sores. The type of scorching described in these verses and the fact that it affects the entire unbelieving world argues for the effects of this plague being supernaturally present regardless of precautions men may seek to take. Just as the frogs, flies, gnats and locusts of the Exodus plagues made their way into the innermost places of the houses of the Egyptians (and they were incapable of avoiding them), so it seems that these burns will be impossible for the followers of antichrist to escape altogether (cf. Ex.8:3; 8:17; 8:21; 10:6). On the other hand, here too we anticipate our Lord's divine protection for those who remain faithful to Jesus (1Thes.1:10):

The Lord is the One who guards you. The Lord is your shade, at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you down, nor will the moon [do so] by night.
Psalm 121:5-6

By the time of this fourth bowl judgment we might expect the cumulative effect and build-up of the cursing – the sores and the oceanic devastation and the undrinkable fresh water and now this scorching heat – to have finally broken the will to resist among the followers of antichrist. For, one would think that all of these events, pressing down with such force and effect at the same time, would leave no doubt as to the insanity of opposing the God who made heaven and earth and who holds our very lives in His hands. But instead of giving in to this truth, instead of crying “uncle!” and acknowledging the obvious fact of His superiority, instead of repenting and giving Him the glory due His Name, those who worship the beast actually have the temerity to blaspheme that holy Name in the face of such inexorable judgments! No stronger evidence can be found in scripture for the blindness brought on by the hardening of the heart through the embrace of evil, except perhaps for the example of Pharaoh. And it is in fact Pharaoh that we are meant to recall, who, in his similar blind arrogance, so inexplicably and defiantly continued to oppose the God of heaven in the face of similarly irresistible plagues (Ex.9:16). But just as his implacable resistance only served to further the plan of God – both by demonstrating God's power and also by proving beyond all question the solidity, depth and irreversibility of Pharaoh's arrogant disposition – so now this curse directed toward God, at once so impotent and so horrific, only serves to show that no amount of mercy or judgment could ever be sufficient to sway the followers of the beast from their evil ways. This incredibly arrogant behavior is in stark contrast to that of a previous world ruler, the “head of gold” himself, Nebuchadnezzar, who when personally confronted with the awe-inspiring power of God, humbled himself in response to the Lord's discipline (Dan.4:28-36):

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.
Daniel 4:37 NIV

5. Darkness

(10) And the fifth [angel] poured out his bowl onto the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened, and [the inhabitants] were chewing their tongues because of the suffering [this caused them]. (11) And they blasphemed the God of heaven on account of their sufferings, but they did not repent.

Revelation 16:10-11

Darkness is one of the most significant of all divine judgments (e.g., Ex.10:21-23; 14:20; Is.8:22; Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2Pet.2:4; 2:17; Jude 1:6; 1:13), for God is light, and there is no darkness in Him (1Jn.1:5-7; cf. Jn.1:3-9). Response to the light, God's truth, is thus the universal litmus test of true creature character. Therefore, as in His turning off of the universal lights in response to Satan's rebellion (Gen.1:2), God has always used this judgment of darkness to show in a very graphic and tangible way not only His power but also the true character of those judged: antichrist and his most ardent core of followers are given the darkness they truly love and have unquestionably merited by their entirely blind and light-less conduct (cf. Gen.19:11; Deut.28:28-29; 2Ki.6:18ff.; Acts 13:11).

And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will).

John 3:19-21

As was the case with the darkness occasioned by the fourth trumpet judgment (Rev.8:12), it will be impossible for contemporaries to rationalize away this casting of the beast's kingdom (comprising roughly a fourth part of the earth) into what is being described here as at the very least near total darkness. But again, although the power of God is unquestionably being made manifest in this judgment, and although the pain and suffering this judgment brings ought to provoke a response of humility and repentance, in the completely hardened hearts of the worshipers of antichrist it will provoke instead only impotent blasphemy against the One who made and sustains the very heavens and earth (cf. Jer.6:27-30; Ezek.22:17-19). In this respect too then, this bowl judgment at least foreshadows the supernatural darkness that will occur just prior to the Second Advent, the time when the beast and his followers will finally be destroyed for so enthusiastically serving the darkness rather than the light (Is.13:9-13; 34:4; 60:1-3; Ezek.32:7-10; Joel 2:2, 2:10, 2:31; 3:15; Zeph.1:15-18; Zech.14:6-8; Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24-25; Acts 2:17-21; Rev.6:12-13).

That the darkness mentioned here affects only “the kingdom of the beast” is extremely significant. It will be remembered that the fourth trumpet judgment, while seemingly less intense in that it reduced the emission of light from the sun, moon and stars by a third whereas here the darkness is described in absolute terms, was nevertheless the first judgment wherein *the entire earth* was adversely affected. By contrast here we see the darkness, while total in the area directly stricken, said to affect *only that one particular area*, namely the “throne” and “kingdom”

of the beast. By this point in the Tribulation, it is true that antichrist will exercise some degree of control over the entire world, enough, for example, to orchestrate the Great Persecution in all quarters of the globe. But in the precise terminology used here, “throne” and “kingdom”, something less than the entire world is meant. Specifically, Revelation 16:10 has to be referring to the original seven members of the ten nation confederacy (i.e., the European continent) which, following his seizure of Babylon, came to constitute the power base for the beast's worldwide dominion.

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e., Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon. (42) And [antichrist] will extend his control over the lands (of the southern alliance), so that even the land of Egypt will not escape. (43) Thus [antichrist] will take control of all the repositories of gold and silver, even over all of Egypt's treasures, with Libya (i.e., representing North Africa) and Cush (i.e., Sudan-Ethiopia) following her [in submission]. (44) But reports [coming] from the east and the north will disturb him, with the result that he will depart [from Israel] in a great rage to destroy and to exterminate many. (45) Then [upon his return to Israel] he will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then].

Daniel 11:40b-45

As we have seen previously, verses 40b-43 above describes the beast's conquest of the southern confederacy and consolidation of his power during the Tribulation's second half. Then, in verse 44, we are given additional critical information about antichrist's subsequent conduct, specifically, his actions at the time of the fifth bowl judgment which we are presently studying. At that time, the beast will quit Jerusalem because of “reports” which will “disturb him”. These “reports”, furthermore, are said to emanate from “the east and the north”. They will provoke him to “a great rage” and motivate him “to destroy and to exterminate many”. The following context in verse 45, is a clear reference to the battle of Armageddon where the beast will meet his end at the hands of our victorious returning Lord. This means that antichrist's hasty departure from Jerusalem in verse 44 has to be sandwiched between the two, and in the description given seems to occur during the time period just prior to the Second Advent (as also in Zech.9:8, NASB: “him [i.e., antichrist] who passes by and returns”). There is thus much to recommend understanding the cause of these “reports” which so enrage the beast and cause him to abandon his new world headquarters in Jerusalem's temple for a wide-ranging and destructive punitive campaign as being the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment. For just as in Daniel 11:40-45 the departure lies between events taking place late in the Great Tribulation and the return of Christ, so in Revelation chapter sixteen the fifth bowl judgment occurs just before the commencement of the Armageddon campaign (the sixth bowl judgment), and is likewise positioned late in the Great Tribulation (e.g., it follows the Great Persecution and the previous four bowl judgments).

So in the same way that Babylon will be singled out during the seventh bowl judgment, here we see the earth's northern quadrant (essentially synonymous with antichrist's seven nation European confederacy, although for geographical reasons we can omit Israel in this case) being similarly singled out – not destroyed, as Babylon will be, but plunged into darkness. That this blacking out of the entire continent of Europe will be the cause of much political and social disruption should come as no surprise especially given the horrendous nature of antichrist's social and economic policies in particular (that is to say, there will unquestionably be many who will take advantage of this opportunity to rid themselves of his rule). The mention of the “east” here as also being a source of the disturbing reports is significant as well. The degree of control enjoyed over the world's eastern hemisphere by antichrist at this time will be, as previously discussed, based upon an overall military, political, and economic dominance, and exercised in that quadrant largely through surrogates (i.e., “the kings of the east”), rather than being underpinned by large-scale military occupation (although the deployment of his substantial naval superiority in this endeavor is not to be ruled out). Therefore, though not suffering the judgment of darkness itself, the global disruption of command and control that this unprecedented event will produce can reasonably be expected to engender at the very least the rumblings of an increased degree of political independence in these eastern regimes. It is certainly in keeping with antichrist's character to react vigorously and ruthlessly to any perceived threats to his power and position, especially when they are so potentially serious as what we are contemplating here. In such circumstances, a campaign of terror designed to put down any hint of rebellion in the north and by example squelch all potential moves towards political independence in the east may be understood in the phraseology of verse 44: i.e., antichrist's method in temporarily relinquishing Jerusalem “in a great rage” will be “to destroy and to exterminate many” in order to repair the breaches in his worldwide empire.

In Daniel 11:45 we see antichrist returned to Israel, and taking up positions with ominous intent against rather than in Jerusalem. As with verse 44, this description is again in complete harmony with what we find in Revelation chapter sixteen where, shortly after the darkening of the north during the fifth bowl judgment, we find that the “kings of the east”, rather than entertaining rebellion, are now full-fledged participants in the anti-God Armageddon campaign (Rev.16:12). This development, and the mustering of the armies of the world to do battle with the soon to return Lord Jesus Christ, is sufficient to show that antichrist's efforts to reestablish his authority in the north and east following the disruption of his control occasioned by the darkness will be entirely effective.

The Jewish Rebellion: As we have seen, following antichrist's second campaign against the south, the campaign following which he takes up residence in the temple in Jerusalem, Israel was said to be subject to “harsh treatment” at that time according to Balaam's prophecy (Num.24:23-24). Much of this “harsh treatment” is almost certainly a proleptic reference to the “rage” with which antichrist will return to Israel from Egypt following the failed attempt upon his person (Dan.11:30). Thus the bulk of the maltreatment suffered in Israel at that time will be intimately connected with the beast's war upon Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, the scapegoats chosen by antichrist to atone for the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate him (Rev.11:7-13). We

can also expect as a result of these developments, especially in light of the fact that the beast from this point forward takes up residence in Jerusalem, that personal freedom in Israel during this period will be even more limited than is the case in the rest of antichrist's empire. Conservative unbelievers and zealots, who resisted the message of Moses and Elijah but fell short of wholeheartedly embracing antichrist as God, will be extremely resentful of the beast's representation of himself as the Holy One of Israel. Indeed, the source of the previous assassination attempt will most likely derive from these circles, and this "breaking of the [pseudo-Messianic] treaty" between himself and Israel during the middle of the Tribulation will be a major grounds for continuing unrest (Dan.9:27).

But although political liberties may be nonexistent in Israel during the Great Tribulation, relative to much of the rest of the world she will be experiencing at least some measure of material prosperity thanks in no small part we may assume to the fact that Jerusalem has now become the capital of the world. Thus the resulting pilgrimages to the temple and the embassies connected with the Great Persecution on the one hand, and the likely desire of the beast to make "the place of his feet glorious" (as part of the pseudo-fulfillment of the messianic promises to which he lays claim: Is.60:13) will to some degree enrich Israel in material terms (cf. Ezek.38:7-16 where Israel appears as relatively prosperous before Armageddon), even though she will never know a time of greater spiritual abasement. Nevertheless, scripture does also indicate that even in the case of this relative material prosperity, the bulk of the population will be subject to extreme exploitation and maltreatment at the hands of the beast's ruling class, notable among them being the "false shepherd", one of the "ten kings" and Israel's ruler during this period.

We can therefore easily understand how many elements within Jewish society at this time would find the supernatural darkening of antichrist's home kingdom and his departure from Israel with the greater portion of his military forces an ideal opportunity to throw off the beast's yoke once and for all, little understanding or appreciating that this very action will soon set in motion the Armageddon campaign as the beast summons all of the world's military forces to Israel in hopes of destroying her forever in retaliation for her unfaithfulness. This rebellion and the response it provokes thus fulfills the prophecies of wars and desolations destined to continue for her until our Lord returns (Dan.9:26; cf. Lk.21:9).

A word needs to be said here as well about the role in this rebellion of prophetic Babylon (i.e., the U.S., antichrist's original home country). Although it will be recalled that antichrist is Babylon's "king", scripture also indicates that she will have a regent as well, no doubt managing her government while the beast is occupied overseas (as he will be for the bulk of the Tribulation). This would be the "regent" of Babylon as opposed to her true "king", antichrist (contrast Ezek.28:2-10 referring to the former, with Ezek.28:12-19, which applies to the latter). We can well imagine that with the beast and the majority of his imperial guard disappearing into the darkness that enshrouds Europe at this time, it will not only be Israel and the eastern marches of the beast's empire who are entertaining thoughts of independence. Therefore a revolt centered upon antichrist's new capital is likely to bring a receptive response from all such quarters, and none will be more naturally sympathetic toward such a development than Babylon and her

regent. The emotional tie between Babylon and Israel did much to bring about the two campaigns that led to antichrist's world dominion in the first place. And as to the deputy ruler of Babylon, scripture indicates that in his arrogance he is very likely to see himself as the beast's natural successor, with the present crisis providing an opportunity to move that succession forward in time beyond anything previously anticipated. But of course this thinking represents a miscalculation in the extreme.

(1) Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, (2) Son of man, say to the prince[-regent] of Tyre (i.e., as opposed to the “king” in v.12), “Thus says the Lord. Because your heart is lifted high [with pride], and because you say 'I am a god [and] I occupy a position like God's in the heart of the seas', but because you are a man and not a god, though you have indulged your heart [with divine prerogatives] as if it were God's heart . . . (3) behold, you are wiser than Daniel! No hidden thing is concealed from you! (4) It is by your own wisdom and understanding that you have enriched yourself and piled up gold and silver in your storehouses! (5) It is by your own abundant wisdom, by your own trafficking, that you have multiplied your wealth! But [in fact] your heart has been lifted high [with pride] because of [that very] wealth of yours.’
Ezekiel 28:1-5

We see the regent of antichrist's home country Babylon described above as the “prince-regent of Tyre”, with Tyre being an alternative representation for the same prophetic future state stressing economic as opposed to military power (cf. Ezek.28:12ff. where the king of Tyre is a type of both antichrist and Satan). The unfaithfulness demonstrated by the beast's sub-ruler at this time will have much to do with motivating the destruction of Babylon soon hereafter.

(46) And lest your heart grow faint and you become afraid at the report heard against the land (i.e., antichrist's decree against Israel in his call to Armageddon: Rev.16:12-16), in the year this report comes, after it will come another report in the same year; the one [will be] of violence against the land [of Israel], the other of a ruler (i.e., antichrist) against a ruler (i.e., the prince of Babylon). (47) For behold, in days to come I will render judgment on the idols of Babylon. Her entire land will be ashamed, and all of her slain will fall in her midst.
Jeremiah 51:46-47

Another representation for this deputy ruler is “Pharaoh” in those cases where Egypt and Pharaoh are being contrasted with Assyria and her king in prophetic contexts. In such situations, Assyria and her king represent revived Rome and her ruler antichrist, while Egypt and Pharaoh represent prophetic Babylon and antichrist's disobedient deputy respectively. Israel's reliance at this time upon prophetic Babylon, a pagan nation which only recently contributed mightily to her troubles, is eerily parallel to her reliance in the past upon literal Egypt. In both cases not only does such confidence prove to be entirely misplaced, but it also demonstrates the folly of Israel looking anywhere for help apart from the Lord who created her (Is.30:1-6; 31:1-3; Lam.4:17).

(6b) [I shall destroy you in this way, O Pharaoh], because you have been a staff [made only] of reed for the house of Israel. (7) When they took hold of you, you splintered in their hands, and [so] you broke everyone's back [who leaned on you].
Ezekiel 29:6b-7

At this juncture, therefore, though there will be a renewed dialogue between antichrist's home country and insurrectionist forces within Israel for reasons of political expediency on both sides, and though this will serve to greatly encourage the rebel camp within Israel, whatever material support Babylon may give to this rebellion will all be for naught. For Babylon will be destroyed soon thereafter, while the rebellion itself will only furnish motivation and pretext for that destruction, as well as for the Armageddon campaign which follows in its wake.

(13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the [spiritual] rebellion (i.e., apostasy) which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified."
Daniel 8:13-14

This passage in Daniel allows us to reconstruct the timing of the rebellion with great specificity. It will be recalled from the chart of the bowl judgments above, that the supernatural darkness which strikes the beast's kingdom of revived Rome will occur at the beginning of the eighth month preceding our Lord's return at the end of the Great Tribulation. That is to say, the fifth bowl judgment occurs 1,120 days into the Great Tribulation and 240 days from its termination. The information in Daniel's prophecy above further assures us that the beast's pollution of the temple, begun it will be recalled at the Great Tribulation's outset, will last for 1,150 days (i.e., 1,150 evenings plus 1,150 mornings). This means that it will take just over four months (130 days) after the fifth bowl judgment begins for the Jewish rebels to re-occupy the Temple Mount and complete the requisite ritual purification of the holy place (a process which took the priests under Hezekiah half a month to complete: 2Chron.29:17). Thus the beast's departure from Israel, the formation (or coming out into the open) of an armed resistance, the capturing of the Temple Mount, its ritual purification, and antichrist's reaction in mounting the Armageddon campaign will all happen in rapid-fire succession as the pace of events accelerates toward the Tribulation's end. The re-conquest of the Temple mount will certainly not mean the end of armed struggle within the borders of Israel. Part of antichrist's modus operandi of rulership worldwide will be to cement his control through the use of "fortresses" (Dan.11:38-39), strong points manned by his loyalists as a hedge against just such attempts on his regime, and scripture indicates that the same will be true in Israel (Is.2:15; 25:12; 30:25; Zeph.1:16; 3:6; 3:15 [Hebrew only]). Once the rebellion begins, these strong-points will no doubt be occupied not only by the beast's residual garrison, but also by those Jews whose allegiance to antichrist has passed the point of no return (as, for example, the "king" of Israel). Given the progression of the Armageddon campaign (covered below), we can expect a number of these outposts to hold out until antichrist returns for the battle of Armageddon, and thus for the struggle to continue right up until our Lord's return

(Dan.9:26), for it will be His Second Advent which destroys the beast and delivers Israel rather than this rash attempt at self-deliverance.

(6) Then [one of the two other angels] said to the man (i.e., the angel) clothed in linen who was [suspended] above the waters of the river, “How long [will it be] until the end of [these] astounding things?” (7) And I heard the man (i.e., the angel) clothed in linen who was [suspended] above the waters of the river. He raised his right hand and his left hand to heaven and he swore by Him who lives forever and ever that it would be a period [of time and] two periods [of time] and half [a period of time] (i.e., the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation), and that [just] when the power of the holy people was being completely crushed, [all] these things would come to their completion.

Daniel 12:6-7

And after the sixty two weeks, Messiah will be cut off and have nothing (cf. Is.53:8), and the people of the prince who is coming (i.e., antichrist) will destroy both the city and the holy place. And his end will come with a flood (i.e., the “flooding away” of his armies at Armageddon), and until that end there will be wars – [appalling] devastation has been decreed.

Daniel 9:26

6. Preparation for Armageddon

(12) And the sixth [angel] poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water dried up in order that the way of the kings of the orient (lit., “sun's rising”) might be prepared. (13) And I saw [coming] out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like [unto] frogs. (14) Now these are spirits of demons which produce “signs”: they will go forth to the kings of the entire earth to gather them together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty. (15) – Behold, He (i.e., our Lord Jesus) is coming like a thief. Happy is he who both stays awake and guards his clothing, in order that he may not walk about naked and [people] see his shame. – (16) And they (i.e., the demons) gathered them (i.e., the kings of the earth and their armies) together to a place called in Hebrew, “Armageddon”.

Revelation 16:12-16

The Kings of the East: It will be remembered that reports coming from both east and north had compelled antichrist to abandon temporarily his new world headquarters in Jerusalem in order to re-secure his base of power. Only the north, the “kingdom of the beast”, had been plunged into supernatural darkness, but the disruptions caused in that quadrant of the world produced rumblings of insurrection in the eastern quarter of the globe as well. Now, scarcely a month later, we see the situation entirely reversed. In characteristically “leopard-like” fashion (Rev.13:2), the beast's fierce and lightning-swift reaction to incipient rebellion in his own kingdom has not only restored complete control to the north, his current location, but has apparently so over-awed the “kings of the east” that they are now more than willing to offer him

the use of their own massive if inferior military forces as a sign of their loyalty and obeisance (and no doubt with the intention of warding off a similar punitive strike aimed in their direction).

And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?"

Revelation 13:3-4

Thus, the other rumblings of rebellion are rapidly and mercilessly squelched by antichrist and die out without so much as a whimper. Instead of their actions being cloaked by a worldwide insurrection to throw off the beast's yoke, the rebels within Israel now find themselves not only bereft of erstwhile allies (Babylon temporarily excepted), but have also become the primary target of the remaining military might of the entire world. For antichrist is now mustering every available battalion from the four corners of the earth. Previously in control of the south, and having regained control of the north, here we see even the forces of the east available to him. As this process begins to unfold, we now find ourselves some six or seven months away from the climax of the Armageddon campaign which culminates with our Lord's return at the Second Advent. Judging from the description of massive troop movements from the east, it appears that the beast, with time now on his side, will opt for a somewhat different strategy to crush Israel. Rather than striking immediately with limited forces as was his method in the past, he will choose instead to gather all of the world's military forces in and around Israel for a final massive assault on Jerusalem with the intention of annihilating Israel stock and stem (and we can expect him to use every aspect of his considerable political and social control to bring this campaign to pass in a spectacular way). Thus, even as the Jewish rebellion proceeds and consolidates around the newly reclaimed temple, antichrist's juggernaut will be gathering momentum even as it grows ever greater in size, assembling on the borders of Israel from every corner of the globe. Finally, as to Babylon, as suggested in the parallels to Egypt and Pharaoh and the historical disappointments they consistently dealt to Israel whenever she relied on them for support against northern invaders, the west, still under Babylon's nominal leadership, will provide no tangible help (for reasons covered below), so that her previous encouragement will only have served to have emboldened secular Israel to take up this hopeless fight, hopeless, that is, without extreme divine intervention, a contingency upon which these rebels never planned.

The Sixth Bowl: The meaning of the drying up of the Euphrates is symbolic (cf. Is.11:15). As a purely geographical barrier, it presents no great obstacle to the passage of a massive modern army, whether dry or at flood stage. However it did once mark the traditional boundary between east and west, one which was rarely crossed in antiquity with any sort of effect. By "drying it up" we are meant to understand that all of the factors which have so far prevented or restrained involvement of "the east" from the seat of conflict in the Middle East have now been removed by divine intervention. It may seem somewhat odd that this sixth bowl judgment seemingly plays into antichrist's hands, removing all restraint on the previous reluctance of the kings of the east to participate in Middle-Eastern conflict. But just as the removal of Holy Spirit restraint worldwide was a necessary measure in order to allow "the book to be opened" and the Tribulation to begin, so the removal of the barrier to involvement by the kings of the east is a necessary measure to

allow all of the earthly forces of evil to assemble for the Great Day of the Lord, the battle of Armageddon. This, then, is truly a judgment as well, because now the east too, the last quadrant of the world so far not directly involved in the military affairs of the Tribulation, will be drawn into the destruction about to be rained down by our returning Lord Jesus Christ.

Armageddon: Armageddon is the scene of the last battle of the Tribulation, the place where our Lord will destroy the massive armies of antichrist on the “great day of God the Almighty” just as they are on the point of destroying Israel and all who have recently sought shelter within her borders. Contrary to popular belief, Armageddon has nothing to do with “Megiddo”, an ancient city located in the north of what today is the state of Israel. Armageddon is, rather, a prophetic name for Jerusalem, the place where the unbelieving rebels and the saints recently escaped from Babylon make what appears to be their “last stand”.

The popular (and misinformed) association of Armageddon with Megiddo rests entirely upon the similarity in spelling between these two proper names. This is not an unreasonable place to begin a consideration of what scripture means by the name “Armageddon” (a word that occurs only here in Revelation 16:16), but further investigation will show that, while the perceived etymological connection is illusory, scripture leaves us in no doubt whatsoever about the fact that, just as we ought to have expected, it is at Jerusalem that the final battle of the Tribulation will occur (while, on the other hand, the Bible is entirely silent about Megiddo on this score; cf. Ps.2:1-6; Is.4:3; 22:1-14; 25:6-7; 31:9; 33:3-5; 33:10-22; 40:1-2; 40:9-10; 52:1-8; 60:1-3; 62:11; Joel 3:1-2; Zeph.3:14-17; Rom.11:26):

(1) Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped (i.e., Jerusalem)! Add year to year, let your festivals run their course, (2) but I will besiege Ariel so that there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will become to Me like an “Ariel” (lit., “God’s [sacrificial] altar”). (3) For I will beleague you round about with palisades, and surround you with siege works. (4) You will be brought low and speak from the ground, and from the dust your speech will be humbled. Your voice will come ghost-like from the earth, and your speech will come muttering from the dust. (5) But the multitude of your enemies will become like pulverized powder, even like chaff swept away [on the wind], that multitude of ruthless [enemies]. And it will come to pass in an instant that (6) you will experience visitation from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against **Mount Zion**.

Isaiah 29:1-8

(9) Break forth [in song] and rejoice altogether, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has had compassion on His people. He has redeemed **Jerusalem**. (10) The Lord has

uncovered His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God!

Isaiah 52:9-10

(18) As they have done, so He will repay them, wrath to His adversaries and recompense to His enemies. Even unto the islands (i.e., the remotest lands of the west) He will repay the recompense [due them], (19) so that they will fear the Name of the Lord in the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun (i.e., the east). For although the enemy (i.e., antichrist) will attack like the River (i.e., the great Nile or Euphrates; cf. Dan.11:22; 11:26), the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight. (20) For the Redeemer will come to **Zion**, even to those in Jacob who turn away from their transgression.

Isaiah 59:18-20

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on **Mount Zion** and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:30-32

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of “the Lord will judge”). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from **Zion**, and from **Jerusalem** He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:12-16

(15) For the Day of the Lord is near against all the nations. Just as you have done, it will be done to you, and your recompense will return on your own head. (16) For just as you have drunk on My holy mountain, so all the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow down [the Lord's cup of wrath] and will be as if they never were. (17) But on **Mount Zion** there will be deliverance.

Obadiah 1:15-17a

(2) For behold, I am going to make **Jerusalem** a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And Judah also and **Jerusalem** will be besieged. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make **Jerusalem** a burdensome rock for all the nations. Everyone who tries to lift it will surely be injured. For against her (i.e., Jerusalem) will be gathered all the nations of the earth.

Zechariah 12:2-3

And it will come to pass on that day that I will make it My purpose to destroy all the nations which are attacking **Jerusalem**.

Zechariah 12:9

And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against **Jerusalem**: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

Zechariah 14:12

Thus the precise place where our Lord was crucified and resurrected, and to which He is prophesied to return, is where this final battle of the Tribulation will take place (cf. Acts 1:11):

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (2) From **Zion** the Lord will send forth your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) Your people will volunteer on the day of your valor[ous victory] (i.e., the armies of Israel). In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). (4) The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek." (5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations. He will shatter [their] head (cf. Gen.3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result]. (7) [But as to His troops], they will drink from a brook beside the way. Therefore He will lift up their head.

Psalms 110:1-7

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

Zechariah 8:3

Rejoice greatly, daughter of **Zion**. Shout [for joy], daughter of **Jerusalem**. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is; humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal.

Zechariah 9:9

(2) For I shall gather all the nations to **Jerusalem** to fight against her. The city will be captured, its houses will be sacked, and its women will be ravished. (3) Half of the city will be taken away captive, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth, and He will fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle. (4) For His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east.

Zechariah 14:2-4a

And the winepress [of the slaughter of Armageddon] was trodden down outside of the city [of Jerusalem]. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia.

Revelation 14:20

Given the overwhelming testimony of scripture to the fact that Jerusalem will be the focal point of the final battle of the Tribulation, it is indeed strange that the misunderstanding of the name “Armageddon”, a hapax legomenon occurring only at Revelation 16:16, has had such a profound (and negative) influence on the true interpretation of these events. Most interpreters agree that the *Har-* of Armageddon (the “h” sound present in the Greek being commonly if unfortunately left out in the traditional transliteration of this name) is the Hebrew word for “mountain” (and it should be noted in passing that the most common geographical feature that has recommended Megiddo to exegetes has been its extensive *plain* rather than any “mountain”). This leaves us to explore the second part of this compound place name, *-Mageddon*. First in this respect, it is best to take the *Ma-* as a pre-formative *mem* used here in the locative sense, i.e., “Mountain-which-is-a-place of _____”. The use of the letter “m” as a prefix indicating “place of” to whatever root it is attached is a well-attested phenomenon in Semitic languages. This leaves us to derive *-geddon* from either the “double ayin” root *gdd* (גדד), or the hollow root *gud* (גוד). The distinction is largely academic here, as both roots have the same essential meaning in Biblical Hebrew: “attack, cut, go in troops or throngs”. Given that the most commonly attested substantive from either root, *ghedhudh* (גדוד), generally refers to military formations, the most likely meaning of Armageddon is “Mountain of Troops” or “Mountain of [mustering] Troops”. So what we have in this name is a very clear reference to the assembly from the world over of all the forces of antichrist to Jerusalem. Here they will assemble, at Jerusalem called here prophetically and appropriately “the Mountain of [Assembly of] Troops”, for here all of the beast's worldly armies will be annihilated by our Lord. Indeed, it is for this very purpose that they will be so assembled:

And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion.

Isaiah 29:8

(2) For behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And Judah also and Jerusalem will be besieged. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome rock for all the nations. Everyone who tries to lift it will surely be injured. For against her will be gathered all the nations of the earth.

Zechariah 12:2-3

And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

Understood in this way, we can then see in Micah 5:1-5a the locus classicus, for “Armageddon”, that is, the passage which John under the guidance of the Spirit had in mind when coining this prophetic name. In Micah 5:1-5a, we see that this predominantly Second Advent passage also brings in testimony about our Lord's first advent, weaving the two events together in a wonderful, poetic way, a common phenomenon in Hebrew prophecy:

(1) But now marshal your [own] troops (<gdd, אָרְבָּה), O city (lit., “daughter”) of troops (<gedhudh, אָרְבָּה) [which are marshaled against you]. For they have laid siege to us. For they have struck on the cheek with a rod the Judge of Israel. (2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. (3) For He will give them over [to the oppressor] until the time when [Jerusalem] labors [like] a woman in labor. At that time the rest of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel (i.e., prior to the Second Advent). (4) For He (i.e., our Lord Jesus at His return) will arise and will be their Shepherd, in the might of the Lord, and in the majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they (i.e., His flock) will abide, for then He will be great, even to the ends of the earth. (5) For this One will be our Peace.
Micah 5:1-5a

7. Earthquake and Hail

(17) And when [the seventh angel] poured out his bowl upon the atmosphere, a loud voice issued forth out of the [heavens coming] from the throne [of God], saying “It is done!” (18) And there occurred thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and a great earthquake such as had not occurred since men came to be upon the earth – of such great magnitude was [this] earthquake. (19) And the great city (i.e., Jerusalem) was split into three parts. And the cities of the gentiles fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God [so as] to give to her [the] cup of the wine of [God's] angry wrath (Jer.25:19-32; Ob.1:16; Zech.12:2-3; cf. Jer.51:7; 2Thes.1:8-10; Rev.17:4; 18:6). (20) And every island fled, and mountains could not be found. (21) Then great hail stones the size of a talent (i.e., approx. 80 lb.) were coming down out of heaven upon mankind, and they blasphemed God on account of the plague of hail, because that plague was very severe.
Revelation 16:17-21

The seventh bowl comprises all of the final events of the Great Tribulation which culminate in our Lord's return and His destruction of the beast and his armies at Armageddon. Some of the items in this description, specifically, the thunderous voices (of God) and the flashes of lightning, the earthquake and the hail, we have seen before (Rev.4:5; 8:5; 11:19). All of the signs mentioned here presage the coming of the Lord. As with their parallel predecessors, these miraculous signs will be perceptible around the globe and as yet unimaginably awesome to

experience (as was the case in their previous occurrences). Moreover, their intensity will dramatically increase (cf. of the earthquake “such as had not occurred since men came to be upon the earth” and of the hail “the size of a talent”). The increased intensity here indicates that our Lord's coming is now imminent, even as the words “It is done!” are unquestionably meant to show. In fact, history since our Lord's ascension into heaven has been, from the divine perspective, a series of preparatory periods of intensifying warning telescoped into ever smaller windows of time: The Church Age (2000 years), whose last era is Laodicea (144 years), which culminates in the Tribulation (7 years), whose most intense phase is the Great Tribulation (three and a half years), which ends with the seventh bowl judgment (six months), which is itself concluded by the Second Advent proper (a unique, single day, the “Day of the Lord”: cf. Zech.14:1-7). For as with the signs which preceded the Lord's descent to Mount Sinai (Ex.19:16-20), these signs too are indications of the imminence of the awesome and terrifying presence of God Himself, soon to return to the earth in judgment. With the words “It is done!”, we have God's assurance that the Great Tribulation is now in its final phase.

The Earthquake: Earthquakes are prominent precursors of most of the ever shortening periods of warning that lead up to our Lord's return (Matt.24:7; Mk.13:8; Lk.21:11; cf. Amos 1:2 w/ 1:1; Hag.2:6-7; Heb.12:26-29), and, as this unprecedented temblor indicates, their intensity parallels the intensity of the period covered. For we find exceptional earthquakes characterizing and marking the commencement of . . . 1) the Church Age (lasting 2000 years: Matt.27:51; 27:54; 28:2; Acts 4:31; cf. Acts 2:1-2); [2] possibly the era of Laodicea (lasting 144 years)¹; 3) the Tribulation (lasting 7 years: Rev.8:5); 4) the Great Tribulation (lasting 3.5 years: Rev.11:13; 11:19); 5) this earthquake which accompanies the Seventh Bowl Judgment (and governs the period six months prior to the Second Advent: Rev.16:18-20); 6) the Second Advent proper (coincidental with the Day of the Lord's official commencement: Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; Hab.3:6; cf. Zech.14:3-5; Rev.6:12); and finally, 7) the beginning of eternity (Hag.2:6-7; 2:20-21; 2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.6:12-17; 20:11). As is the case with many of the horrendous events destined to occur during the Tribulation, it is difficult to digest and appreciate without experiencing it firsthand the magnitude of this particular earthquake and the terror it will inspire at that time (cf. Lk.21:25-31). Scripture clearly indicates that this earthquake will be unparalleled in human history and experience, and of such incomprehensible force that it will bring down “the cities of the gentiles”.

Although Babylon is often described as “the great city” (cf. Rev.14:8; 17:1; 17:5; 18:2; 18:10; 18:16; 18:18-19; 18:21; 19:2), her punishment is related in this context as the third event in the sequence of events which comprise the seventh bowl judgment (following the lightning and the earthquake). That punishment will be unique, and is detailed in Revelation 17:15 - 19:3. Jerusalem, antichrist's world capital of late, is the “great city” mentioned *here* (as she is described

¹ While merely hypothetical since scripture does not mention it, the explosion of Krakatoa in 1883 at the beginning of the Laodicean era is perhaps not merely coincidental in this regard (the era of Laodicea commencing in ca. 1882 according to our reckoning in part 2A of the Coming Tribulation series).

at Revelation 11:8 as well, also in the context of a great, local earthquake, #4 above: Rev.11:13). Having previously undergone an earthquake judgment earlier in the first half of the Tribulation (Rev.11:13), and with another major earthquake foretold to accompany the Second Advent proper (Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; cf. Zech.14:1-7; Rev.6:12), Jerusalem will at this time be physically split into three parts. It will be recalled that those Jews who responded to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 are at this time enjoying safe haven in the desert (Rev.12:6). This earthquake, among other things therefore, will be another sign to the as yet unbelieving population of Israel of the futility of seeking deliverance apart from God. For we can expect this mammoth quake to seriously disrupt all plans for resistance to the beast as he begins to muster his forces for Armageddon. The earthquake which splits Jerusalem into three parts will have two salutary effects, however: 1) while it will degrade the overall effectiveness of the Israeli armed forces, it will make Jerusalem herself more defensible (cf. the complications to the German offensive at Stalingrad caused by the great mass of industrial ruin and debris); and 2) the dislocation caused by the earthquake will result in opening up the way for an influx of refugees from Babylon (who might otherwise be denied entrance were the civil administration not reeling from this event).

Since as explained above the seventh bowl entails a series of divine judgments which begin six months prior to but culminate in the return of our Lord, we may expect little or no time between the last event described here, the plague of hail, and that return. On this point, the preceding words "every island fled, and mountains could not be found" must be applied to the next major earthquake which accompanies that return (i.e., happening as a result of earthquake #6 above, and not #5). This second earthquake in context, the "2nd Advent" quake, will be a gigantic one, with these words indicating that few geographical features will remain unaffected by its massive, global shockwaves. The world's islands and coast-lands will be swamped by the tsunami effect of this world-wide event, with its violent vibrations affecting all of the world's mountains as well, bringing many eminences crashing to earth as a result. This fourth event in the seventh bowl judgment is thus the same earthquake referred to in the description of the Second Advent given in the sixth seal (Rev.6:12-17), the same event often mentioned in prophecy as the harbinger of our Lord's return (Is.2:21; 24:18-20; 29:6; Ezek.38:19-20; Joel 3:16; Hag.2:6-7; 2:21; cf. Zech.14:1-7), with the "fleeing" of mountains, islands, earth and sky being a characteristic feature which accompanies the coming of the Lord to execute judgment (Rev.20:11; cf. 2Pet.3:10):

And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits

upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?

Revelation 6:12-17

Hail: Large hailstones falling worldwide, it will be recalled, also accompanied the blowing of the seventh trumpet, the event which heralded the beginning of the Great Tribulation proper, also accompanied by “thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and an earthquake” (Rev.11:19). But just as the earthquake of the seventh bowl judgment is exponentially larger and incomparably more devastating than its predecessor, so this worldwide hailstorm will be without parallel in world history, surpassing both the seventh plague of the Exodus (Ex.9:18-35) and the hail rained down by the Lord upon the Canaanite kings at Gibeon (Josh.10:11) – not only in its ferocity, but also by virtue of the fact that it will not be localized as those two judgments were: everyone on earth will feel the fury of this divine judgment (believers excepted to some degree as always: cf. Is.26:20-21; 32:19-20).

Though we can scarcely imagine the terror produced or the damage caused by the raining down of hailstones some eighty pounds in weight, yet the most remarkable thing about this judgment will be the continued implacable hardness of heart on behalf of the worlds' unbelieving population. In spite of the massive earthquake, in spite of this massive hail, in spite of the warning voices, thunder and lightning, there is still not the slightest thought of repentance. Indeed, their only response is to blaspheme God. Surely in all this God has shown Himself to be just in all He has done – and in all He is about to do to this world of unrepentant and irremediable evil.

(5) For the earth has befouled itself at the hands of its inhabitants. For they have transgressed the teachings [of God]; they have altered [His] statute[s]; they have violated the eternal covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants are punished. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are incinerated, and little of mankind remains.

Isaiah 24:5-6

B. Judgment on Babylon

1. Babylon, the Woman who Rides the Beast

(1) Then one of the seven angels with the seven bowls spoke with me, saying, “Look! I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, (2) [the one] with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication even as the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk from the wine of her fornication.” (3) And he took me off in the Spirit to a desert. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was covered with blasphemous names, [and which] had seven heads and ten horns. (4) And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and was adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, [and was] holding a golden cup in her hand filled with abominations and [all] the unclean things of her prostitution and [the prostitution] of the earth (Jer.51:7;

Rev.18:6; cf. Jer.25:19-32; Ob.1:16; Zech.12:2-3). (5) And on her forehead a name was written: “mystery Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the world”. (6) And I saw that the woman was drunk from the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw [this], I was greatly amazed. (7) And the angel said to me, “Why are you amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and the beast who is carrying her, the one who has the seven heads and the ten horns. (8) The beast, which you saw, was (i.e., “existed”), and is not (i.e., came “not to exist”), and is going to rise from the Abyss (i.e., the revival of Rome on the one hand and apparent resuscitation of antichrist on the other), and is going to its destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, [those] whose names have not remained written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, will be in awe when they see the beast, because he was (i.e., “existed”), and is not (i.e., came “not to exist”), and will again be present on the scene (i.e., return to life in the case of antichrist, and be reestablished in respect to the empire). (9) This calls for a mind having wisdom: the seven heads [of the beast (cf. v.3 and 13:1)] are seven mountains whereon the woman sits. They are also seven kings. (10) The [first] five [of these kings] have fallen. The [next (i.e., the sixth)] one is now [alive]. The last (i.e., antichrist) has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain for a short time (i.e., the Tribulation). (11) And [as to] the beast which was and is not, this is the eighth [king] and he is [also] one of the seven, and he is going to [his] destruction. (12) And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings for one hour (i.e., time period, specifically, the Tribulation) along with the beast. (13) These will have one purpose and [are going to] give their power and their authority to the beast. (14) These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and those who are with Him are called, and elect – and [have remained] faithful.”

Revelation 17:1-14

a. The Woman Babylon who Rides the Beast (verses 1-6)

Like the four horsemen of chapter six and the woman and the dragon of chapter twelve, this vision which John is given to see of Babylon and the beast is an allegory, that is, a symbolic representation of events which provides concentrated and memorable content related to the future. Babylon is the home country of the beast, an economic, military, and cultural powerhouse which was the first part of antichrist's kingdom and the springboard both for his military conquests as well as for his worldwide religion. As verse fifteen later tells us, the “waters” upon which the woman sits are “peoples and multitudes and nations and languages”, and this clearly speaks to the potency of Babylon's worldwide power and influence (cf. Jer.51:12-13). But John does not see her “sitting on many waters”. This bit of information comes in verse one before the angel shows him the vision in verse two. What John sees in this vision is a gaudy prostitute sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads.

The woman Babylon's appearance and behavior as described above in terms of prostitution and fornication tell us much about the character of her role in antichrist's plan for world domination

and the institution of Satan's pseudo-millennium. In the metaphor here, prostitution and fornication refer in general terms to illegitimate, sinful, and evil as opposed to godly behavior and relationships. Specifically, the metaphor is comparing to prostitution Babylon's embracing of and trafficking for the devil's pseudo-Messiah (antichrist, the beast) and the devil's pseudo-divine kingdom (of which she styles herself the capital). Just as prostitutes use superficial yet attractive wives to entice their customers, so Babylon will be instrumental in “selling” antichrist's ideology and false religion. Her methods are cultural, economic-technological, and military ones, yielding political, social, and religious results for the beast's conquest and domination of the world. Rather than serving the One who should be her true Husband, our Lord Jesus Christ (to whom the entire world owes its true allegiance), Babylon has developed her unfaithfulness to a high art, and has sold herself to the devil's anointed in the prosecution of his horrible goals. This facilitation of the beast's influence and power on Babylon's part is said here to extend both to the “kings” and also to the “inhabitants” of earth generally, demonstrating that the witches brew of her influence, i.e., the “wine” she has mixed for her victims, has had an enormous effect both strategically (in the larger military-political scheme of things) and tactically (on the level of personal influence through culture, religion, and techno-economic impact). It should be noted here that the sinful and evil aspects of current day U.S. cultural and other influences are quantitatively and qualitatively not to be compared to what Babylon of the Tribulation will do. For the “fornication” of that final eschatological day will be conscious, deliberate, and out of all proportion to anything presently imaginable. Therefore she will be completely without any excuse whatsoever in the face of the divine judgment described in Revelation chapters 17-19. Babylon's outrageous aiding and abetting of antichrist's corruption, seizure and abuse of the world generally constitutes the first divine charge against her. The second charge on the bill of indictment against Babylon is her facilitation of the Great Persecution as the original headquarters of antichrist's world religion. This is the meaning of the description of her in verse six as “drunk from the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”, and the fact that this heady wine has intoxicated her suggests that rather than being a reluctant participant in the Great Persecution, Babylon has taken a sick pleasure in it, for she is “drunk” on this wine.

The “desert”, a place of physical desolation where we find the woman mounted on the back of the beast, speaks of the spiritual desolation of the world under the rule of antichrist, in which spiritually desolate Babylon has played a signal role. This symbolism, moreover, has for Babylon a double meaning, for the spiritual desolation she has fostered is about to bring upon her a literal, physical desolation through the judgment which God is about to unleash upon her as a result.

The scarlet color of the beast speaks of the unprecedented slaughter which will characterize antichrist's reign, and that is also the point of comparison in the woman Babylon's scarlet dress, for she has aided and abetted antichrist in the slaughter of his opponents generally and in his martyrdom of believers in particular. She is also described as wearing “purple”, the color of royalty, and this is a reference to the fact that Babylon styles herself the “Queen of the World”, the jewel of kingdoms through which the beast has gained world political dominion. It is from

this lofty height that she shall fall, with her fall all the more precipitous and destructive as a result.

For you [O Babylon] said, “I will be a queen forever”. But you did not consider these things (i.e., the ramifications of your evil actions) in your heart. You did not call to mind the consequences [of your deeds].

Isaiah 47:7 (cf. Is.47:3)

To the same degree that she glorified herself and indulged in wanton excess, to that same degree give her torment and grief. For she says in her heart, “I am enthroned as a queen, and I am not a widow and I shall not see grief”.

Revelation 18:7

The golden goblet encrusted with gemstones and pearls, yet filled with fornication and abomination, completes the allegory of Babylon. All of these elements speak to the nature of her evil influence upon the world in the service of the beast. She has prostituted herself for antichrist, and this description of the cup and its contents relates entirely to that service on antichrist's behalf. The “wine” of fornication, antichrist's message of political “deliverance” and religious “devotion” is potent, taking away the wits of the nations and kings of the world who drink it (Jer.51:7; Rev.18:6), and yet it is delivered in a very attractive package (the impressive goblet) at the hand of an alluring agent (though it will bring on the corresponding cup of God's wrath in the end: Jer.25:19-32; Ob.1:16; Zech.12:2-3). Babylon appears to be a beautiful and perfect mate, but she is in reality a shameless prostitute. These symbols indicate in no uncertain terms that the prostitute and her wiles will be difficult to resist – except for those who know and faithfully follow their God.

b. The Beast on whom Babylon Rides (verses 7-14)

Verses 7-14 serve to bring the focus of action back to the beast and his kingdom, reprising the history of his rise and bringing us forward to the threshold of the Great Tribulation's end, a cluster of eschatological events which precede the Second Advent, key among which is the destruction of Babylon:

verse 7: The word “mystery” is used here because the vision of the woman riding the beast which John sees is an allegory which must be explained. The woman is Babylon, the beast is antichrist, and the seven hills and ten heads represent the beast's original European federation and the ten rulers of his post-conquest composite empire respectively. The beast is said to be “carrying” Babylon at this point, because, now that antichrist has conquered the world and faces no more political opposition, Babylon's support is no longer necessary (making her vulnerable to the judgment described below).

verse 8: Rising from the Abyss, the symbolic place of death (and actual present place of deceased unbelievers) represents antichrist's pseudo-resurrection and his European empire's seemingly miraculous reconstitution. Thus, the three-fold description “was, is not, and will

come” is descriptive both of antichrist, the personal beast, and the empire of revived Rome, the territorial beast, which constitutes the power-base from which (in addition to his original kingdom of Babylon) antichrist will gain world dominion. The three-fold description as applied to the territorial beast refers to revival in modern form of a pan-European power block which will greatly resemble the Roman empire in size, power, and location. The three-fold description as applied to the personal beast refers to his apparent death and pseudo-resurrection through which he will falsely convince much of the world's unbelieving population that he is the true Messiah. As a result of being deceived, these unbelievers will not come to saving faith in Christ, for although their names were originally written in the book of life “before the foundation of the world”, they are blotted out for actively rejecting Jesus Christ by choosing instead to follow antichrist. This description allows for the existence of unbelievers who, in spite of all that has presently transpired, do not put their faith in the beast (including many Jewish unbelievers who will yet turn to Christ when they witness His Second Advent return: Zech.12:10-14).

verses 9-11: The seven heads of the beast represent seven “mountains” or power-blocks within the *revived* Roman empire (cf. Jer.51:25). In terms of the vision John sees of the scarlet beast, they also represent rulers of the *historic* Roman empire. This device is used to explain antichrist's status. The beast will be “the seventh” in the line of absolute rulers or “Caesars” in that he will likewise come to have complete power and authority over the area ruled by Rome just as the Julio-Claudians, the original ruling house of the Roman empire, possessed. Five of these emperors were “fallen” or deceased at the time John wrote Revelation, but the sixth, Nero, was still alive. Antichrist is described here as being the next in the sequence (i.e., he will be a ruler just as powerful and absolute over revived Rome as the Julio-Claudians were over historic Rome), but he is also said to be “the eighth” while at the same time being "one of the seven" because in addition to being the new emperor of revived Rome (number seven) he will also be king of Babylon, a kingdom and an empire in its own right through the dominance of which antichrist will come to control revived Rome (and leader of the contemporaneous seven kings who will dominate the seven power-blocs during the Tribulation).

verse 12-14: The ten horns are the ten kings of the beast's composite empire of revived Rome, seven of whom will be his regents over the seven “mountains” (his original European power-base plus Israel), three of whom will be his regents over the three power-blocks of the southern alliance which the beast will conquer during the Tribulation's first half. All ten of these sub-rulers are likewise servants of Satan, and will be in league with antichrist from the beginning. The truth of this may be seen in verse thirteen where they are said to “have one purpose and [are going to] give their power and their authority to the beast”. By the Tribulation's midpoint, the entire globe will be under antichrist's control to one degree or another, opening the way for the Great Persecution which defines its second half and yields the name, “The Great Tribulation”. In verse fourteen, the synoptic view offered by this vision and its allegory now moves swiftly forward through those events of the Tribulation's second half (which John has just written about in detail in the preceding chapters 13-16), and on to the battle of Armageddon and the Second Advent, the closing events of the Tribulation. But although the assembled military might of the entire world of that time will be marshaled against Him, it will be no match at all for

the conquering Lamb of God. For He is “Lord of Lords and King of Kings”, true God and true man in One unique Person forever. Having won the victory over death through His own death on our behalf on the cross, He will quickly dispatch the forces of evil arrayed against Him on that future day of His glorious return. Here we are given a particular and blessed piece of encouragement: as believers in Jesus, no matter whether we are taken to be with Him before the Tribulation begins, die as martyrs for our Lord during that fiery trial, or endure until His return, we will in any case accompany Him, resurrected at the point of His return to live forever with Him in glory, partaking with Him in the victory of that great and glorious day. We are described, moreover, as “the called, selected, and faithful”. This gives the progression of our salvation, called to believe, selected to the family of God on the basis of that belief, and maintaining that belief firm until the end, no matter what may come. For it is on the basis of our faith, held fast until the end of life or the resurrection, whichever may come first, that we will experience the “first resurrection” (cf. Rev.20:5), and will rise to meet and then accompany our Lord in His victorious return. These words thus serve as an important reminder to all believers of the critical importance of maintaining our faith firm until the end, even in the face of the most intense tribulation the world will ever know, the Great Tribulation.

Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Mark 13:13 NIV (cf. Matt.10:22; 24:13)

2. Hatred of Babylon

(15) Then he said to me, “These [waters] which you saw upon which the prostitute sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. (16) Now as for the ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will come to hate the harlot [Babylon] and will render her desolate and naked, and they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. (17) For God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose and to be of one accord and to give their kingdoms to the beast until the words of God shall be fulfilled. (18) And the woman whom you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

Revelation 17:15-18

verse 15: This verse demonstrates the worldwide scope of Babylon's power and influence, a major point in the jealousy she arouses, not least in the beast, whose ego cannot brook the elevation of anyone or anything to any degree of earthly glory that might compete with his own. The fact that without Babylon and her political, economic, military and, last but far from least, cultural influence he never would have achieved the mastery of the world he now enjoys will matter little to antichrist. As a true son of his father the devil, there is not a scintilla of gratitude to be found in the beast's heart of solid stone, a fact that should give pause to any and all who contemplate serving him or his master Satan, even from a strictly worldly way of evaluating matters.

verse 16-17: This is our first indication in Revelation of the precise manner in which Babylon will meet her demise. In all of the various Old Testament passages which speak of the

destruction of Babylon (historical and eschatological), God is the cause, but in all such instances He makes use of earthly means. The seven European rulers together with the three rulers of the southern alliance's main power-blocs will all be equally jealous of Babylon's status, power, influence and wealth, no doubt all the more so inasmuch as we have already seen that Babylon will, up to this point, have been largely spared from the worst effects of the Tribulation, including much of the economic dislocation (as evidenced by the description of the prostitute's wealth earlier in this chapter), the ravages of war (since the conflicts will be fought far from her doorstep), and, as the beast's home country and favored realm, from the worst of antichrist's social, religious, economic and political system and "reforms". The beast's own hatred is also unquestionably predicated upon Babylon's recent infidelity to him. For it will be recalled that during the just concluded fifth bowl judgment, Babylon had made use of the dislocation occasioned by the darkness of the seven kingdoms to conspire against him.

The unfaithfulness demonstrated by the beast's sub-ruler in charge of Babylon at this time will have much to do with motivating her destruction. Rather than expressing disapproval in the face of the ruler of Babylon's intrigues with Israel during antichrist's emergency expedition into the darkness of the rebellious north, there is no indication that either the powerful or the general population of Babylon were at all averse to exploring the possibility of alternative leadership. Given that Babylon has up until now been the privileged exception to all of the beast's depredations, it is no wonder that his attitude on returning will be one of "hatred" for Babylon, motivated by his own anger over such ingratitude, and mixing with the "hatred" born of jealousy on the part of the ten kings.

Although antichrist and his ten rulers are the means used, this judgment itself originates directly from the hand of God and is completely in God's plan (for reasons that will be made clear below). But in verse seventeen we are also given a good deal of information about the course and manner of this judgment. First, Babylon will be isolated from allies and support (the beast and the ten kings will "render her desolate"), then stripped of all of her defenses (made "naked"). Once Babylon is completely defenseless, "they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire", a twofold process wherein Babylon will first be plundered ("eat her flesh"), and then made subject to a devastating conflagration, with all aspects of this horrendous judgment emanating from antichrist and his subordinates, but originating with God: "for God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose".

verse 18: While Babylon represents religious, cultural, and technological power, she is first and foremost a discrete geographical nation, a great "city-state" (Greek *polis*, πόλις) "which has dominion over the kings of the earth". This dominion, rule, and influence which preceded antichrist's rise to power came primarily as a result of her political, military, and economic power (and it is of these assets and defenses that she will be stripped before being plundered and destroyed). Babylon represents the jewel in Satan's crown. Aside from ancient Rome, no other nation in the history of the world has come close to matching such systematic and tangible power (political, military, and economic), wrapped up in such systematic and intangible influence (religious, cultural, and technological). But whether we focus upon Babylon as a nation

projecting power or Babylon as a system projecting influence, we should not forget that, in the end, Babylon is made up of people, and it is the collective depravity of her population on that future, eschatological day which will call down this extreme divine judgment.

Raise the standard on the walls of Babylon! Strengthen the guard, station the watchmen, prepare the reinforcements! But nevertheless what the Lord has planned, that He will do, namely, what He has decreed against the inhabitants of Babylon.
Jeremiah 51:12

3. Fallen is Babylon:

(1) After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven with great power, and the earth was lit up by his glory. (2) And he cried out in a mighty voice, saying, “Babylon the great has fallen! And she has become a dwelling place for demons, and a place of confinement for every [sort of] unclean spirit, and a place of confinement for every unclean and detestable bird. (3) For the nations have drunk from the wine of [God's] wrath [that flows] from her prostitution. And the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her. And the merchants of the earth have grown rich with her from the [economic] power [flowing from] her wanton excess”.
Revelation 18:1-3

verse 1: Like the angel with the little scroll of Revelation chapter ten, this angel too is best seen as a type of Christ. For just as in the case of the angel of Revelation chapter ten, this angel too is seen “coming down from heaven” (a picture of the Second Advent). This angel too is said to possess “great power” (cf. v.1 with Rev.10:1), and have a “mighty voice” (cf. v.2 with Rev.10:3). And in a manner analogous to the powerful angel of Revelation chapter ten whose hair and face “were like the sun” (Rev.10:1), in the case of this angel it is said that “the earth was lit up by his glory” (v.1). Since the fall of Babylon is, in prophetic terms, intimately connected with the final events of the “Day of the Lord”, comprising part of the final series of judgments which bring the Great Tribulation to an end and usher in the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the fact that this prophecy about the impending fall of Babylon should be given to another powerful angel whose appearance likewise foreshadows the now imminent return of our Lord serves to emphasize the immediacy of that return: once Babylon has been destroyed, Armageddon and the Second Advent will follow in rapid-fire succession.

verse 2: As in the case of the angel in Revelation chapter ten, the proclamation given here, “Babylon the great has fallen!”, is prophetic – but only just so. The command to “flee Babylon” comes immediately upon the heels of this prediction (Rev.18:4), with the actual destruction following with very little intervening time elapsed (the description of which begins in Rev.18:5).

The symbolic relegation of post-judgment Babylon to a habitation for demons, unclean spirits, and unclean birds, serves to underscore that this judgment is from God and that it represents cursing of the first order. Just as the original earth, a paradise of light and delight created perfectly and out of nothing from the hand of God in Genesis 1:1, was cursed with the

devastating judgment of being made dark in utter waste and desolation becoming “ruined and despoiled” by the time of the situation described in Genesis 1:2 as a result of God's judgment upon Satan's rebellion, and just as Sodom and Gomorrah were totally annihilated with fire and brimstone and remain a curse to this day, so Babylon's judgment will be cataclysmic, with her end serving as a memorial to the folly of serving Satan in place of the one true God (cf. Rev.18:22-23; 19:3).

verse 3: While we have already considered the reasons why the beast and his ten sub-kings should hate Babylon (retaliation and jealousy respectively), here we are given the first of two reasons why Babylon has earned such a devastating judgment from God. This first reason concerns the negative effect she has had upon the world, primarily upon unbelievers, in promoting, supporting, and in fact to a very great degree producing the system of spiritual “prostitution” which will characterize human life throughout the Tribulation and which will hold sway throughout the world of that time. This corrupting influence is described here as having three main venues: 1) other nations generally, 2) the “kings” or ruling hierarchies around the world, and 3) the “merchants”. Herein we are given to see just how all-pervasive Babylon and her corrupt values and practices have been. For in this three-fold breakdown we can see her cultural and religious, political and military, and economic and technological influences at work upon these three respective groups. The spirit of prostitution, of seeking solutions apart from God (and turning instead by definition to Satan, and explicitly so in following the beast), will penetrate deep down into the marrow of every significant power-bloc in the world of that future day. With this level of culpability, having made herself essential to all that antichrist and his father the devil have “accomplished” in the world at large during the Tribulation, it is small wonder that Babylon has incurred such an extraordinary measure of divine wrath.

4. Flee Babylon:

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out from her, O my people, that you may not receive a share of [the punishment for] her sins, and that you may not partake of the plagues [which are about to fall upon] her.

Revelation 18:4

Up until this point, as we have had occasion to mention before, Babylon has apparently been spared many of the more draconian aspects of the beast's tribulational rule. The command given here in verse four is a clear indication that she has also been a sort of “safe haven” for believers. We should not, of course, expect that believers dwelling in Babylon and her vicinity have been completely exempt up until now from either the general trials of the Tribulation (e.g., the two series of worldwide divine judgments and the general suffering brought about by antichrist's policies), or from the Great Persecution. However, the fact that the remainder of this chapter in Revelation definitely paints a picture of a Babylon characterized by excessive luxuries certainly indicates that she has fared far better than the rest of the world to this point, with at least her privileged classes knowing very little lack as judged from the description in Revelation 18:4-24. Secondly, our present verse definitely assumes that 1) there are a sizeable number of believers still alive and living in Babylon in spite of the Great Persecution, and that 2) at this point at any

rate they have the freedom of action and opportunity necessary to respond to this command to “flee Babylon”. For some, it will doubtless be the case that their prior imprisonment or confinement or restriction had been lifted at the point of Babylon's rebellion, when the beast and his imperial guard temporarily disappeared into the supernatural veil of darkness which had fallen upon his kingdom. For others, it may well be that they had been largely spared the intensive trouble endured by their brothers and sisters in Jesus around the world. For all concerned, however, the recent destruction in Jerusalem on account of the worldwide earthquake will make that city seem the last place that anyone should flee to, especially in light of that city's recent status as antichrist's world capital. But regardless of prior experience or human reasoning, it will be absolutely critical for believers to respond to this command when it comes, for the safe haven of Babylon is about to become a danger zone. Failure to do so will result in “sharing the plagues which are about to come upon her” (Rev.18:4). Given other previous heavenly commands, signs, and signals during the Tribulation (e.g., Rev.8:5; 10:3-7; 11:15; 11:19), it is best to understand this command to flee Babylon as one which will likewise be audible and, to all believers within Babylon's borders at least, comprehensible. All the more so then will it be absolutely essential for those who have retained their faith in Jesus Christ to respond to this mandate immediately, for there will be no excuse for non-compliance with this exceptionally clear warning (cf. 2Pet.3:1-13).

(28) Likewise just as it happened in the days of Lot, [people] were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting [orchards] and building [homes]. (29) But on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven, and [the judgment] destroyed everyone [who had not left]. (30) It will be the same on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. (31) In that day, who[ever] is on [the roof of] the house, even though his possessions are in the house, let him not come down to collect them, and let the one who is in the field likewise not turn back. (32) Remember Lot's wife! (33) Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses it (i.e., treats it as lost) will preserve it.

Luke 17:28-33

When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman (i.e., the tribulational judgments culminating in Armageddon will begin).

1st Thessalonians 5:3

The verses above, while not technically describing this situation, are certainly applicable, with the first passage driving home the lesson that our response at that time must be swift and decisive, with no looking back and no indecision, while the second passage indicates that the need for flight will be completely counter-intuitive. To the secular world, the fifth bowl judgment which plunged the beast's kingdom into darkness, the instability which followed, and antichrist's temporary disappearance into the gloom will seem to mark the end of a long nightmare, but in reality it will begin what is apparently a very short count-down to Babylon's annihilation. Those who draw the false conclusion that their trouble is over once and for all will likely fail to flee in time, even if they recognize their error after antichrist's re-emergence from

the darkness prior to Babylon's destruction: this passage in Revelation definitely indicates that the window of opportunity for flight will be a narrow one indeed.

Depart from Babylon! Flee from the Babylonians!

Isaiah 48:20a

(8) “Take flight from the midst of Babylon and from the land of the Babylonians! Depart, and be like the he-goats at the head of the flock! (9) For behold, I am about to stir up and bring up against Babylon an assemblage of great nations from the land of the north. And they will array themselves against her, and from there she will be captured. Their arrows are like those of a skilled warrior who bereaves – they will not return without effect. (10) The Babylonians will be plundered, and those who plunder them will get their fill”, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 50:8-10

Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who grabs the sickle in time of harvest. Let everyone return to his own people and let everyone flee to his own land from before the sword of the oppressor.

Jeremiah 50:16

(6) Flee from the midst of Babylon, and save your lives, everyone! Don't be annihilated on account of her iniquity! For this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, and of His recompense – He will repay her in full. (7) Babylon is a golden cup in the hand of the Lord which makes the whole earth drunk. The nations have drunk of her wine, [and] therefore the nations have gone mad. (8) Babylon will fall in an instant and be broken. Lament over her! Get balm for her disease! Perhaps she can be healed. (9) We would have healed Babylon, but she could not be healed. Abandon her! And let us get out, everyone to his own land. For the judgment against her has reached up to heaven and has risen to the clouds.

Jeremiah 51:6-9

(6) “Awake! Awake! And flee from the land of the north (i.e., Babylon), even though I scatter you like the four winds of heaven [were driving you on]!” says the Lord. (7) “Awake! Flee to Zion, you who dwell with the Babylonians!

Zechariah 2:6-7

The above passages all have a double application, referring first to the historical return of the Jews to Israel following the Babylonian captivity, but also referring to the situation at hand, the escape of believers from eschatological Babylon prior to her destruction. Indeed, many of the details in these and other like passages are incomprehensible without understanding and applying this final fulfillment in the last days. From the above quotations, the answers to several important questions about this escape come to light:

a. What is meant: Three “exoduses” are mentioned in the prophecies about the end times: 1) the rapid flight of believers within Israel to the divinely prepared sanctuary in the desert which takes place as antichrist assumes worldwide control at the Tribulation's mid-point (cf. Rev.12:6; 12:13-16; covered above); 2) the measured exodus of Jews from all the nations of the world returning to Israel after the end of the Tribulation following the Second Advent (e.g., Is.60:4ff.; 66:20); *3) the rapid flight of believers from within mystery Babylon just before her destruction prior to Armageddon (Rev.18:4, our subject here).

b. Where to flee: As we have seen, the one place other than Babylon at this time not under antichrist's control will be Israel. Scripture indicates that believers who flee Babylon at this time will have but one safe haven and therefore one objective in fleeing, namely, Jerusalem:

Wail, O gate! Howl, O city! Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not a straggler in its ranks. What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? “The Lord has established Zion, and in her (i.e., Jerusalem) his afflicted people will find refuge.”

Isaiah 14:31-32 NIV

The voice of the refugees and fugitives from the land of Babylon [resounds], to tell in Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) of the vengeance of the Lord our God, vengeance for His temple (i.e., believers; cf. 1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19; 2Cor.6:16; Eph.2:21; 1Pet.2:4ff.).

Jeremiah 50:28

(9) We would have healed Babylon, but she could not be healed. Abandon her! And let us get out, everyone to his own land. For the judgment against her has reached up to heaven and has risen to the clouds. (10) The Lord has brought forth the vindication [due us] (cf. Rev.19:8b). Come and let us tell in Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) of what the Lord our God has done [for us].

Jeremiah 51:9-10

(44) For I will visit [judgment] on Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out of his mouth what he has swallowed (i.e., believers released from antichrist's religious persecution represented by “Bel”). And the nations will never stream to him again. For the wall (i.e., the military protection) of Babylon has fallen. (45) Come out of her My people! And let everyone [of you] save his own life [by fleeing] from the fierce wrath of the Lord!

Jeremiah 51:44-45

You refugees, flee from the sword! Don't stay put! Remember the Lord from your far away land (i.e., Babylon), and let Jerusalem ascend in your hearts (i.e., set your thoughts on her)!

Jeremiah 51:50

(2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are

from long ago, even from the days of eternity. (3) For He will give them over [to the oppressor] until the time when [Jerusalem] labors [like] a woman in labor. At that time the rest of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel.

Micah 5:2-3

(6) “Awake! Awake! And flee from the land of the north (i.e., Babylon), even though I scatter you like the four winds of heaven [were driving you on]!” says the Lord. (7)

“Awake! Flee to Zion, you who dwell with the Babylonians!

Zechariah 2:6-7

c. When to flee: Given that before the bowl judgments begin, antichrist is ruling in Jerusalem as Satan's world regent with the world as a whole to one degree or another directly under his control, the beast's departure into the gloom of the fifth bowl judgment's darkness and the accompanying revolts in Israel and Babylon would seem to be the first opportunity for believers either to leave Babylon or to escape to Zion. As we have seen above, antichrist, to the amazement and confounding of his adversaries, reappears very shortly thereafter and issues his directive to all of his confederate forces throughout the world to assemble at Armageddon. This order given to all of the armies of the world under his command (i.e., with apparently only the meager forces of Israel and Babylon being excepted), constitutes the sixth bowl judgment, an event which occurs a mere month after the beast's disappearance (see chart above). Although we may suppose that the proclamation for Armageddon comes immediately after the beast's reappearance, and that in light of the severe dislocation of this command structure as a result of the preceding events effective implementation of this command and reassertion of his worldwide control will lag to some extent, it can nevertheless be concluded that from this point forward flight will become problematic. Thus the guidance given above about the necessity for immediate flight upon the first opening of this narrow window of opportunity should be heeded with all the rigor demanded by our Lord's warning to flee in haste and not turn back (Matt.24:18; Mk.13:16; Lk.17:28-33; cf. 1Thes.5:3), in spite of the fact that in the (temporary) absence of the beast this will seem completely counter-intuitive to worldly eyes (cf. the pre-judgment description of Babylon as “lounging in security”: Is.47:8). The necessity for rapid flight would also seem to rule out any sort of extensive preparations. Believers who have either been imprisoned or living under great restriction of their personal freedom heretofore will have to trust the Lord to “make a way through the Red Sea”, that is, to provide the necessary transport to Israel. Whether by air or by sea, time will be of the essence, and it is very likely that little in the way of tangible material assets will be capable of being brought along. Like Lot leaving Sodom and the Israelites leaving Egypt, we will have to depart with what we can carry, and do so in great haste (cf. Jer.21:9).

d. Why flight is necessary at this time but may be ill-advised earlier: The command given here to flee Babylon is clearly given to believers (i.e., “my people”). Thus ipso facto this command to flee shows that there are some of God's people still in Babylon at this time, and, given the prominence of this command in scripture, one would imagine a goodly number of them. We must therefore conclude that at the very least while these facts do not prohibit an early flight from Babylon, it is no sin for a believer to be still residing within Babylon's borders during the second

half of the Tribulation. As suggested above, for many if not most believers, an earlier escape may be impossible. For we may expect that during the Great Persecution, even if those dwelling in Babylon proper are spared execution for their refusal to take the mark of the beast and worship antichrist, it is very likely nevertheless that they will be placed under severe restrictions (which may include incarceration in prison or concentration camps, seizure of property, restricted travel and mobility, etc.). Therefore the issue of leaving Babylon before this time may be entirely moot for most of those who choose to follow the Lamb wherever He leads instead of bowing to the beast. There are other reasons too why seeking an earlier departure may be ill-advised, among which may be 1) to continue Christian service and ministry; 2) to continue spiritual preparation for the crisis; 3) to continue witnessing for the Lord; 4) to provide leadership and support for those who are not able or who are unwilling to leave earlier. In sum, we must assume that for many if not most believers in Babylon, the Lord has a purpose for us being here until that final directive to withdraw, and it is not an insignificant consideration that to leave before this command in Revelation 18:4 will be to act in the absence of a clear and definitive divine message (even though we are told here through prophecy that this very one will indeed be forthcoming). Finally, it is well to ask the critical question of those who are inclined to remove themselves from Babylon before this crucial last command to do so: what possible place of refuge might they find? For prior to this moment the entire world has been under antichrist's control, with only Babylon offering any degree of sanctuary for believers (with the exception of course of the divinely provided and completely inaccessible refuge in the wilderness provided for the believing refugees from Israel just prior to the Great Tribulation's commencement). Thus it could very well be the case that attempts to anticipate this command may put those who opt for early flight to some self-selected refuge in a far worse situation than if they had patiently awaited the Lord's timing. Only at this point, with the beast's control temporarily disrupted, will there be a clear opportunity to depart and a definite, divinely prophesied destination to seek: Jerusalem.

e. How: Just as when haled before the beast's tribunals during the Great Persecution we are instructed to give no thought ahead of time to what we will say (Matt.10:19-20; Mk.13:11; Lk.21:14-15), so it would seem that prior preparation for this exodus will be of little help, if only because the precise particulars of that future situation are unknowable except for the fact that the window of opportunity will be so narrow. This last point suggests that elaborate prior plans will not be able to be implemented and could act as a hindrance, at least to the extent that they cause those who have made them to delay until "everything can be worked out". For is it more than likely that we shall all have to leave much behind in order to obey the Lord's insistent command: houses, property, possessions, assets, money – even loved ones who are for whatever reason reluctant to flee with the required rapidity. Those who delay overmuch are likely to end up like Lot's sons in law; those who look back are likely to end up like Lot's wife. A corollary to this principle is that, since specific prior preparations are likely to be of no use when the time comes, there is little point to making them. Scripture gives no support for adopting a "survivalist mentality", stock-piling food and weapons and withdrawing to some remote location. Indeed, it is more than likely that over the course of the seven years of Tribulation antichrist will have little trouble identifying, locating, and persecuting all who are truly "of Christ". Rather than seeing this as an entirely negative thing, it is also possible to look on the positive side. Since when the

time comes the Lord will provide a way for us to follow His directive to flee Babylon, the loss of all of our worldly goods in the Great Persecution which precedes is something we should try not to take to heart: there will be a way out because God ordains it, and, on the other hand, if we have managed to retain and are relying upon our possessions to provide that “out”, it is just possible that these may instead form an “anchor” which keeps us from departing in a timely fashion. When we hear the command “flee Babylon!”, for most of us it will probably be the case that we have little to gain by staying behind anyway, and that may prove to be a blessing in disguise. As suggested above, the temporary departure of antichrist from Israel and Babylon's sympathizing with Israel's rebellion will provide an opportunity for travel to Jerusalem. Isaiah 43:14 describing the later flight from Babylon of unbelieving fugitives at least suggests that travel by sea at this time will also be the likely means of transport (although Is.21:6 indicates that a variety of transport is possible). We can well imagine that, with Jerusalem's recent status as the beast's world religious and political headquarters, and with all the world making pilgrimages to the temple in order to demonstrate their allegiance to antichrist, a large ferry service will have developed along the lines of the one we see bringing Moslems to Mecca, only in this case even much more extensive and serving all regions of the world, Babylon most especially. With the temporary cessation of all such activities, this same ferry service would seem the likely means to transport believers to Jerusalem. Those just released from prison and or camps may have little or no material resources, but we can have complete confidence in the Lord that He will provide the material means for our departure. Just as the Lord gave the Israelites “favor in the eyes of the Egyptians” and enriched the children of Israel in their hasty departure from Egypt (Ex.12:35-36; cf. Ex.3:21-22; 11:2-3; Ps.105:37), so we can be absolutely sure that no one who is willing to follow our Lord's command will be left behind for want of boat fare (or anything else).

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help . . .
Daniel 11:33-34a

f. The Exodus parallel: The experience of the children of Israel during the Exodus furnishes a prophetically important and detailed parallel to the experience of believers undergoing the Tribulation over all. However the actual departure from Egypt provides some critical points of comparison for the future departure from mystery Babylon:

1) The origin and character of the people being delivered: Just as the Israelites went down to Egypt, so a godly seed came to America and has been both nourished and expanding ever since. But just as there was a time for God to make a distinction between those who were His and those who were not, and to call forth His people from Egypt, so it will be in Babylon's case (cf. Heb.11:7-8).

2) Deliverance from oppression by divine agency: Just as Egypt was originally very hospitable to the people of God, so also in the case of Babylon. However, in the last days of Israel's abiding in that land, a harsh ruler oppressed the Israelites mightily. So also in the case of Babylon we may

anticipate that the days of the Tribulation will weigh heavily upon the people of God, and that believers will face ever increasing oppression in this country. But just as the Israelites were delivered from the hand of Pharaoh by the mighty power of God, so also the bowl judgments of retribution will create a situation whereby God opens the doors of the prison house so that we may safely take our leave of Babylon. Just as darkness preceded immediately the plague of the firstborn and the Exodus, and just as there was light for the Israelites but darkness for the Egyptians, so on that coming day there will be darkness on the kingdom of antichrist but light for believers to escape from Babylon.

3) Divine provision: As mentioned above, the Lord did not allow the Israelites to leave Egypt empty handed, but gave them grace in the eyes of the Egyptians so that they “plundered” them (Ex.12:35-36; cf. Ex.3:21-22; 11:2-3; Ps.105:37). So also we may have every confidence that no matter how we may have been oppressed, no matter how long we have been in prison or otherwise confined, no matter how widespread and extensive the confiscation of our belongings has been, we shall nevertheless be provided the means we need to depart Babylon for Jerusalem.

4) Rapid departure: God led Abraham out of his country to the land of promise at just the right time (Heb.11:8). God prepared Noah to “flee” the destruction of the world of his day by following His instructions so that he was preserved and not destroyed along with it on the day the flood came (Heb.11:7). And God brought the Israelites out in an equally swift and decisive manner, having them leave at twilight ready for a hasty march when the time came to depart (Ex.12:11; 12:31; 12:34; Deut.16:6). Just so, when the divine command is clearly received on that future day, it will be incumbent upon the believers who receive it to make haste in carrying it out.

5) Deliverance through the sea to the promised land: Just as the Israelites who faced the seemingly impossible obstacle of the Red Sea between them and the land of promise were miraculously delivered through the sea by the mighty hand of God, so also we may have every confidence that our Lord will bring us through every trouble, trial and tribulation, safely to the place He has made for us in Jerusalem to await His return (and in the New Jerusalem thereafter where we will rejoice in Him forever).

5. Babylon Destroyed:

(5) For [Babylon's] sins have been piled up to heaven, and God has called to mind her wicked deeds. (6) Repay her just as she also herself has repaid. And give her a double measure according to her deeds. In her own cup with which she mixed [her evil brew], mix a double batch for her. (7) To the same degree that she glorified herself and indulged in wanton excess, to that same degree give her torment and grief. For she says in her heart, “I am enthroned as a queen, and I am not a widow and I shall not see grief”. (8) Because of [all] this [arrogance of hers], her plagues will come in one day: death and mourning and famine. And [then] she will be burned down with fire (the invasion

undertaken by the beast and his confederates). For the Lord God who has judged her is mighty.

Revelation 18:5-8

It is an occupational hazard of great material abundance to lose humility and all sense of proportion in terms of our mortality. This is true on an individual as well as a national level (Deut.8:10-18; 32:15; Prov.30:7-9; cf. Hos.13:6). But Babylon is seen here to have taken this principle to what may be a historical extreme. In the divine wisdom of God, her punishment will consist in her deprivation of the very things she has treasured and boasted of, things of which she had thought she would never be deprived, and the loss thereof will be like a sword piercing her heart, a “double measure” and “double batch” of destruction that will bereave her of everything upon which she has arrogantly prided herself (cf. Ezek.7:1ff.; Is.47:5-15).

a. **Babylon Attacked:** As we saw above in Revelation 17:15-18, Babylon is destroyed in accordance with the will of God, but the agents of His judgment are the beast and his sub-kings for “God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose” (v.17). It is not uncommon for the Lord to make use of the devil and his minions, whether human or angelic, to accomplish His overarching purpose (cf. Paul's handing over of the offending Corinthian believer “to Satan for the destruction of his flesh”, 1Cor.5:4-5). The actual destruction of Babylon will be preceded by a military invasion that will occasion much plundering, after which Babylon, or at least all of her significant cities and towns, will be put to the torch by this invasion force. This sequence of events is clearly visible in the near context of Revelation 17:16 where we are told that the beast's henchmen (1) “will render her desolate and naked”, (2) “and they will eat her flesh”, then (3) “will burn her up with fire” (cf. Rev.18:8: “her plagues will come in one day: death and mourning and famine. And [then] she will be burned down with fire.”). The rendering of Babylon “desolate and naked” in Revelation 17:16 refers to the removal of all of her defenses, the “eating of flesh” to the plundering of Babylon by the beast's invasion force, and the “burning with fire” to the literal physical destruction of Babylon at the conclusion of this campaign.

b. **The Disarming of Babylon:** It will be remembered that by this time the beast will have been in control of the world for several years, with all its military forces under his command (directly or indirectly). At this time, it is very doubtful that Babylon will possess significant forces within her borders. On the one hand, the need for defense against foreign attack will have evaporated (or so it will seem). On the other hand, what use there will be for the military at this time will be in maintenance of the beast's control over his realm beyond her borders. Furthermore, the campaign to reduce the north to full obedience occasioned by the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment is likely to have resulted in the summoning of the remaining major portion of Babylon's military power to his aid (and this would have preceded her rebellion). In short, by this time the vast bulk of whatever military force Babylon does possess in principal will be fully integrated into the beast's one-world army, and geographically located outside of Babylon. Finally, there are indications from scripture that by this time much of Babylon's military will be composed of foreign nationals or “mercenaries” in any case (a trend already incipient today), so that Babylon is unlikely to be able to count on the loyalty of those who are at this time still ostensibly in “her army” (Ezek.27:3b-11).³⁸ Rendering Babylon “desolate and naked” may

demand little more than requiring her few remaining troops to place their oath of fealty to the beast ahead of their oath to her, with the result that the few resident forces which choose to remain loyal will be pitifully insufficient to prevent her destruction.

Look at your troops – they are all women! The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed their bars.

Nahum 3:13 NIV

c. The Invasion of Babylon: As the passage cited above describing the fall of historical Babylon and eschatological Babylon shows, the campaign of conquest will not be much of a campaign at all (cf. Nah.3:7; Jer.51:29; Ezek.27:27). In practical terms, this assault will amount to little more than a rapid “Blitzkrieg” style occupation of an essentially defenseless country. Based both upon the scriptures which predict it and the scant time remaining before all of antichrist's forces are collected at Armageddon, we can safely say that the small forces still remaining in Babylon are likely to put up only scattered and token resistance in the face of what will be a rapid and largely unexpected onslaught by an overwhelming assemblage of opponents assaulting her from the north (Jer.25:9; 50:3; 50:9; 50:41ff.; cf. Rev.17:16), the east (cf. Ezek.27:26), the desert (Is.21:1-10), the sea (Ezek.27:34), in short, from each and every side (Jer.51:1-2).

“Therefore, behold, I am going to bring foreigners against you, the [most] ruthless of the nations, and they will un-sheath their swords against the allure of your wisdom, and they will defile your glory.”

Ezekiel 28:7 (cf. Ezek.28:10; Is.13:4-5)

We cannot underestimate the fury which Babylon's behavior during the Tribulation has aroused worldwide, both externally among the other nations of the world, all of whom to one degree or another have to this point been her imperial possessions, and also internally among a large and most likely majority population of immigrants, slaves, and those reduced to penury and indentured servitude. Likewise, we cannot underestimate the attractiveness of plundering Babylon at this time given the extreme contrast between her excessive wealth and the incredible poverty and dearth otherwise throughout the world during the dark days of the Great Tribulation. Thus the motive for the latter internal unrest as well for the invading armies will be two fold, jealousy and revenge on the one hand (Nah.3:19; Hab.2:6; Rev.17:16-17), and greed and plunder on the other (Jer.50:10; Zech.2:8-9; Is.21:2; 33:1; Nah.2:9-10; Jer.50:37; Ezek.26:5-6; 26:12; Hab.2:7-12).

d. The Destruction of Babylon: As a political state, historical Babylon was destroyed by the Persian invasion “from the north” ca. 529 B.C., but Babylon the province was never entirely depopulated (cf. Daniel 5:31 - 9:1), and Babylon the city, though in decline ever after, continued as provincial capital of the Persian empire and, later, as Alexander's eastern capital. In the time of Christ, the city was a shadow of its former self, and in recent times it has indeed become completely depopulated (though it was revived as a tourist attraction under Saddam). These historical facts invite us to pose the question of whether or not the devastating destruction leveled upon eschatological Babylon by antichrist and his forces will indeed be total in our modern,

western sense of the word. For without a doubt there are many passages which certainly suggest something like total destruction by any definition (Is.13:5; 13:19; 47:3; Jer.40:12-13; 50:29; 50:39-40; 51:29; 51:13; Ezek.26:17-21; 27:26-36; and compare the similarity of these last two passages with Rev.18-19). Babylon will be “burned with fire”, left “naked and desolate” with her “flesh eaten” (Rev.17:16-17; 18:19-23; 19:1-3; cf. Is.13:19-22; 14:3-4; 14:21-23; 24:10-12; 27:10; Jer.50:21; 50:26; 51:4; 51:29; Zech.9:3-4). Clearly, the coming judgment upon Babylon, whether or not it involves her complete and total depopulation and systematic devastation for all future time, will be horrendous. Babylon's affliction will produce a dramatic outflow of her non-native population (Is. 13:14; Jer.51:8). Babylon's native population will be terribly abused and depleted (Is.13:15-16; Jer.51:2). Babylon will never be rebuilt to her former glory (Is.25:2; 47:5). In many respects, then, it is a moot point whether the territory of Babylon, devastated by this invasion and its aftermath, will play host to any significant millennial population. For on the one hand, in the coming kingdom of our Lord, Babylon's name, fame, power and prestige will be gone forever in any case, with her commercial might completely obliterated. And, on the other hand, no one in their right mind who with the benefit of scripture has discerned the “signs of the times” will forsake the opportunity to flee during this narrow window when the world in general and the population of Babylon in particular wrongly assume that antichrist's reign of terror has come to end.

On balance, the many descriptions of complete devastation seem to leave little doubt that Babylon will be irreparably destroyed by antichrist's dual assault of massive invasion followed by deliberate incineration. It seems clear that the Lord is making a very deliberate example of Babylon, one whose lesson will continue into the millennial kingdom (and the extensive description given in the rest of chapter eighteen certainly confirms this impression). All other things being equal, therefore, one might suppose that everyone who does not take the opportunity to escape to Jerusalem during the calm before this storm will be caught up in it and destroyed (with the exception of those who somehow manage later to flee successfully: e.g., Is.47:2). There is, however, one piece of information which may challenge this assumption. We have posited in the past that up until this point, Babylon, the original homeland of the beast, has to a large degree been shielded from some of the worst of antichrist's depredations, and may in fact have functioned as a sort of safe haven – not necessarily just for dedicated Christians, but possibly also for marginal believers and for non-believing Jews as well (especially perhaps in regard to avoiding the mark, something they will no doubt be keen to do in spite of a lack of faith in Christ: cf., Deut.11:18; Jer.30:11). Now one of the first orders of business in Christ's millennial kingdom will be the regathering for evaluation of all remaining Jews from the four corners of the world (cf. Is.11:11-12; 48:20-21; 52:12). It will be recalled that the ministries of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 resulted in the salvation of a large number of Jewish people around the world though by no means anything like a majority. At this point in time, the believing remnant is enjoying a protected interlude in the desert kept safe by the power of God from all the troubles of the Great Tribulation until Christ's return (Rev.12:13-17). Given the large Jewish population in this country, and the very likely possibility that it will increase significantly as Jews around the world seek a place of safety during the worst of the tribulational events, it stands to reason that those Jews living in Babylon at this time will at least escape with

their lives so as to be available for the great regathering after our Lord's taking up of His millennial kingship (and that they may perhaps form the largest element of this return).

Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

Micah 4:10 NIV (cf. Is.48:20-21; Ezek.20:34-36; Rev.17:3-5)

Such a deliverance from Babylon after the fact would follow the parallel of the Jewish return to the land after the destruction of the historical Babylon. It is thus entirely possible and consistent with the scriptures to envision a scenario wherein Babylon will be so thoroughly looted and so deliberately put to the torch that she becomes largely uninhabitable for all time to come, yet without the complete and immediate destruction of all who live within her borders at that time, even though the loss of life may be extreme and the loss of property nearly complete. According to this interpretation, the transfer of population from out of the territory of destroyed Babylon will occur after Christ's return with life in the ruins until that time existing on a bare subsistence level (quite a contrast to Babylon's former unprecedented luxury).

This is what the Lord says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.”

Isaiah 43:14 NIV

C. The Beast's Armageddon Crusade

Believers who have now escaped from Babylon in response to the divine warnings that preceded her destruction will have occasion to appreciate the Lord's deliverance of them from that fatally stricken country, no matter how wrenching the departure may have been or how much they may have seemed to have lost in a material way: to have stayed would have meant losing everything, and most probably their lives as well. Jesus tells us that we believers are “the salt of the earth” (Matt.5:13; Mk.9:50; Lk.14:34; cf. Lev.2:13; Num.18:19; Col.4:6), and salt with its preservative properties is a piquant metaphor for the preservative effect of a remnant of genuine, godly believers whose presence God honors wherever they may be found, even if it be in the midst of the Great Prostitute. But now, with all responsive believers having heeded the Lord's command to withdraw from Babylon, the wanton creature has found herself without any shred of protection. And while from the human viewpoint the lack of military defense will seem critical, those who know their God will realize that just as the withdrawal of Lot from Sodom paved the way for her destruction, so the removal of the remnant of believers from Babylon will likewise remove the final impediment to her reaping what she has sown. In the description of her in Revelation chapter 18, Babylon is dressed in fine linen (bespeaking her economic dominance and luxury), purple (referring to her [tyrannical] rulership), scarlet (the color both of prostitution and of blood), and is adorned with gilding and precious stones (the results of these three anti-God activities: Rev.18:16). In every respect then, Babylon had become the queen of the nations, but

what did this profit her? Though she came close to gaining the entire world, she has now been made bereft of everything she had possessed, plundered, looted, and put to the torch.

Following the destruction of Babylon, the events of the Tribulation will move swiftly to their appointed end. With the north back under antichrist's control, with all restraint removed for the assembly of the kings of the east, with Babylon now out of the way, and with the forces employed in her destruction now available, the beast's mustering of the armies of the world for the assault upon Israel will begin in earnest. Throughout his rule and visible in his opposition to all truth, antichrist has continually represented the lie as the truth and evil as good. This trend will reach its apex now at the end of the Great Tribulation in the battle of Armageddon, where our returning Lord will be represented by the beast as the usurper who must be opposed at all costs (cf. 2Thes.2:4). We may expect the beast to bill this final “crusade” as being one of so-called “good” against so-called “evil” (Ezek.38-39; Rev.16:12-16; 19:19-21), casting the Jewish people in the role of the last stain which much be erased in order to gain the final victory. Moreover once Israel is destroyed, there will be no one left to deliver. Thus antichrist's gathering of the nations to Jerusalem to exterminate Israel will seem to him and his father the devil the ideal way to put the Lord “on the spot”, daring Him to prevent the elimination of the Jewish state and the Jewish race. Since he is the pseudo-Messiah, it had no doubt been a sweet thing for the beast prior to this Jewish rebellion to have his military headquarters at Jerusalem, the prophesied millennial capital. For the past several years, Jerusalem was the capital of death where many were forced to come to worship antichrist on pain of execution; but Jerusalem is also the coming capital of life, where all will desire to come and appear before the true Messiah (Zech.8:23; cf. Is.2:3ff.). That coming wave of visitation will be in response to the divine millennial blessings about to be poured out upon the entire earth. At present, however, we see the earth reeling under the bowl judgments of which Armageddon is the final travail. The unbelieving world led by antichrist is responding to these just judgments from the Lord exactly as Pharaoh had done, by attacking God's people rather than learning from their mistakes. Instead of repentance, the proper response in the face of such clear divine disapproval, the world as a whole is only too happy to join in the madness of the beast's crusade – in an attempt to fight against God Himself.

Now these are spirits of demons which produce “signs”: they will go forth to the kings of the entire earth to gather them together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty.
Revelation 16:14

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly.
(2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) “Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!”
Psalm 2:1-3

The beast's response to the Jewish rebellion will be characteristically swift (cf. Dan.7:6; Rev.13:2), and yet overwhelming in spite of its speed, coming “like a flood” raging over the land of Israel (Is.8:6-8; Dan.9:26; 11:22 [in the Hebrew]). Feverishly mustering the united armed forces of evil from all the remaining quarters of the earth, antichrist will cause to descend upon

the true center of the world an innumerable, polyglot horde with Jerusalem as its objective. But the Lord will help her “at break of day” (Ps.46:5), and, indeed, it has been His plan all along to bring antichrist and all his forces together and cause them to founder on Zion's Rock.

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say “I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!” (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]. (12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. "For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side." (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:9-16

The call to Armageddon will be a universal proclamation to all the nations on the face of the earth, bringing every able-bodied man to do battle at Jerusalem (Rev.16:12-16). Overlooked universally in the translations of the passage cited immediately is the fact that the Hebrew verb in the second command of Joel 3:9 means “consecrate” rather than simply “prepare” (from the root *qdsh*, קדש). This will indeed be a “holy war”, the final “crusade” of Satan and his antichrist against the coming true Messiah at His own truly holy and righteous return. The massive nature of the mobilization can be seen from the description in verse ten above where even the implements of peace are rapidly forged into weapons of war for this final assault on the people of God, a command famously and stunningly reversed in the millennial prophecies of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 in a way which serves to demonstrate quite clearly the difference between the pseudo-Messiah and the genuine One about to come. From the passage above we also see that even those who would otherwise be disinclined to enter military service will be zealously enthusiastic to join in this final battle of “total war” between the forces of the devil, seen and unseen, against the camp of God in Jerusalem.

1. Gog of Magog:

(1) And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, “Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against you, Gog (i.e., antichrist), chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal. (2) And I will fetch you back, and conduct you, and bring you up from the far reaches of the north. For I will make you come to the mountains of Israel. (3) Then I will strike your bow from your left hand (cf. Rev.6:2), and make your arrows fall from your right hand’”. Ezekiel 39:1-3

"Gog" is synonymous with the beast, while "Magog" means "the place of Gog". That is to say, in our prophetic context Magog is mystery Babylon (MGG via the use of the Hebrew cryptographic technique of *athbash* stands for LBB = BBL = Babel). It is true that the consonants are reversed in the cryptogram (i.e., a direct correspondence would require Babylon's cryptographic name to be "Gogam"). But "Magog" is a historical name (he is one of the sons of Japheth: Gen.10:2), so that the reversal is used no doubt to preserve the identification with mystery Babylon without altering the historical name and so losing that part of the analogy. For it is precisely by using the historical name "Magog" that the power center of this future invader of Israel is plainly located for the reader in the far north, the historical locale of Japheth's second son. Now while eschatological Babylon is, strictly speaking, in the west, historical Babylon is in "the north" in terms of biblical geography, and, until her destruction at the end of the Tribulation, is indistinguishable from the revived Roman empire as part of antichrist's dual base of power. Thus, for Ezekiel's listeners, the association of "Gog", the future invader of the land, with "Magog", one of if not the most remote of the northern nations, not only conveys in contemporary terms a perfect picture of what will actually happen, but also allows us with the benefit of later prophetic details to take things a step further and identify "Magog" with prophetic Babylon for the reasons already delineated. Further, if we see in the root of the names "Gog/Magog" a doubling of the Hebrew word for gentile, (*goy*, גוי), then "Magog" will mean something like "archetypical gentile nation". And with eschatological Babylon being, in ethnic terms, on the one hand more representative of more Japhetic nations than any other single nation, and on the other hand more polyglot in general than any other nation, the use of "Magog" to represent mystery Babylon as the homeland of the beast (he is "chief prince" of Magog) and the lynchpin of the dual confederation presided over by Magog (composed of the two parts, Meshech and Tubhal) makes perfect sense. There are, moreover, many indications throughout the context that show of a certainty that Ezekiel is speaking exclusively of far future events in chapters 38-39, and specifically of the events of Armageddon:

- a) The Lord Himself repeatedly stresses His own role in assembling all of His enemies *worldwide* for this final showdown and their destruction (Ezek.38:3-4; 38:7; 38:16; 39:2), something which never happens before Armageddon (and certainly not in the two previous campaigns between antichrist and the southern alliance).
- b) Gog's confederacy indisputably includes peoples from around the world, and clearly from the south as well as the north working in unison, so that it is indisputable that this is a *worldwide* undertaking unlike any preceding campaign against Israel, including the preceding campaigns of the Tribulation.
- c) The occasion of burying the bodies of the Lord's enemies after Armageddon in chapter 39 suggests no further satanic activity thereafter but a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity (esp. Ezek.39:25-39). In all of human history after Eden, only the Millennium fits the situation so described. Additionally, the length of time required for this cleanup (cf. especially the "seven years" of Ezek.39:9) is clearly inconsistent with the immediate arrival of New Jerusalem at the end of the Millennium (following the similarly named Gog-Magog assault on Jerusalem directed

against the rule of the Messiah). On this last point, at the end of the post-millennial Gog-Magog rebellion, we are also told that “fire came down from heaven and devoured” this final set of rebels, so that there would be no bodies to bury in that case (Rev.20:9).

d) The statement at Ezekiel 39:26 that “they will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward Me when they lived in safety” must be looking back to the contemporary and tribulational situation, not to the time of the perfect rule of Christ during the Millennium (when there will be no such “shame” or “unfaithfulness”; e.g., Jer.31:33-34). Moreover the following verse, Ezek.39:27 sets the time frame as still future from our perspective today: “when I have brought them back from the nations”, namely, the regathering of Israel by divine agency after the 2nd Advent at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon (as distinguished from the present political situation; cf. Is.60:8ff.; Zech.8:23).

e) The great earthquake mentioned in this context is an event which precedes the 2nd Advent (i.e., around the time of the seventh bowl judgment: compare Ezek.38:19 with Rev.16:18).

f) There is only one human army described here, that of antichrist, showing that this is not one of the earlier campaigns of antichrist against the south or an earlier historical invasion, but the predicted arraying of the nations against the Lord and His Anointed at Armageddon (Ps.2).

g) The way in which the warriors of the beast go mad and kill each other in a frenzy is also consistent with other 2nd Advent-Armageddon passages (compare Ezek.38:21-22 with Zech.14:13).

h) The plague of hail at Ezekiel 38:22 is, as we have seen, also a well-known pre-cursor of the 2nd Advent-Armageddon (cf. Rev.16:21).

i) The Lord uses the destruction of Gog's army to make Himself and His power known to the world (Ezek.38:16; 38:23; 39:6), something that only happens at its most emphatic at the 2nd Advent during the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev.1:7; 19:11-16), analogous to the way in which He dealt with the Pharaoh of the Exodus, a type of antichrist as we have seen (Ex.9:16).

j) The bodies of the dead providing food for the birds is also a 2nd Advent-Armageddon reference (compare Ezek.39:17ff. with Rev.19:17-18).

k) The fire which is poured out upon Magog (Ezek.39:6) is in part a reference to the same event as the fiery destruction of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (although with the phrase “even upon those of the coast-lands who live in safety”, we have an expansion of the judgment to more of the west after Armageddon; see below).

l) Ezekiel 39:36 speaks of the regathering of Israel following the invasion as a result of which there will be “no one to make them afraid” any longer, a clear reference to the peace and security of the Messiah's millennial kingdom.

(2) “Son of man, set your face against Gog (i.e., antichrist) of the land of Magog (i.e., Babylon, the home kingdom of the beast) [he who is] chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal (i.e., Revived Rome). Prophesy against him (3a) and say 'Thus says the Lord God. Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal.

Ezekiel 38:2-3a

Just as Ezekiel's reference to historical Magog refers prophetically to the beast's home country, Babylon, so his use of Meshech and Tubhal, also sons of Japheth, is likewise focused on future rather than contemporary events. The pairing here of these two ancient nations reveals to us that in addition to ruling his own “super-nation”, Babylon, antichrist also holds sway over a larger, composite empire (a.k.a., “revived Rome”), one consisting of two essential parts and named here “Meshech and Tubhal” (cf. Gen.10:2; 1Chron.1:5; Is.66:19; Ezek.27:13; 32:26; 39:1). Thus, as in the case of Magog, these names are given to Ezekiel by the Spirit in order to express future prophetic realities in geographical terms understandable to his contemporary readers. For our purposes here in examining the beast's Armageddon campaign, we can say that the core of his invasion force will be composed of the same set of armies he used to conquer the south, the armed forces of the west and the north, that is, of (now destroyed) Babylon and her allies and of the revived Rome and her allies respectively. However, since both Meshech and Tubhal are mentioned, we can be sure that the second part of antichrist's revived Roman empire, the newly conquered southern alliance (i.e., the three horns out of the ten which fall before the small horn in Daniel 7:8), will also contribute her entire complement of military might (and we have also seen from Rev.16:12 that the east will contribute as well).

(3b) “And I shall bring you back [here again] (i.e., for Armageddon). (4) For I shall put my hooks in your jaw and make you come, [you] and your entire army of horses and horsemen, all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear], a vast multitude, all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords. (5) Persia, Cush, and Put will be with them, all with shield and helmet, (6) Gomer, and all her hordes, Beth-Togarmah (i.e., “the house of Torgarmah”) [at] the recesses of the north and all her hordes, a host of [allied] nations with you [O Gog]. (7) Make thorough preparations, you [O Gog] and all your troops who have gathered together around you, and be on your guard for them.”

Ezekiel 38:3b-7

This passage demonstrates that bringing the beast and his hordes to Jerusalem in order to destroy them utterly is unquestionably “of God”, while the image in verse four of our Lord physically impaling Gog and his armies with a hook and dragging them to the slaughter of Armageddon states in the most unequivocal terms the irresistible nature of the divine plan to defeat this final offensive of the devil and the devil's chosen one, and to do so in an unprecedentedly decisive way. For it is the Lord who will “bring you *back*”. The Hebrew verb here (*shabhabh*, בָּבַשׁ) indicates quite unmistakably that Gog has been in Israel before (a reference to antichrist's prior residence in Jerusalem). This theme of Gog being led to his destruction by the Lord in the manner of Pharaoh is later emphatically repeated in the above quoted beginning of chapter 39:1-3 as well where the Lord renews His pledge to “bring Gog back” to Israel, adding that He Himself will “conduct you” (i.e., the Lord's facilitation of a rapid and complete arrival of antichrist's

forces to Jerusalem), “bring you up from the far reaches of the north” (“up”, as always because of Jerusalem's relative elevation; “the north” is precisely the region whence antichrist will begin the campaign) and, finally “make you come”. This last phrase shows us once again that in spite of the beast's and the devil's enthusiasm for this evil crusade, the Lord is the One who is leading them on to a complete annihilation that is already firmly determined in the plan of God, precisely as He led Pharaoh into the Red Sea only to dispose of him and his army in an equally complete and miraculous manner.

The following verses describe in vivid terms the sheer size of this expedition which will constitute the largest and most powerful force ever brought to bear against a single objective in world history (v.4 “a vast multitude”, and cf. the muster list later in the chapter). Nor should we assume based upon the excessively large numbers involved that the quality of these troops will be substandard. The large number of volunteers will be welded onto a large base of veterans from the previous campaigns. It will be an entirely mechanized force (v.4 an “entire army of horses and horsemen”), and an exceptionally well equipped one as well (v.4 “all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear]”, “all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords”; v.5 “all with shield and helmet”). Also, in spite of the swiftness of its mustering and the rapidity of its assembly in the theater of operations, this vast army will not for all that be either disorganized, or unprepared, or operating without proper plans or orders. For the Lord Himself is seen here to give the command and to offer encouragement to the beast and his general staff to put forth their very best effort in this regard as well (v.7 “Make thorough preparations, you [O Gog] and all your troops who have gathered together around you”, and “be on your guard for them”). In short, this will be absolutely the largest, best equipped, best trained and prepared, most professional combat force conducting the most effective operation in world history – and that is precisely the point. Were the defenders reduced to mere human means, they would stand less than no chance before antichrist and his irresistible Blitzkrieg. But it is the Lord whom they will meet at Armageddon, and the sharp sword that proceeds out of the mouth of the glorious Messiah, the Son of Man, our Savior Jesus Christ (Rev.19:15; cf. Is.1:20; 49:2; Heb.4:12; Rev.1:16; 2:12; 2:16).

As to the nations listed in verses 3-7 above, these can be broken down into three essential groupings: 1) Persia, Cush, and Put; 2) “Gomer, and all her hordes” along with “Beth-Togarmah [at] the recesses of the north and all her hordes”, and 3) “a host of [allied] nations”. As to the first group, these nations are representative of the south and, specifically, of the three regional powers of the southern alliance now subject to the beast (i.e., three of the ten horns that form the revived Roman empire; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:20; Rev.12:3; 13:1; 17:3-16). Persia may be taken to represent Iran and the central Asian power center (Turkey to Kazakstan). Put refers to Libya and represents North Africa. Cush, in biblical terms usually refers to Ethiopia but sometimes also to Mesopotamia (cf. Cush, the father of Nimrod who operated in that region: Gen.10:8), and in our context probably has both meanings, referring to the arc of southern kingdoms from Ethiopia and Sudan across the Red Sea and into Arabia and Iraq. Egypt is notably missing from this description no doubt because as the head of the southern alliance she suffered especially grievously at the hands of antichrist after their defeat (cf. Ezek.30:2-26; 32:11-15).

“For I will spur on Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight one against his brother and another against his friend, a city against a city and a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the splintering of the triple coalition). And Egypt's spirit will be emptied from the midst of her, for I will confound her plans, although they consult their idols and mediums and oracles and familiar spirits. And I will hand Egypt over into the hand of a cruel master (i.e., antichrist), even a stern king (i.e., antichrist; cf. Dan.8:23) [who] will rule over them, says the Lord God of hosts.”

Isaiah 19:2-4 (cf. Is.19:5-17 compared with Is.19:18-24)

In the second grouping we find only two subdivisions, Gomer and “the house of Togarmah”. That is because these two sons of Japheth represent the twin pillars of the beast's power during the first half of the Tribulation, the west from whence he sprang (and which until only just recently was dominated by the now destroyed Babylon), and the north (that is, the first seven kingdoms of revived Rome), conquered in the early days of the Tribulation. Gomer and Togarmah, often taken to be the Cimmerians dwelling in the (at that time) terra incognita of the northern steps and the somewhat less remote Armenians, thus represent from the biblical perspective the more and the less exotic quadrants of the world respectively, namely, the (in Ezekiel's time) unknown west and the somewhat less mysterious north. With the addition of the final element in verse six, “a host of [allied] nations with you [O Gog]”, we have a reference to the last of the world's four quadrants, the east, now brought into this final conflict by specific divine facilitation represented by the “drying up” of Euphrates to “prepare the way for the kings of the east” at Revelation 16:12 in the sixth bowl judgment, “Armageddon” (cf. Rev.16:16). In the clearest possible terms his contemporaries could fathom, Ezekiel has thus through his delineation of the muster list of antichrist demonstrated through the Spirit that this mobilization will be worldwide in its scope and massive in its implementation.

(8) “Many days from now you [and your forces] will be mustered. At the end of the years (i.e., at the end of the 6,000 years of human history just prior to Armageddon) you will come to a land restored from the sword, [to a nation] gathered out of many peoples, [you will come] against the mountains of Israel which had [previously] been [in a state] of continual devastation. (9) When you come up [against the land of Israel] you will come like a cataclysm. You will be like a [storm] cloud and cover the land, you and all your hordes and the many peoples with you.”

Ezekiel 38:8-9

For the many reasons already delineated (i.e., the list of twelve given above), what is being described here is not the end of the Millennium, but rather the political situation as it will obtain on the eve of Armageddon. The passage is very careful not to say that the inhabitants of the land have been regathered “by the Lord” (the process of this prophetically necessary pre-Tribulation regathering is already far advanced in our time of course). Further, while the situation in Israel on the brink of the beast's invasion will be one of “restoration from the sword”, nothing more is implied by these words than a breathing space from war and domination by others (and certainly not the much anticipated prosperity of the Millennium). The fact that the world in general and the government of Israel with her ally Babylon had imprudently anticipated antichrist's demise as

he disappeared into the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment will merely make the short respite all the more disappointing. For the contrast between the anticipated end to the beast's rule and all the concomitant evils of the Great Tribulation and the approach of Armageddon will be jarring as the newfound peace and tranquility dissolves into the cataclysm of this advancing storm.

(10) Thus says the Lord God, "It will come to pass on that day that thoughts will rise in your heart and you will devise an evil plan. (11) For you will say, 'I shall go up against [that] land of unfortified towns and villages. I shall attack those who are at peace, all living in [false] security, all of them inhabiting [towns and villages] without defenses (lit., "bars and doors", i.e., city gates).' (12) [For you shall] take plunder and take spoil and set your hand against [previously] desolate places which are [now] inhabited, and against a people [recently] gathered from the nations and now in the process of acquiring livestock and property and dwelling at the center of the world. (13) Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all her nobles will say to you, 'Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your troops to carry off silver and gold, to take [their] cattle and property, to take much loot?'"

Ezekiel 38:10-13

In no further need of the Jewish state and eager to punish them for their unfaithfulness, antichrist at the behest of his father the devil has conceived the "evil plan" of annihilating the Jewish race now heavily concentrated in this single location. As at the present time, the indications are that during the Tribulation the Jewish state has continued to rely on the strategy of counter-attack and mobile rather than static defenses. While generally a superior approach for a small and highly skilled armed force, against vastly numerically superior and equally skilled opponents attacking simultaneously from every direction, the lack of any significant fixed fortifications will be sorely felt, and, as the scriptures above suggest, will place the Israeli army at a considerable disadvantage. We may expect that, as news of the beast's re-emergence and of his mustering of the world's armies for Armageddon reaches Israel, it will occasion a frantic effort to construct makeshift forts and entrenchments throughout the land, and especially around the capital of Jerusalem. To the rest of the world, however, the imminent demise of the Jewish state will seem certain, so that the international merchant class, represented by the traders of Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish (noted trading nations of Ezekiel's day representing from their relative geography vis-à-vis Israel the mercantile interests of the south, west, and north respectively), will be looking forward to the opportunity of trafficking in what promises to be a wholesale liquidation of all property within the borders of the Jewish state just as soon as antichrist's mission is accomplished. The eagerness visible in the verses above is no doubt accentuated by the fact that the seven years of tribulation have taken their toll on the world and its wealth (not to mention that their best customer, Babylon, has just recently been obliterated), but Israel, as the headquarters of the beast and his religion for the past three years has benefitted economically significantly more than any other nation, though that "benefit" has come at the extremely high cost of having to experience the presence of antichrist and his anti-God rule more directly than any other nation.

(14) “Therefore prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord God. On that day when My people are living [in false] security will you not realize it? (15) For you will come from your place, from the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding horses, a huge multitude and a vast army. (16) And I will bring you up against my people Israel like a cloud covering the earth. At the end of days (i.e., in the last days, the Tribulation: cf. Is.2:2) it will come to pass that I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know Me (i.e., understand who I am) when I show forth My holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog'.”

Ezekiel 38:14-16

Finally, it should also be pointed out here that the essential strategy of Armageddon has been developed by Satan, and that Israel is really not so much the target as she is the bait, for it is the true essence of the devil's mad plan to force the issue in one place and at one time in a final confrontation of all the forces he can muster, human and angelic, with the Lord Himself (e.g., Ps.2:1-3; Rev.16:14). But of course the entirety of all creature effort is a laughable pittance in the face of the least expression of divine power. Just as the Lord raised up Pharaoh for the very purpose of displaying His power and proclaiming His Name (Ex.9:16; cf. Rom.9:17), so all the devil's efforts through the mobilization of more human might than has ever been deployed in one place in world history will only serve to “show forth my holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog” (Ezek.38:16).

2. The Jewish Resistance: As the class most resentful of antichrist in his portrayal of himself as “the Holy One of Israel” coupled with his breaking of the pseudo-Messianic treaty (Dan.9:27), we may expect that it will have been the religious conservatives and nationalistic zealots who took the lead in rebelling against the beast. While the first object of their attention, Jerusalem, has by now most likely come completely under their control (or nearly so: cf. Rev.11:2), we may also posit as suggested above, that, at the time of the beast's re-emergence from the northern darkness and his call to Armageddon, there will still remain strongholds within the land of Israel whence the loyalists of the secular party and the relatively small contingents of antichrist's armed forces still based in the land of Israel at that time will have fled for safety. The existence of these hostile strong-points throughout Israel in the face of an imminent invasion of incredibly mammoth proportions will pose a major complication for the leaders of the Jewish resistance and will greatly complicate the defense. Indications from scripture are that instead of attempting to defend the entire land of Israel, a very difficult prospect under the best of circumstances and objectively impossible in this situation, the Jewish generals will fall back upon Jerusalem and fortify the capital with every available soldier and all available means (as was typically the case in antiquity, e.g., 586 B.C. versus the Babylonians and 70 A.D. versus the Romans). Thus it is at Jerusalem that the final battle of the Tribulation will be fought, the “Mountain of [the assembly of] Troops” otherwise known as Armageddon. This has been the Lord's plan from the beginning, and it is He who is in truth directing things to this end (Ezek.38:16).

Something to keep in mind as we examine the passages which relate the heroic but seemingly futile Jewish resistance to antichrist's invasion is that these defenders however noble and however courageous share a common characteristic which has brought them to this pass: they all

rejected the ministry of Moses and Elijah during the Tribulation's first half. Had they accepted the testimony of these two great prophets and the ministry of the 144,000 martyrs, they would presently find themselves safely ensconced in the wilderness far east of Jerusalem, riding out the storms of the Great Tribulation and this latest catastrophe in the embrace of God's protection, waiting for the return of the King when they, in company with all believers still alive and all who have by then passed on to be with the Lord, would have been resurrected on that glorious day of victory at the 2nd Advent of Jesus Christ. Many if not most of these men and women who resist the beast's assault will convert when they see the sign of the Son of Man and witness His return with their own eyes (Matt.24:30; cf. Zech.12:10; Rev.1:7), but their reluctance to put their faith in Jesus before His actual return will mean that they will have to wait for their own time of resurrection as the double portion of Christ's victory prize, the resurrection of the Friends of the Bride who will take on immortality at the end of His millennial kingdom (1Cor.15:24). Nevertheless, there is indeed also a distinction to be made on the one hand between these courageous, conservative defenders whose hearts have been vexed in all of antichrist's doings, who come in for scriptural praise in their conduct of the defense, and who apparently do convert upon our Lord's return, and on the other hand the secular compromisers who embraced the beast, no doubt accepting his mark. This distinction is also born out in the prophetic passages which describe honorable fighting by the former group while other scriptures describe the low state of affairs in Israel on the threshold of this invasion. Since the Tribulation is a time of judgment, the Lord is using this invasion also as a final bit of punctuation to demonstrate that compromise with evil whether to a small or great degree (i.e., failure to choose for the good on the one hand and wholehearted choosing of evil on the part of the latter) both invite divine judgment.

(1) Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on my holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. (2) A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom. An army great and mighty is [coming], spreading itself out over your mountains like the dawn. There has never been anything like it since the beginning of time and never will be again in latter times from generation to generation. (3) Fire devours in front of them, and behind them flames are set ablaze. In front of them the land is like the garden of Eden, but behind them is a desolate desert and nothing escapes them. (4) Their appearance is like that of horses, and they race forward just like mounted cavalry. (5) Their clatter on the mountains is like that of chariots, like the sound of fire devouring chaff, like a mighty army arraying itself for battle. (6) Before them the nations writhe in anguish and every face turns pale. (7) They rush on like mighty men. Like men of war they storm the wall. They all keep their ranks and all march straight ahead. (8) They do not crowd each other. Each maintains his file. They throw themselves at the defenses. They do not falter. (9) They charge into the city. They rush the wall. They go up into the houses. They enter into the windows like a thief. (10) The earth trembles before them and the heavens quake. The sun and the moon grow dark and the stars contract their light. (11) Then the Lord will sound forth with His voice before His host, for His army is [also] very large, for [the forces] who obey His word are [also] numerous. For the Day of the Lord is great and extremely awesome. Who can endure it?

Comment: The passage above is a very clear example of the sort of dual application of prophetic scripture we have been discussing since the beginning of this series. Through the use of the “Day of the Lord paradigm”, Joel is very clearly speaking both about the invasion of locusts during his own day (cf. Joel 1:2-4), while at the same time illustrating that invasion through comparison to the beast's invasion for Armageddon. By terming the locust “a nation” in chapter one verse six, Joel has prepared his readers for this more expansive comparison in chapter two wherein the invasion of locusts is deliberately compared to the invasion of the beast's army prior to Armageddon, an event which ends in the “Day of the Lord” proper when Christ returns and destroys the literal armies of antichrist. The comparison is rendered unmistakable when Joel actually describes this “locust” invasion as directly preceding “the Day of the Lord” (framing the passage with that description in both verse one and verse eleven). Through this common prophetic and Holy Spirit inspired device, not only are Joel's contemporaries given a helpful point of comparison for their suffering in judgment, but we too are blessed in being given a precisely parallel representation of the beast's invasion where the speed, shock, and irresistible nature of antichrist's offensive are brought home in a very graphic way. The eschatological significance not only of this and other passages but also of the situation generally cannot have been lost on the Jewish rebels who are led by religious though non-believing conservatives. It is safe to say that as in the case of other such Jewish rebellions in the past, they are staking their survival on divine intervention, and, specifically, on the return of the Messiah. It is thus more than a little ironic that these religious conservatives will in truth have correctly divined the signs of the times and the prophetic situation, but will have missed the main point of this entire exercise (i.e., the need for faith in Christ), stumbling over the cross of the Messiah in order to embrace His crown. But before this campaign is at an end, the futility and pointlessness of all human endeavor apart from accepting the merciful provision of God in the Person of Jesus will be made evident.

(6) “Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, (7) therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River — the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks (8) and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!” (9) Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! (10) Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.

Isaiah 8:6-10 NIV

Comment: The word “Shiloah” means “[the] One sent” and is reference to the true Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.3:16; 3:34; Jn.17:1-5; 17:18; 17:20-22; Rom.8:3; Gal.4:4-6; Heb.3:1; 1Jn.4:9-10; cf. Gen.49:10; Is.8:6; Zech.2:9; 2:11; 4:9; 6:15), and the water is a reference to the truth of the gospel that brings rest and salvation (Jn.3:5; 1Cor.10:4; Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17). Isaiah's contemporaries, like the religious conservatives on the brink of Armageddon, were

relying on human agency rather than the divine help which only comes to those who are seeking God in the correct way – through His Son Jesus Christ. As a result, the “hired razor from beyond the Euphrates” (Is.7:20) would be employed to destroy the idolatrous northern kingdom and chastise the sinful southern kingdom, not entirely annihilating the latter, but, as the passage above says, sweeping through the land like a flood that reaches all the way up to the neck (i.e, stops only just short of utter devastation). It will be recalled that the Lord did indeed deliver the kingdom of Judah on this occasion and in miraculous fashion as the Angel of the Lord (an appearance of Christ in “Christophany”) slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers encamped before Jerusalem (Is.37:36). Thus we see many parallels in the previous historic situation to the one presently under discussion wherein Immanuel, “God with us” is indeed on the point of returning to rule the world. Just as the northern kingdom was swept away at that time, so on this occasion only Jerusalem and its environs will prove able to provide anything more than token resistance in the face of antichrist's assault, and just as the Lord made a point of delivering Judah in an unanticipated and miraculous way only after she had been thoroughly chastened and only after all human means had utterly failed, so our Lord will return in glory to extirpate the beast's hordes only after the resistance of the rebellion has been broken (cf. Dan.12:7). The Messianic war cry of the rebels, “God is with us!”, that is “Immanuel”, will prove to be true indeed, but not for the reasons they suppose, nor will their deliverance come at a time or in the manner they hope. They will first have to experience the shattering of their might, and then will be revealed the sign of “the Son of Man” emblazoned in the heavens for all to see: the Cross of Jesus Christ (Matt.24:30; cf. Zech.12:10; Rev.1:7).

(9) And He said to me, “Go and say to this people, 'Hear well, but do not comprehend. See well, but do not understand'. (10) Harden the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, nor repent and be healed”. (11) Then I said, “Until when, Lord?” And He replied, “Until their cities are devastated without anyone dwelling [there] and their houses [are empty] without any inhabitants, and their land is devastated with appalling destruction. (12) And [until] the Lord removes the inhabitants far away so that the desolation is great in the midst of the land [of Israel].
Isaiah 6:9-12

Comment: This passage, along with many others, firmly connects the resistance of the inhabitants of the land of Israel to this final scourging judgment at antichrist's hand, so that whether the recipients are secular confederates and servants of the beast or conservative religious Jews who have continued to resist the reality of the true Messiah Jesus Christ, the essential reason for the devastating nature of the beast's invasion will be precisely on account of their rejection of God's will for them (see also especially Is.3:1 - 4:1; 5:8-30; 17:4-14, 33:7-9, 51:17-20; 64:9-12, prophetic descriptions of the dire state of affairs in Israel at this time and the underlying reason for it).

(5) "Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: 'Sound the trumpet throughout the land!' Cry aloud and say: 'Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities!' (6) Raise the signal to go to Zion! Flee for safety without delay! For I am

bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction." (7) A lion has come out of his lair (i.e., the beast); a destroyer of nations has set out (i.e., antichrist). He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant.

Jeremiah 4:5-7 NIV

(11) At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, "A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; (12) a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them."

(13) Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined!

Jeremiah 4:11-13 NIV

(15) A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim.

(16) "Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: 'A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah. (17) They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me,'" declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 4:15-17 NIV

(29) At the sound of horsemen and archers every town takes to flight. Some go into the thickets; some climb up among the rocks. All the towns are deserted; no one lives in them.

Jeremiah 4:29 NIV

Comment: These excerpts from Jeremiah chapter four speak about the contemporary situation of Nebuchadnezzar's imminent invasion of Israel during the 6th century B.C., but also have the same prophetic application we have been noticing throughout. The attribution of the attack to "a lion" and "a destroyer of nations" is a clear reference to the beast, and the message that the judgment about to be leveled at his hands has a divine origin is impossible to overlook. The swiftness of the assault and stunning nature of the devastation it will wreak are also very clear from the quotes above and from the rest of Jeremiah chapter four as well. Finally, these passages also illustrate the last ditch strategy of the rebels, namely, retreat to the most inaccessible and highly fortified areas within the land of Israel, and, preeminently, to Jerusalem, the one place most worth fighting for to the end, and the one place where divine deliverance may best be expected.

The rapid narrowing in of the campaign to the network of valleys surrounding Jerusalem and leading down to the coast is especially obvious in Isaiah chapter 22 where the frantic efforts to fortify the capital in the face of the northern invasion are recounted.

(1) An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision: What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs, (2) O town full of commotion, O city of tumult and revelry? Your slain were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle. (3) All your leaders have fled together; they have been captured without using the bow. All you who were caught were taken prisoner together, having fled while the enemy was still far away. (4)

Therefore I said, “Turn away from me; let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people.” (5) The Lord, the Lord Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror in the Valley of Vision, a day of battering down walls and of crying out to the mountains. (6) Elam takes up the quiver, with her charioteers and horses; Kir uncovers the shield. (7) Your choicest valleys are full of chariots, and horsemen are posted at the city gates; (8) the defenses of Judah are stripped away. And you looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest; (9) you saw that the City of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool. (10) You counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall. (11) You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the Old Pool, but you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.
Isaiah 22:1-11 NIV

All of the factors discussed above are evident here, the rapidity of the oncoming disaster, the early shift of focus for the defense exclusively to Jerusalem, and the stop-gap measures taken to ward off the coming assault. And even in the face of the overwhelming force swiftly arrayed in battle line before the city and the irresistible nature of their approach, still we see a stubborn refusal to understand that this judgment is from the Lord and is the result of the rejection of His true Messiah.

3. The Siege Begins:

But now marshal your [own] troops O city of troops [marshaled against you]. For they have laid siege to us.
Micah 5:1a

Then [upon his return to Israel] he (i.e., antichrist) will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then].
Daniel 11:45

(1) Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped (i.e., Jerusalem)! Add year to year, let your festivals run their course, (2) but I will besiege Ariel so that there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will become to Me like an “Ariel” (lit., “God’s [sacrificial] altar”). (3) For I will beleague you round about with palisades, and surround you with siege works. (4) You will be brought low and speak from the ground, and from the dust your speech will be humbled. Your voice will come ghost-like from the earth, and your speech will come muttering from the dust. (5) But the multitude of your enemies will become like pulverized powder, even like chaff sweeping away [on the wind] that multitude of ruthless [enemies]. And it will come to pass in an instant that (6) you will experience visitation from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring

flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion.
Isaiah 29:1-8

These passages, while presaging the beast's defeat in the soon to ensue battle of Armageddon, show antichrist hemming in the resistance in preparation for a grand assault on Jerusalem. At His return, our Lord will breathe courage and might into the defense (Is.28:5-6; Ob.1:18; Mic.4:11-13; 5:5-9; Zech.9:13-16; 10:3-7). At this moment, however, as the dire nature of their predicament sinks in, the defenders have begun to realize the complete hopelessness of their cause absent a miraculous divine intervention, a situation producing mixed emotions and pleas for help amidst expressions of despair (cf. Psalm 60:1-12):

The harvest is over, the summer has past (i.e., time-frame nearing the Day of Atonement), but [still] we have not been delivered!
Jeremiah 8:20

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say "I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!" (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem].
Joel 3:9-11

(5) For this One (i.e., the Messiah) will be our peace. When Ashur (i.e., a type of antichrist's world coalition) comes against our land, and when he tramples upon our fortifications, we will appoint seven generals (lit., "shepherds"; cf.) against him, even eight rulers of men (i.e., the seven and the supreme civil commander represented by Shebna in Is.22:20-25). (6) And Ashur will ravage the land with the sword, even [the people of] Nimrod right up to the very entrances [to Jerusalem].
Micah 5:5-6a

For I will assemble all the nations to Jerusalem for war, and the city will be captured, and its houses will be plundered, and its women will be ravished, and half the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.
Zechariah 14:2

(6) And I asked the man (i.e., angel) clothed in linen [suspended] above the waters of the Euphrates how long [it would be] until the fulfillment of these marvelous things. (7) And I heard the man (i.e., angel) clothed in linen [suspended] above the waters of the

Euphrates; for he lifted his hand and his left hand to heaven and swore by the One who lives forever that it would be a time, times, and a half (i.e., the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation), and that when [they] (i.e., the beast's forces) had finished shattering the power of the holy people, all these things would come to an end.

Daniel 12:6-7

As the last two passages in particular demonstrate, all resistance will prove vain, for it has not been of God. The Lord will allow the “power of the holy people” to be shattered, and Jerusalem to be captured and on the point of going completely into exile – and then He will arise to deliver His people.

D. Signs of the Second Advent

It is only during the last hours before our Lord's return to earth that the final indisputable signs of His Second Advent will occur, namely, the supernatural darkness of that unique day, along with the cataclysmic heavenly and earthly events which accompany it (cf. Lk.21:25-31).

(6) Howl, for the Day of the Lord is near, all destroying from the Almighty. (7) Therefore will every hand hang slack and every human heart melt, and they will be dismayed. (8) Convulsions and pain will seize them, and they will writhe like a woman about to give birth. They will look at each other in astonishment, their faces ablaze. (9) Behold, the Day of the Lord is coming, a mighty day of anger and intense wrath, to make the earth desolate and remove her sinners from upon her. (10) For the stars of heaven and the constellations will not flash forth their light. The sun will grow dark on its course and the moon will not pour out its light. (11) Then will I punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring an end to the arrogance of the proud and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless. (12) I will make men more rare than gold, and mankind than the choice bullion of Ophir. (13) Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath.

Isaiah 13:6-13

(6) This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. (7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord Almighty.

Haggai 2:6-7 NIV (cf. Hag.2:21-22)

Immediately preceding the glorious Second Advent of our Lord which will rend the darkness with brilliant light, these will be the unmistakable signs of His coming: seismic disruption on the earth below, catastrophic turmoil in the heavens above, and all enshrouded in supernatural darkness (cf. Is.2:10; 2:19-21; 5:30; 24:1-6; 24:17-20; Jer.4:23; 25:32; 30:7; Ezek.38:18-19; Hos.10:8; Amos 5:18-20; 8:9 [at noon]; Mal.3:2; Matt.24:7; Mk.13:8; Lk.21:11; Heb.12:26; 2Pet.3:7-13; cf. Ezek.32:7):

You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire.

Isaiah 29:6

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. (4) All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

(1) Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on My holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. (2) A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom.

Joel 2:1-2a

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:30-32

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of “the Lord will judge”). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:12-16

(18) Woe to you who long for the Day of the Lord! Why do you long for the Day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. (19) It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. (20) Will not the Day of the Lord be darkness, not light – pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

Amos 5:18-20 NIV

(14) The great Day of the Lord is near, very near and coming quickly. The sound of the Day of the Lord will be one of warriors roaring bitterly. (15) That day will be a day of blackness, a day of constraint and pressure, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom, (16) a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corner-towers. (17) For I shall bring distress upon mankind, and they will walk about like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like excrement. (18) Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the anger of the Lord. And all the earth will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy. For He will bring all the inhabitants of the earth to a complete, yes, a terrifying end.

Zephaniah 1:14-18

And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?"

Revelation 6:12-17

Thus the last day of the Tribulation which is also the beginning of the Day of the Lord proper, the day of Jesus' return, will be a unique day, a day which begins with darkness, but which ends with light. This supernatural darkness which gives way to equally miraculous light is thus not only the unmistakable sign of the 2nd Advent, but a powerful metaphor for the return of God's rule on earth in the person of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as the darkness of the world now become complete gives way to the light of Him who is the Light of the world, the bright Morning Star (2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 22:16).

The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

Isaiah 30:26 NIV

For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you.

Isaiah 60:2

(6) For it will come to pass that on that day there will be no light. [The light of the] heavenly bodies will be withheld (lit., “curdled”). (7) For it will be a unique day, one which is known [only] to the Lord, neither day nor night, and it will come to pass at evening time that there will be light.

Zechariah 14:6-7

For in His day, the Son of Man will be just as lightning which, when it flashes, lights up the earth from one horizon to the other.

Luke 17:24

E. The Resurrection

1. The Interim Body

Since the death of the first human beings after mankind's expulsion from the garden of Eden, death has not meant oblivion or even a "bodiless" state. In between physical life and the resurrection, everyone has had and continues to have what may be termed an "interim" body upon departure from this life. For believers, this “interim state”, while far inferior to the resurrection to come, is nonetheless far superior to the difficult life we are leading now in these corrupt and temporary physical bodies.

Contrary to the false doctrine of “soul sleep”, those who die in the Lord are not waiting for the resurrection in what amounts to a coma, oblivious to all events (compare our Lord’s interim state in Hades for the three days prior to His resurrection: 1Pet.3:18-19; cf. other instances of the conscious departed: 1Sam.28:11-19; Jn.8:56; Lk.16:19-31; Rev.6:9-11; 7:9-17). After all, why would Paul (and others) be so anxious to "be with the Lord", if it only meant that they would be "asleep" until some far distant future time (Phil.1:23)? Instead, departed believers constitute the “cloud of witnesses” observing from heaven the ineluctable advance of the Plan of God and our progress in it here on earth (Heb.12:1; cf. Jn.8:56; Rev.6:10). The following passages make it clear that upon, departing from this body of sin, believers receive a temporary “tent” which, while superior to this present flesh in every way and devoid of sin is nevertheless not to be compared to the eternal home for our spirits which we shall receive at the resurrection:

For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling (i.e., our physical body) be struck, we have an abode [that comes] from God, a dwelling made without human agency, eternal in the heavens. For indeed we do groan in this one, desiring to put on our habitation which comes from heaven. And even if we do put off this present one, ***we will not be found naked*** (i.e., our spirits will not be “body-less” at death because we shall receive an interim body ; cf. Ps.141:8).

2nd Corinthians 5:1-3

And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying “How long, O

Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?” *And a white robe was given to each one* of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course].

Revelation 6:9-11

And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, “These people *dressed in white robes* – who are they and where have they come from?” And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 7:13-14

Other passages of scripture support this truth as well, such as the brief interview of the departed Samuel by Saul (1Sam.28:13-19), and the appearance of Moses and Elijah at the mount of transfiguration (Lk.9:28-36). Neither of these appearances would be possible if the dead in Christ were somehow “asleep”, or if they were disembodied spirits without interim bodies. Of particular interest in this regard is the parable of Abraham's bosom (Lk.16:19-31), wherein Jesus gives us rich detail of the interim state and abode as it was before our Lord's ascension. Lazarus, the rich man, and Abraham are all recognizable, and (aside from their presence in eternity), are largely indistinguishable from the living. All this is perfectly understandable when we consider that we are creatures of both a material and an immaterial nature (i.e., body and spirit), for that is the way God made us, each and every one (cf. Gen.2:7). Therefore, God will not leave us in any other condition than He always meant us to be, possessing both a body and a spirit (and that is even true of those who reject His will for their lives: cf. Dan.12:2; Lk.16:19-31; Rev.20:11-15).

While what we can know about our interim status in eternity is limited to such detail as we are able to glean from scripture, it would thus be a great mistake to imagine that our person or our essential human form or functioning will be radically altered after departing this earth (except for the good in the case of believers). For example, it is clear that while we occupy the interim body we shall be visible as the persons we have always been (Rev.6:9), capable of speaking (Rev.6:10), of wearing clothing (Rev.6:11), of worshiping God (Rev.7:9-10), and of experiencing all the joy of communion and fellowship with Him and with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Rev.7:15-17). This joy is impossible for us to comprehend at present, but from the time of our transfer to the third heaven (probably, as in the case of Abraham's Bosom, conveyed there by angels: cf. Lk.16:22), there shall be no more unhappiness of any kind, only the bliss of eternity in the presence of the Lord (Rev.7:15-17; 21:4). Thus we can expect both this interim state (and our ultimate resurrection state) to be *better* to an unknowable degree than what we are now experiencing without making us fundamentally different individuals (apart from the welcome absence of sin).

2. Paradise before the Cross

In anticipation of our Lord's sacrifice (which was acceptable to the Father in every way), the Father had mercifully delayed judgment upon sin until the time when He gave His own Son to be a means of propitiating all sin for those who put their faith in Him (Rom.3:25-26; 2Cor.5:19; cf. Acts 14:16; 17:30). This salvation – forgiveness of sin and provision of eternal life – extends not only to all who have trusted in Jesus since the cross, but also to all those who sought forgiveness and eternal life from God before the cross, trusting in His promises and in His promised One to come so clearly portrayed in the tabernacle and all its rites, so clearly foreshadowed and prophesied throughout the Bible (e.g., Gen.3:15; 3:21; 4:4; Ps.22; Is.52-53; Lk.24:25-27). Because the way into the presence of the Father was not opened until Jesus' sacrifice and ascension to Him, the righteous who died before these events (which constitute "the conjunction of the ages": Heb.9:26) were taken after death to an interim "paradise" below the earth (also known as "Abraham's bosom": Lk.16:19-31). This paradise was a place of blessing to be sure, but was still separated from the presence of the Father by the veil of the heavens until the fulfillment of the Messiah's mission. This is the "hell" to which our Lord descended after His death on the cross before His resurrection (1Pet.3:19; cf. Eph.4:9-10 with Ezek.26:20-21; Matt.11:23). Therefore this region of "hell" was not a place of torments (although part of Hades was and still is reserved for that function), but rather, in the case of all those who died in the Lord from Abel until the resurrection, it was a place of rest and repose in which to await the opening of the way into the heavenly inner sanctum through the blood of Christ. It is to this interim paradise that Jesus refers when on the cross He tells the believing thief "today you will be with Me in paradise" (Lk.23:43; cf. Lk.16:19-31).

3. The Third Heaven after the Cross:

Before our Lord's ascension into the presence of the Father following His resurrection, no human being had ever entered the third heaven (Jn.3:13). All this changed when Jesus "split the veil" of heaven and entered into the presence of the Father on the basis of His saving work on the cross, then took His seat at the Father's side until the time when He should return to the world to establish His kingdom (Ps.110:1; Heb.1:1-3). Our Lord's ascension through the heavenly veil and session in the heavenly temple are clearly portrayed in the symbolism of the tabernacle. In the tabernacle (and in the later temple) there are two spaces, commonly referred to as the holy place and the holy of holies respectively. The holy place, the outer space and the larger of the two rooms, contained the table of the bread of presence, the altar of incense, and the golden candlestick, and was representative of the fellowship between God and sanctified believers in paradise. From before the creation of man, to Eden, to paradise below the earth, to the present third heaven, to eternal New Jerusalem, although the location of "paradise" has been variable, the most fundamental aspect of it has always been the same: it is the place where God's creatures enjoy untrammelled fellowship with Him.

At the present, ever since our Lord's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, His passage "through the heavens" into the heavenly Holy of Holies, "paradise" has meant the third heaven, the heavenly temple and dwelling-place of God the Father. Christ's ascension into heaven "split the veil" of the heavens, rending the barrier of separation between man and God through His

blood, opening the way of “access” to the Father for all who believe and follow His Son (cf. Eph.2:18; 3:12). For Jesus Christ is the only entrance, the only way into heaven (Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; 14:6; cf. Rev.3:7-8; 19:11), and so He is in a very literal sense our “leader” into the heavenly holy of holies (our *archegos*: Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb.2:10; 12:2). That is why at Jesus’ death, the moment when He had completed His victorious life and sacrifice perfectly in every way, the Father caused the temple’s literal veil to be split open, graphically demonstrating – for any and all who would not refuse to see it – the reality of His provision of salvation symbolically portrayed in the temple which speaks entirely of Jesus’ work: with the cross an accomplished fact, man can now enter into the very presence of God – but only on the basis of our Lord’s sacrificial death (compare Matt.27:51 with Heb.10:19-20). For Christ’s work removed the veil-barrier of enmity and estrangement (erected by man through the sin of our first parents) making possible our reconciliation to the Father, so that we may now stand in His presence through the blood of Christ (Rom.5:10-21; 2Cor.5:17-21; Eph.2:14-18; Col.1:19-22).

Since our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, ascension to the third heaven, and session at the right hand of the Father, there is now nothing to hinder departed believers from entering into the presence of the Father along the “newly opened and living way” that Jesus has made for us into His presence (see especially Jn.14:2-3; cf. Jn.17:24; Heb.1:3; 4:14; 6:19-20; 8:1-5; 9:11-12):

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this access of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, an entryway, so to speak, through the veil (which is His flesh), an entrance which is new and alive and which He has consecrated, and since we have [this] great high priest over the household of God, let us pray with a truthful heart in complete faith, our hearts sprinkled [clean] of [any] bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the Word (cf. Eph.5:26)].

Hebrews 10:19-22

This tangible reality of believers liberated from the necessity of occupying a temporary abode (i.e., the underground paradise of *sheol*) and free to anticipate their destined home with God in heaven after death was promised by our Lord (Jn.14:1-6; cf. Jn.12:26; 17:24), and is clearly visible in the biblical descriptions of believers now actually in the presence of the Father and the Lamb (2Cor.5:8; 12:1-6; Phil.1:23; Heb.12:22-23; cf. Rev.6:9; 7:9-17). Moreover, it is also clear from a number of passages that our Lord, when He made His actual as well as highly symbolic journey through the heavens and into the Father’s presence, Jesus led “captivity captive” (Eph.4:8; cf. Ps.68:18), freeing from the subterranean paradise known as “Abraham’s bosom” all the faithful who had previously died (Lk.23:43; cf. Ps.146:7b; Is.14:17b; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Lk.16:19-31), and taking them in His train up to the third heaven (cf. Ps.68:24-27; Jn.14:2-3; 17:24; Col.2:15; 1Pet.3:18-22; Rev.1:18). Since the veil of the heavenly temple of God (i.e., “the third heaven”, the “antitype” or true location represented by the Holy of Holies in the earthly tabernacle) has now been split open by Christ’s victory, there is no further distinction in heaven between the Holy Place (representing the previous subterranean compartment of *sheol*, “Abraham’s bosom”) and the Holy of Holies, with saved, departed humanity now resident in the presence of the Lamb and of the Father. For it is into this genuine “Holy of Holies” in heaven

above that Christ entered when He ascended, along with all those who had previously died in the Lord and had previously been awaiting this momentous event in the paradise below:

For Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. Rather, ***He entered into heaven itself***, so as to present Himself before God [the Father] on our behalf.

Hebrews 9:24

4. The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming in command of the clouds of heaven (i.e., the heavenly hosts) with power and much glory. (31) And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, and He will gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other (i.e., this is not to “help” us but to marshal us – we are already flying to meet those just resurrected). (32) Learn this parable from the fig tree. When its branches become supple and its leaves sprout, you recognize that the summer is close. (33) In the very same way when you behold all these things (i.e., the events of Matt.24:1-31), recognize that [My return] is right at the door.

Matthew 24:29-33 (Mk.13:24-27)

Just as dawn is preceded by the darkest part of the night, so it will be at the end of the present age when our victorious Lord returns and turns our darkness into light (cf. Num.24:17; Is.9:2; 60:1; 60:19; Matt.2:2; 2:9-10; Jn.1:4-5; 8:12; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 21:23; 22:16). The wonder of the Second Advent return of that One truly New Person, our resurrected Lord, will seem all the more wonderful in contrast to the pain of the Tribulation that preceded it. And the brilliance of the glory of His return will seem all the more brilliant in contrast to the darkness of the supernatural night that preceded it. This will be all the more so true for His Bride, the Church, of which we who believe are all a part. For on that glorious day of days, those of us who are still “in the body” will be resurrected while we yet live, and lifted up in our new bodies to join the Lord at His return in company with all who have gone before us.

As Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians, the resurrection takes place in three echelons: 1) our Lord Jesus Christ, 2) the Church (the Bride), and 3) all who believe *after* Jesus' return (the Friends of the Bride).

(23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits. Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end, when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority. (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet – (26) and death is the final enemy to be done away with.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself, the Head of the Body, constitutes the initial echelon of the resurrection. And as the Head, our Lord rules two further, subordinate echelons. The first of these is the Church, that is, all believers who have ever lived from Adam and Eve to the last person to accept Christ before His return when the resurrection of the Bride begins. The uniting of Christ with His Church in resurrection is the “wedding” that finally binds us together forever with our Husband Jesus Christ in full experiential reality (cf. Matt.9:15; Matt.25:1-13; Mk.2:19; Lk.5:34; Jn.3:29; 2Cor.11:2-3; Eph.1:22-23; 5:22-33; Rev.19:6-8; 21:2-4; 21:9ff.; 22:17). Although we are His here and now in a positional way, on that greatest of days we shall be His irreversibly and unconditionally forevermore, “and thus shall we ever be with the Lord” (1Thes.4:17). For only when we are resurrected do we become His Bride in this official and permanent way. This wedding of the entire Church to Christ, described in Revelation 19:6-8, is a preliminary event which immediately precedes our Lord's taking up His rightful rule over the earth in the wake of His victory at Armageddon. The final echelon of the resurrection will occur at the end of the Millennium, just prior to the last judgment, the destruction of the present heavens and earth, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. This final group to be resurrected we call “the Friends of the Bride” in accordance with what the angel tells John at Revelation 19:9: “Happy are those who have been called to the wedding of the Lamb” (cf. the “virgin companions” of the Messiah's Bride in Psalm 45:14, a clearly Messianic victory Psalm). Revelation 19:9 expresses the invitation to the great banquet in the kingdom given to all who believe after Christ's return (Matt.8:11; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Lk.13:29; cf. Is.25:6-9), a group which at the time will largely be composed of repentant and now believing Jews. At the end of human history, the number of believers in each of the two subordinate echelons of the resurrection, that is, the Church and the Millennial Believers, will be precisely equal, and will in turn collectively be precisely equal to the number of elect angels. The final fulfillment of both the Church at Jesus' return and the complement of Millennial believers at the end of human history will thus leave the devil and his fallen angels not only effectively replaced, but superabundantly and marvelously so (in a ratio of two to one – replaced directly by the Church one-for-one, complemented by the Friends of Bride in equal numbers). It will be at that point at the end of history, at the point of the defeat of all hostile human and angelic opposition (cf. Rev.20:7-10) at the end of the present creation and at the beginning of the new, eternal one, that death itself, the last enemy (cf. Psalm 110:1), will be removed from the scene once and for all, as we and our fellow servants of the Lord live an indescribably blessed eternal life with Jesus ever after and forevermore.

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17

In the above passage we see the essentials of the resurrection at Christ's return. First, our Lord returns from the third heaven where He is presently seated at the Father's right hand "until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps.110:1; cf. Acts 2:35; Heb.1:13; 10:13). Glowing with refulgent light brighter than the sun (as befits the Light of the world; cf. Acts 26:13), He will split the supernatural darkness which has enveloped the world and in the heavens above will be visible to everyone on the earth (Rev.1:7; cf. Matt.24:30). It is in that instant that Jesus will give the command to rise (cf. Jn.11:43), while the archangel at His side blows assembly in response (cf. Matt.24:31). Then all those believers who have to that point passed from life will rise from the places where they were laid to rest, the dust of their former bodies being transformed into their eternal forms in the manner of the Son of Man Himself (Phil.3:20-21; 1Jn.3:2), while all believers still alive on earth will follow them in a living resurrection, transformed into their eternal state without ever experiencing physical death, a significant blessing experienced only by those who have had to endure the Tribulation (while unbelievers are "left behind": Matt.24:36-41; Lk.17:34-35). As each group rises in resurrection, either through the uniting of their departed spirits with their new eternal bodies or, in the case of those still alive, through the transformation of their bodies while their spirits still indwell this present flesh, we will all be conducted to the assembly area above the earth (cf. Matt.24:31), where our Lord and the rest of His heavenly legions of elect angels (i.e., those not involved in the process of mustering the newly resurrected believers; cf. Mk.13:26) are arrayed in anticipation of initiating the battle of Armageddon once His entire host is complete (Dan.7:13; 1Thes.1:10; 4:13-18; 2Thes.1:7-10; Rev.17:14; cf. Lk.2:13; Matt.16:27; 25:1-13):

First, Jesus returns and appears with His angelic legions above the earth, visible to the whole world:

Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming in command of the clouds (i.e., the angelic hosts) of heaven with power and much glory.
Matthew 24:29-30

"But I say to you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and [after that] returning in command of the clouds (i.e., the angelic hosts) of heaven."
Matthew 26:64b (cf. Mk.14:62; Lk.21:27)

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.
Revelation 1:7

Then our Lord gives the command for the dead to rise, and for those of us who are His and still in our physical bodies to be resurrected while yet alive as well, and so we shall be resurrected in response to the archangel's trumpet blast (Matt.24:31; cf. Ps.50:5):

(50) But I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (i.e., live in eternity with the Lord), nor can corruption inherit incorruption (i.e., we need the resurrection to live forever). (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery: not all of us will fall asleep, but all of us will be changed (52) in [that] moment of time, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet blast. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise incorruptible, and we too (i.e., believers still alive) will be changed [at that time (i.e., the Lord's Second Advent return)].

1st Corinthians 15:50-52

(16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:16-17

Finally, Christ and all His hosts, elect angels and resurrected believers alike, proceed to the final battle of the Tribulation:

And His armies (i.e., elect angels and the Church once the mustering of the resurrection is complete) were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure (cf. Rev.19:8).

Revelation 19:14

This is our future hope (2Cor.4:17-18; Col.1:27; 3:1-4; 1Tim.1:1), the full realization of our adoption as sons and daughters of the Lord (Jn.1:12-13; Rom.8:16-17; Gal.3:21-4:7; Eph.3:15; Heb.12:4-11; 1Jn.3:1-2), the redemption of our physical bodies (Matt.6:12; 18:27-32; 20:28; Lk.1:68; 24:21; Rom.3:24; 1Cor.1:30; 6:20; 7:23; Gal.3:13; 4:4-5; Eph.1:7; Col.1:14; 2:14; 1Tim.2:6; Tit.2:14; Heb.9:12-15; 1Pet.1:18; 2Pet.2:1; Rev.5:9; 14:3-4), that is, their transformation into perfect and eternal "resurrection bodies" in which we shall dwell forevermore in the presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we enjoy sweet fellowship with Him for all eternity in the New Jerusalem (Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-28; 3:4-5; 3:12-13; 3:21; 21:4; 21:27; 22:3-6; 22:14). While scripture may not tell us everything we should wish to know about the body we shall inhabit forever, we have some very definite information that does tell us two very significant things about them: 1) these eternal "resurrection" bodies will be comparable to the one possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and 2) they will be characterized by "glory", that is, the pure resplendent light that is our God.

For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself.

Philippians 3:20-21

Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He is revealed [in glory], we will be like Him, that we shall see Him exactly like He is.

1st John 3:2

As the Son of Man returns to earth, marshaling His hosts in the skies above, His glory will split the supernatural darkness like a flash of the most intense lighting imaginable and illuminate the dark world below. For He is the Light of the world, literally as well as in every other way (Jn.1:4-9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; cf. Rev.21:11; 21:23; 22:5). It is unto this radiant Savior of ours that we shall congregate as we rise up from the earth, flocking to Him like eagles gathering in the sky above.

(26) So if they say to you, “Look! [The Messiah] is [out] in the desert!” don't go out there, or “Look! He is in the inner rooms (i.e., hidden somewhere in town!)”, don't believe [it]. (27) For just as lightning flashes in the west and lights up the sky all the way to the east, so it will be with the Son of Man's return. (28). Wherever there is a body, there the eagles will gather.

Matthew 24:26-28

(30) “It will be just like this (i.e., the examples of vv.22-29) on the day the Son of Man is revealed. (31) On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. (32) Remember Lot's wife! (33) Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. (34) I tell you, on that night (i.e., just previous to vv.30-33 which represent the dawning of the Day of the Second Advent) two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. (35) Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” (37) “Where, Lord?” they asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”

Luke 17:30-37 NIV (cf. Matt.24:40-41)

Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me.

Isaiah 8:18a NIV (cf. Heb.2:13)

United now with our Lord Jesus for all time to come (Jn.12:26; 14:1-3; 17:24; 2Cor.5:8; Phil.1:23; 1Thes.4:17), and clothed in our eternal forms, we shall be free from tears and pain and want forever after (Rev.7:17; 21:4; cf. Is.25:8; 35:10; 65:17-19; 1Cor.15:54-58; Heb.2:14; Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-28; 3:4-5; 3:12-13; 3:21; 21:4; 21:27; 22:3-6; 22:14).

“These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them

to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".

Revelation 7:13b-17

This is our blessed future hope, for a critical part of the true good news of Christianity is that we will not cease to exist after death (as atheism claims) or experience some sort of "shadow existence" as many pagan religions claim, but will instead have a tangible real body forever in resurrection, and one that is far better than at present we can have any idea:

So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained our access into this grace in which we stand, and let us boast in the hope of the glory of God (i.e., in anticipation of our resurrection).

Romans 5:1-2

To all [believers] God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you.

Colossians 1:27

[We] who are awaiting the blessed hope, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears).

Titus 2:13

As the passages quoted immediately above make clear, "glory" is the word often used for our blissful eternal state, not as an abstract expression of that blessed future time to come, but on the contrary the word has been deliberately chosen because it expresses vividly our sharing in God's glorious light in a very real and tangible way after our bodies have been transformed in resurrection.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him. (18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved.

Romans 8:17-24a

The effulgent glory of divine light is an essential trait of our Lord's divinity (Is.40:5; Jn.12:41) and also of His humanity now that this part of His nature too has been glorified (Matt.24:30; 25:31; Mk.8:38; 9:2-8; 13:26; Lk.9:26; 21:27; cf. Jn.7:39b). Therefore since our confident hope is to share in this same resurrection glory, we can learn much about our own glorification in resurrection from considering the glory which characterizes His resurrected, eternal human form.

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.

Matthew 16:27

And [there on the Mount of Transfiguration] He was transformed before them, and His face shone like the sun and His clothing became white like light [itself].

Matthew 17:2

(29) And it came to pass while He was praying that the appearance of His face changed and His clothing [turned] white, flashing forth [like lightning]. (30) And, behold, two men were speaking with Him – and they were Moses and Elijah. (31) These [two] appeared in glory . . .

Luke 9:29-31a

And now glorify Me, Father, with your own glory, [that glory] which I had in your presence before the world existed.”

John 17:5

[Jesus Christ], who appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the [Holy] Spirit, was revealed to angels, was preached among the nations, was believed upon in the world, was taken up in glory.

1st Timothy 3:16

[Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat (i.e., beyond the veil) at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:3

But now we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even He who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all.

Hebrews 2:9

But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at the revelation of His glory, you may also rejoice with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:13

(12) So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. (13) And in the middle of the lampstands was what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. (14) And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were like a fiery flame, (15) and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. (16) And He held seven stars in His right hand, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And His face shone like the sun in its glory.

Revelation 1:12-16

As part of His Body, the Bride, the Church, glory will characterize our eternal human forms as well. For we shall share the glory, the divine refulgent light of the Son, a characteristic which does much to explain the nature of the eternal life we shall lead with Him forever (1Cor.2:7; 2Cor.3:11; 2Cor.3:18; Eph.5:8-14; 5:27; 1Tim.1:11; 1Pet.5:10). For we shall be children of light (Eph.5:8) in an eternity where, just as there will be no more death, there will never be darkness again as all evil will have been inexorably and eternally expunged from the New Heavens and the New Earth (Rev.21-22; cf. 1Jn.1:5): light and life, the glory of our eternal bodies and the eternal life we shall evermore enjoy in them are inseparable.

In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected).

Psalms 110:3b

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

Isaiah 26:19 NIV

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:2-3

(6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works, (7) to those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life.

Romans 2:6-7 (cf. Rom.2:10; 3:23; 15:7)

(29) For those whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to share the likeness of His Son (i.e., to have identical resurrection bodies), so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He foreordained, these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also made righteous [through faith in Christ],

and those whom He made righteous, these He also glorified (i.e., our resurrection and eternal life has been set fast in the plan of God since before the world was made).
Romans 8:29-30

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.
2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. (4) When Christ – your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be revealed in glory.
Colossians 3:1-4

For it is precisely for this purpose (i.e., salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth; v.13) that He called you through our gospel in order that you might gain lasting possession of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the resurrection).
2nd Thessalonians 2:14 (cf. Eph.1:14; 1Thes.5:9; Heb.10:39; 1Pet.2:9)

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of the elect, in order that they themselves too may lay hold of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ with eternal glory (i.e., resurrection).
2nd Timothy 2:10

For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory (i.e., resurrection), [our Lord Jesus Christ]. For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers, as He says: “I will proclaim Your name to My brothers. In the midst of the assembly I shall praise you.” And elsewhere, “I [too] shall put My confidence in Him (i.e., the Father),” and elsewhere, “Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me”.
Hebrews 2:10-13

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. Rejoice in this [salvation to come], even though at present it may for a time be your lot to suffer through various trials so that this validation (lit., “assaying”) of your faith [which

results from your successful passing of these tests] may result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. For this [validation process] has a greater benefit [for you] than [is true in the case of] gold, which, while it is also proved by fire, ultimately perishes (e.g., in contrast to the eternal rewards of faith proved genuine through testing).

1st Peter 1:3-7

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade.

1st Peter 5:1-4

As can be seen from the passages above, eternal rewards are an important part of the glorification of the resurrection, and indeed eternal rewards are not given out until the resurrection (cf. Heb.11:39-40), for it is the resurrection body which will be glorified forever in no small part by these rewards (with which they are indelibly associated: cf. Dan.12:13). The process of evaluation of the Church known as “the Judgment Seat of Christ” will take place when Jesus has taken His seat as Ruler of the world in Jerusalem and begun His millennial rule (see below, section 8.A.7; cf. Matt.16:27; 19:28; 20:8; Lk.14:14; Rom.14:10-12; 1Cor.3:10-15; 2Cor.5:6-10; Rev.2:7; 2:10-11; 2:17; 3:5; 3:11-12; 2:26-27; 3:21; 11:18; 20:4-6). Nor should it be thought that until that blessed day of resurrection when we see the Lord in His glory and partake of a similar body of eternal glory that we will in any way be disadvantaged. For as we have seen the interim state our departed brothers and sisters in Christ presently enjoy is greater than our earthly state in ways we can only dimly imagine (though it falls short of the glory we shall enjoy forever in resurrection).

For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling (i.e., our physical body) be struck, we have an abode [that comes] from God, a dwelling made without human agency, eternal in the heavens (i.e., the resurrection body). For indeed we do groan in this one, desiring to put on our habitation which comes from heaven. And [even] if we do put off this present one, at any rate, we (i.e., our spirits) will not be found naked (i.e., “body-less”; for we will enjoy an interim body in the meantime: cf. Lk.16:19-31; Rev.6:9-10; Rev.7:9-17).

2nd Corinthians 5:1-3

The resurrection body, its nature and its capabilities, consistently described in terms of “glory” as we have seen above, can best be understood from a consideration of the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ (although it is important to keep in mind as we have noted above that in all of His post resurrection, pre-ascension appearances He had not yet been glorified as would soon be the case; compare those appearances with Jn.7:39; and with Acts 9:1-6; 22:6-11; 26:12-18; Rev.1:12-16). Rather than being a diminishment of our current bodily state in any way, the

resurrection body will constitute an improvement upon our present state of affairs in every way – and to a degree we cannot properly now appreciate. For all its benefits and glory, the resurrection body is still a real and genuine body. In resurrection, Jesus is recognizable as Himself and behaves as Himself with no diminishment of personality in any way (Lk.24:31; Jn.20:16; 20:20; 20:26-28; 21:12). Christ's transformed body is solid and tangible (Matt.28:9; Lk.24:39; Jn.20:17; 20:27), and capable of the entire range of normal human activities (Matt.28:10; 28:18-20; Lk.24:15; 24:43; Jn.21:13-15). And even before His ascension and glorification, the resurrection body of our Lord (the model and the pattern for the one we shall receive: Rom.6:5; Phil.3:20-21; 1Jn.3:2), possessed super-material capabilities without at the same time sacrificing material advantages, being capable of negotiating material space at will (cf. Matt.28:1-3; Lk.24:31; 24:36; Jn.20:19; Acts 1:9-10). The most complete description of these specifics is given by the apostle Paul in the book of 1st Corinthians:

(35) Now somebody will no doubt say, “In what manner do the dead rise? And with what sort of body do they come back?” (36) Use a little common sense! When you plant a seed, it doesn't “come back to life” unless the seed itself is first destroyed, does it? (37) And what you put in the ground is not the actual plant which later sprouts, but an “empty shell”, so to speak, of the wheat or of whatever you are planting. (38) God then transforms this seed into a plant in accordance with His creative plan, giving each specific seed its own unique structure. (39) [As it is with seeds and plants, the same is true of animate bodies.] For in an analogous way, not all bodies are the same. Obviously, the bodies of men are different from the bodies of cattle, the bodies of birds are different from the bodies of fish, (40) and, just as obviously, bodies capable of dwelling in heaven are different from the bodies we occupy here on earth. Moreover the splendor of our heavenly bodies will transcend that of our earthly ones. (41) [Nor should we imagine that all heavenly bodies will possess the same degree of splendor.] After all, the radiance of the sun and of the moon and of the stars is different in each case, and even the stars differ amongst themselves in glory. (42) So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body sown is corruptible, the one raised incorruptible. (43) The body sown is dishonorable, the one raised glorious. The body sown is weak, the one raised powerful. (44) The body sown is suited to physical life, the one raised to spiritual life. If there is a physical body (and there patently is), then there is also a spiritual one. (45) For as it has been written that “Adam, the first man, became a physical being, possessing life”, so Christ, the last Adam, became a spiritual being, bestowing life. (46) However it is not the spiritual body, but the physical body which comes first, and the spiritual body follows. (47) The first man was earthly, being taken from the ground. The second Man is heavenly. (48) And as was the earthly man, so also are we of the earth. And as is the heavenly Man, so also shall we be when we too take on heavenly form. (49) For just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so also shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man.

1st Corinthians 15:35-49

As the verses above make clear, the “spiritual” or resurrection body is not in any way less real or tangible or capable than the corruptible body we now inhabit. Far from it. We will still be “who we are” in the eternal home we will receive on that great day of days, only then possessing a body

that is completely in tune with the life we shall live with God forevermore, capable of appreciating Him and the blessings of the eternal life He has prepared for us and for all who love the appearance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is our blessed hope. For this we wait in expectation day by day, looking forward to the return of our Lord, the redemption, the adoption, the glorification of our bodies in resurrection, and the rewards and wonders of eternal life in the New Jerusalem in the presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ forever and ever (Matt.13:30; 25:1-13; Jn.5:29; Acts 24:15; Rom.6:5; 6:9; 8:11; 8:23; 8:29; 1Cor.6:12-14; 1Thes.3:13; 2Thes.2:1).

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:1-3

“For this is My Father's will, for everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

John 6:40

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

John 11:25-26

F. The Repentance of Israel

The process of “mourning” and grieving on the part of all unbelievers on account of their failure to recognize the true Messiah will commence immediately upon His return to the heavens above the earth in blinding light that splits the sky from one horizon to the other, accompanied by the sign of the cross (Matt.24:27-31). And we may be sure that the rising of the Church in resurrection into our glorious resurrection bodies, with the previously departed being raised up bodily from their graves and with living believers then being transformed before the eyes of all, and with all flying up to meet the Lord in the air, will undoubtedly be an unimaginably astounding sight which will leave the world's unbelievers aghast. At this time many will no doubt turn to the Lord – too late to be part of this echelon of the resurrection, but in time to enjoy the blessings of Jesus' millennial reign as His followers. But as impressive as the resurrection of the Church will be, scripture makes it quite clear that for unbelieving Israel, at any rate, it will be the glorious return of the Messiah Himself that will bring about the end of the “hardness in part” which has characterized the Jewish people since our Lord's first advent (i.e., the “this generation” of which our Lord often spoke: Matt.24:34; Mk.13:30; Lk.21:32; cf. Matt.11:16; 12:41-42; 23:36; Mk.8:12; Lk.7:31; 11:30-32; 11:50-51; 17:25).

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when

the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent). (26) And it is in this way (i.e., coming to believe upon witnessing the Messiah's return) that all [true] Israel will be saved just as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.
Romans 11:25-27

For He will give them over until the time when she who is about to give birth gives birth (i.e., the mother of Jesus' humanity, Mary: the First Advent), and the rest of His brothers return to the sons of Israel (i.e., Jewish repentance at the Second Advent).
Micah 5:3

This return to the Lord will commence immediately, just as soon as He appears. For He will be visible to the entire world, seen by every earthly eye, prominent at the head of His legions of angels and the now assembled, resurrected Church. Then the reality of their mistake in failing to recognize Jesus as the Christ before this moment of His revelation to the world as the true Messiah and Son of God will cause the entire world "to grieve".

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.
Revelation 1:7

This grief will in many cases be part of a godly repentance in turning to the now revealed Lord Jesus Christ, a phenomenon that will be especially pronounced in Israel.

And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son.
Zechariah 12:10

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.
Hosea 3:4-5 NASB

Moreover, there will be no need for anyone to explain that the glorious Messiah visible to all the world in the heaven above is Jesus Christ our Lord, for His sign, the sign of the cross, will also be emblazoned across the sky, leaving no basis to deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the one and only true Messiah.

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the

heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory.

Matthew 24:29-30

Then our Lord will respond to the repentant hearts throughout Israel and particularly in besieged Jerusalem. For He will unleash His violent fury against those who dare to touch “the apple of His eye” (Zech.2:8; cf. Deut.32:10).

(12) “Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. (13) Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (14) Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. (15) Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. (16) Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. (17) Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” (18) Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. (19) The Lord will reply to them: “I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations. (20) I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise.” Surely he has done great things.

Joel 2:12-20 NIV

(30) I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. (32) And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:30-32 NIV

For the Redeemer will come to Zion, even to those in Jacob who turn away from their transgression.

Isaiah 59:20

G. The Second Advent and Armageddon

1. Antichrist and his Armies

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army.

Revelation 19:19

In that antichrist is described here as leading “the kings of the earth”, we are meant to understand that all the standing armies of the world, now under his power, have been assembled in Israel. Further, this verse makes it quite clear that the true, mad purpose of this assembly is “to make war” with Jesus Christ! Therefore antichrist's immediate purpose of destroying Israel is merely “bait” to bring our Lord to battle. Oh the insanity that arrogance brings! But in this purpose the beast is not only following the behest of his father the devil – he is mimicking Satan's actions in rebelling against God before human history began. The results will be comparable, and equally dramatic and swift at that.

The place of this assemblage of the armed forces of the entire world will be, as we have explained above under our treatment of the name "Armageddon", namely, Jerusalem, whose eastern valleys will accommodate the leading elements of antichrist's advanced guard, no doubt composed of his most elite warriors. This will be the *schwerpunkt* or center of his operational mass at the point of our Lord's return, with the rest of his troops deployed throughout the length and breadth of Israel from north to south and centered around Jerusalem.

(45) Then [upon his return to Israel] he will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then].

Daniel 11:45

(1) For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, (2) I will gather all the nations and bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., “the Lord will judge”) and will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance Israel whom they have scattered among the nations and whose land they apportioned [to others]. (3) They even cast lots for My people and exchanged a boy for a prostitute and sold a girl for the wine they drank.

Joel 3:1-3

“Therefore wait for Me,” says the Lord, “until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.”

Zephaniah 3:8

“Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.”

Isaiah 41:1 NIV

2. The Seizure of the Beast and his False Prophet

(20) And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshipping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur.

Revelation 19:20

Even before the great slaughter of Armageddon proper commences, antichrist along with his false prophet will be removed from the head of their armies, thus decapitating the forces arrayed against Jerusalem at the most critical time (a fact that will only intensify the terror of their last moments on earth). Herein we see very clearly the value of walking with the Lord and the terrible folly of making Him an enemy (cf. Jer.30:16), for on that day the judgment He exacts will be swift and severe upon all those who have chosen to oppose Him (cf. Is.10:22-23; Rom.9:28).

The beast, and, for his pivotal role in deceiving the followers of antichrist, the false prophet are immediately “cast alive” into the lake of fire, the final end of all unbelievers and fallen angels (notice that antichrist's abominations are so extreme and unique in the history of the world that no explanation need be given in the verse above for this immediate seizure and disposition). Not only are these two the first to experience the “second death”, but they will do so without the formality of the “last judgment”. This final adjudication is completely unnecessary in their case since they have proven by their extreme words and actions beyond all doubt or argument to the entire world that they never had the slightest interest in responding to God. Indeed, they have opposed Him and His people to such a unique and unprecedented degree that no additional formal process is required to demonstrate their free will choice of the devil over the Lord. Like the fallen angels, their choice has been confirmed to such an extent that human history (and in the case of the beast and his false prophet, their time and actions in it) constitutes their “trial”.

(32) Every stroke the Lord lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm. (33) Topheth (i.e., the lake of fire) has long been prepared (cf. Matt.25:41), it has been made ready for the king (i.e., antichrist). Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.

Isaiah 30:32-33 NIV

Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire.

Daniel 7:11 (cf. Dan.9:27b; 11:45)

(13) You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. Selah (14) With

his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding.

Habakkuk 3:13-14

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – (9) [that same lawless one] whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-10

3. The Battle of Armageddon

a. Jesus Christ's Return to Earth on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:2-7).

(2) For I shall gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against her. The city will be captured, its houses will be sacked, and its women will be ravished. (3) Half of the city will be taken away captive, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth, and He will fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle.

Zechariah 14:2-3

At this point we see all the nations of the world already gathered in Israel by antichrist and his false prophet. According to the situation described in these two verses, the battle for Jerusalem has been going on now for some considerable time, at least long enough to transport the world's armies to the middle east and reduce most if not all of the rebellion's strong-points shielding Jerusalem (Is.22:8). Given the seven months between the call to Armageddon and Christ's return, fighting may have been going on at Jerusalem proper for several months by now. The situation at the Messiah's imminent return is dire indeed. Rebel resistance is on the point of collapse, the western half of the city has already been consolidated in the hands of antichrist's troops, and those captured have been harshly used, the women raped (v.2), the young sold into slavery (cf. Joel 3:1-8), and those not killed in the process of the attack now captives of the beast. But now that the situation is at its most desperate, Jesus Christ will come to the rescue of His people (cf. Is.49:24-26: the captives will be rescued "from the fierce"). It is often the case that our Lord will bring us to the point of complete helplessness before delivering us, precisely to demonstrate His power, mighty to save (cf. 2Cor.12:10).

The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

Daniel 12:7 NIV

It is precisely at this time of seemingly utter hopelessness that the Lord of hope will return, and, after appearing in the heavens above and gathering His Church to Himself, will swiftly descend at the front of His heavenly army to deliver the remnant of His holy people.

(4) This is what the Lord says to me: “As a lion growls, a great lion over its prey – and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against it, it is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor – so the Lord Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights. (5) Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it.”

Isaiah 31:4-5 NIV

For His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east. Then the Mount of Olives will be split in its midst [into] a very great valley [leading] east and west. For half of the mountain will recede [out of the way] to the north, and half of it to the south.

Zechariah 14:4

As the verse above states plainly, before commencing the slaughter of His enemies, our Lord will first rescue the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem. He will physically land on the eastern heights of the city known as the Mount of Olives which looks down on the temple and Mount Zion. The Mount of Olives is really a long hog-back ridge running roughly north to south and blocking access to and egress from Jerusalem to the east (absent a time-consuming ascent and descent of this ridge). Cleaving it asunder in this miraculous way will occasion a significant earthquake, prophesied by Ezekiel:

(18) This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign Lord. (19) In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. (20) The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground.

Ezekiel 38:18-20 NIV

Our Lord's astounding splitting of this obstacle in two will greatly facilitate the escape of the beleaguered occupants and defenders of Jerusalem, giving them much needed respite as He proceeds to resolve the Tribulation's final battle. Herein we shall see a fulfillment of the promise of faith for those who now believe: “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him” (Mk.11:23; cf. Matt.21:21; 1Cor.13:2). The moving of the Mount of Olives will be an occasion for great rejoicing, anticipating the victory and deliverance which the Messiah is about provide.

(9) You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" (10) See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm (i.e., Jesus Christ) rules for Him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Isaiah 40:9-10 NIV (cf. Nah.1:15)

(7) How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (8) Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. (9) Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:7-10 NIV

Then you will flee by way of the valley of My [two new] mountains, for the valley between the mountains will reach directly over to [you] (i.e., in Jerusalem). Thus you will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah (i.e., swiftly). And then the Lord my God will enter [the battle], and all His holy ones with Him.

Zechariah 14:5 (cf. Lk.17:28-33)

The historical earthquake which took place during the days of Uzziah king of Judah (ca. 792-740 B.C.), was not accompanied by enemy activity, therefore the direction of the flight of Jerusalem's population was no doubt to the west, down-hill and through the valley approaches to the city, rather than east and up-hill over the Mount of Olives. In this case, with the western approaches occupied by the armies of the beast (which by this time undoubtedly have also flanked the city on the north and the south, east is the only viable direction of retreat, so that this "way of escape" (cf. 1Cor.10:13) opened up by our Lord will be as timely, welcome, and necessary as His opening up of the Red Sea to provide a similar escape from the armies of Pharaoh, who was typological of antichrist.

(6) For it will come to pass on that day that there will be no light. [The light of the] heavenly bodies will be withheld (lit., "curdled"). (7) For it will be a unique day, one which is known [only] to the Lord, neither day nor night, and it will come to pass at evening time that there will be light.

Zechariah 14:6-7

These verses harken back by way of explanation to the period before Christ's descent onto the Mount of Olives. Just as the splitting of the mountain to provide deliverance is reminiscent of the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh's forces at the Red Sea, so also this picture of supernatural darkness wherein light is miraculously withheld from the enemies of God is a deliberate repetition of the circumstances that obtained before Israel's escape on that former occasion (Josh.24:7; cf. Ex.14:19-20; Ps.105:39).

(2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:2-3

b. The Terrifying Signs and wonders:

Coincident with our Lord's glorious, resplendent return and His subsequent descent onto the Mount of Olives, various celestial and terrestrial signs and wonders will further serve to terrify the adversaries of God even as they encourage His people. Heaven and earth will be shaken in a dizzying display of the transcendent power of God, events which are well-documented in the prophetic passages which anticipate the Second Advent.

Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath.

Isaiah 13:13 (cf. Is.24:17-20; Matt.24:29; Mk.13:25; Lk.21:25-26)

(6) You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel (i.e., "Jerusalem") will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her.

Isaiah 29:6-7

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. (4) All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day].

Joel 2:30-31

(15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:15-16

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. (7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord Almighty.

Haggai 2:6-7 NIV (cf. Hag.2:21-22; Heb.12:26)

(12) And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], (13) and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, (14) and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. (15) And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. (16) And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?”

Revelation 6:12-17 (cf. Is.2:19-21; 51:6; 2Pet.3:14)

c. Israel Fights

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, “Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” (2) From Zion the Lord will send forth your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) Your people will volunteer on the day of your valor[ous victory] (i.e., the armies of Israel). In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). (4) The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, “You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek.” (5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations. He will shatter [their] head (cf. Gen.3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result]. (7) [But as to His troops], they will drink from a brook beside the way. Therefore He will lift up their head (cf. Judg.15).

Psalms 110:1-7

In one of the most well-known Messianic Psalms we see very clearly the close connection between our Lord's return to rule the earth and His support and empowerment of the hard-pressed Israeli forces at the point of His intervention in the battle of Armageddon. Simply put, while Jesus Christ will for the most part destroy the armies of antichrist Himself (by means of the swift sword that proceeds from His mouth: 2Thes.2:8; Rev.1:16; 2:12; 2:16; 19:15; 19:21; cf. Is.11:4; 49:2), Jewish soldiers who repent and turn to Him at the point of His return will be allowed to share in the honor of the final battle. They will be the “willing volunteers” of verse three above, “flocking” to the standard of our Lord as He goes forth to annihilate the forces of the beast, refreshed and energized to play their role in the Tribulation's ultimate battle (verse seven above).

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your

ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say “I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!” (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]. (12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:9-16

The battle will turn against the beast first at Jerusalem, the front line where Jewish defenders have so far held off antichrist's forces from re-taking the temple mount in spite of the fall of the city proper (cf. Zech.9:8 “but I will defend My house against marauding forces” with the following verse, Zech.9:10, Messiah's return). Thus Jerusalem, as we saw during our treatment of Armageddon above, along with her Jewish defenders, will be the anvil upon which the Lord will first begin to hammer out the salvation of the Great Day of the Lord. It will not, however, be the place where our Lord's personal treading down of the wine press of Armageddon begins, but rather the place of His final return to assume His throne in the temple at Jerusalem once His victory is complete (Mal.3:1). For just as Joshua in his campaigns to occupy the promised land upon the Israelites' entry into Canaan began his attack in the south then moved to the north (Josh.10-12: Joshua, as we have seen, is a type of Christ, and his campaign is a type of the 2nd Advent; cf. Josh.10:12-14), so our Lord will rescue “Judah” before Jerusalem. That is, the slaughter will commence from the south, as our Lord annihilates antichrist's armies which are at this time spread out in a wide arc before the city stretching over hundreds of miles from north to south (with Jerusalem in the concave center of this arced deployment). That is the essential meaning behind Zechariah 12 wherein the “honor of Jerusalem” is prophesied to be no greater than that of Judah – not because of any relative merit or deficiency, but because the Lord's campaign of Armageddon, while beginning with the splitting of the Mount of Olives and the shielding of Jerusalem, will then proceed to the south, then from south to north, then back southeast to Jerusalem in a triangular or clockwise-shaped route designed to sweep up every last enemy in the net of destruction.

(2) Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And also for Judah there will be a siege against Jerusalem. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome rock for all the peoples. All who try to lift it will certainly be ruptured (lit., “lacerated”). For all the nations of the earth will be gathered against her. (4) On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with confusion and every rider with madness. But toward the house of Judah I will open my eyes. But I will strike with blindness the eyes of every horse of all the peoples [gathered against her]. (5) Then the generals of Judah will say in their hearts, “The inhabitants of Jerusalem are a strong support for me through the Lord of Hosts their God!”. (6) On that

day I will make the generals of Judah like a fire pot put to wood and like a fiery torch put to sheaves of grain. For they will consume on the right hand and on the left all of the peoples round about. Thus Jerusalem will continue to dwell in her place, even in Jerusalem (i.e., she will not be completely deported). (7) But the Lord will deliver the tents of Judah first with the result that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants will not be greater than that of Judah. (8) On that day, the Lord will put His shield around the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that even those on the point of falling will become like David and the house of David will become like gods (or “angels”), [even] like the Angel of the Lord before them. (9) And it will come to pass on that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations who are attacking Jerusalem.
Zechariah 12:2-9

As can be seen from the passage above, the Spirit of the Lord will both empower and protect the Israeli forces in Jerusalem while our Lord Jesus goes about His work of destroying the armies of antichrist. This protection, inspiration and empowerment for battle of the Jewish army on the Day of the Lord is in fact prophesied in many other passages of scripture:

Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it.
Isaiah 31:5 NIV

(5) On that day (of Armageddon), the Lord of Hosts will be [like] a glorious crown, [like] a beautiful diadem to those who survive among His people. (6) [He will be] a Spirit of [inspiring good] judgment to him who sits in judgment (i.e., the leadership, political and military), and [He will be a Spirit] of [inspiring good] courage to those (i.e., the soldiers) who are turning back the enemy attack (lit., “war”) from the gate.
Isaiah 28:5-6

(11) For at that time many nations will be gathered against you, [O Zion], who will say, “Let her be profaned! And let our eyes look upon Zion [in her defeat]!” (12) But they do not know the plans of the Lord, nor do they understand His purpose. For He has [deliberately] gathered them [to Zion like] tussocks of grain to His threshing floor. (13) “Wake up and thresh, daughter of Zion! For I will make your horn a horn of iron, and I will make your hooves into hooves of bronze.”
Micah 4:11-13

(13) “Indeed, I will bend Judah for Myself like a bow and I will fill [his bowstring] with Ephraim (i.e., south and north = all of Israel together). I will wield your sons [like a weapon] O Zion (i.e., Jerusalem), against your sons, O Greece (lit., “Javan”, a reference to the origin of antichrist's typological parallel, Antiochus), and I will gird them on like a warrior's sword.” (14) For the Lord will appear above them, and His arrows will shoot forth like lightning. And the Lord God will sound the trumpet, and He will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south (cf. Is.21:1). (15) And the Lord of Hosts will be a shield around them, and they will devour (the enemy) and be impervious to [his] sling-stones.

And they shall rage [against the enemy] and drink [them down] like wine until they are completely [poured out] like a bowl as [at] the corners of an altar. (16) For the Lord their God will deliver them on that day like the flock of His people.

Zechariah 9:13-16a

(3b) For the Lord of Hosts will give attention to His flock, even the house of Judah, and He will make them like a war-horse in its glory. (4) From [Judah will come] the corner, from [him will come] the peg, from [him will come] the battle-bow – from [him will come] every leader altogether. (5) And they will become in that battle like mighty warriors trampling down [the enemy like] mire in the streets. (6) For I will make the house of Judah mighty warriors, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will restore them because I love them deeply. And they will be as if I had not rejected them [previously]. For I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them. (7) Then the men of Ephraim will be like mighty warriors, and their hearts will be glad as [when gladdened] with wine.

Zechariah 10:3b-7a

(5) For this One (i.e., the Messiah) will be our peace. When Ashur (i.e., a type of antichrist's world coalition) comes against our land, and when he tramples upon our fortifications, we will appoint seven generals (lit., “shepherds”; cf.) against him, even eight rulers of men (i.e., the seven and the supreme civil commander represented by Shebna in Is.22:20-25). (6) And Ashur will ravage the land with the sword, even [the people of] Nimrod right up to the very entrances [to Jerusalem]. Then He [who is our peace] will deliver [us] from Ashur when he comes against our land and tramples our borders. (7) Then the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like plentiful rains which do not wait for man and which do not tarry for the sons of men (i.e., they will be unstoppable). (8) Then the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations [surrounding Jerusalem], in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep from whom no one can rescue when it passes by and tramples down and mauls. (9) Your hand will be lifted up against your enemies, and all your enemies will be cut down.

Micah 5:5-9a

In the passage above, the “generals of Judah” are seen to be seven in number with an additional commander in charge of the overall operations. For the brief and unspecified “day”, wherein the day begins with darkness, “but at evening, there will be light” (Zech.14:6-7), a day not limited to any particular span of time (as Joshua's day of victory at Gibeon was supernaturally extended: Josh.10:12-13), the Jewish army will be unstoppable, inspired and empowered by the Lord Himself, even as their enemies flee in terror from before Jerusalem.

And Judah also will fight in Jerusalem.

Zechariah 14:14

(9) Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! (10) Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us (i.e., “Immanuel”).

Isaiah 8:9-10

d. The Great Slaughter.

Our Lord Jesus Christ will first return to earth descending upon the Mount of Olives from the east, the direction of the sunrise toward which the temple is oriented (Ex.27:12-13; Ezek.11:23; 41:14; 43:1-4). But in between His splitting of the Mount of Olives and His entrance into the temple at Jerusalem, the nations arrayed against Jerusalem will come to know the full fury of our Lord's wrath and of His zeal for His people.

1) The Vintage:

The slaughter or “vintage” of Armageddon will be carried out by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself by means of the terrible swift sword that proceeds from out of His mouth (2Thes.2:8; Rev.1:16; 2:12; 2:16; 19:15; 19:21; cf. Is.11:4; 49:2), for the battle is the Lord's (1Sam.17:47; 2Chron.20:15). Just as Pharaoh and his Egyptian armies raced after Israel into the dry bed of the Red Sea in order to destroy her only to meet their own destruction at His hands, so the massive military forces of the beast have in truth been led to a similar place of slaughter.

(5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath.

(6) He will render judgment on the nations. He will shatter [their] head (cf. Gen.3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result].

Psalm 110:5-6

(15) See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. (16) For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord.

Isaiah 66:15-16 NIV

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called “Faithful and True”, and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, “The Word of God”. (14) And His armies were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure. (15) And a sharp broadsword proceeded from His mouth wherewith to smite the nations, and He Himself will shepherd them with an iron staff, and He Himself will trample the winepress of the furious wrath of God the Almighty. (16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a

name written: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. (17) And I saw a single angel having taken his stand in front of the sun. And he cried out in a loud voice, saying to all the birds flying in the sky, “Come, gather together for the great banquet of God, (18) that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of generals, and the flesh of horses and those who ride upon them, and the flesh of all [these wicked men], free and slave, small and great [alike]” (cf. Ezek.39:17-20). (19) And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army. (20) And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur. (21) And the rest [of the beast's forces] were killed by the broadsword which came forth from the mouth of the One riding on the [white] horse. And all of the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.
Revelation 19:11-21

As the passage above shows, the battle of Armageddon is described as the trampling down of the vintage of grapes in a winepress, a process which cannot help but splatter the one doing the crushing with the “blood of the grape”. This extremely vivid image is meant to impress us with the graphic nature of our Lord's slaughter of the armies of the beast. For the victory of Jesus Christ at Armageddon will prove beyond any doubt the folly of opposing Him. Thus, His millennial reign, built upon a decisive victory carried out by irresistible force, will set the tone for a time of unparalleled prosperity during our Lord's perfect rule wherein no disobedience or rebellion will be tolerated (thereby allowing the righteous to live in peace).

He (i.e., Judah, and thus the Messiah) will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch (cf. Matt.21:1-8); he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.
Genesis 49:11 NIV

(1) Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” (2) Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? (3) “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. (4) For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. (5) I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm (i.e., the Messiah) worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. (6) I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”
Isaiah 63:1-6 NIV

(30) “Now prophesy all these words against them and say to them: “The Lord will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against all who live on the earth.

(31) The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword," declares the Lord. (32) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth."
Jeremiah 25:30-32 NIV

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of "the Lord will judge"). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.
Joel 3:12-16

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe". (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) And the winepress was trodden down outside of the city. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles).
Revelation 14:17-20

As in the case of the destruction of Pharaoh's army, this slaughter will be complete, leaving no survivors. All who participate on behalf of antichrist and his father the devil are deemed fully culpable for their actions, and will pay with their lives.

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.
Isaiah 34:2-3 NIV

(21) I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother. (22) I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. (23) And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 38:21-23 NIV

2) The Plague and the Madness:

The soldiers of the beast's armies who are not destroyed by the Lord Himself, by His terrible swift sword or the plague of hail and burning sulfur (Ezek.38:21-23; cf. Is.29:6), and all who do not perish at the hands of the reinvigorated Jewish army, will fall by the swords of their very own fellow soldiers (cf. Judg.7:22; 1Sam.14:20; 2Chron.20:23; Is.19:2), or else will rot in place while still standing on their feet, until every last enemy of the Lord has been destroyed. This combination of such divinely inflicted madness and this terrifying plague are unique in human history. Such is the folly of opposing the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(12) And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. (13) And it will come to pass on that day that a great madness from the Lord will fall upon them, so that everyone will grab hold of the hand of his comrade and will lift up his hand against his comrade (i.e., they will attack each other). (14) And Judah also will fight in Jerusalem. The wealth of all the nations round about will be gathered up, their gold and silver and clothing in abundance. (15) And thus also a plague will befall their horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all [the other] animals in their camps just like this plague [that befalls the soldiers].

Zechariah 14:12-15

I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

Haggai 2:22 NIV

On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with confusion and every rider with madness. But toward the house of Judah I will open my eyes. But I will strike with blindness the eyes of every horse of all the peoples [gathered against her]

Zechariah 12:4

(24) Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives rescued from the fierce? (25) But this is what the Lord says: "Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save. (26) I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

Isaiah 49:24-26 NIV

(21) I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother. (22) I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. (23) And so I will

show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 38:21-23 NIV

3) The Winepress of Armageddon

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom.

Joel 3:12-14

The valley of Jehoshaphat, mentioned only here in scripture and meaning “The Lord will judge”, is a poetic designation for the system of ravines and wadis sloping down from Jerusalem generally westward (and branching off to the north and south as well). As the natural highways of approach, these areas will be filled with antichrist's forces, from his forward combat units to their rearmost logistical tails.

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.

Isaiah 34:2-3 NIV

As this passage shows, the slaughter will not be limited to the network of valleys to the west of Jerusalem, but will cover the entire area wherein the forces of antichrist are amassed. Since the ridges separating the valleys are the high ground whereon the defense will no doubt be concentrated, these obviously cannot be ignored in the assault on Jerusalem. We may expect some of the best shock units to be assigned the task of clearing the ridges, working their way towards Jerusalem in this manner. The total area of deployment necessary for assembling the world's armies and organizing an attack on the entire Judean hill country will thus of necessity be quite large indeed. The book of Revelation itself gives some very specific details about the extent of this “winepress” or “killing field”, the place of the last stand of the devil's earthly armies under his son the beast.

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying “Send forth your sharp sickle and gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe”. (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) And the winepress was trodden down outside of the city. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles).

Centered on Jerusalem, this distance covers from the northern part of contemporary Israel from a point roughly even in latitude with the Sea of Galilee, to a point some twenty miles south of the southern most extremity of the Dead Sea.

(3) God will come from Teman, even the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory will cover the heavens, and His praise will fill the earth. (4) His splendor will shine forth like the light [itself] (i.e., brighter than the sun). Rays [of light will shoot forth] from His hand, and there His hidden power [will be revealed]. (5) Plague goes before Him, and bolts of lightning follow in His train. (6) He will take His stand, then take the measure of the earth. He will take in the sight, then cut off the nations.

Habakkuk 3:3-6

Teman and Mount Paran are located in the Negev (or, alternatively, in biblical Edom) south of the Dead Sea and thus south of Jerusalem, and mark the southern boundary of the beast's major military deployments. In these verses we see our Lord's campaign of annihilation of the armies of antichrist being carried out in complete consonance with the other passages quoted above, only here the direction of the assault is made clear: it will begin with the southern flank of antichrist's armies and finish in the north (exactly as in the case of Joshua's campaigns to occupy the promised land: Josh.6-12; cf. Judg.5:4; Ps.68:4-17; Is.40:3-5).

(20) I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise.” Surely he has done great things.

Joel 2:20 NIV

The armies of the beast are described in toto here as “northern” because that is the compass point from which most of them will enter into the land of Israel. Here we see the reaction of the nations to the terrifying sight of our Lord in all His glory cutting a wide swath through the very heart of their army. In their crazed panic, many will flee to the west and northwest and perish in the Mediterranean Sea, while many others will flee to the southeast and perish in the Dead Sea (again, reminiscent of the panic and demise of the Egyptian army; cf. Ex.14:24-25).

(27) See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. (28) His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray.

Isaiah 30:27-28 NIV

Still others, fleeing from the advancing terror, will flee into the trackless desert of the Negev directly south of Jerusalem, far from any civilized habitation. Ezekiel 39:11 describes a probable specific concentration of the slaughter of the southern wing, the valley of “Hamon-Gog” (i.e.,

“Gog's multitude”) which will be given as a burial place generally for the remains of antichrist's soldiers in order to cleanse the land of ritual pollution (Ezek.39:12-16). Connecting the idea of the winepress with this otherwise unknown southern valley, we may perhaps identify it very tentatively as the “Great Crater” (or, more literally, “Great Mortar”) south of present day Dimona, a geographical feature which resembles an ancient wine-press and whose general location, orientation, and physical features certainly fit a scenario which finds a large portion of the southern wing of the beast's army pouring headlong into this inescapable killing field in a manner comparable to their predecessors' rushing into the Dead Sea to their deaths. The following chart summarizes the information we are given about the Messiah's campaign, the winepress of Armageddon.

[insert chart: The Winepress of Armageddon]

After splitting the Mount of Olives and securing the safe retreat of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, our Lord will “pass over Jerusalem” (Is.31:4-5), breathing courage into its defenders and sowing intense panic in the hearts of its assailants. Then He will begin His campaign of destruction, heading first to the south and the slaughter of the southern winepress, turning then to the north and the remaining wing of the beast's army, all the while driving the terrified survivors fleeing in a deranged panic to their deaths in the eastern and western seas, and ending His flying campaign of slaughter in Jerusalem, where, all His enemies destroyed, He will take His seat in the temple as the true Messiah to rule Israel and the entire world from Jerusalem during His blessed millennial reign. Between the swift sword which will proceed from our Lord's mouth, the inspired counter-attacks of the Jewish army, the plague that will smite down many who will rot while yet standing on their feet, and the uncontrollable madness and panic which will drive the rest into the waters of the Mediterranean and Dead seas westward and eastward, the forces of antichrist will be utterly destroyed – there will be no survivors ().

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging of the sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.
Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV

In this way too, our Lord will see to it that the land of Israel will be kept from being so entirely polluted by the slaughter of Armageddon that functional life in its aftermath might be impossible. Those enemy soldiers not driven into the seas or deserts or consumed by the plague will be feasted upon by the carrion eating birds of the entire world, summoned to Israel by angelic agency for just this purpose (Ezek.39:1-5; 17-20; Rev.19:17-18). The remainders of the slaughter, the bones of the dead, will be systematically purged from the land, buried in the “valley of Hamon-Gog”, far from the populated areas of the land. Though this army shall have been the largest ever assembled in one place in human history, in short order nothing will remain.

(7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion.
Isaiah 29:7-8

6. The Humbling of the Wicked and the Joy of the Redeemed.

The complete defeat and total annihilation of antichrist along with all his earthly forces, the concomitant defeat of Satan and his legions and their removal from the world, and our Lord's vindication of all the words and promises of God evidenced by this awesome victory, followed by His session in the temple of Jerusalem as the true Messiah – all of these things will be a cause of utter terror to the wicked who remain (Rev.6:16-17; cf. Is.2:10-21; Hos.10:8; Mal.3:2; Lk.21:25-27; 23:30), of abject humiliation to the proud who had cast their lot with the beast (Is.2:9-22; 5:15-16; 13:11-12; 23:9; 26:1-5; Zeph.3:11; Mal.4:1; cf. 1Sam.2:1-10; 2Sam.22:28; Lk.1:51-53), but of unrestrained joy and jubilation to the people of God (as attested by the many hymns in scripture which anticipate that great Day of Days: e.g., Ps.9:7-8; 45:1ff; 75:1ff; 76:1-3; 93:1-100:1ff; Is.9:2-7; 12:1ff; 14:1ff; 25:1-27:1ff; 30:27-29; 35:1ff; 52:7-10).

(1) “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the Lord Almighty.
Malachi 4:1-3

The time has now come for the meek to inherit the earth (Matt.5:5; cf. Ps.37:11; Zeph.2:1-3), and our Lord Jesus Christ's astoundingly blessed millennial reign will begin with the unleashing of a torrent of emotion, as the way of the world as it seemingly always has been is turned on its head (cf. 2Pet.3:3-13). Many who were first will be last, and the last first as the promises of retribution upon the wicked who oppose God find their experiential fulfillment at last (Matt.19:30; 20:16; Mk.10:31; Lk.13:30), while those who have now set themselves to seek God in humility and truth experience the relief, the deliverance, and the joy of “God with us” in the Person of the Savior Himself, come to rule the world in righteousness (cf. Is.51:14; 61:1-3).

(14) They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the Lord's majesty. (15) Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord; exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. (16) From the ends of the earth we hear singing: “Glory to the Righteous One.”
Isaiah 24:14-16a NIV

Despite the amazing might of the beast and all his depredations, despite the harsh rule of his father the devil over this scarred world for some six thousand years, in the end, the day came when all their fortresses fell (Is.30:25; 31:9; Dan.11:38-39; Zeph.1:16; 3:6; 3:15; cf. Is.2:15; 23:11-14; 25:2; 25:12; Amos 1:10; 6:8; Ob.1:3; Mic.5:11; Zech.9:3), at the hands of the One who died for us that we might live for Him.

(24) The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. (25) I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders." (26) This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. (27) For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?
Isaiah 14:24-27 NIV (cf. Prov.21:30)

8. Last Things

A. The Second Advent Judgments: Revelation 20:1-3

The seven thunders of Revelation 10:3-4 represent the seven judgments directly connected to Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, inappropriate to discuss just prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation where they are mentioned in Revelation chapter ten (since they would not actually happen until later on), but easily discernible from scripture and necessary to consider here in their place of chronological occurrence. The first of these Second Advent judgments, the destruction of Babylon, occurred just prior to but closely associated with Christ's return; the time frame of judgments two through four is essentially contemporaneous with the Second Advent; judgment five will apparently occur in very short succession thereafter; judgments six and seven will require progressively longer periods of time to complete, and will occur sequentially. Once all of these judgments have been accomplished, the King's millennial reign, His coronation, His victory at Armageddon, and His wedding to His Bride the Church will be officially celebrated, then followed by a thousand years of bliss and blessing unlike anything the earth has seen since the fall of Adam and Eve. The Tribulation followed by the Millennium is the final "day" of human history, the "eschaton" or end times, the "Day of the Lord" in which all divine judgment will be completed in the Person of Jesus Christ. This process began with the tribulational judgments, will be followed by these seven judgments, and will be concluded at the end of Christ's thousand-year righteous rule by the Last Judgment, after which the present universe will be re-created, cleansed by fire and transformed into the New Heavens and New Earth "where righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13). But before that blessed day of eternity, Christ must rule until all enemies are placed under His feet (1Cor.15:25; cf. Ps.110:1; Heb.2:5-9).

"For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

1. Babylon

This judgment, covered in the section above, "Judgment on Babylon", has already taken place at this point, occurring at the threshold of the Second Advent but considered eschatologically a part of it (i.e., it is literally "wrapped" into the seventh bowl judgment whose main application is the Second Advent: Rev.16:19 in the context of Rev.16:17-21).

2. The Armies of Armageddon

The Second Advent and our Lord's destruction of the armies of the beast at Armageddon has been covered immediately above. Following Babylon's destruction and occurring at the point of Christ's glorious return, this judgment has likewise already taken place at this point in the chronology of Revelation.

3. The Beast and the False Prophet

Uniquely among all of woman born, antichrist and his false prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire to experience the second death immediately upon Christ's return:

And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur.

Revelation 19:20

This judgment as well has already taken place, occurring between the initial point of Christ's return (Rev.19:1-19), and the culmination of the slaughter of Armageddon (Rev.19:21). These two are deprived of their part in the final trial, "The Last Judgment" because by their extreme words and actions in serving Satan and in attempting to utterly destroy God's people throughout the Tribulation – a trial in and of itself – they stand self-condemned beyond all doubt or argument. As with the fallen angels, no further trial is necessary to illuminate their choice, since that choice has been confirmed to such an unprecedented extent. The Tribulation constitutes their "trial" just as human history in its entirety constitutes the trial of Satan and his angels (Is.30:32-33; Dan.7:11-14; 9:27; 11:45; Hab.3:13-14; 2Thes.2:8; cf. Jer.25:26; Dan.7:26; Hab.2:2-20). The beast and the false prophet are denied any further "last judgment" or process of adjudication because of their non-human status (being nephilim not created in the image of God).

4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons

(1) And I saw another angel coming down from heaven with the key to the Abyss and with a great chain in his hand. (2) And he took hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent,

who is the Slanderer (*diabolos*, i.e., "devil"), even Satan. And he bound him for a thousand years (3) and he cast him into the Abyss, locked it, and set a seal upon it, so that he might not [be able] to deceive the nations [any longer] – until the thousand years (i.e., the Millennium) were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time.
Revelation 20:1-3

Not only is Satan now prevented from appearing before God the Father to slander believers (Rev.12:10). Here we see the fulfillment of the much anticipated removal in toto of the devil from the affairs of this world.

(12) How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit.
Isaiah 14:12-15

In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings.
Ezekiel 28:15-17

The seventy-two returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star".
Luke 10:17-18

"Now the judgment of this world is [imminent]. Now the ruler of this world is about to be cast out [of it]."
John 12:31

a. The Other Angel: This angel is not named, but based upon angelic military conduct as described elsewhere in scripture it is probable that he is of archangel rank and it is likely that he is none other than Michael. As the commander of the most elite angelic warriors who have distinguished themselves in the conflict with Satan (comparable to David's "mighty men"), Michael is the most likely choice for this extraordinary mission, possibly in direct leadership of his crack unit of angels.

b. The Key: This is the key to the Abyss proper, not the key to its entry shaft which we saw used in Revelation 9:1 to effect a partial release of some of the demons detained therein for the fifth trumpet judgment. This second key to the Abyss proper (as opposed to its entryway only)

includes not only the power to open and close the subterranean dungeon, but also to lock and unlock all the restraints therein (and was previously apparently used by the angel in Rev.9:14 to release for the sixth trumpet judgment the large number of fallen angels enchained in the Abyss proper behind its main entrance door).

c. Special Security Precautions for Satan: We should note here that the security measures used to sequester the devil for the duration of the Millennium are threefold and are therefore unique. First, he is locked in the Abyss (in common with all other fallen angels removed from circulation from the beginning of human history for various violations of divine ground rules; cf. Lk.8:31). Secondly the devil is placed in chains within the Abyss as a second level of security (as were those fallen angels who severely violated protocol by cohabiting with human women prior to the flood; Gen.6; 2Pet.2:4-10; Jude 1:5-7; Rev.9:13-19). Finally and uniquely, the Abyss is specially "sealed", indicating that throughout the Millennium there will be no access to the Abyss whatsoever (and hence no possible chance of the devil exiting until the appointed time through either accident or design). The exceptional level of precautions taken here shows very clearly the importance of a Millennium without the devil.

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man (i.e., analogous to Satan)? Then he can rob his house (i.e., analogous to the distribution of the plunder upon conquering his kingdom: Ps.68:18; Is.33.23b; 53:12; 60:11; Lk.11:22; Eph.4:7-8).
Matthew 12:29 NIV

In the absence of any Satanic influence whatsoever, and with the provision of perfect environment by the Messiah Himself (as perfect, that is, as the mortal and therefore still inherently sinful human beings who will populate the world of that time can tolerate), mankind will nevertheless by and large still make use of its God-given free will to reject rather than to accept in faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thus proving both the nature of free will and the reality of it. This is also true for angelic kind, for even though the fallen angels will be put out of operation for a thousand years and given to witness not only their own total defeat but also the coming of the astoundingly marvelous Kingdom and penultimate Eden on the threshold of eternity, no change of heart or regret will be visible in any of them, to the extent that the devil, when he is released at the Millennium's end, will once again do all that is in his power to continue to fight against God.

d. Status of the Other Fallen Angels during the Millennium: As the head of the opposition to God, Satan's imprisonment is naturally emphasized here in Revelation 20:1-3, especially as this event fulfills many long-anticipated prophecies (e.g., Gen.3:15; Lk.10:18; symbolically as a type of Pharaoh and Egypt cf. also Rahab: Job 26:12; Ps.89:10; Is.51:9; and Leviathan: Ps.74:14; Is.27:1). However, the fact that only Satan is specifically said to be imprisoned should not be taken to mean that the fallen angels are exempt; rather, this is an instance of scripture focusing upon the leader of the rebellion and leaving us to understand by implication that his followers share his fate. Just as the devil is mentioned alone as being summarily thrown into the lake of fire at the Millennium's conclusion (Rev.20:10) and yet we know that his demons will suffer an

identical end (Matt.25:41), so we should assume here that his fallen angels are likewise expelled from Christ's Kingdom at His return to languish in the Abyss for a thousand years along with their leader, a blessing similarly anticipated in prophecy.

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

Given the reasons for the devil's removal from circulation during the Millennium discussed above, allowing his untold number of minions to remain at liberty would seem to be inconsistent with everything we know about that blessed time to come. Indeed, there are strong biblical indications that all demons are in fact removed to the Abyss at this time, with the devil merely being the last to be deposited therein before it is sealed for the duration of the Millennium.

(21) And it will come about on that day (i.e., the 2nd Advent) that the Lord will visit punishment upon the host of the [heavenly] heights in the [heavenly] heights (i.e., the fallen angels), and upon the kings of the earth upon the earth (i.e., antichrist's elite following). (22) And they will be crowded together, bound in a pit, and imprisoned in a prison. And after many days they will be punished.
Isaiah 24:21-22

The "pit" here is the place to which the human "kings" are committed, and is a synonym for Sheol or Hades (Ps.30:3; Is.14:15; 14:19; cf. Ps.28:1; 143:7; Is.38:18; Ezek.26:20; etc.). Specifically it refers to Torments, that part of the underworld where all departed unbelievers reside, awaiting the Last Judgment (Lk.16:19-31). The prison is a reference to another part of Sheol-Hades, namely, the Abyss (which in our context is described in precisely these terms with its chains, and with its locked and sealed entry door). It is into the latter that the "host of the heavenly heights", that is, the fallen angels who cast their lot with Satan, will be placed to await their final disposition at the end of history.

(4) All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (5) My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;
Isaiah 34:4-5a NIV

"Tell them this: 'These gods (i.e., demons worshiped as gods), who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.'
Jeremiah 10:11 NIV

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. [God] does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth.
Daniel 4:35a NIV

This incarceration of the demons to await their final judgment at the end of human history stands in direct and blessed contrast to the theme of the release of the (human) prisoners at the Messiah's return.

(6) I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and shall take You by the hand, and guard You, and appoint You a covenant for the nations and a Light for the gentiles, (7) to open the eyes of the blind, to bring forth the prisoner from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from their place of captivity (i.e., physical and spiritual redemption).
Isaiah 42:6-7

(8) This is what the Lord says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, (9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"
Isaiah 49:8-9 NIV

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place of their faint spirits.
Isaiah 61:1-3a

As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
Zechariah 9:11 NIV

e. The Participation of the Resurrected Church in this Operation: Believers most assuredly share Christ's authority in administering His millennial government (1Cor.4:8; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4), and when we are also told that we shall "judge angels" at 1st Corinthians 6:3, it seems likely that fallen angels are meant (for what need would the elect angels have for any sort of judicial evaluation, however small?). Further, while Revelation 19:21 places sole responsibility for carrying out the slaughter of Armageddon in our Lord's hands, Zechariah 14:5 and Revelation 19:19 state that we shall indeed "enter battle" in company with our Lord:

And then the Lord my God will enter [the battle], and all His holy ones with Him.
Zechariah 14:5

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army.
Revelation 19:19

At this point in time, that is, the point of the Second Advent, all fallen angels are at liberty (having been released in the course of the trumpet judgments), and yet all have been confined to the earth and its environs (since Satan and the other demons were "thrown down" by Michael and his forces: Rev.12:7). Since, as we have had occasion to see in the past, the number of resurrected believers belonging to the Church, the first part of Christ's double portion, will be precisely equal to the number of fallen angels, passages such as this may indicate that the reason we "enter battle" with the Lord will be for each of us individually to dispatch our demonic counterpart back into the Abyss (enjoying at that time the same superiority in our resurrection bodies over angels as that possessed by Christ: Heb.1:4-14). If such is the case, this would be a fitting way for our Lord to underscore the replacement of the devil and his angels by the Church, now just newly resurrected and glorified for the first time.

The Lord came from Sinai, and burst forth like the dawn against them (i.e., all of his foes, human and angelic) from [Mount] Seir. He shone forth from Mount Paran, and advanced with His holy multitudes; from His right hand [He cast] fiery judgment against them.
Deuteronomy 33:2

God will not turn back His anger; Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab (i.e., the mythical serpent symbolic both of Egypt and the devil).
Job 9:13 NASB

(5) Let the holy ones (i.e., believers) rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. (6) May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, (7) to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, (8) to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, (9) to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the Lord.
Psalm 149:5-9 (cf. Song 2:15)

"Behold! The Lord has come with His holy multitudes, to render judgment against all . . ."
Jude 1:14b - 15a

(2) Or don't you know that the holy ones (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute? (3) Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters?
1st Corinthians 6:2-3

For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms.
Ephesians 6:12

f. Satan's Later Release: While Revelation 20:7-10 clearly tells us that the devil will be released at the end of the Millennium for a short time, there is no indication that his followers will likewise be set free – nor is there any reason for this. The temporary release of Satan and the world's rapid rallying to his banner to oppose the rule of the perfect Ruler will demonstrate once and for all that mankind, even in the most perfect environment possible in this sinful world, will still resent God's authority. The Gog-Magog rebellion will thus prove conclusively that salvation, universally provided by the grace of God in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is ultimately a matter of choice. Those who perish do so of their own free will out of an essential unwillingness to submit to the Lord, even though the alternative is the forfeiture of eternal life.

5. The Baptism of Fire ("Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands")

Then (i.e., immediately after Armageddon) I will send fire upon Magog (i.e., eschatological Babylon) and upon those who dwell securely in the islands (i.e., the remainder of the gentile world; Gen.10:5; cf. Ps.97:1; Is.11:11; 13:22; 24:15; 40:15; 41:1; 41:5; 42:4; 42:10; 42:12; 49:1; 51:5; 59:18; 66:19; Jer.31:10; Ezek.27:35; Mic.5:15; Zeph.2:11; 3:8b), so that they may know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 39:6

The judgment on Babylon which occurred prior to Armageddon, while devastating her territory in a singularly horrific way, did not destroy her entire population. We have already suggested that she will have given sanctuary to a large Jewish population, presently to be repatriated to the land of Israel (cf. Mic.4:10). At the time of our Lord's Second Advent, there will be found within her borders and throughout the gentile world at large a sizeable number of people who have taken the mark of the beast, yet were not present at the battle of Armageddon and so were not destroyed at that time. While refusal to receive the mark exempts those who so refused from this judgment (Rev.13:8; 17:8b cf. Josh.6:25; Matt.25:37-40), all who have worshiped antichrist and allowed themselves to be so marked will be excluded from our Lord's millennial kingdom, and miraculously so, by being supernaturally incinerated in the wake of His return, similar in fashion to the fate of the soldiers who sought to arrest Elijah (2Ki.1:9-15; cf. Lk.9:52-55), and similar in its selectivity to the destruction of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families (Num.16).

"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me."
Luke 19:27 NIV

The criteria for this destruction are twofold: not only unbelief, but also "reveling in unrighteousness", namely, supporting the beast and his anti-God agenda and so by definition rejecting the Messiah in favor of the counterfeit, the very thing which accepting the mark implies (2Thes.2:12).

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] (9) whose appearance [will come about]

through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. (11) And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them an empowerment of error so that they may believe the lie, (12) in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12

Other passages foreshadowing this elimination of such stumbling blocks from Messiah's incipient kingdom include the following:

1. The workers in the field who are not taken (Matt.24:36-44).
2. The wicked servant who is thrown out with hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt.24:45-51).
3. The sleepy virgins who are shut out of the kingdom (Matt.25:1-13).
4. The lazy servant who is thrown out into darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt.25:14-30).
5. The enemies of the King who did not want Him to rule over them who are killed in His presence at His return (Lk.19:27; quoted above).

The supernatural fire sent upon Magog-Babylon (singled out here because it was the home country of the beast) and also upon the rest of the nations outside of Israel is sometimes referred to as "the Baptism of Fire" after the phrase used by John the baptist for the eschatological alternative to accepting Jesus Christ (so as to receive instead the Baptism of the Spirit; Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16; cf. Mk.1:8):

(10) For the ax has already been put to the trunk of the trees. Accordingly, every tree which does not produce good fruit is about to be cut down and thrown into fire. (11) Now I am baptizing you with water for the purpose of [your] repentance. But the One coming after me is more powerful than me and I am not worthy to carry His sandals. It is He who is the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 3:10-12

Just as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, began the Church Age, so also the baptism of fire will be one of the first acts of the returning King to begin the Millennium. Jesus will make a "clean sweep" of His threshing floor, removing the "chaff" (unbelievers who have already formally declared their hostility to Him through accepting the mark) by subjecting them

to a fiery end (described here as "unquenchable" since this execution by fire is followed, after a thousand years in torments, by final disposition in the Lake of Fire). The gathering in of the wheat has a double reference, looking forward as it does to the end as a whole, comprising both the frequently prophesied regathering of Israel into the Messiah's millennial kingdom, and the final eschatological gathering up of all believers into the eternal kingdom following history's end (cf. Matt.13:24-30; 13:47-50).

(1) "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty.

Malachi 4:1-3 NIV

(6) . . . since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon these [same persecutors] who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9 (cf. Is.59:18b)

The second passage here also conflates the Baptism of Fire at the commencement of the Millennium with the disposition of all unbelievers at the Last Judgment and the entrance of all believers into the eternal kingdom at the Millennium's end. In respect to its Second Advent application, not all unbelievers on earth will be subjected to fiery judgment on our Lord's return (if they were, then no one would remain to repopulate the human race, since all believers alive at the Second Advent are resurrected "to meet the Lord in the air"; 1Thes.4:17). Those taken away by fire are indeed unbelievers, those who "do not know God" and who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus". However, it is only those guilty of "subjecting you to tribulation" who are to be summarily dispatched with a fiery end. This offense seems to be one of which all those who received the mark of the beast are universally guilty. For the persecution of believers during the Great Tribulation was a key characteristic of all those who cast their lot with antichrist, participating in his pseudo-Christian religion, and acting as his instruments in the Great Persecution. Therefore no one who joins the beast and receives his mark will be found to have clean hands in this respect, and none will be allowed to remain and taint the Messiah's incipient Kingdom.

(15) For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and His chariots will be like a whirlwind, to bring down His wrath in anger and His rebuke in flames of fire. (16) For with fire the Lord is going to execute judgment – and with His sword – upon all flesh, and many will be those slain by the Lord. (17) Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens

following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.

Isaiah 66:15-17

The dual destruction mentioned above, by means of sword (i.e., at the battle of Armageddon: Rev.19:21), and by fire, clearly indicates two phases of destruction: 1) Armageddon, where all assembled to do battle with the Lord will be destroyed by "the sharp broadsword which proceeds from His mouth" (Rev.19:15); and 2) the Baptism of Fire directed towards all who have taken the mark. This can be seen from verse 17 above, where the description of abominable cult activity refers to those who worship the beast and take part in his religion's foul rites and activities (which are by association with antichrist "[characterized] by violence" references to the persecution of believers referred to in 2Thes.1:7 quoted above), including the Great Persecution.

Just as the resurrection which immediately precedes the Second Advent is selective and determined on an individual basis (cf. Matt.24:40-41), so the Baptism of Fire which occurs at the commencement of the millennial kingdom will be restricted to a select population; but instead of consisting of those who lived for Jesus Christ and were uniquely resurrected while yet alive, this group will consist of those who chose against Him in the most forceful and willful possible manner. Their removal from the earth to prevent them taking any part in the glories of the Millennium will be likewise unique in the course of human history.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tortured/tormented in fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torture/torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

As Ezekiel 39:6 quoted above suggests, the Baptism of fire will be extensive and will no doubt consume the great majority of the world's remaining population (for most of those who are not followers of Jesus will have chosen instead to follow the beast: Rev.13:8; 17:8b). It will not, however, be total, and we can expect a very large proportion of those who survive this judgment to be children who had not yet reached the age of accountability and consent at the time of the Second Advent (cf. Is.2:2-3; 60:14). The purpose of this judgment will be two-fold and merciful in every way to all inclined to respond to God's mercy. By cleansing the threshing floor and removing all such stumbling blocks out of Messiah's kingdom (cf. Is.57:14; Zeph.3:11; Matt.13:41), the fire sent "upon Magog and upon those who dwell securely in the islands" has another very specific purpose, and one that works hand in glove with the first: "so that they may know that I am the Lord" (Ezek.39:6).

(2) At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it. (3) And many peoples will come and they will say, "Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

Isaiah 2:2-3

6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel

The return of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is at once one of the most blessed and most frequently occurring of all of the promises of Old Testament prophecy. It would be nigh on impossible to produce a completely comprehensive list of the passages, ubiquitous in scripture, wherein the return is expressed literally or figuratively, prophetically and by promise, in the Old Testament or in the New.

After Armageddon, our glorious Lord will immediately begin the process of bringing all survivors of Jewish blood back to the Land. Whether hailing from Babylon (Jer.50:4-8; Mic.4:10) or previously imprisoned (Is.51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; cf. Ps.68:6; 79:10-11; 102:20; 146:7), whether dwelling abroad as a result of the recent diaspora caused by antichrist's depredations (Deut.26:6-8; Hos.8:10; Joel 3:2-8; Zech.14:2; Lk.21:24) or in long established Jewish communities throughout the world (Jer.3:18; 30:10; Ezek.37:21; Zeph.3:10), all who are of Jewish blood will be repatriated to the place of judgment on the threshold of the Land of Israel in the opening days of the Millennium. There, in the "desert of the nations", they will stand judgment for their right to enter the land.

The return will be prominently announced:

(11) In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

(12) He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

Isaiah 11:11-12 NIV

(12) In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. (13) And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 27:12-13 NIV

(10) They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. (11) They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. "I will settle them in their homes," declares the Lord.

Hosea 11:10-11 NIV

(8) "I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before. (9) Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. (10) I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them. (11) They will pass through the sea of trouble (i.e., the Tribulation); the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away. (12) I will strengthen them in the Lord and in his name they will walk," declares the Lord.

Zechariah 10:8-12 NIV

The return will be orderly:

(11) Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. (12) But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Isaiah 52:11-12 NIV

The return will be rapid:

(7) "Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son. (8) Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. (9) "Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the Lord. "Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?" says your God.

Isaiah 66:7-9 NIV

The means for the return will be abundantly provided (Is.43:19-21; 48:20-21; 60:4; 62:10):

(15) The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals. (16) There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.

Isaiah 11:15-16 NIV

(7) The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. (8) And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. (9) No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, (10) and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with

singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Isaiah 35:7-10 NIV

(9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. (10) They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. (11) I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. (12) See, they will come from afar – some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan."

Isaiah 49:9-12 NIV

Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.

Isaiah 60:9 NIV

"And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord – on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels," says the Lord. "They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels."

Isaiah 66:20 NIV

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will be the Agent of the return (Ezek.11:17; 20:41-42):

(5) "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. (6) I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – (7) everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Isaiah 43:5-7 NIV

The return will be complete (Dan.12:1b):

Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind.

Ezekiel 39:28 NIV

(12) "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. (13) One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head."

Micah 2:12-13

The return will be a vindication:

(19) "At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. (20) At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the Lord.
Zephaniah 3:19-20 NIV

b. The Purging of the Jewish People prior to Reentering the Land:

(4) He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people. (5) "Gather to me this consecrated people, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice."
Psalm 50:4-5 NIV (cf. Hos.6:11)

In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; For then ***I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride***, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain.
Zephaniah 3:11 NKJV

Although the regathering will indeed apply to all Jews who survive the Tribulation, only those who accept the Messiah will be allowed into the land of promise (those who believed before Christ's return have, of course, already been resurrected as part of Christ's Bride). This process of purging is the sixth of the seven "thunder judgments", the purifying of the new remnant of Israel following their regathering to the threshold of the land of Israel so that only the righteous may enter to inaugurate the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Is.60:21).

(34) I will ***bring you from the nations*** and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered—with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. (35) I will bring you into ***the desert of the nations*** and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. (36) As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. (37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will ***purge*** you of those who ***revolt and rebel*** against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet ***they will not enter*** the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV

Comment: In this passage we see all of the essential features of the process of regathering: 1) All of Jewish stock who did not receive the mark are regathered (v.34); 2) The place of initial regathering is near the Land, but not actually in the Land (v.35); 3) The purpose for this phased arrival into Israel is to render judgment as to who is fit to enter (vv.36-37); 4) Those who "revolt and rebel" even after witnessing the Messiah's miraculous return and their own astounding regathering will be purged from the remnant and will not enter the Land (v.38).

1) The Place of Purging: As explained immediately above, this judgment will take place *near* the Land of Israel but not actually *in* the Land (Ezek.20:38). Ezekiel 20:35 describes the place of judgment as "the desert of the nations" (Hebrew: *midhbar ha'amiym*, מִדְּבַר הָאֲמִיּוֹת). This is most often taken to mean the places of Jewish diaspora around the world, but that is obviously incorrect since verse thirty-eight very clearly states that all individuals of Jewish stock will be "brought out of the land where they are living" yet "will not enter the Land of Israel". The true identification of "the desert of the nations" is Sinai. Israel was delivered from the nations to be her own nation-state under God by going through the desert of Sinai and undergoing a process of cleansing and judgment under the leadership of Moses (a type of Christ). Just as Sinai was the place of testing and purging in the first Exodus, so also at this future time the same "desert of [deliverance from] the nations" will be Sinai. The strong parallel deliberately drawn in Ezekiel chapter twenty between the situation of this future generation and that of the Exodus generation supports this identification: a prolonged stay in Sinai was the unhappy alternative for that previous generation who had likewise experienced the miraculous deliverance of God in bringing them forth from the nations. Sinai is on the threshold of the Land of promise. In terms of biblical geography, it is not technically in Egypt, but neither is it "in the Land" (the "brook of Egypt" will be the southwestern boundary of millennial Israel Ezek.47:19; 48:28). We can therefore conclude that the "desert of the nations" is indeed Sinai, given this unique name now because all those of Jewish blood are brought back to this place from all of the nations of the world where they had previously been scattered, not just from Egypt. Sinai will be the place of blessed cleansing for all willing to accept the Messiah, an event soon followed by their repatriation to the Land of Israel.

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into *the desert* and speak tenderly to her.

Hosea 2:14 NIV

This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find favor *in the desert*; I will come to give rest to Israel."

Jeremiah 31:2 NIV

2) The Time of Purging: As noted above, scripture describes the return to the land as something that will rapidly follow Jesus' return, so we may expect that the entire process of collection, transfer to Sinai, judgment and repatriation to be a very swift affair. In fact, Daniel chapter twelve provides us with a detailed and definitive schedule:

(11) From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

Daniel 12:11-12 NIV

The phrase from verse eleven above, "from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up", refers to the Tribulation's mid-point and antichrist's session in the temple of God, an event that will be accompanied by the abolition of the daily sacrifice and the erection of the cult-idol statue of antichrist which the false prophet will animate

(i.e., the "abomination of desolation", or more correctly, "the abomination that causes desolation": Dan.9:27; Rev.13:11-15; cf. 2Thes.2:1-12). Moreover, the "1290 days" must then stretch to a time beyond the end of the Tribulation past the Second Advent. That is because the Great Tribulation itself, the period which begins with the events mentioned here in Daniel 12:11, lasts for three and one half years only, a time frame described in scripture (in terms of lunar years) as either 42 months, or 1260 days, or "a time, times and half a time" (Dan.7:25; 12:7; Rev.11:2; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5). And since this period of time will be further shortened to some degree at least "for the sake of the elect" (Mk.13:20), it is impossible for the 1290 days to be fit in its entirety into this window of the Tribulation's second half. Even calculating on a 365 day year, the maximum yield for the period would be 1278 days assuming a leap year, and this figure does not include the unspecified span of curtailment "for the sake of the elect". It seems best, therefore, to understand the differential between the actual return of Christ and the 1290 days as the interval within which all Israel will be regathered into Sinai so that we should complete Daniel's words somewhat as follows: "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days [until all Israel is regathered]", that is, until the premier prophetic event to which Daniel was looking in anticipation comes to pass.

The place of regathering, for the purpose of judgment and purging, will be the "desert of the nations", and the process of regathering will occupy approximately 30 days (depending upon the variables noted above). There then remains the differential between the 1290 days and the 1335 days, a span of 45 days. This 45 day period will then be the time frame of the actual judgment.

In addition to meshing seamlessly with all of the other information we have about these events, the above interpretation also has two further advantages:

1) It allows for a close parallel to the events of the Exodus. As we have seen, the fact that Israel will be regathered initially into "the desert of the nations", that is, Sinai, and winnowed in a way similar to that experienced by the original Exodus generation, invites this comparison generally. As we have seen since the beginning of this series, days are often representative of years in prophetic contexts (e.g., Ps.90:4; Dan.9:25-27), so that the 45 days naturally suggests the 40 years of wandering and testing in Sinai in addition to the 5 years of entrance under Joshua (cf. Josh.14:10). In its application to this particular prophecy in Daniel, the 40 days will then be the time of our Lord's judging all regathered to Sinai, and the 5 days the period of their restoration to and resettlement in the Land of Promise under Messiah's reign.

2) This also explains Daniel's words "Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days". According to this interpretation, those who "wait for the Lord" (a picture of faith: Ps.27:14; 37:9; Is.40:31; Mic.7:7; Hab.2:3; Zeph.3:8; Rom.8:25; cf. Matt.24:13; Lk.12:36; Rom.11:25-26), and "reach the end" are the Jewish returnees who pass muster in the desert and enter the Land. All who do survive this judgment will most certainly be "blessed", both in comparison to those who do not and in absolute terms as well, for theirs it will be to experience

the ineffable blessings of Millennial Israel under Messiah's reign, a boon much anticipated in prophecy from Genesis to Revelation.

(15) When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." (16) Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. (17) At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' (18) "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' (19) "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' (20) "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' (21) "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' (22) "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' (23) "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. (24) I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

Luke 14:15-24 NIV

(1) Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: (2) "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (3) He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. (4) "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' (5) "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. (6) The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. (7) The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. (13) "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Matthew 22:1-14 NIV

As our Lord's parable makes unmistakably clear, while being present at the great banquet in Israel (the wedding banquet "of his Son": cf. Matt.22:2) which celebrates the wedding of the Lamb and His Bride will be blessed indeed (Lk.14:15 above), only those who attain to it, that is, only those who are not destroyed first by outright rejection of the invitation (i.e., those who accept the mark of the beast and so are destroyed in the prior "thunder judgment", also known as the "baptism of fire"), and who are not subsequently found wanting during the judgment in the

desert (represented by the man without proper attire in Matt.22:11-14 above), will be allowed to enter the Land and enjoy all of the marvelous blessings to come (n.b., these passages also apply to the entrance into the eternal kingdom at the end of the Millennium).

3) The Process of Purging:

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent). (26) And it is in this way (i.e., coming to believe upon witnessing the Messiah's return) that all [true] Israel will be saved just as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.

Romans 11:25-27

When all Israel is assembled on the border of the Land, many in her number will already have come to believe in Jesus Christ, having been convicted of the truth of His Messiahship upon witnessing His sign of the cross appearing in the heavens along with His miraculous return.

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.

Revelation 1:7

And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son.

Zechariah 12:10

There are indications, moreover, that the process of repentance will continue right up until the end of the present judgment we are discussing:

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.

Hosea 3:4-5 NASB

As the context of Hosea chapter three quoted above makes clear, the Lord is eager for reconciliation with Israel despite her previous reluctance (just as Hosea is commanded to reconcile with his wife despite her serious indiscretions).

(10) "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. (11) "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and

will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you."
Zechariah 2:10-11 NIV

During the Millennium, the change of heart among the offspring of the remnant of Israel will bring a flood of Jews to faith in Christ (comparable to the flood of gentiles that characterizes the Church age). Seeing the Messiah face to face (Deut.4:30; Is.17:7-8; Jer.3:22b-25; Joel 3:17; Zech.12:10-14; Rev.1:7; cf. Is.31:6; 60:20-21; Matt.24:30), Israel will turn to Him in numbers that will proportionally outstrip the greatest gains of the Church age, as God abundantly blesses His chosen people, fulfilling all the promises He has made (Ps.80:18; Is.65:8-10; Jer.31:31-34; Ezek.20:33-38; 37:11-14; Hos.1:10-11; Mal.4:5-6; Matt.23:39; Rom.11:26). However, it is a sad fact that in spite of the nearly two millennia that Israel has spent "in the wilderness" (Amos 9:9), in spite of all the pressures of the Tribulation (cf. Is.48:10; Lk.13:6-9), in spite of all of the glories of Second Advent where "all mankind together will see the glory of the Lord" (Is.40:5), and in spite of this process of face to face judgment with our Lord, the hardness of the hearts of many of the original survivors will prove persistent and not susceptible to being cracked (cf. Zech.2:10-11). Scripture is very clear on this point. Not all who are regathered will enter, only the remnant, and that remnant is consistently described as small (Is.6:13; 17:5-7; 65:8-12; Jer.50:20; Joel 2:32; Mic.4:6-7; Rom.9:27-29; cf. Zech.13:8).

Although your people may be like the sand of the sea, O Israel, [only] a remnant of them will return.
Isaiah 10:22

I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion.
Jeremiah 3:14 NIV

(8) "In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. (9) This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"
Zechariah 13:8-9 NIV

As is clear from the last passage in particular, in addition to the high casualty rate suffered by the Jewish population of the Tribulation generally, the "one third" who survive will be "refined". That is to say, they will be purified by a purging that distills them into a remnant of believers. This remnant will in turn provide the root stock for the abundant Jewish population of the Millennium, the majority of whom will continue in the footsteps of their forefathers in faith in Jesus Christ, the true Messiah.

The process of purging is clear to see from Ezekiel chapter twenty, the pertinent section of which for this topic is as follows:

(37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV

The procedure for this judgment will thus be very similar to what will transpire at the end of the Millennium during the initial stage of the last judgment as described in Matthew 25:31-46, otherwise known as the judgment of the sheep and the goats. In both cases we have a mixed population that must be separated, and in both cases it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who will do the separating. However, while the sheep and goats judgment will involve the entire millennial population at the end of history, this judgment will only concern those Jews still alive after the baptism of fire who have been repatriated to the doorstep of the Land of Israel. And while the later judgment will end in a living resurrection, with the believers entering eternity and the unbelievers cast into the lake of fire (Matt.25:41-46), no such resurrection occurs at this time. Those who are shown to truly be believers in Jesus will enter the millennial kingdom of the Messiah in their physical bodies. Those who refuse to accept Jesus will be dispatched to torments (the temporary residence after death of all unbelievers since the beginning of history) to await the last judgment. The criterion or basis of judgment will be the individual's attitude towards the newly returned Messiah. As Ezekiel 20:38 states, Jesus will "purge you of those who revolt and rebel *against Me*". All those who resist accepting and obeying Jesus Christ through faith, that is, all who persist in unbelief in spite of all that has transpired, will not be allowed to enter the land.

There are thus five discrete categories among those of Jewish blood who survive the Tribulation:

- 1) Those who previously accepted the mark of the beast: these are executed as part of the baptism of fire.
- 2) Those who accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ upon witnessing His return: these are allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.
- 3) Those who refuse to accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ in spite of the previous miracles and the message given during this judgment: these are executed in the process of this judgment and dispatched into torments to await the last judgment.
- 4) Those who did not accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ as they saw Him return, but who do repent and accept Jesus as their Savior during the process of this judgment: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.
- 5) Those who have not yet attained to an age or capacity of accountability, and so are not yet responsible for making this critical decision: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.

The purpose of this judgment is therefore not only to assure that the Millennium begins with a pure cadre of Jewish believers in the Land of Promise cleansed of all prone to "revolt or rebel" against the truth or to grumble against the Lord Jesus, their ruling Sovereign (cf. the parallels of Lev.24:10-23 and Acts 5:1-11), but also to give even those who have so far demurred for whatever reason every opportunity to put aside their hard-heartedness and accept the free grace of God for salvation. The fact that some sizeable portion of those so gathered will nevertheless still refuse to accept the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ is at once a startling and horrifying fact, and a testimony to the power of self-willed arrogance to blind the human heart against the truth even when it is so overwhelmingly revealed. For to be brought face to face with the Messiah Himself, to the gospel message from His own lips, to see the consequences of unbelief with one's own eyes, and to persist in arrogant rejection of Him nonetheless, is irrefutable testimony to the fact that, short of taking away our free will entirely, nothing God could ever do would result in all human beings turning to Him in faith. And as we are here for the purpose of exercising our free will in faith to accept Jesus Christ (or reject Him), this He will most certainly not do.

And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:32

(11) "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. (12) As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. (13) I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. (14) I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. (15) I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. (16) I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. (17) As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. (18) Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (19) Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? (20) Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. (21) Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, (22) I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. (23) I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend

them and be their shepherd. (24) I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.

Ezekiel 34:11-24 NIV

As it was during the time of the Exodus when far from the entire complement who left Egypt entered the land of promise (indeed, only Caleb and Joshua of the older generation did enter the land), so it will be during this future judgment. Just as in the Exodus the children who had not yet reached an age of accountability did enter the land after the forty years of refining, so also in a similar way, we may expect a large proportion of those entering and passing this judgment to consist of those too young to be held accountable at present with the result that they are automatically allowed to enter. There will also be opportunity for repentance, the giving of the gospel message from the Lord Himself, the truth about salvation through the washing of the water of the Word of God wherein accepting His Person and His work, the blood of Christ, results in cleansing from all sin, deliverance and salvation for all who are willing to accept the truth (Jn.3:5; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5; Heb.10:22; 1Pet.3:21; cf. Heb.9:14; Jas.1:18; 1Pet.1:23).

The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire.

Isaiah 4:4 NIV

I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.

Jeremiah 33:8 NIV

In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare.

Jeremiah 50:20 NIV

(18) Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. (19) You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:18-19 NIV

(9) "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. (10) From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. (11) On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. (12) But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. (13) The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."

Zephaniah 3:9-13 NIV

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."

Zechariah 13:1 NIV

(2) But who can endure the day of [the Messiah's] coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. (3) He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, (4) and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Malachi 3:2-4 NIV

But while all who repent of their prior unbelief and accept Jesus as the Messiah and the true Son of God at this time will be cleansed and forgiven, the purging process will discover the dross, and those who would otherwise have been the "sons of the kingdom" will be thrust out into outer darkness.

I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.

Isaiah 1:25 NIV

(11) "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 8:11-12 NIV

At the completion of this process, God will conduct the remnant, those who have passed the test of faith, into the Land of Promise to experience the glorious blessings of the millennial rule of Jesus Christ.

(8) This is what the Lord says: "As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do in behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all. (9) I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live. (10) Sharon will [again] become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me."

Isaiah 65:8-10

7. The Judgment and Reward of the Church

So then each of us will give an account to God concerning himself.

Romans 14:12

It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that, judgment is in store.
Hebrews 9:27

The final evaluation of all believers constituting Christ's Church (that is, all believers from Adam and Eve to the last person saved during the Tribulation) will not be judgment of assessing blame for sin since Christ has already died for all of our sins; rather it will be an evaluation of assessing our production for the Lord during our earthly lives wherein everything we have thought, said and done will come to light (Matt.10:26; Mk.4:22; Lk.8:17; 12:2; Rom.2:16; 1Cor.4:5), with reward coming for everything good and with fire purging away everything else:

If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].
1st Corinthians 3:15

Also known as "the judgment seat of Christ", this judgment is Christ's evaluation of His Bride, the resurrected Church. Our Lord will personally evaluate the lives of every human being who has ever lived following their resurrection, whether it is unto life or unto death. This is the first such resurrection judgment: since the Church is the first echelon of the resurrection following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, final judgment begins with us.

For [the] time for the [last] judgment to begin with the household of God is [imminent] (cf. 1Pet.4:7). And if it begins first with us, what [in the world] will be the result for those who are disobeying the gospel of God (i.e., the "good news" of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ)?
1st Peter 4:17

a. The Time and Place of the Judgment:

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.
Matthew 16:27

Behold, I am coming quickly, and I bring with me my wages with which to repay each according to his work.
Revelation 22:12

The passages above and many others refer to the time of our rewarding at our Lord's Second Advent (e.g., Is.40:10; 62:11; Matt.16:27; Lk.14:14; Rev.11:18; 22:12). The judgment of the Church will thus almost certainly take place immediately after the conclusion of the regathering and purging of Israel, following the resettlement of the remnant in the Land of Israel. Rather than a judgment of those still in mortal bodies, however, the final evaluation of the Church will concern believers from Adam and Eve to the Second Advent, all of whom were already

resurrected to form part of Christ's Bride at His return. For believers and unbelievers both, resurrection confirms every person's final eternal state (saved or lost), and is a necessary event before receiving final judgment (for reward or for confirmation of condemnation respectively; cf. Dan.12:1-3; Rev.20:11-15).

"But as for you, [Daniel], be on your way until the end. For you will rest, and [then] at the end of days you will arise [in resurrection] to receive your allotted inheritance."

Daniel 12:13

Therefore our eternal status will not be at issue in this judgment. Even in cases where production for Jesus during one's lifetime has been virtually nil, while all false efforts will be burned up, those believers with little to show for their lives will yet "be saved", though "so as through fire" (1Cor.3:15). Having survived life with our faith in Jesus Christ still intact, we shall remain part of His Body forever, even if our eternal rewards are at a minimal level.

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

Romans 14:10-12 and 2nd Corinthians 5:10 both state that the judgment will take place "before Christ's tribunal". The word "tribunal" (also often translated "judgment seat"), is the Greek word *bema* (βῆμα), and refers to a public podium, dais, or rostrum, used for public speaking or administering justice. The latter accords better with the analogy Paul is drawing in these two passages, comparing the public evaluation of believers' earthly service with the Roman administration of justice (Acts 18:12-17; cf. Matt.27:19; Jn.19:13; Acts 12:21; 25:6-17). Unlike most contemporary settings of jurisprudence today where trials are held indoors and generally not made widely available, by contrast as in the example of Roman justice (where the trial occurs in some central part of the city or municipality, often in the open air, and always accessible to all), our evaluation before Christ's *bema* or judgment seat will be public, and since all members of the Church will be evaluated, it certainly stands to reason that the entire Body of Christ will attend. This circumstance argues for an outdoor venue (rather than within the holy of holies of the temple whence Christ will reign for a thousand years), and we know from Isaiah that during the

Millennium there will be just such a large, open-air area for assembly in Jerusalem near the temple, miraculously protected from the elements:

(5) And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. (6) It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

Difficulties of space (the approximate size of the Church is unknown, but if the number of those who truly put their faith in the Lord from Eden onwards reached into the billions, it would not be at all surprising), and of time (obviously, to give each person an individual evaluation would require a tremendous amount of "earth time"), are likely to be met supernaturally. After all, everyone being evaluated will be at that point "eternal", so that both Judge and judged will be capable of standing somewhat outside of normal temporal and spatial constraints as well as within (compare the ability of the resurrection body to defy the limitations of time and space as we presently understand them). Therefore although the question of how long a time this last of the seven judgments, the "judgment of the Church", will take is not set out in scripture, on the basis of its association with the other Second Advent judgments it must surely be relatively short-lived (again, in "earth time"). That would seem to suggest that this will be a case of our Lord doing almost instantaneously (in terms of our present understanding of time) what would otherwise require a very long period to accomplish, if one were to be restricted to the current laws of time and space (which our Lord clearly is not, and, in resurrection, our present earthly restraints will be greatly changed as well). In other words, it will both be a short judgment (in calendar terms), and a long and detailed one (in terms of the precise and exacting evaluation of each of us by our Lord Jesus Christ). The fact that we like He at that point will no longer be subject to temporal constraints in the same way as we are now (for we shall have been resurrected at that point) no doubt explains much about the potential to compress this process temporally from the earthly point of view.

b. The Order of Judgment: While the sequence in which we shall be judged by our Lord is not expressly specified in scripture, there is much to suggest that the order will proceed according to merit. That is to say, the judgment will not be chronological (i.e., starting with Abel, Adam and Eve, etc.), nor reverse chronological (i.e., beginning with the last tribulational cohort to be saved before Christ's appearance), but instead it will progress from the greatest believers to the least, beginning with the likes of king David and the prophets and the apostles, and terminating with all those whose production during this life was at the bare minimum level.

1) Many who are last shall be first: Our Lord's prophecy to the effect that many of those who were exalted in this life will find their positions reversed with those who were not is clearly tied to the principle that self-exaltation in the service of self-interest (i.e., not rank or position per se, but self-sought promotion) tends to negate reward, while self-abasement in the service of the kingdom of God (i.e., not asceticism practiced perversely for its own sake, but genuine sacrifices made on behalf of serving Christ's Church) tends to produce this reversal of the present order.

"Whoever wishes to be first will [have to become] last of all and a servant of all."
Mark 9:35

"So whoever lowers himself like this child, this person will be higher [ranking] in the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 18:4

"For the one who is [making himself] smaller among you all, this person is the great[er] [one]."
Luke 9:48

It is in this sense that we should understand Jesus' words about the exchange of places between "the first and the last": the standards of this world are not the ones our Lord will use in determining our eternal rewards; rather, our Lord will execute a true judgment wherein "many" who seem great in this life will be found to have produced little, while "many" who seemed insignificant in this life will be found to have produced much, with each group being rewarded "according to what they have done" (Ps.62:12; Matt.16:27; Rom.2:6; 1Cor.3:8; Rev.2:23; 22:12).

And it is not that everyone who seems to be "great" to the world's eyes will not also be so in eternity (e.g., David, Moses, Daniel, the prophets, the apostles, and many others seemed great at the time and genuinely were; these individuals will without question figure high on the list on that day of days); nor is it the case that everyone who seems insignificant in the world's estimation will not also be so in eternity (for some who seem not to be producing for the Lord really are not producing for the Lord). Nevertheless, the emphasis our Lord put on this point suggests strongly that we should take to heart the principle that present appearances are likely to be deceiving in "many" cases. For "many" who may seem to us now as likely to be among the first in the kingdom will in fact be shown not to have produced much at all that is significant for the Lord, while "many" whose work and sacrifice is not highly visible at present will be revealed as having produced significant results for Jesus Christ "on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom.2:16). It is for this reason that we should be reluctant to "judge before the time":

(4) The Lord is the One who judges me. (5) Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.
1st Corinthians 4:4a-5

Seen from this perspective, our Lord's statements about the "many first being last" and "many last being first" likely also indicate that the order of the judgment of Christ's Church will proceed as suggested above, that is, from the most meritorious to the least so.

But many who are first will be last, and the last first.
Mark 10:31 NIV

Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.
Luke 13:30 NIV

The context of the first passage above, Mark 10:17-31, is the request made of Jesus by the rich young ruler to know what must be done to inherit eternal life, his disappointment when told to sell his possessions, and Peter's desire to receive confirmation of the reward he and others will receive for following Jesus sacrificially. Against this background, Jesus' words "many who are first will be last, and the last first" are meant to demonstrate that although to the world's eyes the apostles were at that time nothing compared to the rich and powerful Pharisees and Sadducees, at the judgment their places would be reversed (so that Peter and his fellows should keep their eyes focused on their eternal reward rather than on their present humble status). The context for the second passage above, Luke 13:22-30, is Jesus' description of the narrow door of salvation, and the exclusion of many of the prominent religious figures of the day from the great millennial celebration-banquet. Against this background, Jesus' words "there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" likewise indicate that few of those who are seen to be celebrities in this world will be so in God's eyes in the next, and that on the other hand many who are of no account in the world's thinking will be honored on that future day.

Perhaps the clearest evidence from this set of "first-last-last-first" passages which indicates that a correspondence is to be found between this reversal of roles (i.e., between the only apparently spiritual and with those who are truly meritorious though anonymous workers for Christ) and the order of judgment-reward (with the new "first" being the more highly rewarded) comes from the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

(30) "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. (1) For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. (2) He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. (3) About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. (4) He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' (5) So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. (6) About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' (7) 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' (8) When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' (9) The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. (10) So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. (11) When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. (12) 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' (13) But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? (14) Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. (15) Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or

are you envious because I am generous?' (16) So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Matthew 19:30 - 20:16 NIV

With the use of the word "so" (Greek *houtos*, οὕτως, "thus / in this way") in verse sixteen above, we see that it is the reversal of the expected order that constitutes the fulfillment of the "last/first – first/last" prophecy. Applying this to the Church at large, the denarius represents the award of salvation which all who trust in Christ will possess equally. The workers hired first represent those who seem in the world's eyes according to the world's standards as likely to receive a larger reward, while those hired last appear to be precisely the opposite, namely, those whose reward will be the least. But in fact, the situation is exactly the reverse of worldly impressions. For our purposes here, the critical point of interpretation is the greater honor given to those whose production is often invisible to us here and now being represented by the order of evaluation: rather than having to wait at the end of the line, this group is promoted by being given their wages first (while on the contrary those who appear to our sight to be worthy of more, are not, and are in fact placed behind the truly more worthy). Thus this parable indicates that those who are truly first in God's eyes will receive their judgment and reward first, while those who may seem more prominent to us but are actually not so in truth will have to wait until later, a situation which also reflects their relatively lesser rewards.

2) The Parable of the Banquet Guests:

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 14:7-11 NIV

As in the case of the first and the last, many of those who assume that they are deserving of "first place" (and are assumed by others to be so as well), will find themselves demoted to the end of the line when the true Judge begins His process of evaluation. In contrast, those who were at first not deemed worthy by their fellow diners of such honor, nor even deeming themselves so, will be promoted to the first rank. Humbling oneself for Christ, that is, pursuing Jesus' agenda in this life rather than what the world esteems, though such a course of action usually results in little worldly glory, is the only way to achieve anything worthwhile for Him and thus to be exalted by Him on that great day so as to be moved up to the first rank, that is, to be evaluated earlier in the order reflecting greater rewards (in contrast to those who sought honor in this life and accomplished little for Jesus, and will thus be among those evaluated last, an indication of lesser reward).

3) The Parable of the Talents and the Minas: The parable of the talents (Matt.25:14-30), and the parable of the minas (Lk.19:11-27), though not identical in all details do teach the same principles. In both cases, the master or king represents our Lord, while we are represented by his servants. In each telling of this parable, the servants are given money belonging to their lord and commanded to make good use of it until he returns (with his return representing the Second Advent). The money given to (us) represents the means, opportunity, and authority (cf. Mk.13:34) to act for the Lord in His stead here on earth according to the gifts we have been given (n.b., the English word "talent" actually comes from this parable). Talents and minas are both monetary units used throughout the ancient Mediterranean world from Babylon to Rome. Depending upon the specific standard employed, the approximate weight of a talent could range from some 60 to 100 pounds. At current rates for gold, therefore, a single talent might be worth as much as a million and half dollars in contemporary terms (although its buying power in the ancient economy where money was scarcer in relative terms would be significantly greater). A mina (or *mna*), was commonly one sixtieth of a talent and thus, while still very valuable, was worth considerably less (i.e., comparing the total value of the amounts given to the servants who received the talents to that given to the servants who each received a single mina equates roughly to eight million dollars versus twenty to thirty thousand dollars). The disparate range between these two similar parables indicates a similarly large range in the gifts and opportunities we are given, but the standard of judgment is the same in every case: our Lord expects a return on His investment, and will reward us wonderfully and marvelously in proportion to our efforts (i.e., the one whose mina gained ten more is placed over ten cities; the one whose mina gained five more is placed over five cities), but will do so with a reward that abundantly exceeds our results to an unimaginable degree (i.e., by the standards of the ancient world even more so than today, rulership over a city would be vastly more valuable than a single mina). For our purposes here, we see in both versions that the servants who accomplished the most are judged and rewarded first, and that the judgment continues in a descending order until it reaches the servant who accomplished nothing.

4) Millennial Offices: Finally, since we know that believers will share Christ's millennial rule (Matt.25:19-23; Lk.22:28; 1Cor.6:3; Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6; and see below), it stands to reason that those who will hold the highest positions will be rewarded first (as it is customary in the organizing of any hierarchy to begin with the top positions). It is not only logical but consistent with scriptural notions of appropriate honor for the likes of David and the two who will sit at Christ's right and left hands (presumably Moses and Elijah) and the twelve apostles to have the honor of first place in evaluation so as to take their places first in the millennial command structure which our Lord will establish.

c. The Procedure and Criteria of the Judgment: With the incarnation, all judgment was placed into our Lord Jesus Christ's hands (Jn.5:22; cf. Acts 10:42). Jesus is our Judge here and now and will be the One who judges us on that day; and since that is so, any idea we may have of taking judgment into our own hands in criticizing our brothers and sisters in Christ is horribly presumptuous (as the passage immediately below states). We are Jesus' Bride, His Church, and He is the One who will personally evaluate "how we did" in living this life for Him (or not).

(10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also belittle your brother? For we will all stand before God's tribunal (11) as it is written: "As I live", says the Lord, "every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will praise God" (Is.45:23). (12) So then each of us will give an account concerning himself to God.
Romans 14:10-12

For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless.
2nd Corinthians 5:10

It is clear from these and other passages that this will be a thorough and comprehensive judgment: our actions will be individually evaluated, with the eternal rewards we receive depending upon "what we accomplished" with our time, resources and opportunities here in life. Our Lord's judgment of us will thus be quite detailed, covering all of our positive actions, and all of our negative ones as well (1Cor.3:12-15), including even our every word (Matt.12:36-37; cf. Heb.13:17; Jude 1:15). In the context of the passage immediately above, 2nd Corinthians 5:10, we see Paul using this future judgment to motivate our behavior here and now: because this future judgment is the crowning event of our lives on earth (though it takes place after resurrection), we should "make it our [primary] ambition to please Him (i.e., our Lord Jesus Christ)" (v.9). For if we were to find ourselves standing before Him this instant, we would certainly realize more fully and deeply than we can presently imagine that all of the troubles and pleasures of this life had meaning only in so far as we overcame them in service to Him (or failed to do so). In fact, the word Paul uses to express what should be our goal or desire or mind-set is the Greek *philotimeomai* (φιλοτιμέομαι), meaning etymologically and essentially "to love honor/office/promotion". This verb is used throughout Greek literature to express the inner drive of highly motivated individuals to compete for the top honors in society, be it in politics, athletics or any other field. Individuals characterized in this way are "ambitious", that is, possessed of a burning desire for success in their respective fields of endeavor. As Paul says elsewhere (1Cor.9:25), non-Christians pour their all into their work, professions or pursuits "to win a perishable prize, but we do it to win an imperishable one". When we stand before Jesus, we can be sure that it will not only be our words and actions that are evaluated, but also the intentions and motivations of our hearts. If we have loved the world and the things of the world more than our rewards and the One they glorify forever, that will be made abundantly clear.

The Lord is the One who judges me. Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.
1st Corinthians 4:4-5

Not only should we not judge others, but we should even refrain from judging ourselves "before the time". The reason for this seems obvious: if we are too harsh on ourselves for lack of visible progress in our ministries, we may be unnecessarily discouraging ourselves on account of trivial things that are truly not our fault, with the unfortunate result of possibly backing off on our

efforts (but there have always been ministries which, while it is the Lord's desire for them to be done, yet do not yield the same obvious results as what those of others may seem to be yielding); on the other hand if we are too pleased with ourselves and our work, whether we are justified in our assessment or are grievously miscalculating, in either case we are similarly more likely to back off on our efforts as if we have already "arrived" (although if our Lord has given us a particularly fertile field it is certain that He expects more from us in terms of visible production rather than less). It is our Lord Jesus who has assigned to us the particular field we are to till, be it exceptionally fertile or barren (1Cor.12:5), and it is God the Father who provides the results (1Cor.12:6; cf. Mk.4:26-28). Therefore, we will avoid both potential pitfalls by keeping our eyes on the finish line ahead and resisting the temptation to look backward (cf. Lk.9:62; 17:32).

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:13-14

We know the course; we know the rules; we know how to run. Now is not the time to survey the course, or look back at how far we have come. Now is the time to run. If we keep on running in the way our Lord would have us do, our reward will take care of itself.

In terms of procedure, as suggested above, our evaluation will take the form of a dialogue between us and the Lord. In the parables of the talents and the minas, the master in each case summons his servants to discover how they have done, and in each case his servants give him a report (cf. Matt.25:19; Lk.19:15); likewise in each case, whether the report is favorable or unfavorable, the master pronounces reward (or punishment) based upon the results. Two obvious differences between the general approach indicated by these parables and the specific procedure of the Judgment Seat of Christ are, first, that our Lord knows very well ahead of time exactly what we have done (so that there is in no sense any "finding out" on His part during these proceedings). Secondly, the last individual in each case, the one who fails utterly to carry out his master's orders and is thrown into hell as a result, represents faithless unbelievers who squander their lives entirely. This group will not be evaluated until the last judgment. Believers whose production is at a bare minimum level will be rewarded last and least (discussed above), and while believers whose efforts have been in truth mostly worthless will suffer loss of anticipated reward (1Cor.3:10-15, discussed below), no one at this judgment will lose their eternal life or full share in Jesus Christ.

The dialogue format of this judgment can also be deduced from our Lord's synoptic description of the parallel evaluation of millennial believers (i.e., the "sheep" of Matthew 25:1 ff.), and the final "last" judgment of all unbelievers which follows it immediately (i.e., the "goats" of Matthew 25:1 ff.). In each case, our Lord begins with an overall evaluation of the person's life based upon their deeds which in turn reflect their status, saved or lost respectively; and in each case the person being evaluated responds with a question which is then answered by our Lord. As this treatment is meant to be seen as synoptic in nature (e.g., the list of deeds or failures is clearly not

meant to be seen as identical in every case), all we can glean from this description about the procedure of our own judgment is that there will be a verbal give and take whereby we are given to see the quality of our life's work (or lack thereof). This same essential picture is found at 1st Peter 4:5 where we are told that unbelievers, who we know are judged "according to their deeds" (Rev.20:12-13), will "render an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead", and also at Hebrews 13:17 where pastor-teachers are said to work hard (lit., depriving themselves of sleep) "as those who will have to render an account" – those sitting under their ministries should obey them and yield to them "so that they may do this (i.e., render an account to the Lord) with joy and not with groaning – for that would be unprofitable for you". In short, what the Bible has to say about the actual procedure of our life-evaluation before Christ's tribunal is precisely the sort of thing we ought to expect when a Judge with full powers and complete evidence evaluates an individual's record for the purpose of instruction and reward, namely, a dialogue wherein the facts of the case are revealed through a process of questioning and answering, with a final pronouncement from the Judge which, in this case, will determine our eternal rewards for all eternity. The conclusion Paul draws from this sobering thought, appended directly to his discussion of the judgment seat of Christ in 2nd Corinthians 5:10 (quoted above), is telling:

Since then we understand what it means to fear the Lord (i.e., in anticipation of this judgment), we are [trying to] persuade everyone (i.e., to run a good race). Our motives in this are clear to God, and I hope that they are also clear in your hearts (lit., "consciences") as well.

2nd Corinthians 5:11

We should all certainly take the above in deadly earnest, and set to ordering our lives according to this future judgment. After all, if we are striving for success in whatever it is we must do in this life (work and profession), whatever we have obligated ourselves to do in this life (marriage and family), and even in whatever it is we choose to do in this life (hobbies and avocations), how it is that we are not striving with at least equal vigor in what will count not only for the short span of these lives of ours on earth but also for all eternity? The prospect of being publically judged by our Lord Himself in the presence of all our brothers and sisters in the Church should certainly fill us with reverent fear – but not with irrational terror. God is not asking us to do anything we cannot do, no matter how hard living our lives for Jesus may sometimes appear. We run this race one step at a time, one day at a time, one thought, one word, one deed at a time – and they all count. No matter how late in the race it may be, we still have time – "as long as it is still called 'today'" (Heb.3:13) – to make all our remaining opportunities count for Jesus Christ. He will provide us with the means to will and to do (Phil.2:13), if only we are willing to do. We should also take comfort in the fact that God is totally fair, cannot be otherwise, and that therefore our Lord Jesus' judgment of us will be absolutely impartial, totally objective, and based upon absolutely perfect and complete information. Jesus will take every pertinent factor into consideration in a perfect way, and render a judgment which is absolutely just in every respect.

(5) But according to the hardness and unrepentant nature of your heart, you are storing up for yourself wrath in the Day of wrath and revelation of God's just judgment, (6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works. (7) To those who by persevering in

the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life. (8) But to those who are disobedient to the truth out of selfish ambition, obeying unrighteousness instead, [there will be only] wrath and anger. (9) Tribulation and vexation will be the lot of every single individual who does what is wrong, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (10) Glory and honor and peace will be the blessing upon everyone who does what is right, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (11) For there is no favoritism with God. (12) As many as sin without the Law will perish without the Law, and as many as sin under the Law will be judged through the Law. (13) For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but it is those who follow (lit., "do") the Law who will be justified. (14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do by nature the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of the Law has been written in their hearts when their conscience testifies against them, and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them. (16) This [examination will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:5-16

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions. (13) For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12-13

So if you are calling upon a Father who renders judgment upon each man's work in a [completely] impartial way [and you most certainly are], then [you should make it your practice to] live the remaining time of your [temporary] sojourn here [on earth] in [Godly] fear.

1st Peter 1:17

In regard to the standard of judgment which will be employed, it is evident from the passages treated above and indeed from a multiplicity of passages that all will be judged "according to works" (e.g., Matt.16:27; 2Cor.5:10; 1Pet.1:17; Rev.2:23; 20:12-13; 22:12). However, it needs to be understood that "works" (from the Greek *ergon*, ἔργον, cf. English "erg", "ergonomics", "energy"), is a generic term employed in the Bible to encompass the totality of our actions in this life and, by extrapolation, our lack thereof (something which one would hope is obvious from the equally large number of passages where the judgment is described in slightly different terms but with the same overall meaning: e.g., Rom.2:7; 14:10-12; 1Cor.4:4-5; 2Cor.5:10; 2Pet.1:9-11). Suffice it to say that we will be judged not by what we were tempted to do and didn't, nor by what we intended to do and didn't, but by whatever we actually did do in thought, word and deed throughout the entire course of our earthly lives. This will clearly include our motivations and reasons for doing (or not doing) whatever we did (or did not) do, as well as all the attendant

circumstances pertaining thereto. Simply put, the Lord will know (and in fact already knows) more about what we did and why we did it than we could ever possibly dream to know ourselves in this life, even if we made such an investigation our prime concern (and what a hopeless, pointless task that would be).

The assumption on the part of many Christians that "works" is a phrase restricted to deeds of charity (or concrete, physical "acts" at all) is thus entirely incorrect. James tells us that "faith without works is dead", but the examples he uses to describe what the "work of faith" looks like are not charitable actions at all, namely, Abraham's trusting of God in the command to sacrifice Isaac, and Rahab's concealing of the spies because she feared God more than the threat to her life from her own townsmen (Jas.2:21-25). In a similar way, in chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews where the apostle Paul gives us a veritable catalog of the "great deeds" of believers of the past, there is not a single instance of what we today would consider "charity". What all of the "deeds" in this chapter have in common are a remarkable faith-response to God, trusting Him in the most difficult of circumstances and doing what He has called us to do regardless of the consequences. It is out of such faith that the "deeds" with which God is truly pleased must come, in the hope that He will reward steadfastness and steadfast service to Him and His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6

Ultimately, it is the sum of our faith-choices for God, generating our hope, and manifesting a genuine love for God and His children (which is never without its own tangible fruits), which forms the basis for our reward. These are our true deeds, regardless of the misconceptions of the world or the sad manner in which some organizations may wish to define and limit them.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
Matthew 5:11-12 NIV

(5) And to this end, along with your faith zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, (6) and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, (7) and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. (8) For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) But whoever does not possess these [virtues] is nearsighted or even blind, having forgotten the cleansing of his previous sins. (10) Strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your calling and election secure. By devoting yourselves to these things [virtue, growth and Christian production] you shall never be tripped up along your way. (11) For it is by such means that your path into

the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.

2nd Peter 1:5-11

d. The Rewards: On the issue of rewards, the first thing that we should understand is that "reward motivation" in the Christian life is not only legitimate but absolutely essential for a proper and successful running of the Christian race. We run to win, not to lose.

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and [must believe] that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6b

Reward motivation is a quintessential means of transforming our thinking, leading us to modify our outlook on the world, to change our behavior where appropriate, and to adjust our priorities to the eternal over the temporal.

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Great believers in every generation of the Church from Adam and Eve to the end of the Tribulation have always had (and always will have) the desire to please God and to be rewarded by Him (albeit eternally rather than temporally) as the foundation of their thinking, motivating their entire approach to the Christian life, spurring them on in the race.

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26

To be rewarded at the highest level requires in turn the highest sort of diligent attention to the truth and to the application of it to one's life. Further, such a manner of life is only possible if one really believes that what is done for Jesus Christ in this life is of infinitely greater importance than anything else. Thus it is that there is nothing more important than focusing on the treasures which await those who have performed well in the Christian life (instead of focusing on the transitory treasures of this world which are in truth merely dust) – at least for all those who wish to be richly rewarded in a manner which will be pleasing to our Lord. And indeed there is no better proof of this truth and no better example of the proper way to think about this issue than the example of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

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

Hebrews 12:1-2

As the most successful warrior on this battlefield, our Lord has won "the Name above every Name" (Phil.2:9), and has been seated at the right hand of the glory of God to await the day of His installment as King of King and Lord of Lords (Ps.110:1). But as the verses above demonstrate, as part of His reward He has also won for Himself a Bride, His Church. We are "the joy" or special reward with which our Lord motivated Himself to run that most difficult of all races here in the devil's world.

(20) Which [divine power] He (i.e., the Father) exercised in Christ by having raised Him from the dead and having seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places] (21) far above every other rulership or authority or power or lordship and [far above] every other name which may be mentioned not only in this age but also in the age to come. (22) And He (i.e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways.

Ephesians 1:20-23

All things have fallen to Him who has won the victory of victories, and we believers have in turn come "into the joy of our Master" (Matt.25:21-23). Just as our Lord Jesus encouraged Himself with "the joy that was before Him", so we too should never let slip from our mind's eye the joy of being rewarded and commended by Him for a job well done on this earth, for that is precisely what He desires us to do.

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for (or which could be taken from Him). (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

As Jesus' sacrifice was the most sublime of all time, not only in humbling Himself and becoming a human being, not only in enduring the most difficult life in human history, not only in

ministering the perfect ministry whose end was condemnation and crucifixion, but also and most importantly in paying the penalty for all sin by being put to death for them in the darkness on the cross (His spiritual death), so He has reaped the greatest imaginable reward, and our own rewards on that day before His judgment seat will be apportioned out to us from what He has won. Thus, He is our example of the perfect approach, and a large part of that approach, not only legitimate but necessary for success, is a sharp focus on the eternal rewards which will accrue to those who walk like Jesus walked. For everything we do in this life that is truly for Jesus Christ will not fail to have its reward, given to us by the Lord Himself and enduring for all eternity.

"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."
2nd Chronicles 15:7 NIV

This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the Lord.
Jeremiah 31:16a NIV

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."
Matthew 10:40-42 NIV (cf. Mk.9:41)

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."
Luke 14:12-14 NIV

(5) You who are slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling with simplicity of heart just as you [should obey] the Lord, (6) not doing so with "eye-service" (i.e., only when they are watching you) as those who seek to please men, but as servants of Christ, accomplishing God's will from your heart, (7) serving with good will as if to the Lord and not to men, (8) for you know that whatever good thing each one of you accomplishes, he will receive [a reward] for this from the Lord, whether he is slave or free.
Ephesians 6:5-8

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.
Colossians 3:23-24 NIV

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

Every true believer will have at least something to show for their time on this earth. For as James assures us, "faith without works is dead"; therefore every true believer with a genuinely living faith will not fail to have accomplished at least some small acts that stem from that faith while here on earth. As mentioned above, we should resist seeing such acts as being restricted to what is currently thought of as "charity" (notice that in the list of great believers and their accomplishments in Hebrews chapter eleven there is not a single thing commended there that could be described as "charity"). Acting out of faith can take many forms, for as Jesus Himself assures us the fundamental "work" of all Christians is "to believe in the One He has sent" (Jn.6:29). Regardless of the level of production in this life and corresponding level of reward in the next, all true believers in Jesus Christ who exit this world with their faith still intact will receive an eternal inheritance "which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed" (1Pet.1:4), a perfect resurrection body, a place in the New Jerusalem, and eternal access to the Son of God Himself, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There will be many other extraordinary benefits in which the entire Body of Christ will share, some to which scripture alludes (as in our access to the tree of life: Rev.2:7; 22:2), and others which we cannot even at present imagine:

But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him".

1st Corinthians 2:9

(6) "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:6-7 NIV

This common set of eternal blessings which will fall to the lot of every believer for all eternity is analogous to the inheritance that all Israelites received upon their entrance into the Land of Promise – or more precisely put, the temporal inheritance is actually an analogy which teaches the enduring eternal one (just as the earthly temple is merely a representation of the true heavenly realities, etc.). Indeed, we find the New Testament replete with this inheritance analogy, indicating just how important it is for us to concentrate our focus on the eternal possessions we shall enjoy rather than on the ephemeral here and now. As members of the Body of Christ, we are God's heirs and we are Christ's heirs, possessors of an inheritance of eternal life in God's eternal Kingdom whose richness exceeds anything we can presently even imagine. Regardless of how little or how much we have done for Him in this life, all believers will receive a full share in Jesus and the kingdom:

(16) For the Spirit Himself testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. (17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.
Romans 8:16-17

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.
Galatians 3:29 NIV

So that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope.
Titus 3:7

Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, the heirs of His promise [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath (Gen.22:16-17).
Hebrews 6:17

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?
James 2:5 NIV

(8b) in all wisdom and understanding [God] has made known to us the mystery He has willed (according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ]) for administering this [present] fulfillment of the epochs: namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth – (11) In whom we also have an inheritance, having been ordained according to the design of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will, (12) that we who have previously placed our hope in Christ might serve the purpose of generating praise for His glory (in life). (13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is a pledge of our inheritance for redeeming its preservation (i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), to the praise of His glory.
Ephesians 1:8b-14

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.
Ephesians 1:18 NIV

. . . . giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.
Colossians 1:12 NIV

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-24 NIV

And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called might receive their eternal inheritance on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant.
Hebrews 9:15

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time.
1st Peter 1:3-5

One important aspect of our coming reward which needs to be considered here is that a good deal of the authority, the gifts and the other tangible rewards we shall receive from the Lord are said to come to us as a result of our sharing in the plunder or "spoils" that He won by His victory on the cross (cf. Ps.68:12; 110:1-7; Mic.4:13).

Arise, O God! Judge the earth! For You will assign [us] an inheritance among all the nations.
Psalm 82:8

Then (i.e., at the 2nd Advent) an abundance of spoils will be divided and even the lame will carry off plunder.
Isaiah 33:23b NIV

Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He laid bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors.
Isaiah 53:12

(21) "When a strong man (i.e., Satan by analogy; cf. vv.14-20), fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. (22) But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.
Luke 11:21-22 NIV (cf. Matt.12:25-29)

(7) And to each of us this grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) For it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive (i.e., He brought pre-cross believers to heaven). He gave gifts to men." (9) Now [as to] this [phrase] "He ascended", what can it mean except that He had also [previously] descended into the lower reaches of the earth (i.e., Hades, from whence He brought the pre-cross believers to heaven)? (10) The One who descended is also the One who ascended above

all the heavens (i.e., into the third heaven, the place of the Father's residence), in order to fulfill all things (i.e., complete the victory won at the cross; cf. Ps.110:1).
Ephesians 4:7-10 (cf. Ps.68:18)

In this last passage, we note that the spiritual gifts that are the unique province of Church Age believers are essentially our "weapons" whereby we may earn the battlefield decorations and earn a share of these "spoils" which will be ours for all eternity. Since the devil and his angels are described as the ones defeated at the cross and made subject to plunder, there is a sense in which all that they now have (i.e., their positions, powers, and territories on earth and within the universe) will fall to our lot on that great future day of distribution.

Reaping significant rewards is not, however, automatic. Establishing the sort of track-record in the Christian life commensurate with substantial honors awarded before the judgment seat of Christ requires diligence, consistency, persistence, and perseverance.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.
Luke 12:35-38 NIV

(6) Let him who receives instruction in the Word share in all good things with him who gives instruction. (7) Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (8) For the one whose sowing is directed to his own [sinful] flesh from that [sinful] flesh will reap corruption, but the one whose sowing is directed toward the Spirit, from that [same] Spirit will reap eternal life. (9) And [so] let us not grow weary of doing the good [work of God], for at [the appointed] time we will reap [our reward], provided that we do not give up. (10) So then as long as we have this opportunity, let us keep accomplishing the good [work of God] towards all [people], and especially to the family of faith.
Galatians 6:6-10

Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.
2nd Timothy 2:5-7 NASB

(7) So be patient, brothers, until the coming (*parousia*, 2nd Advent) of the Lord. Consider: the [good] farmer waits for the earth [to yield its] precious crop, waiting patiently for it until it receives the late and early rains [which make it grow]. (8) So then, [see to it that] you too exercise [such] patience, [and] steady your hearts, because the

return of the Lord has drawn near. (9) Brothers, do not grumble against one another so that you may not be judged [for it]. Behold, the Judge [Jesus Christ] is standing in front of the door (i.e., His return and our final judgment are imminent)!

James 5:7-9

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:35-39

Moreover, this consistent and dedicated work for which we shall be richly rewarded is nothing more, of course, than precisely what we are supposed to be doing in any case.

(7) "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? (8) Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? (9) Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? (10) So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "

Luke 17:10 NIV

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them).

Ephesians 2:10

The Land of Promise requires a significant journey. To receive our promised inheritance therein (and especially to receive it bountifully) we have to follow the Lord wherever He leads us (cf. Rev.14:4). Despite shortages of water or food, God has and will always provide (Ps.23:1; Lk.22:35). Despite opposition from enemies numerous and strong, He always has and always will give us the victory (Ps.66:12). The fight we fight, the journey we travel, the struggle with which we have to contend may not be obvious to the world (the purpose behind it and its ultimate reward certainly are not). But the way in which we negotiate the distance between "point A" (wherever we now find ourselves), and "point B" (the moment when our Lord Jesus calls us back to Himself) makes all the difference. Only by continuing to walk, fight, and struggle in a faithful way will we reap the maximum rewards to which we have been called.

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the Exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in

both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come to serve as examples for us, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:1-13

As Paul's assessment of the poor performance of the Exodus generation above indicates, the dangers and pitfalls along the way to Zion are numerous, and the number of believers who overcome them to win significant rewards is small in consequence. Indeed, through its use of athletic and military metaphors wherein significant rewards accrue only to the few, scripture seems to confirm what observation suggests, namely, that those who will receive the highest levels of reward will be relatively few in number, and thus in turn that while all believers will enjoy salvation, eternal life, an equal share of Jesus Christ, a resurrection body, and a place forever in the New Jerusalem, many if not most will have little to show for their life here on earth in terms of additional rewards (cf. Rom.2:7; 1Cor.9:24-27; Gal.6:7-9; Phil.3:11-16; 1Pet.1:9). For in the case of many believers, it will be seen that their time here on earth was largely wasted (from the divine point of view). Instead of living for Jesus, they were distracted by fear and greed, and worked for themselves instead. In the parable of the Sower, these are those who fell among the weeds and the thorns:

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that he becomes unproductive."

Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow up [over them like thorns and weeds] and stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that they become unproductive."

Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who are stunted by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they do not bear a full crop to harvest."

Luke 8:14

Finally in this regard, there is a large difference between what God judges to be genuine, legitimate production and what mankind may perceive. As the parable of the Sower makes clear, genuine production is always a result of genuine spiritual growth which precedes it. It is only the "good ground" which receives the Word and accepts it without compromise, responding to it in an acceptable and godly way, which produces a significant crop (Matt.13:23; Mk.4:20; Lk.8:15). It is a very common thing in the Christian life – and has been very common throughout human history – for people to attempt to "work" their way into heaven or into God's good graces. Even a cup of cold water offered in the Lord's Name will not fail to receive its due reward (Matt.10:42; Mk.9:41), but the gift of millions of dollars done out of self-righteousness and self-aggrandizement is of absolutely no avail in entreating God's favor. When unbelievers employ such methods, they are only engaging in self-deception. When believers do the same, attempting to substitute self-works for spiritual growth and true, godly production, their false efforts will be erased at the Judgment Seat of Christ. They themselves will be saved (just as the seeds that fall among the thorns indicate genuine believers who are ineffective for Jesus Christ), but only "though as through fire".

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may instead receive a full reward. No one who goes wandering off, that is, anyone who does not keep to the teachings about Jesus Christ, has [even] a share in God.

2nd John 1:8-9

I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have so that no one takes your crown [away].

Revelation 3:11

Level 1 Rewards: All those who truly love Jesus Christ should take to heart the wonderful news that all of their legitimate efforts for Him here on earth will be richly rewarded by Him at His judgment seat. Indeed, above this basic level of salvation without significant production (representing those who were distracted by the "thorns" of life), scripture details three higher levels of reward (represented in the crowns of righteousness, life, and glory respectively, and in the 30, 60, and 100-fold harvest of the parable of the Sower). Before moving on to these higher level rewards, a few additional, general points need to be made here.

1) All believers will receive an inheritance for placing their faith in Jesus Christ and maintaining that faith to the end of their lives. This inheritance will be wonderful beyond expression and beyond our present ability even to understand it. It is doubtlessly true that a moment of eternal bliss experienced by the very last person in line when our Lord hands out eternal rewards will exceed to infinity the longest and most blessed human life here in time on earth. All believers will have eternal life, a full share in Jesus Christ and eternal access to Him and our heavenly Father, a resurrection body which will never age or know pain or grief, access to and a place in the New Jerusalem, and many other exquisitely sublime blessings which at present we cannot even dimly comprehend. That said, it is still the case that even "more" is possible, that we are called to have "more", that this "more" is earned through spiritual growth, progress and ministry here in time, and that this "more" will glorify our Lord Jesus forever, even as our efforts to win it please Him now and will be officially acknowledged by Him during this judgment.

2) There is an important distinction to be drawn between the type of believer being considered here who has very little to show for a life of faith (the thorny-ground type), and on the other hand an unbeliever who never had faith at all (the packed-ground type) or one who lost faith (the rocky-ground type). Faith without any works whatsoever is dead (Jas.2:20), so that all true believers will have some record of legitimate production, however small (Ex.34:20b). This category is thus not one of "dead faith" but rather of a faith on "life-support", namely, a marginal believer just barely hanging onto their faith in Jesus, distracted by the worries of the world and its pleasures, never having committed to spiritual growth, and therefore never truly having been tested nor having accomplished the ministry intended for him/her. This thorny-ground category of believer does exist. In fact all scriptural and experiential indications suggest that it is by far the category containing the largest number of Christians. It is nonetheless the case that, in addition to being the most scantily rewarded category, it is also by far the most *dangerous* category. For that reason, as we can clearly see from the parable of the Sower (the thorny ground) and from the passages quoted above (i.e., 1Cor.3:10-15; 2Jn.1:8-9; Rev.3:11; etc.), biblical descriptions where this category is evident make very little distinction between the almost completely unproductive Christian and the unbeliever. That is because far from taking comfort in the biblical truth that even without significant production in life, eternity will be immeasurably wonderful, such Christians should rather take fright – because their marginal conduct makes them incredibly vulnerable to falling away from Jesus Christ altogether (not to mention that they are disregarding entirely the desires of their Lord and failing to engage in any meaningful way with the mission to which they have been called and for which they were given specific gifts at salvation and left here in life to utilize).

(45) "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? (46) It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. (47) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (48) But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' (49) and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. (50) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. (51) He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 24:45-51 NIV

As with the parables of the talents (Matt.25:14-30) and the minas (Lk.19:11-27), we see the main distinction emphasized in scripture to be one of the productive believer versus the unbeliever. In the passage above, largely unproductive believers are not even mentioned, while in the parables of the talents and minas, they are represented by the theoretical option with which the unbeliever is reproached: putting out the "talent" on interest to let someone else do the work (but gaining at least some return, albeit marginal). All evidence suggests very clearly that a marginal Christian life wherein little is accomplished for Jesus Christ falls just short of being a wasted life – though it is inestimably superior to dying in unbelief.

3) Finally (in terms of preliminary matters), there is also an important distinction to be drawn between what the world may see and perceive as "good works" on the one hand, and genuine production for Jesus Christ which receives a reward on the other. We certainly know that this is the case from the very vivid description Paul gives us in 1st Corinthians chapter three where we are told that "wood, hay and stubble" will be burned up, and that the believer under evaluation will "suffer loss" of reward for things he/she no doubt assumed would be richly rewarded. Only doing what Jesus really wants us to do and doing it His way results in reward. Doing what we want to do or what the world praises us for doing or what we wrongly assume is pleasing to God will not be rewarded. From a positive point of view, the three higher levels of rewards treated immediately below lay out in general terms what God's will truly is in this regard: spiritual growth (level 2); spiritual progress (level 3); and ministry corresponding to spiritual gifts (level 4). These three higher levels are, moreover, sequential, so that, minor overlaps aside, a truly meaningful fulfillment of the ministry God has planned for a person and gifted him or her for is impossible without prior spiritual maturity and prior testing successfully passed (which are in turn essential components of truly effective ministry). From a negative point of view, there are also important scriptural caveats which make clear the distinction between legitimate production which will be rewarded and illegitimate production which will be burned. Man looks at the surface of things, but God looks on the heart (1Sam.16:7). A cup of cold water given "because [the recipient] is My disciple" (Matt.10:42; Mk.9:41) receives a reward, but not, we conclude, a cup of cold water given at random and from improper motives. God can certainly tell the difference between proper and improper motivation, even if it is difficult for us to make such distinctions.

(25) I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. (26) Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. (27) And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

Luke 4:25-27 TNIV

Correct motivations always flow from humility, from obedience to God and to His truth, and from a desire for His glory, not our own (just as our Lord sought the glory of the One who sent Him).

"The one who speaks for himself seeks his own glory. But the One who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this is the One who is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."
John 7:18

The Pharisees did all that they did not out of a desire to glorify God but instead to glorify themselves.

"All their works they do [only] to be observed by men [in so doing]".
Matthew 23:5a

Anything done with such motives brings no reward from God, even if it would have done so when accomplished with correct motivation.

"(1) Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, **to be honored by others**. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."
Matthew 6:1-2 TNIV

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners **to be seen by others**. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."
Matthew 6:5 TNIV

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces **to show others** they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."
Matthew 6:16 TNIV

While we tend to think of monetary gifts given to charity as the prime means and measure of "good works", in fact, not only are gifts given for the wrong reasons worthless to God (a prime means and measure of the works to be burnt up before Christ's judgment seat), but we are also very wrong to imagine that the amount counts with God. For He has need of nothing (cf.,

Ps.50:8-15; Acts 17:25), and evaluates our giving on the basis of our true motives and our true means.

(41) Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. (42) But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. (43) Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. (44) They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."
Mark 12:41-44 TNIV

As with virtually everything else in the Christian life, legitimate production is a function of spiritual growth, and depends upon a proper attitude of the heart exercised in faith, for it is for faith that we have been called, and it is faith in Jesus Christ that is the fundamental "work" upon which all others depend.

Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He has sent."
John 6:29

Higher Rewards: Certain basic rewards will be the province of all believers, no matter how minimal their efforts for Jesus Christ during this life. All will take part in the resurrection, with the perfect, eternal, unimaginably wonderful resurrection body furnishing the essential "platform" for the enjoyment of a blissful eternity wherein there will be no pain or trouble or anything negative at all, only an inexpressibly delightful existence in which we shall revel for all eternity (e.g., Rev.7:17; 21:4; 21:9-27; 22:1-5). Merely being resurrected into eternal life will entail blessings and benefits beyond our present ken, the entire fulfillment of that for which we were made, and the hope for which we presently yearn.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him. (18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved.
Romans 8:17-24a

All these wonders await the believer in Jesus Christ, regardless of spiritual effort in this life, and all who come through this life with their faith intact will experience the divine seal of approval at this judgment as our Lord Jesus acknowledges our name "in the presence of My Father and in the presence of the holy angels" (Rev.3:5). That name, our name, will be from that day forth a "new name" (Rev.2:17; 3:12; Is.65:15; cf. Is.62:2b), and our re-naming at the time of this judgment will be a very significant event. For our new name will reflect the spiritual course of our lives here on earth. Just as all God-given names in the Bible are incredibly important and are always expressive of essential spiritual realities, so we may be sure that our eternal name will encapsulate the effort we put forward for Jesus Christ and His Church, whether prodigious or pathetic. This fact alone ought to fill us with a single-minded determination to do all we can in our Lord's service to ensure that this new name will be a cause of rejoicing rather than regret, a name which glorifies Him forevermore through the accomplishment of the works prepared ahead of time for us to do by grace in the power of His Holy Spirit (Eph.2:8-10). For not everyone who stands before His judgment seat will receive a "Well done!" from Jesus Christ on that great day along with the additional rewards which accompany our Lord's positive endorsement, but only those who attain through their legitimate efforts to the higher levels of reward which exceed the basic blessing that will be the province of all believers.

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

Matthew 25:21 NIV

"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'"

Luke 19:17 NIV

The most common biblical symbol of exceptional service for Jesus Christ meriting these higher level rewards is the (athletic) crown or *stephanos* (Greek στέφανος; in contrast to the regal crown, the *diadema*, διάδημα). The *stephanos* "crown" has a long and colorful history in the Greek and Roman world, but there is a common thread which connects its multifarious uses. Whether awarded for military, athletic, artistic or political exploits (and all such instances are widely attested), the *stephanos* crown is invariably given as a reward for meritorious service or exceptional conduct of some sort. As such, it is often closely connected in scripture with our hope for rewards which extend beyond the resurrection body:

So then my beloved brothers whom I deeply desire, my joy and my crown [of victory], stand fast in the Lord, beloved, in this way [in which I have written you]!

Philippians 4:1

(19) For who is our hope and our joy, or the crown [of victory about which we] boast? Is it not in fact even [all of] you? [For you are our crown of victory] before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. (20) For you are our glory and our joy.

1st Thessalonians 2:19-20

I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away].
Revelation 3:11

The essential idea which lies behind the crown of competitive-like effort in striving for achievement is ubiquitous in scripture. However, we are competing against the "world, the flesh, and the devil", *not* against our fellow Christians. We believers strive to win, without that hoped for victory necessitating any measure of loss whatsoever by our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ (indeed, we win our highest honors *by helping* them do the same). We can all win top rewards (or fail to do so), for it would most certainly be within the power of God to provide the same level of ultimate blessing and reward to every single believer (and indeed to every single human being, were it the case that all chose to believe). The fact that the majority of believers will not attain to the highest honors in eternity has nothing to do with God's provision but everything to do with the choices made by each and every individual each and every day. For this reason every one of us ought to take pains to see the life we have been given for what it really is: not only a time of responsibility to do as God requires, but also as a time of immense opportunity to win the rewards our Lord Jesus very much desires us to win (Mk.4:21-25).

Once we have been saved, once we have committed ourselves and our lives to Jesus Christ, the purpose for our continued existence here on earth really has nothing at all to do with the priorities upon which the secular world focuses (essential as some of them may be), but instead has everything to do with carrying out our Lord's command to follow Him. It is through our determined and consistent efforts to seek our Lord Jesus (spiritual growth and application), and serve our Lord Jesus (spiritual progress and ministry) that rewards are won. And while as described above we will all be heir to blessings the least of which put the best of what the current world can offer in the shade to an infinite degree, nevertheless it is also true that there are indeed higher levels of reward which will fall to the lot of those who made following Jesus and serving Him their top priority – not merely biding their time here on earth with an occasional "nod to God", but by taking up on a daily basis the challenge of making the most of our opportunities in time to excel for our Lord – in hope of reward for so doing. Thus, whenever we see individuals rewarded and honored in this life for their exceptional earthly achievements, be they of a military, political, artistic, athletic or other professional nature, we should make it our practice to reflect that we are involved in a similar quest, with the signal exception that we are seeking rewards and honors which are eternal rather than evanescent and temporal (cf. Gal.2:2; 5:7; Phil.2:16).

Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the

gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus.

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

(3) Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4) No one on military campaign becomes involved in the affairs of normal life. [He avoids such things] that he may please the one who enlisted him. (5) Likewise if anyone engages in athletic competition, he does not win a crown if he fails to compete according to the rules.

2nd Timothy 2:3-5

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

Hebrews 12:1-2

(12) Therefore (going back to the race analogy of v.1), pick up those hands hanging slack at your side, put some strength back into your weak knees, (13) and make straight tracks for your feet, so that, [even though you fell down,] what you sprained might not be twisted completely out of joint, but might instead work its way back to health.

Hebrews 12:12-13

All of the passages above make absolutely clear that there is no time to lose in this race of ours, and no effort which should be spared in putting our all into this competition in which we are engaged. For not only is this our duty, but there are also great rewards in so doing.

The higher level rewards occur in three distinct categories, and these are represented by the three levels of production yielded by the "good ground" in the parable of the Sower described as "thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold" (Matt.13:8; Matt.13:23; Mk.4:8; 4:20; cf. Lk.8:8), by the "gold, silver, and precious stones" of 1st Corinthians 3:12 (albeit here in descending order), and by the victory crowns of "righteousness", "life", and "glory" which likewise correspond to this three tiered system. To use a modern analogy, everyone whose earthly production entitles them to enter one of these three higher-level classes of reward will be "officer grade", set apart from the

enlisted rank and file; but the three levels will be discernible even within this class (as between company, field, and general grade officers in our contemporary military establishment). To carry this analogy a step farther, it is also true that even within the highest class, there are a very small number of top-ranking individuals (such as the joint chiefs), and that will undoubtedly be the case in eternity as well. We can certainly expect the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, the twelve apostles, and the famous prophets and believers of the Bible to constitute a unique and special subset of the highest class.

If the desire to glorify Jesus through the awards we win, the desire to be praised by Him at this final judgment (and the reluctance to have our efforts shown to have come to naught instead) were not enough to motivate us to make our spiritual growth, production and ministry the absolute top priority of our lives, then the details of the rewards given by scripture, limited though they may be, should be sufficient to spur us on to greater efforts. The rewards that lie ahead for those who are committed to striving for them in a godly and acceptable way are absolutely disproportionate to any suffering or sacrifice or effort in this life. The parables of the talents considered above makes this abundantly clear: the servants who produce a (relatively) small amount of return proportionate to what they have been given are rewarded with the rulership of cities, that is, rewards exponentially more valuable than anything they had possessed or achieved in the king's absence. And if that is true in an earthly analogy, just imagine applying this same principle to eternal rewards in a new universe wherein there is no scarcity but only superabundance beyond our dreams!

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

We may expect all such achievement which rates the three higher levels of reward to be violently opposed by the evil one. Indeed, to a certain degree such opposition is an essential part of the effort-reward principle. The higher level rewards represent recognition for effective engagement in the struggle which is the true Christian way of life, and military decorations (another frequent use of the *stephanos*-crown in antiquity) are an equally valid parallel to be employed here. Whether we think of these three higher levels of reward as "bronze, silver, and gold medals" or as "silver stars, navy crosses, and congressional medals of honor", in both analogies a higher degree of difficulty and accomplishment is clearly associated with each, and in terms of eternal rewards, that opposition comes increasingly and more aggressively at every stage from the satanic forces arrayed against us. Just as our Lord was opposed, so those who bear His Name and determinedly advance in His service will likewise be opposed. Indeed, it is our Lord and the example of His life which sets the pattern and the principle: just as the most effective and self-sacrificing life and ministry produces the most for God even as it garners the most opposition from the devil, so also it is right that it reap the highest rewards as well:

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for (or which could be taken from Him). (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

(5) For it is not to angels that He subordinated the world to come (which is our present topic), (6) but someone testifies at some point saying, "What is Man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor. (7) You made him sovereign over all the works of your hands, (8) you put everything under his feet" (Ps.8:4-6). For in subordinating the world to Him, He left nothing that was not subordinate to Him. However, we do not now yet see the world in subordination to Him. (9) But we do now see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even He who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all.

Hebrews 2:5-9

In general terms, believers achieve the second level of rewards by means of spiritual growth and the attainment of spiritual maturity, persevering in the learning, believing and applying of divine truth to their lives, thus demonstrating consistent faith which transcends visible realities. The third level is achieved by passing serious and significant testing beyond the normal, everyday sort, thus demonstrating surpassing hope in eternal realities over temporal opposition. Believers attain the highest or fourth level of rewards through effective and consistent ministry in spite of all opposition to the point of fulfilling the ultimate purpose for their lives and spiritual gifts, thereby demonstrating a love for their Savior which exceeds all other personal concerns. Finally, although it is certainly true that in any life, there will be some overlap in these functions, nevertheless, these reward levels are very much progressive in nature: consummate ministry (level 4) is impossible without the prior preparation of serious testing and refining (level 3); and the ability to pass such tests is impossible without prior spiritual growth and the attainment of true spiritual maturity (level 2).

Level 2 Rewards: The Crown of Righteousness – The "Faith" Level of Spiritual Maturity

The crown of righteousness, represented by the 30-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "precious stones" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "faith level" of high reward. It is achieved by the attainment of spiritual maturity, the completion of spiritual growth that comes to the believer who consistently learns the Word of God, believes the truth he/she has learned, and

consistently applies God's truth to his/her life. What this means can be seen at least in part from the negative examples provided by the parable of the Sower and the judgment as described by Paul in 1st Corinthians 3. In the case of the latter, many believers, and notably many of those who have not attained higher-level rewards, must stand by and watch while everything done in life is burned up before Christ's judgment seat – the individual believer is saved, "yet as though by fire", and with "loss [of reward]" (1Cor.3:15). The fire which "assays" the work of each of us will not damage the genuine "rewards" we have achieved (even in the case of those who, while not attaining to a crown, will yet have some legitimate production to show for their time in this world), but the "wood, hay and stubble", representing the false works, missteps, and wasted opportunities of this life, will be obliterated by divine fire which tests and evaluates its true quality. Those whose effort in this life is found to be at least on the level of "precious stones" will thus of necessity have taken some advantage of the opportunities given, will have pursued sanctification to a sufficient degree to be rewarded in a significant way, having walked in faith consistently enough to produce spiritual growth and achieve spiritual maturity.

Scripture very clearly does draw a very visible line in the sand between those who are spiritually mature and those who are not (1Cor.2:6 [cf. 1Cor.3:1]; Col.1:28; Phil.3:15; Col.4:12; Heb.5:14; 6:1; Jas.1:4).

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

1st Corinthians 14:20 NASB

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 NASB

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

1st Corinthians 2:6 NIV

These specifics are fleshed out in more detail in the parable of the Sower where spiritual maturity is described by its results. The good ground, even that which yields only this first higher-reward level of "30-fold", will of necessity have avoided the pitfalls of the previously considered type of ground, the ground plagued by thorns (cf. Matt.13:1-9; Mk.4:1-9; Lk.8.4-8):

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that he becomes unproductive."

Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow

up [over them like thorns and weeds] and stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that they become unproductive."

Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who are stunted by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they do not bear a full crop to harvest."

Luke 8:14

Therefore in order to achieve spiritual maturity, worry, desire for wealth, and the placing of the pleasures of this life in front of God's will must all be overcome. This does not suggest that a flawless Christian walk must be perfected before achieving any true results for the Lord, but it does indicate that a believer who allows the worries of life, wealth or pleasure to dominate his or her outlook and modus vivendi will of necessity not be capable of producing a "level two" crop for Jesus Christ. For if we are too worried and concerned about the necessities of life, we have not yet built up our faith to the point necessary for trusting the Lord to take care of our problems as a mature believer should (cf. Matt.6:25-34; Lk.12:22-34). And if we are still looking first and foremost to the riches of this world for our satisfaction and security then we have yet to develop a mature Christian hope which sets its heart on the rewards of eternity instead (cf. Matt.6:19-23; Lk.12:33-34). And as long as we are primarily focused upon our own pleasures rather than seeking to please the Lord, it is very clear that we have not yet progressed in our Christian love to the point of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity, defined above as having grown to the point where in the basic Christian virtues we have effectively turned our backs on the world and towards the Lord instead is the entry point to the field of battle whereon the higher level rewards may be won.

Don't be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

As seen in this and in many other verses, sanctification, the turning away from sin and carnality generally is an important part of the spiritual growth equation: a good defense is essential for any military operation or competitive contest. But as in both of these secular analogies, defense cannot win on its own. Even more important in attaining spiritual maturity is our spiritual offense, and that process is all about God's truth: taking pains to seek it out, listen to it respectfully, take it into our hearts by believing it, and then applying it to our lives – actually acting and behaving out of faith, hope and love in a truly godly and correct way, based upon what is actually God's will as known from His truth (rather than merely upon immature assumptions).

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own

ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge (*epignosis*) of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

The "goal" mentioned in verse thirteen above is described as consisting of "belief" (i.e., "faith", *pistis*) and "full-knowledge" (i.e., *epignosis*). The linking of these two words here is key. The latter word is usually translated (insufficiently) as "knowledge"; but while there are a number of Greek words for mere knowledge, the prefix *epi-* on this critically important New Testament technical term shows direction: this is not just something understood – this is something understood and effectively applied. *Epignosis* is knowledge which is believed, and which has been completely internalized by faith (1Cor.13:12; 2Cor.1:13; Eph.4:13; Col.1:9-10; 2:2; 1Tim.2:4; 4:3; 2Tim.2:25; 3:7; Tit.1:1; 2Pet.2:20-21; cf. Rom.1:28; 1:32; 3:20; 10:2; Eph.1:17; Phil.1:9; Col.1:6; 3:10; Philem.1:6; 2Pet.1:2-3; 1:8). *Epignosis* transforms the person who has fully digested it, because this new "information" is not only part of the memory – it has also critically become part of the conscience, forming and reforming the inner-person to see and to act in a completely new and different way. *Epignosis* causes internal change which produces external results. Thus, it is only by believing truth that true spiritual growth takes place. True spiritual growth is an "inside-out" process. We can clean and scrub the outside of the cup ad nauseam (as the Pharisees did), but this will never produce growth. We can adopt the most rigorous code of personal behavior (as the Pharisees did), but this will not bring us closer to God, nor will it prepare us to live for Christ and to serve Christ. Committing facts to memory may help a person pass a secular, written test. Committing divine truth to the heart through faith is the only thing that contributes to a believer's passing of life's spiritual tests which alone harden and develop faith, focus and sharpen hope, and motivate and direct love in response to our Lord Jesus Christ in the cause of His Church.

After all, it is possible to be "ever learning" but "never come to an understanding of the truth", because when the "knowledge" or "understanding" (as it is in this passage, 2nd Timothy 3:7) is only *gnosis*, mere academic appreciation of some abstract principle, there is no inner change, no spiritual growth. Only the incorporation of divine truth into the heart by faith, only God's knowledge understood and **believed**, has the potential of transforming our inner-man and rendering us useful to Jesus Christ so as to produce for Him and His Church. Even attending a Bible study where the truth is taught genuinely, accurately and in great detail (a rarity to be sure in this Laodicean era of the Church) will not in and of itself produce spiritual growth: truth has to be understood and **believed** to become usable; truth has to be **believed** to become *epignosis*.

The passage quoted above, Ephesians 4:11-16, also shows very clearly the method by which the Body of Christ is to be built up: the teaching of the Word of God among the entire community of believers by gifted and prepared men for the purpose of spiritual maturity, a godly situation which in turn empowers the gifts of all, and in a blessed "feed-back loop" results in more growth and more effective service by all. This is the ideal process to which we have been called. Sadly, Christian fellowships today where the teaching of the truth exists beyond even a superficial level are few and far between. But even if such a fellowship is found, God's truth in Jesus Christ must be *believed* to be of any benefit. Only by this essential spiritual mechanism empowered *by* the Spirit is *epignosis* assimilated, God's truth made usable *for* the Spirit in the believer's heart, and spiritual growth thus attained.

(7) I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith. (8) In the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that [great] day [of judgment] – and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearance (i.e., who have exercised consistent love for Jesus Christ in anticipation of His return).

2nd Timothy 4:7-8

Righteousness comes by faith to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom.1:17; 3:22; 4:3-24; 9:30-31; 10:6; Gal.3:6; 5:5; Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7; Jas.2:23). However, it is not by entry-level faith that this crown is won but by "keeping" the faith and advancing through faith in the same manner in which we were saved (Phil.3:16; Col.2:6), defined above as "fighting the good fight" and "completing the course" which God has laid out for us that believers earn this award. We all have God's righteousness in Jesus Christ but only those who have achieved spiritual maturity actually live in consonance with the righteousness all believers positionally possess. The crown of righteousness is given for the witness of maturity, for achieving a measure of spiritual growth whereby a person actually "lives like a Christian", staying true to the faith and its principles ("I have kept the faith"), looking forward to the rewards of eternity more than earthly ones ("the crown . . . which the Lord will award me on that day"), and loving the Lord more than this world ("[having] loved His appearance"). Faith, hope and love, the three basic virtues of the Christian walk, become fully functional at the point of spiritual maturity (1Cor.13:13).

In 2nd Timothy 4:7-8 quoted above, Paul in characteristic humility does not lay claim to the next two levels of reward, the crown of life (given for endurance of testing) and the crown of glory (given for completion of ministry) – although if there has ever been a "triple crown winner" in the Church, it is most assuredly the apostle Paul. Instead, as an encouragement and an exhortation to "follow me", he holds out the promise of this first crown, the crown of righteousness, to "all" who have come to the point of a solid, mature faith, a focused and vibrant hope, and a genuine and constant love for Jesus Christ. Most if not all believers have some degree of faith beyond the basic "mustard seed" which brought them into union with Christ. Most if not all believers have some hope of the resurrection and the glories of eternity to the point that these truths form a part of their Christian motivation and encouragement. And most if not all believers love Jesus Christ to the point of doing or having done something for Him, His truth, His Church, in response to His sacrifice on our behalf by which we have been saved. Spiritual

maturity, however, is the point where all three of these representative virtues are fully formed, complete, and "ripe". Just as we can watch the development of any fruit or vegetable as it grows, from being just barely discernible, to nearly full-sized yet green, to ripe and ready for picking, so it is in the case of a believer's spiritual growth. There are various degrees of size, quality, color and overall "goodness" in any ripe fruit or vegetable – and indeed in the Christian life God has set no limit or end to the potential for goodness which may be attained – yet what all mature believers have in common is this "ripeness" or discernible, distinct maturity. Immature believers may occasionally (and inconsistently) manifest some or all of the characteristics identified with these basic Christian virtues, but just as there is a clear difference between a green tomato, whatever its size, and a ripe red one, so those who have not yet attained to spiritual maturity are obvious – certainly to God, usually to other believers, and also often to the world at large. In the same way, mature believers are also known "by their [ripe] fruit" to be honorable and faithful followers of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt.7:15-20; Jn.15:1-17). The mature witness of our lives in effectively and consistently living up to the standard of righteousness which we have in Jesus Christ through faith is the essential produce which yields this second level reward, the crown of righteousness.

Level 3 Rewards: The Crown of Life – The "Hope" Level of Spiritual Production

The crown of life, represented by the 60-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "silver" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "hope level" of higher reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the hope they have in eternal rewards above earthly considerations, mature believers who endure significant testing successfully by preferring eternal life to this life. Winners of the crown of life of necessity have first attained spiritual maturity. This mature faith and faithfulness is then tested in the crucible of life in order to refine it further and also to demonstrate its true quality to the world of men and angels both. Just as the righteous life consistent with that righteousness by faith we all receive through faith in Jesus Christ is a witness to the world, reflecting the grace and goodness of God, to an even greater degree the perseverance of mature believers under severe pressure and tribulation yields unmistakable proof that such individuals really do esteem God more than anything in this life, and that Jesus' opinion – and the eternal life and rewards He promises – are more real to them and more important to them than anything this world of dust and decay could possibly offer.

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. (7) But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 1:6-7

Many of the believers being addressed in the passage above had matured spiritually, and were at the time undergoing intensive pressure and testing. Specifically, the recipients of this letter were experiencing social ostracism along with legal and economic sanctions as the new "religion" of Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman world in the mid to late first century, and to incur increasing opposition as it did so. All truly good intentions on the part of Christians will be

opposed by the evil one, and the reality of satanic opposition at every step and at every stage of spiritual advance is a scriptural fact. However, it is also very much the case that mature believers come in for – and are allowed to come in for – attacks of greater intensity. As the book of Job makes abundantly clear, such exceptional testing and tribulation really is "a compliment", though it doubtless will seldom seem so at the time. Believers who have not yet attained the solidity and consistency of faith which is defined by spiritual maturity are incapable of bearing up under such concentrated satanic attack – and God never puts upon us more than we are capable of bearing.

You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:13

It may indeed often seem to us that the load put upon us is impossible to carry, but that is part of such tests. To grow beyond the basic level of maturity, we have to learn to trust God that though things seem unbearable to us, He is faithful and will see us through, and a large part of gaining and retaining that perspective is necessarily based upon the anticipation of future rewards (Heb.11:6).

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26

For believers who have grown up spiritually, this next level of resistance to our progress is essential if that mature faith is to be refined and made even more resilient. In Peter's analogy (1Pet.1:6-7, previously quoted), we see precisely what God intends. Just as steel is tempered in a crucible, so fiery testing is essential to strengthen faith. In order for our faith to be honed into a focused hope capable of truly and experientially seeing the reward ahead as more valuable than anything in this life and as worth whatever suffering and significant trouble must be endured on this earth, we must successfully pass through trials and tribulation beyond the common sort (cf. Mk.10:30; Acts 14:22; 2Thes.1:3-4; 1Pet.2:19-21; 4:12). Only in this way does one earn the crown of life.

Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10

The mark of a believer who has successfully negotiated the hurdle of this penultimate level of reward is a positive attitude in the midst of suffering. That is to say, the believer who has mastered this third level of spiritual advance not only endures severe testing with faith intact, but

can actually be loving, hopeful, and even joyous in the process – an utter impossibility for anyone who has yet to mature spiritually or who has yet to be refined to the point of actually esteeming eternity and its rewards beyond this life. Only such a heavenly perspective is capable of laughing through tears.

And not only this, but let us glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience, and patience produces proven character, and proven character produces hope – and this hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (cf. 2Tim.1:7).

Romans 5:3-5

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us.

Romans 8:18

Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful. For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.

James 1:2-4

Blessed is the man who stands firm in testing, because when he has been [tested and] approved he will receive *the crown of life* which [God] has promised to all who love Him.

James 1:12

Level 4 Rewards: The Crown of Glory – The "Love" Level of Completed Ministry

The crown of glory, represented by the 100-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "gold" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "love level" of highest reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the love they have for Jesus Christ by successfully, faithfully and consistently completing the ministries He has assigned them for the building up of His Church. Winners of the crown of glory must first necessarily have attained spiritual maturity, and must have then had that mature faith refined into a constant, eternal hope through serious and significant testing. Having been thus spiritually "blooded", these battle-tested veterans are then prepared for and capable of being used by the Lord for the edification of His Body through the effective employment of their various spiritual gifts in ministries which He Himself assigns (1Cor.12:5; cf. Acts 9:15; Rom.1:1). Having first properly oriented to our place in the world by faith through our attainment of spiritual maturity, and having thereafter had this faith refined into a surpassing "blessed" hope focused on Jesus Christ, a hope which "anchors us" to the heavenly perspective in the face of temporal pressures and tribulations (Tit.2:13; Heb.6:19), we are ready to direct this mature faith and tested hope to our fellow believers in love for Jesus Christ and out of love for Him and His Church. This effective deployment of mature love in hopeful anticipation of reward

will always involve the successful completion of a distinct ministry corresponding to the individual believer's particular spiritual gift(s).

An important caveat here is that Jesus is interested in the *actual* building up of His Church, not in wasted or only apparent effort expended in activities of only superficial significance. Only those whose faith is mature and whose hope has been tested are qualified to contend for this highest level of reward, and only ministry which actually does contribute to the salvation of unbelievers and/or the building up and progress of the faith of believers is capable of fulfilling this requirement. Moreover, although the effort involved necessary to win this highest crown will unquestionably be considerable, requiring faithful labor of long-standing duration, we should nonetheless be very reluctant to see such ministries only in traditional terms. It is not only those occupations and activities which are traditionally seen as "full-time ministry" that can qualify a person for the crown of glory. There is no formal "track" for such things, and the individual possibilities for ministering to Christ's Church in a significant way are as numerous and varied as the number of spiritual gifts multiplied by the various circumstances of each of us and of our brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom.12:6-8; 1Cor.12:4-31; Eph.4:7-16).

As each one has received a [particular spiritual] gift, [so let us be] ministering it to each other as good stewards of the multi-faceted grace of God.
1st Peter 4:10

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the choice of gift(s) we receive at salvation is the province of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.12:4; 12:11), and that the choice of specific ministry is the province of our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor.12:5). Therefore an essential part of effective ministry is the proper identification of our individual gifts and proper sphere of effort in support of the edification of Christ's Body – and only mature, tested believers are truly capable of allowing themselves to be led into just the right place so as to be used by the Lord in just the right way. Before the judgment seat of Christ, "many who are first will be last", and it will certainly be the case that many who are assumed in this life to be worthy of this highest award simply because of their role in traditional full-time ministry will not receive it, while others who are not even involved in anything that the traditional church visible has proclaimed to be a legitimate ministry will be called up to the "higher place" to the great surprise of all (Lk.14:7-11).

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade.
1st Peter 5:1-4 (cf. Heb.13:17)

The crown of glory is here promised by the apostle Peter to all pastors whose ministry is properly carried out (it is not denied to other believers, merely specifically promised to pastors by way of

example). With a few choice contrasts, Peter characterizes the attitude of service we should all adopt. We should minister "not out of necessity, but willingly as God would have it; not looking for gain, but with eagerness, and not as overlords, but as examples to your flock" (v.2-3; cf. 1Cor.9:16). Caring for Christ's flock, the goal of all ministry and essential purpose of all spiritual gifts, was the issue emphasized by our Lord during one of His last recorded conversations with Peter (Jn.21:15-19), and He repeatedly and emphatically made the point that all true love for Himself must manifest itself in such ministry. If we truly do love Jesus Christ, then we will minister to His Body, the Church, according to the ministry we have each been assigned. Such ministry is the proof of our love, and is rewarded with the crown of glory. As Jesus told us in the parable of the faithful servant, service of this type will be richly rewarded at His return (Matt.24:45-51; Lk.12:41-48).

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:2-3

It is for this reason that love is the greatest of the virtues – not love as unbelievers or the world in general may define it, but love as God defines it, namely, loving Jesus with our whole heart, and reflecting that love in all we do in this life (Matt.7:12; 22:36-39).

But [until that future time of our Lord's return] there now remains faith, hope and love, these three [cardinal virtues] – and the greatest of these is love.

1st Corinthians 13:13

And to this end, along with your faith zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2nd Peter 1:5-8

The ultimate demonstration of such love is to be found in providing for our Lord's Body by fulfilling the ministries to which we have been called through the effective application of our respective spiritual gifts (cf. 2Pet.1:10 [in Greek]).

(15) When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." (16) Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." (17) The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep".
John 21:15-17 NIV

In the same way you also, since you are [so] desirous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound [in them] for the purpose of the edification of the Church.
1st Corinthians 14:12

Let all these things (i.e., the functioning of the various spiritual gifts) be done for the purpose of edification.
1st Corinthians 14:26b

As we observed at the beginning of this section, the life of love, service and sacrifice of our dear Lord Jesus, and the glory He has received as a result, demonstrate beyond all question that the greatest rewards follow the greatest legitimate production. He was rejected by this world and made to wear a crown of thorns. But now He has been crowned with many crowns, and bears the Name that is above every Name so that it is to Him that all shall bow (Phil.2:9-10). If we would share in His glory and in His rewards to the full, we need to make it our business to follow Him wherever He leads, even if it be that such boldness means that we must share in His sufferings (Acts 5:41; Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.2:21; cf. 2Cor.13:4; 13:9; Gal.6:17).

(28) "You are those who have stood by me in my trials (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
Luke 22:28-30 NIV

(12) Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.
1st Peter 4:12-13

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward.
Hebrews 11:24-26

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

e. The Consequences of the Judgment: Whatever loss of potential reward we may experience at Christ's judgment seat (1Cor.3:12-15), whatever embarrassment we may suffer for failure to live up to our full potential (Heb.13:17), and no matter how we may blush if our Lord Himself finds fault with our efforts here on earth (Rom.14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10-11), we may be sure that eternity for all those resurrected and face to face with our dear Savior in the New Jerusalem will be ecstatically blissful beyond our current comprehension. However, the prospect of eternal rewards instead of loss, of fulfilled rather than failed potential, and of hearing "Well done, good and faithful servant!" from the One we love the most ought to be sufficient motivation for us to grow "above the weeds" and produce a crop in response to His commands – as well as to make every effort day by day to ensure that we do not lose what we have worked so hard for hitherto (Col.2:18; 2Jn.1:8; Rev.3:11). For the rewards we earn during this very short time here on earth will last forever, and will be a source of joy to us and glory to Jesus Christ for all eternity.

As part of the "spoils of victory" which are distributed after the final defeat of the devil by our Lord at the second advent (compare Ps.110:1-7 with Is.53:12; cf. Eph.4:7-8; Lk.11:21), and which we will then be able to use and enjoy in our newly resurrected bodies, these eternal rewards to be received at this final, post-second advent judgment will be operative immediately upon reception for utilization and enjoyment during the Millennium (Rom.8:17; 1Cor.6:3; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

Therefore I will allot the great [of heart] to Him [as His portion of the plunder], and He will apportion plunder to the[se same] mighty [of heart].
Isaiah 53:12a

While Moses and Elijah (the most likely candidates to be seated at Christ's right and left hand; cf. Matt.20:23; Mk.10:40), the twelve apostles (Matt.19:28; Lk.22:28-30), and David (Jer.30:9; Hos.3:5) will have special roles during the thousand years (and this will no doubt be true of other exceptional believers of the Bible as well), all of us who take part in the resurrection will share Christ's millennial rule, having some part in His worldwide administration (with the higher positions of governance unquestionably going to those who receive higher levels of reward).

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father.
Revelation 2:26-27

Given all that is at stake, it would certainly be to our eternal benefit to make maximum use of all that scripture has to say about eternal rewards, and motivate ourselves thereby to serve our Lord consistently and to the best of our ability here on earth, taking maximum advantage of the unique opportunity we have for glorifying Jesus Christ and earning laurels that will never fade in the process.

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. (26) So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. (27) I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus.

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

B. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

(7) Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (8) Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O gates, And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (10) Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.

Psalms 24:7-10 NASB

(1) Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. (2) How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! (3) He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. (4) He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. Selah (5) God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. (6) Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. (7) For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (8) God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. (9) The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

Psalms 47:1-9 NIV

(19) [Messiah speaks:] "Open for Me the gates of righteousness (i.e., the eastern gate of Jerusalem and the gate of the temple facing east)! I shall enter by them and praise the Lord. (20) This is the Lord's gate. The righteous will enter by it (i.e., through Christ; cf. Jn.10:1-9). (21) I shall praise You although You humbled Me (i.e., 1st Advent

sufferings), for You have brought me deliverance (i.e., the victories of resurrection and Armageddon)." (22) [The chorus of celebrants responds:] "The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone! (23) This has come from the Lord, and it is wondrous to our eyes! (24) This is the Day which the Lord has made (i.e., the 2nd Advent)! Let us rejoice and delight ourselves in it! (25) Yes, Lord, deliver us we pray (*hoshi'ah na'* = hosanna!) [from the Tribulation]. Yes, Lord, bless us with prosperity (i.e., the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom)! (26) Blessed be the One (i.e., the Messiah) who is coming in the Name of the Lord! We greet you all (i.e., the Messiah and His retinue) from the house of the Lord! (27) The Lord is God! And He has caused His Light to shine upon us! Bind up the Sacrifice with ropes to the horns of the altar (i.e., the inaugural memorial sacrifice of the Millennial Kingdom meant to remind us of the cross)."

Psalm 118:19-27

The triumphal entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem described in the prophetic, Messianic psalms above has already occurred at this point in our narrative, as has our Lord's session in the temple in Jerusalem and His completion of the seven thunder judgments, including the judgment and evaluation of the Church, the Bride of Christ. With all these preliminary matters concluded, and before the beginning of His day to day millennial reign, the most amazing celebration in the history of the world will take place, the celebratory banquet of our Lord's victory, the wedding supper of the Lamb. This feast is so named because it also serves to commemorate Jesus' winning and receiving His most precious possession, the Church, won at the cross and now placed in His arms forever through resurrection.

(6) And I heard something like the sound of a great crowd, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of powerful peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah (i.e., "praise the Lord")! For God our Lord the Almighty has begun His kingly reign! (7) Let us rejoice and be jubilant, and let us give glory to Him, because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride (lit., "wife"; cf. Rev.21:9) has prepared herself. (8) And it has been given her to wear a pure, resplendent [gown] of the finest material (now this fine material represents the righteous acts of His holy ones [believers])." (9) And [the angel] said to me, "Write this down: Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb! These [words] of mine are the true words of God".

Revelation 19:6-9

We have already studied the scriptural image of the Church as Christ's Bride (cf. Eph.5:22-32). However it is important to note here that the celebration of this wedding is to be found even in Old Testament prophecy. The Song of Solomon (as has been traditionally understood in Calvinistic circles) is an allegory relating to Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride (Song 3:6-11; 8:11-12; cf. 1Chron.22:5-19; Solomon is the typological though not the prophetic Son of David), and this analogy of the Messiah and His Betrothed is also found most notably in the Messianic marriage psalm, Psalm 45:1-17. Notable in that psalm is the presence there too of the "friends of the Bride" (vv.14-15). These "friends" were also seen in Revelation 19:9 as those invited to the great wedding feast ("Happy are those who have been called to the

[wedding] supper of the Lamb!"). These individuals will include all who are at this point believers in Jesus Christ though not yet resurrected (since they believed after His return), and will no doubt be mainly that large company of Jews who turned to Jesus immediately upon witnessing His return, although gentiles who have done so will certainly not be excluded (cf. Zech.8:23).

People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:29 NIV (cf. Matt.8:11-12; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Lk.14:16-24)

As to the location of the banquet, it will indeed take place at Jerusalem.

(6) On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. (7) On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; (8) he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (9) In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Isaiah 25:6-9 NIV

The special preparations for assembly will include the supernatural "canopy" which will, among other things, shield the congregation from the elements.

And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

Exclusion from this feast will be a cause of grief and regret, especially for those who have been removed from the earth by the fifth and sixth thunder judgments:

(11) I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 8:11-12 NIV (cf. Lk.13:28; Rev.3:19-20)

Happy indeed will those be who respond to the Messiah when He returns, for they will be invited to celebrate gloriously on that great day of days in company with all who kept the faith in the great times of trial to come and rose to meet the Lord at His return! For these wonderful and blessed events are not vain hopes, but future realities decreed by the unswerving will of God; they are "the true words of God" (Rev.19:9b).

The length of the feast per se is unknown, but will no doubt continue for many weeks (cf. 2Chron.30:23). In many respects, however, the Millennium itself will be a celebration of the victory and reign of Jesus Christ, 1,000 years of blessing unparalleled since the garden of Eden, and not to be matched until the commencement of the eternal state. For good reason, then, the Prophets and the Psalms in particular are replete with songs of victory, celebration and gratitude which anticipate this wondrous moment, and which will undoubtedly be sung on that grand occasion with their depth of meaning only then fully appreciated (e.g., Ps.47:1ff.; 76:1ff.; 95:1 - 100:1ff.; Is.26:1ff.).

Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). You made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e., deliverance).
Psalm 66:8-12

Let us then make it a personal priority not only to be a part of that wonderful celebration, but to occupy a prime place from which to enjoy it to the full as a result of our life's work for Jesus Christ.

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
Luke 14:7-11 NIV

C. The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ: Revelation 20:4-6

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years. (5) This is the first resurrection (i.e., that of all believers).² (6) Blessed and holy is the one

² The sentence included in some versions, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (e.g., KJV), is a later, non-scriptural addition, and is *not* a part

who has a share in this first resurrection! Over these the second death (i.e., condemnation on unbelievers) has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for the thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6

With these verses Revelation introduces and "covers" in broad strokes the entire millennial reign of Jesus Christ (the verses which follow move to its termination and the "Gog-Magog" revolt). The brevity of the account is not entirely unexpected. As we have seen from the very beginning of this series, Revelation assumes that we have "done our homework", and that we as readers, or, more particularly, as teachers, will bring to bear the other pertinent passages, doctrines, and information that may be found elsewhere in scripture. As it happens, of course, the blessed reign of the Messiah is a subject very well covered in the Old Testament in particular so that there is indeed much to say. Before we supplement this passage, however, we should not fail to notice the special emphasis these verses place on the role the newly resurrected Church will play in the administration of our Lord's earthly kingdom, in particular, those believers who were martyred during the Tribulation for the sake of Jesus Christ. As we have already observed in great detail, the entire Church has already been resurrected by this time and will be rewarded in this way, and Revelation 20:4-6 neither says nor means to imply otherwise (especially when the correct translation is figured in; see the preceding footnote). But it is certainly the case that the tribulational martyrs for Jesus come in here for special mention with the unquestionable purpose of providing special encouragement. For those whose lot it will be to negotiate the Tribulation, to be persecuted by the beast and his followers, and to suffer death on Christ's behalf, the prospect of a solid reward which includes reigning with Him is put here as a given. This special guarantee is thus a pledge from God meant to motivate and support this group of believers during the Tribulation's darkest days: no matter how hopeless things may seem, and no matter that the cost of true discipleship during that terrible time may well be one's life, God has promised salvation, and beyond salvation, the reward of sharing in Christ's rule for all those who reject antichrist's sovereignty, preferring to be executed for the Name of Jesus rather than to bow down to the beast.

(19) "So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, (20) and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, (21) who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old."

Acts 3:19-21

The Millennium will be a literal one thousand year period wherein Jesus Christ will personally rule the restored earth without any interference from the devil or his followers. The Messiah's thousand year reign over the entire earth from Mount Zion will be an inexplicably blessed time, the penultimate Eden whose glories will eclipse those of any other time in human history since

of the actual biblical text.

the garden of Eden and until the ultimate Eden commences, that is, the eternal state and New Jerusalem. For the storm of the Tribulation now has passed (Jer.25:32), and Jesus Christ Himself will henceforth preside over an unprecedented time of calm, peace and plenty, ruling His kingdom in perfect righteousness and justice under Eden-like conditions. For just as God previously restored the earth and heavens from a condition of catastrophic darkness to habitable status in order to create mankind in answer to Satan's rebellion, so during the Millennium the earth will witness a return to much of its earlier glory. The fact that in the Millennium we shall still be "in time" (and therefore still coexisting with sin, even though Satan and his angels will be imprisoned until the Millennium's end) means that the environment on earth will not be "perfect", but it will provide the most exquisitely wonderful conditions seen since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden.

Just as the seventh Genesis day was a demonstration that everything God had done in re-creating the earth "was good" (Gen.1:31), so the Millennium will demonstrate that only a world ruled by God (through His anointed Son), can be made "good". The earth of Genesis chapter one is gradually reclaimed from a condition of darkness and devastation (following God's judgment upon Satan's revolt) by systematically ridding it of all factors unfavorable to human life and habitation, both by separation from elements hostile to life, and by replacement and filling with the elements necessary for life. In an analogous fashion, the millennial earth under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will restore "goodness" to the world again, not only by removing from it the most pernicious source of evil (the devil and his angels and the world system of evil they promote: Rev.20:1-3), but also by the provision of all things necessary to bring about blessing and abundance under the perfect reign of Jesus Christ. Only when Satan and his followers have been removed from interference in human life, and only when the world finds itself under the direct reign of the Son of God (Ps.2; Rev.19:6) will the earth be "good" again, and it is important for believers to understand that without these two key factors of the devil's removal and Christ's return, nothing approaching paradise on earth is remotely possible.

The Millennium will see, through the perfect rule of the Son of God, the reclaiming of God's direct control over the earth, and of Man's as well in the person of Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, reclaiming that which was lost by the first Adam (Heb.2:5-9; cf. Ps.8:5-8). Though sin will not disappear until the present heavens and earth are destroyed by fire and replaced with the new heavens and earth (Is.65:17; 66:22; 2Pet.3:7; 3:10-13; Rev.21:1), the Millennium will be a period that begins and ends with winnowing and purification (i.e., the seven thunder judgments covered above, and the final judgments of men and angels covered below). Like the seventh Genesis day, the Millennium will be a time sanctified (i.e., made holy) by God Himself, who will provide mankind with a world of true justice and righteousness enforced by the Son of God Himself (Ps.2; Rev.19:11; cf. 2Pet.3:13). According to Deuteronomy 5:15, a major purpose of the Sabbath day was for Israel to remember their deliverance from Egypt by God's mighty power. It was to be a day of rest so that even those without other recourse, servants and animals, might have some repose (Deut.5:14). Just so, the Millennium will be a time to remember God's deliverance of the world from the devil's grasp, so vividly and horribly experienced in the Great Tribulation which immediately preceded it (Rev.20:1-3), a time to enjoy the rest and blessing of

the Christ's perfect rule, and to celebrate the great deliverance God has wrought from the worst period of human history:

(1) The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, (2) to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium, the seventh millennial day], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent, the "Day of the Lord"], to comfort all who mourn, (3) to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place of their faint spirits.

Isaiah 61:1-3a

1. The Unique Physical Conditions of the Millennium

a. The Millennial Rule of Christ:

(1) Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. (2) He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. (3) The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. (4) He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. (5) He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. (6) He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. (7) In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more. (8) He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. (9) The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. (10) The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. (11) All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. (12) For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. (13) He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. (14) He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. (15) Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. (16) Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. (17) May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. (18) Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. (19) Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen.

Psalms 72:1-19 NIV

Old Testament prophecy is replete with passages which anticipate the Messiah's coming reign, for He is the fulfillment and focus of all God's promises to Israel (2Sam.7:14; Jer.33:14-17; Lk.1:32-33). In Psalm 72:1-19, penned by Solomon who, as David's son, is there a type of David's greater Son, the Messiah, we see expressed many of the most salient aspects of Jesus'

millennial rule. While that time will be one of blessing in every conceivable way (and all the more so given that it will follow immediately upon the absolute worst of times during antichrist's tribulational rule), certain particular features of His reign and kingdom are continually emphasized in prophecy:

1) The Exceptional Joy and Gladness Occasioned at its Establishment: The day of our Lord's return will be one of delight for the entire world and especially for Israel, but also for everyone else (that is, apart from those who have opposed Him: Is.9:3; 12:3; 12:6; 35:1-10; 42:11; 44:23; 49:13; 55:3-11; 60:1; 61:1-7; 65:18; Jer.31:4-13; 33:9-11; Zeph.3:14-20; Zech.8:19; 10:7).

(7) How comely on the mountains are the feet of the one who gives the good news, the one who proclaims peace, who gives the good news of fair tidings, who proclaims salvation, saying to Zion, "Your God has become King!" (8) The voice of the watchers [is heard]. They lift up their voice. They rejoice together. For [all] will see [Him] face to face when the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) returns to Zion. (9) Break forth [in song] and rejoice altogether, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has had compassion on His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord has uncovered His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God!
Isaiah 52:7-10

2) Its Exceptional Justice and Righteousness: The righteous rule of Christ will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our own experience (e.g., especially by crime and injustice; cf. Zech.5:1ff.), meting out swift and perfect justice upon all malefactors and on behalf all who are unjustly oppressed (Ps.2:9-12; 72:1-2; 72:12-14; Is.1:26-31; 9:6-7; 11:3-5; 16:4-5; 32:1-8; 33:5; 42:1-4; 51:4-7; Jer.23:5-6; 33:15; Ezek.34:16; Zech.9:9).

But the Lord shall be seated as king forever: He sets up His throne for judgment, to judge the world in righteousness, to render justice to its peoples.
Psalm 9:7-8

Justice will dwell in the desert, and righteousness in the cultivated fields.
Isaiah 32:16

No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.
Isaiah 60:19 NIV

3) Its Exceptional Peace and Prosperity: The Millennium will be a time of true peace and prosperity, of security and plenty such as has not been seen on earth since the garden of Eden (Is.11:6-9; 32:16-20; 65:25; Jer.33:16; Zeph.3:15b; cf. 1Ki.8:56). Indeed, the Millennium is the penultimate Eden.

For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer.

Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Mic.4:3-4)

(6) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called "He whose counsel is wondrous", "Mighty God", "the Father of Eternity", "the Prince of Prosperity". (7) To His dominion and its prosperity there will be no limit or end. He will establish it and lay its foundation on David's throne and over his kingdom, in justice and righteousness, now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

Isaiah 9:6-7

(4) Then He (i.e., the Messiah) will arise and will shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they will dwell [in peace], for then He will be great to the ends of the earth. (5) And He will be their peace.

Micah 5:4-5a

He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah 9:10 NIV

4) The Most Profound Blessing of All: The Presence and Personal Rule of Jesus Christ (see also Ps.2:1ff.; 45:1ff.; 48:1ff.; 72:1ff.; Is.2:1-5; Ezek.48:35; Dan.7:14; Zech.14; Lk.1:32; Rev.19:11-20:6):

The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.

Isaiah 24:23 NIV

In those days and at that time, I will make a Branch of righteousness sprout forth for David, and He will accomplish justice and righteousness on the earth.

Jeremiah 33:15

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

Daniel 7:13-14

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity.

Micah 5:2

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

Zechariah 8:3

As discussed previously, the 2nd Advent followed by Christ's millennial reign is the capstone of phase two of God's plan for replacing the devil and restoring the world to complete harmony and perfection. In phase one, God created a new order of creatures, mankind, as the ultimate source for completely replacing Satan and his angels. The original man, Adam, and his spouse were capable of sin, and their eventual exercising of this capability plunged them (immediately) and their progeny (at birth) into a natural state of sin. Contrary to the devil's design and expectation, however, God provided the means for redeeming Adam and Eve along with any and all of their progeny who would desire redemption through the gracious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, and in every generation before and since believers have been enlisting into the roles of His Church. Christ's assumption of true humanity and His sacrifice on the cross opened the way for the next stage of replacement, the resurrection of believing humanity, with the way already having been led by the "Prince-Ruler of our salvation" (Heb.2:10):

When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:3b

Phase one laid the ground work for replacement, providing a new Ruler (Jesus Christ) to replace the present ruler of the world (Satan), a new kingdom (the Kingdom of Heaven) to replace the present kingdom of darkness (Col.1:13), and new subjects (believers bought with the blood of Christ) to attend the King in place of the devil's angelic followers (Phil.3:20). During phase one, these replacements are essentially such in principle only as they await the fulfillment of the two further phases: Christ has been glorified, but has not yet returned to commence His reign; the Kingdom is here in principle (in the persons of believers and the Spirit of Christ: Lk.17:21), but is not yet functioning in practice (cf. Matt.11:12); and the Church is coming rapidly to completion, but has not yet been resurrected. During phase two, Christ our King will return (the Second Advent), and will lay claim to His Kingdom (Rev.11:15), while His Church (His Body of believers called out during the first six days of human history) will be resurrected to share in His millennial rule (1Cor.15:23). As the rightful King, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ replaces the devil as the ruler of this world from the time of the 2nd Advent, and will rule until the end of time when eternity commences at the Millennium's end.

a) His Kingship is founded upon His victory on the cross:

Through the cross, Christ has overcome and will terminate the devil's *kosmos* (Jn.16:33).

Through the cross, the Father has in principle already triumphed over the devil's forces and stripped them of their power (Col.2:14-15).

Through the cross, Christ has in principle already put an end to the one having the power of death (i.e., the devil: Heb.2:14; cf. 2Tim.1:10).

Through the cross, therefore, Christ has the right to bring on the final epoch of Satan's direct rule (i.e., the Tribulation), thus opening the door for His direct millennial rule (Rev.5:5).

Through the cross, Christ has led condemned mankind to the victory of eternal life (Matt.12:20; cf. Col.2:12-14; Heb.2:10).

Through the cross, therefore, we share in His victory over death (1Cor.15:54-57).

b) His Kingship is confirmed by proclamation, resurrection, ascension, and session:

Proclamation of His victory to the demons previously imprisoned in Hades (i.e., in the Abyss: 1Pet.3:19; cf. Rom.10:5-7; Col.2:15; Eph.4:8-10) confirmed the success of Christ's mission and the imminency of His reign. It was also an indication of the coming superiority of His followers over the angels (1Cor.6:3; Heb.2:5).

Resurrection confirmed the prophecies of the Messiah's coming reign (Ps.16:10; Acts 2:24-31; 13:30-38), confirmed His status as heir of the Kingdom (Acts 5:30-31; 10:40-43; 17:31; Rom.1:4; 1Pet.1:21), and confirmed the effectiveness of His sacrifice (1Cor.15:13-19; 15:21; Phil.3:10; 1Pet.1:3; 3:21), which forms the basis for His followers to share in that resurrection (Rom.6:5; 8:11; 8:34-35; 10:9; 1Cor.6:14; 2Cor.4:14; 5:15; Col.2:12).

Ascension confirmed the acceptability of the sacrifice of our High Priest (Heb.4:14; 6:19-20; 7:26; 9:11-12), while His entrance into the true Holy of Holies opened the door for believers to enter into the presence of God the Father (Heb.10:19), with believers who had died prior to the cross led to heaven by Christ in triumph at the time of His ascension (Ps.68:18; Eph.4:8; cf. Ps.68:24-27; 146:7b; Is.14:17b; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Jn.14:2-3; 14:6; 17:24; Col.2:15; 1Pet.3:18-22; Rev.1:18).

Session validated Jesus' status as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Acts 2:32-36; 5:30-31; Eph.1:20-23; 1Pet.3:22), made His ultimate rule only a matter of time (Ps.110; Acts 3:21; Heb.1:13; cf. 1Cor.1:7-8; 1Thes.1:10; Tit.2:13; Jas.5:8), and so became the basis for the reward of believers (Ps.68:18; Is.40:10; 62:11; Eph.4:8; cf. 1Thes.2:19; Heb.12:2; 1Pet.1:7; Rev.22:12).

c) His Kingship is consummated at the 2nd Advent:

With the commencement of His reign, human rule over the earth lost by the first Adam will be restored in the person of the Last Adam, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Ps.8; Rom.5:12-21; 1Cor.15:45; Heb.2:7-9).

With the commencement of His reign, the final stage of reducing all God's enemies to complete submission will begin (1Cor.15:24-26; cf. Phil.2:10).

With the commencement of His reign, there will also begin the final process of reconciling "all things" and restoring completeness and harmony to God's universe (Col.1:20; cf. Eph.1:10).

With the commencement of His reign, earth will forevermore enjoy the perfect rule and presence of the perfect Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev.11:15; cf. Ps.2:1ff.; 45:1ff.; 48:1ff.; 72:1ff.; Is.2:1-5; Ezek.48:35b; Dan.7:14; Zech.14; Lk.1:32-33; 2Thes.1:6-10; Rev.19:11-20:6).

b. The Millennial Administration: The Millennium will present a unique situation in administrative terms in that it will be the first (and only) era of human history where earth will contain not only a (rapidly expanding) population of sinful mortals, but also a host of resurrected believers (the Church) who lived their previous earthly lives at various times during the preceding six thousand years; and both groups will be subject to a perfect, all-powerful and all-knowing Ruler. The precise extent to which the static number of resurrected believers will interact with the rapidly growing millennial population is not spelled out in scripture, but, as we saw in the previous section, it is clear that a part of our reward will be to share in Christ's millennial administration (cf. Is.32:1-2; Dan.7:22; 7:27; Matt.19:28-29; 25:21; Rom.8:17; Rev.1:4-6; 20:4-6; cf. Rev.22:5).

"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. "Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities."
Luke 19:17 NIV

(28) "You are those who have stood by me in my trials (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
Luke 22:28-30 NIV

(2) Or don't you know that the holy ones (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute? (3) Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters?
1st Corinthians 6:2-3

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.
2nd Timothy 2:11-13

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father.

Revelation 2:26-27

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

Revelation 3:21

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!"

Revelation 5:9-10

These passages all establish the fact of resurrected believers forming the cadre of our Lord's millennial administration. It will not be angels who enforce law and order, ruling and administering justice during Jesus' millennial reign, but His Church, resurrected and rewarded, with the positions we hold during that thousand year period appropriate to the rank we have earned during our present lives on this earth. It can also be gleaned from the passages above that our enforcement of the law, our execution of justice, and our general administration exercised over the areas and territories entrusted to us will be perfect – just as we have been made perfect to serve perfectly our perfect Lord.

(1) See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. (2) Each man (i.e., resurrected member of Jesus' administration) will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

Isaiah 32:1-2 NIV (cf. Is.32:8)

As resurrected believers, incapable of experiencing physical or emotional pain or fatigue, our administrative duties during the Millennium will be a "labor of love", "delightful work" such as Adam was given in the garden of Eden, only much more satisfying and devoid of trouble to the degree that our eternal state will infinitely surpass his pre-fall state. Once abused and discarded, once outcasts and sojourners on the earth (cf. Heb.11:36-38), we shall at that glorious time have "attained the promise" of resurrection and reward (cf. Heb.11:39-40). No longer subject to the world and the caprices of its present evil ruler (cf. Is.33:18-19), we shall rule the world with the Righteous One as His viceroys for a thousand years.

(18) In your thoughts you will ponder the former terror: "Where is that chief officer? Where is the one who took the revenue? Where is the officer in charge of the towers?"

(19) You will see those arrogant people no more, those people of an obscure speech, with their strange, incomprehensible tongue.

Isaiah 33:18-19 NIV

As seen from these verses, the blessings of Christ's administration will stand in stark contrast to the rule of the evil one (most egregiously demonstrated by the reign of the beast) not only for us, but also for the millennial population which survives the Tribulation, and most especially for those of Israel whose future reaction is related directly above. Indeed, the government of Israel will be the most blessed and most unique in this regard. For Jerusalem will be the new capital of the world, now ruled by the Messiah Himself, personally residing there. Israel proper will be ceremonially ruled by David himself in resurrection in the capacity of her king (in fulfillment of the biblical promises: Jer.30:9; 33:15-17; Ezek.34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hos.3:5), with the routine administrative duties born by "the prince", a non-resurrected member of the Davidic line endowed with special privileges (Ezek.45-46). The prince himself will likewise have under-shepherds to aid him in his tasks chosen from the non-resurrected population.

(3) "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. (4) I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 23:3-4 NIV

Herein we most likely see the pattern – perfect oversight but with a mortal interface – which is no doubt duplicated around the world. Resurrected believers, as we have seen, will participate in Christ's administration, but probably in a sort of super-executive capacity (in the fashion of David), as well as in a judicial capacity (Matt.19:28; Lk.22:30; 1Cor.6:2; Rev.3:21; 20:4-6), leaving the hands-on, day to day administration to our non-resurrected counterparts (and more and more so as the population and situation following the Tribulation recover). Given the role angels currently play as messengers and intermediaries in God's plan (and specifically in regard to serving the Son of God: Jn.1:51), it would be strange if they too were not involved in the Messianic millennial rule, though no doubt continuing to serve Jesus Christ behind the scenes even more so than the Church. Finally, perfect, resurrected members of the Church will make the best possible selections when it comes to choosing their mortal counterparts in every administrative venue around the world, so that even within the most fragile branch of the government, human beings with sin natures, here too we may expect the highest possible standard to be achieved (as the "code of conduct" in the Psalm below indicates):

(2b) I will walk in my house with blameless heart. (3) I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. (4) Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. (5) Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure. (6) My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless

will minister to me. (7) No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence. (8) Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the Lord.

Psalm 101:2b-8 NIV

Finally, from some of the few details scripture gives about the millennial world government we can also extrapolate the essential administrative principle of the Messiah's rule, namely, that of a perfect central standard, accommodating local needs.

1) Language: The official language of Christ's government will be Hebrew. Not only does this make a certain amount of logical sense, for He will be ruling from Jerusalem with the Jewish nation as His unique possession, but there is scriptural evidence for this probability as well. The Lord states at Zephaniah 3:9 that, after unleashing His fury on the nations during the Tribulation (v.8), "I will give to the peoples a pure lip/language (*saphah berurah*), that they all may call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him of one accord". While this purification of the lips does not exclude forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, the context clearly suggests appropriate ceremonial behavior as well, and it is thus very likely that Hebrew will be the requisite language for the (sometimes mandatory; cf. Zech.14:17) worship at Jerusalem (see below). Isaiah 19:18 further informs us that "five cities of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan" (i.e., Hebrew). From this we may deduce that there will be an eagerness in some pockets of exceptional responsiveness to the Lord and His truth to assimilate to the perfect standard as much as possible and in every way. However, the fact that this development is deemed remarkable also shows us that while Hebrew will be the official legal and ceremonial language, no attempt will be made to enforce its use worldwide. In all other instances, the nations will retain their own languages. Rather than stifling free expression, we may expect a flourishing of legitimate conversation, with only evil communication being restrained.

2) Economics: Ezekiel 45:9-14 establishes a perfect system of weights and measures for use within Israel proper during the Millennium, and we may glean from this that there will be perfect economic regulation not only in Israel but throughout the world – not an attempt to control legitimate human decision-making in any local economy, but rather a process of oversight wherein truly unfair and criminal behavior is prevented. As in the case of language, we may extrapolate that it is the principle which is universally enforced, not the specifics. Unique local weights and standards, along with diverse practices, will be allowed to continue with a resulting explosion of free enterprise prosperity bursting forth under the Millennium's blissful conditions – only dishonest behavior will be restrained.

3) Nationalism: We know of course that the Messiah's worldwide rule will restrict all the negative aspects of national competition, for there will be no war between nations during His millennial rule, as Jesus Christ Himself will settle all such serious disputes.

For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer.

Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Mic.4:3-4)

And yet there will still be unique and discrete individual nations as this passage itself shows, with even some of the most ardent of Israel's enemies restored to their own lands (Jer.12:14-15).

(23) In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together.

(24) In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. (25) The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Isaiah 19:23-25 NIV

Thus this principle of tempered control most likely sets the pattern for all other aspects of Christ's millennial rule. The nations will still be nations, and Israel will still be Israel. Antichrist had tried (albeit unsuccessfully) to destroy nationalism (Dan.2:41-43). Our Lord's administration will remove the problems inherent in a world full of independent (and sinful) nations, without at the same time eliminating national and cultural distinctions. After all, apart from those who belong to the resurrected Church, the rapidly expanding human population of the millennial earth will still be subject to sin, evil and crime, as the sin nature will still reside in all mortal human beings. It is most enlightening to consider that the Messiah will not attempt to change what cannot be changed without destroying the present heavens and earth altogether, but instead will institute the perfect system of control for an inherently sinful world: not the eradication of choice through stringent, Procrustean homogenization, but the preservation of free will through a system of wise and judicious oversight. In the truly perfect world government to be instituted by our Lord, better regulation will actually result in more genuine freedom. For its object, perfectly attained, will be the restraint of evil (rather than what has often been the case in the devil's world, the suppression of freedom in the service of evil). For these reasons, the Millennium, the time of most complete direct control of a single unified government over the earth, will also be the time of greatest *individual* freedom to pursue all legitimate goals and aspirations. This will be so in no small part because of the effectiveness of Messiah's system to restrain crime and evil without at the same time unnecessarily hampering the freedom of action of those not involved in such antisocial pursuits.

c. Physical Blessings of the Millennium: During the Millennium, though human beings will continue to be born mortal and imperfect, yet the righteous rule of Christ (Ps.2:9) will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our own experience. The marvelous physical blessings of the Millennium will be due in no small part to the fact that the curse God placed upon the ground at Genesis 3:17-19 will finally be removed (to complement the rule of Christ and the resurrection of His Church: Rom.8:18-24; cf. Gen.5:29). For the first time since the fall, this curse which resulted from the disobedience of the First Adam's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will be removed – at the return of the Last Adam who paid for its removal through His obedient death on Calvary's tree (Rom.5:12-19):

(18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] ***the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God*** (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved.

Romans 8:18-24a

Once the cursing that came as a result of Adam's fall has been reversed, the result will be a veritable heaven on earth, an environment as perfect as possible (given the limitation that it will contain imperfect human beings still subject to sin), a world overflowing with blessing in its sights and sounds, its prosperity, and in the physical and spiritual wholeness flowing forth from Jerusalem where the Righteous One Himself will rule. This will be the prophesied "year (i.e., season) of the Lord's favor" (Is.61:2); this will be the long-anticipated "time of restoration" (Acts 3:21).

(10) Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (11) Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; (12) let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; (13) they will sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit, "has come"), he comes (lit, "has come") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

Psalms 96:10-13 NIV

The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert like Eden, and her wilderness like the garden of the Lord.

Isaiah 51:3

As this last verse indicates (and as we have intimated above), during the Millennium with the removal of the Genesis curse on the earth, the entire world will be a paradise. In the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the earth will truly be "Eden restored" to all its prior glories, save for the continued imperfection of the rapidly-expanding, non-resurrected human population. However, the sinful nature of un-resurrected mankind will not prevent the Millennium from being truly Eden-like, with Satan bound for a thousand years, with all demons likewise removed from the world, and with the Holy Spirit's ministry of restraint not only reestablished (after being removed during the Tribulation: 2Thes.2:6-12), but now more expansive than ever before (since He will be "poured out" in a dramatic and unprecedented way not seen since the early days of the Church; cf. Is.44:3; Joel 2:28). When we add to these significant changes the perfect rule of the perfect Ruler

administered by His Church, the blessedness of earthly conditions during Christ's coming kingdom are certainly understandable in spite of the flawed nature of its subjects.

In his (i.e., the Messiah's) days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.

Psalm 72:7 NIV

1) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Jerusalem: Jerusalem, the tribulational "rock of stumbling" upon which the Lord Jesus Christ caused the armies of the beast to founder, though subjected to terrible damage during the battle of Armageddon, will rapidly and miraculously rise from the ashes to become the capital city of the Messiah.

(1) Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. (2) It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. (3) God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress. (4) When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, (5) they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror. (6) Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. (7) You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. (8) As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever. Selah (9) Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. (10) Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness. (11) Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. (12) Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, (13) consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Psalm 48:1-14 NIV

Every biblical paradise shares certain unique features that mark it out as a place of extreme blessing, first and foremost of which is the physical presence of God Himself for the purpose of fellowship (rather than judgment). Just as in the garden of Eden, where our first parents Adam and Eve enjoyed sweet fellowship with our Lord when He habitually visited them "in the cool of the day" (Gen.3:8), so the millennial Jerusalem will be blessed with the permanent presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and all of the millennial blessings which mankind will enjoy on that great day will be a result of and will flow from His presence (as is always the case since all blessing originates with God: Jas.1:17).

(2) The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. (3) You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. (4) No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (i.e., "I delight in her"), and your land Beulah (i.e., "married"); for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. (5) As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over

you. (6) I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, (7) and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

Isaiah 62:2-7 NIV (cf. Jer.3:14)

Though devastated by the events of the Tribulation, the beast's Armageddon campaign in particular, Jerusalem will be swiftly rebuilt in a supernatural way by the Lord Himself, to become the most impressive place on earth (cf. Is.11:10; 44:24-28; 51:3; 52:1-2; Mic.4:8), now to rest ever safe and secure under His protecting wings (cf. Jer.31:38-40; Is.54:14-15).

(1) He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; (2) the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. (3) Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: Selah (4) "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush— and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.' " (5) Indeed, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her." (6) The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: "This one was born in Zion." Selah (7) As they make music they will sing, "All my fountains are in you."

Psalms 87:1-7 NIV

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

Isaiah 65:18 NIV

In addition to the ultimate blessing, the actual presence of God Himself in the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God, millennial Jerusalem will share other features in common with the most well-known Eden (and with all of the other biblical paradises as well):

a) An Exalted Location: Millennial Jerusalem will be a city of greatly expanded dimensions (Ezek.48:30-35), and will literally be raised up in elevation to an exceedingly great height (cf. Ps.68:15-16; Ezek.17:22):

At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it.

Isaiah 2:2 (cf. Micah 4:1)

In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city.

Ezekiel 40:2 NIV

(10) The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the

royal winepresses. (11) It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.
Zechariah 14:10-11 NIV

b) The Living Waters and the Tree of Life:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.
Psalm 46:4 NIV

Proceeding forth from the millennial temple in Jerusalem will be a stream of "living water", a supernatural source of refreshment akin to the streams that watered the garden of Eden. The stream will grow in breadth and depth as it runs eastward and descends to the plain of the Arabah (while another branch flows west to the Mediterranean: Zech.14:8), finally emptying into the Dead Sea. Along the banks of this stream, "trees of life" will spring up, comparable to the tree of life of Genesis 2:9, and to the "tree(s) of life" in the final New Jerusalem (Rev.22:2). These trees will share the same purpose as the one which preceded and those which will follow, namely, to impart spiritual as well as physical blessing (cf. Is.41:19; 55:12-13; Ezek.34:27; 36:8; 47:7; Rev.22:2):

And on the bank of the river gorge on both sides will spring up every sort of food-producing tree. Their foliage will not wither, nor their produce fail, but every month they will yield a new crop, for they will be irrigated by the waters flowing from the sanctuary; their produce will serve as food and their foliage as medicine.
Ezekiel 47:12

The river on whose banks the trees described above will flourish will share important qualities with the rivers of Genesis chapter two and with the "river of the water of life" of Revelation chapter twenty-two:

1) It originates from a central source: Just as water flowed out of the garden of Eden, so the millennial river of living water will rise from a fountainhead at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (Ezek.47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8), a very similar situation to that of "the river of the water of life" which we find in the New Jerusalem (Rev.22:1-2).

2) It produces a miraculously fertile effect: The river is associated with agricultural fecundity and abundant fisheries in Ezekiel 47:1-12, while Joel 3:18 connects the fountain with the blossoming of the land in general (cf. a similar, symbolic reference in Is.66:12: "I will extend peace to her like a river and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream").

3) It has a life-giving influence: The river is one of "living water" in Zechariah 14:8, a title which, in light of Revelation 22:17, suggests the spiritual blessings it will confer (see also Jer.2:13; Is.55:1).

Just as the Messiah's Kingdom is likened to a life-giving tree (Matt.13:31-32; Mk.4:30-32; Lk.13:18-19; cf. Dan.4:10-27; Ezek.17:3-24; 31:1-18), so we find in the millennial kingdom literal trees of life flourishing on the banks of the river of living water for the first time since our original parents rejected the first tree of life for the tree of knowing good and evil. It is well to remember that none of these blessings could be possible but for the fact that our Lord Jesus bore all the cursing which was rightfully ours on that "other tree", for it is thus that we are eternally healed:

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

1st Peter 2:24

c) Unique Prosperity: The wondrous nature of millennial Jerusalem will be so exceptional to such an extraordinary degree that it surpasses our present ability to adequately imagine:

(11) "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. (12) I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.

Isaiah 54:11-12 NIV

Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you.

Isaiah 60:11

(15) "Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. (16) You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. (17) Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and iron in place of stones. I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler. (18) No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. (19) The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. (20) Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.

Isaiah 60:15-20 NIV

You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Isaiah 62:3

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.

Isaiah 66:12

Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.

Jeremiah 33:9 NIV

(26) I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. (27) The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land.

Ezekiel 34:26-27 NIV

2) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Israel: The paradise-like conditions of the millennial Jerusalem will be duplicated to a great degree within the boundaries of the entire expanded millennial state of Israel as well (and apparently to an only marginally lesser degree to the earth as a whole). The Millennium under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will be a time of agricultural bounty without scarcity, of flourishing environmental conditions without the hardships and disasters of previous eras, and of general prosperity and blessing beyond anything now remotely imagined – and it will begin with Israel:

(29b) "I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. (30) I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. (31) Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. (32) I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!" (33) This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. (34) The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. (35) They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." (36) Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the Lord have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it."

Ezekiel 36:29b-36 NIV

(21) "In that day I will respond," declares the Lord— "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; (22) and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel (i.e., Israel, "the Lord's planting"). (23) I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'. 'I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

Hosea 2:21-23 NIV

(16) The Lord their God will deliver them on that day (for His people are to Him as a precious flock, like jewels in a crown set prominently in His land). (17) For how fair and beautiful they will be. Grain will make the young men flourish and new wine the young women.

Zechariah 9:16-17

It will, in short, be a time of the veritable rebirth of Eden, with Israel being preeminent in the experiencing of all these blessings (Jer.31:2), as evidenced by

a) an end to the ferocity of wild animals (contrast to Ezek.14:21):

(6) The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

(7) And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (8) And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. (9) They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9 KJV

I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety.

Ezekiel 34:25 NIV (cf. v.28)

In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground.

Hosea 2:18a NIV

b) miraculously improved physical and agricultural conditions:

The mountains will bring forth prosperity for the people, and the hills righteousness.

Psalms 72:3

Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field.

Psalms 72:16 NIV

(23) He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows. (24) The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel. (25) In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. (26) The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days

(viz., a hyperbole literally fulfilled in the eternal state), when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

Isaiah 30:23-26 NIV

(1) The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, (2) it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.

Isaiah 35:1-2 NIV

(18) I will make rivers spring forth on the barren heights, and fountains in the valleys. I will fill the desert with pools of water, and the arid places with springs of water. (19) I will set cedar trees in the desert, acacias, myrtles and olive trees. I will place cypress, elm and box trees together in the Arabah, (20) so that [all] may see and know and take it [to heart] and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this, and that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Isaiah 41:18-20

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.

Isaiah 44:3a NIV

The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert like Eden, and her wilderness like the garden of the Lord.

Isaiah 51:3

The mountains and hills will let out a cheer and the trees will clap their hands. Instead of thorns, cypress will grow, and instead of thistles, myrtles.

Isaiah 55:12-13a

Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me.

Isaiah 65:10 NIV

(12) They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. (13) Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. (14) I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:12-14 NIV

I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.

Ezekiel 34:26b NIV

I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations.

Ezekiel 34:29 NIV (cf. Ezek.34:27)

And it will come to pass on that day that the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills run with milk. And all the watercourses of Judah will run with water.

Joel 3:18

Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when the one who ploughs will catch up with the reaper, and the one who treads the grapes will catch up with the sower. The mountains will drip with sweet wine and the hills will be liquid [goodness].

Amos 9:13

For there will be prosperity for what is sown: the vine will yield its fruit, and the land will bring forth its produce, and the sky will give forth the [necessary] moisture.

Zechariah 8:12

c) general peace and prosperity (cf. Ps.68:6; Is.9:4; Jer.31:22):

Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.

Hosea 2:18b NIV

(14) In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. (15) If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you.

Isaiah 54:14-15 NIV

Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor.

Isaiah 60:21 NIV

(3b) They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. (4) They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. (5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.

Isaiah 61:3b-7

(38) "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. (39) The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. (40) The whole valley where dead

bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished."

Jeremiah 31:38-40 NIV

d) the expansion of the territory of Israel: During the Millennium, the territory of Israel will finally be expanded to the boundaries she was always meant to have, and her land will be newly allotted to ensure a bountiful inheritance to all of Abraham's offspring. Her Kingdom now united under Messiah's rule (Is.11:12-13; Jer.3:18; Ezek.37:15ff.; Hos.1:11), she will possess the full grant of land God originally made to Abraham (Ezek.45:7-8; 47:13-48:29; Zech.9:10). In those days, Israel will be exalted to the premier position among the nations for the first time since Abraham received the promises (Gen.12:2-3; 15:5-21; 17:4-19; 22:17-18).

(1) For the Lord will cherish Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and place them in their own land. Foreigners will join with them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. (2) Nations will take them and bring them to their [rightful] place. Then the house of Israel will receive them by lot in the land of the Lord [for use] as servants and maidservants. For they will take their captors captive, and rule over those who oppressed them.

Isaiah 14:1-2

e) the special enrichment of Israel: In an era of intensive blessing, Israel will be doubly blessed (Is.61:7; Joel 2:25; Zech.9:12), and will be a blessing herself to the whole world (Zech.8:20-23; cf. Gen.12:3). One of the distinct blessings prophesied to fall to Israel's lot during the Millennium is that she will be bountifully enriched in a variety of ways. In addition to the facts of the presence of the Messiah Himself, her status as the new world capital, and the special blessings upon her agriculture and environment examined above, she will also benefit from "plundering" the nations, both through reaping the benefits that will come from recycling the vast treasures of antichrist's recently annihilated armies (Ezek.39:7-16; Zech.14:1; cf. Ps.68:12-13; Is.9:3-5), and also from direct tribute from all of the other nations, the "double portion" of spoils which will come to her as the Messiah's special possession (Is.23:17-18; cf. Ex.3:22; 12:36; Deut.6:10; Rev.21:24).

(29) Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts. (30) Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver.

Psalms 68:29-30a NIV (cf. Ps.72:15)

(5) Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. (6) Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord. (7) All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.

Isaiah 60:5-7 NIV

Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you.

Isaiah 60:11

You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Isaiah 60:16 NIV

(5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.

Isaiah 61:5-7 NIV

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.

Isaiah 66:12

The wealth of all the nations round about will be gathered up, their gold and silver and clothing in abundance.

Zechariah 14:14

3) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanded longevity, health and happiness: The improvements in the physical health, longevity and general well-being of human beings during the Millennium will likewise be extraordinary, and we may take scripture's focus on Israel in these respects as a result more of its concern with the fulfillment of the promises to the Jewish people than as any indication that the rest of the millennial world will be left out. We may well expect these effects to be most pronounced in Jerusalem proper and in Israel in general, but the whole testimony of scripture taken together seems to suggest that disease, poverty, and even death to some great degree will be removed as serious concerns worldwide under the blessing of the Messiah's glorious world rule.

In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

Isaiah 29:18 NIV

(5) Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (6) Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Isaiah 35:5-6a NIV (cf. Is.32:3-4)

No one living in Zion will say, "I am ill"; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.

Isaiah 33:24 NIV

The passage immediately above is informative regarding one of the more controversial aspects of the Millennium, namely the question of whether or not human life spans will expand to their remarkable pre-flood lengths – or even beyond. To put it more directly, will anyone die during the Millennium?

(22) No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. (23) They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them.

Isaiah 65:22-23 NIV

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age.

Zechariah 8:4 NIV

(19) I will rejoice over Jerusalem and be filled with joy for My people. The sound of weeping and the cry of distress will no longer be heard in her. (20) No longer will there be there any infant that perishes in his youth, nor any old man who fails to live out his days in full. For a man will be accounted but a youth should he die at a hundred, even the sinner a hundred years old who suffers this curse.

Isaiah 65:19-20

This last passage in particular is sometimes taken to mean that no one will die of natural causes during the Millennium, but verse twenty contains an important caveat: "even the sinner a hundred years old who suffers this curse (i.e., will even so be accounted to have died early)". Given that near millennium-long life spans were indeed commonly achieved before the great flood (cf. Gen.5), and outside of the garden of Eden at that, it is certainly not impossible that with the restoration of Eden-like conditions on earth we should expect even greater physical resilience and health under the perfect conditions of the reign of Jesus Christ (the Genesis curse on the earth being finally removed as well). However, Isaiah 65:20 quoted above does state that death will occasionally occur nonetheless, and indicates that the key factor in bringing it on will be "sin". After all, even in pre-flood days, people did die, and it is well to consider that the exceptionally long lives recorded in Genesis chapter five apply to believers of exceptional spirituality. In Isaiah 33:24 also quoted above, we are told that illness will be absent in Zion, for "the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven". Thus we may conclude that spirituality versus carnality will be a determining factor in this regard. For as Isaiah 65:19 says, it is "the sinner" who dies at a hundred who will be thought so accursed.

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."

Zechariah 13:1 NIV

As the verse above suggests, the life-giving waters which emanate from the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek.47:1-11; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8), giving rise to medicinal trees which spring up along its banks (Ezek.47:12), would seem to have not only healing properties but also the power of spiritual cleansing from the physical side-effects of sin. We may thus indeed expect believers who are walking with the Lord to live exceptionally long lives, with even the possibility of reaching through the entire Millennium not to be discounted. On the other hand, we may expect those who are, in addition to being unbelievers, spiritually reprobate ("sinners") to have their life-spans curtailed as a result; even so, as Isaiah 65:19-20 suggests, their lives will be long by contemporary standards. Between the two extremes, that is, between essential righteousness and inveterate immorality, there will no doubt be many points along the scale (with a variety of life-spans resulting). We may also expect a number of deaths as punishment for criminal activity to occur during the Millennium under the Messiah's perfect administration of justice wherein there will be a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to crime. There are some passages which may point to the possibility of deaths from natural causes, as in the case of Ezekiel 46:16-18 where regulations are given to the prince concerning the assignment of inheritances. We should also recall that at least the original millennial "seed-stock" will come from human beings who have lived a portion (and in some cases a great portion) of their lives under far less than ideal conditions (most recently the seven year Tribulation). It seems best to conclude, therefore, that people probably will still die during the Millennium (in spite of greatly increased health and longevity). After all, even in the case of uncommonly responsive believers, everyone not yet resurrected will still have a sin nature.

Finally, there is also the question of the disposition of believers who may die during the Millennium, whether from natural causes, or from crime or accidents. Even if these are unusual occurrences, or possibly even especially so, it seems out of place for these individuals to be thenceforth excluded from the millennial kingdom, and we find no indication in scripture that they will then find themselves in the third heaven for the duration of the Millennium, a place which though by far not unpleasant will now otherwise be empty of other saved human beings. It seems better to suppose that in such cases either 1) such individuals will be resuscitated immediately (as in cases of murder, et al.), or 2) given an interim body so as to enjoy our Lord's presence – precisely as is the case today with all departed believers – with the main difference in the millennial regime being that they will enjoy that presence here on earth rather than in the third heaven as our departed brethren are currently doing.

4) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanding population: In addition to the vast destruction of Armageddon, and along with the purging out of Jews who though regathered still refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah (the sixth thunder-judgment), the fifth thunder-judgment will also punish with destruction all unbelievers who took the mark of the beast (and that most likely constitutes the majority of tribulational survivors). Taken in conjunction with the enormous loss of life for many other reasons during the Tribulation, therefore, it is virtually certain that the Millennium will

begin with a very small population relative to the billions of human beings who now inhabit planet earth. But even if this figure be reduced to one percent (and we are told that mankind will become "rare as gold of Ophir" as a result of the tribulational judgments: Is.13:12; cf. Is.24:6; Zeph.1:2-3; Mic.7:13), the remaining millions of survivors under the conditions of millennial blessing and enjoying expanded human life-spans would be certain to rebound to previous levels in very short order (and to surpass them significantly by the Millennium's end). This would also seem to be borne out by the precedents of the rapid expansions of both the pre-flood human population (which began with only two, after all), and of the population after the flood (from a seed stock of only eight), both having occurred under far less favorable conditions. Starting with what must be at the very least some millions more than this (judging from the facts that "we who remain" in 1Thes.4 is a sizable enough category to deserve mention, and that the regathering of Jews from around the world at this time is one of the most prominently emphasized scriptural prophecies), even this relatively small "seed stock" will no doubt prove more than sufficient to surpass current population levels in very little time (so that by the time of the final event of the Millennium's end those who will oppose the Lord will be as numerous as "the sand of the seashore": Rev.20:8). The place where this expansion of population will be most pronounced is within the land of Israel (Is.9:3; Jer.33:10-13; Ezek.36:13-15):

(19) "Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. (20) The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, 'This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.'"

Isaiah 49:19-20 NIV

(1) Rejoice, O barren woman who has never born a child! Break forth with rejoicing and shout for joy, O woman who has never given birth! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than those of the married woman, says the Lord. (2) Enlarge the place for your tent. Let your tent curtains stretch wide and don't hold back. Lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes. (3) For you will burst forth on the right and on the left. Your offspring will possess the nations, and the deserted cities will be inhabited.

Isaiah 54:2-3

The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time, I will do this swiftly.

Isaiah 60:22 NIV

I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pastures where they will be fruitful and increase in number.

Jeremiah 23:3 NIV

(18) "This is what the Lord says: I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. (19) From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound

of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained."

Jeremiah 30:18-19 NIV

(8) " 'But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. (9) I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, (10) and I will multiply the number of people upon you, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. (11) I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the Lord. (12) I will cause people, my people Israel, to walk upon you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children.

Ezekiel 36:8-12 NIV

(37) "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep, (38) as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 36:37-38 NIV

d. Spiritual Blessings of the Millennium: During the prior period of the Tribulation, Satan had attempted a most vigorous suppression of the knowledge of God (Lk.18:8; cf. Amos 8:11), through his instigation of the greatest apostasy in world history (Dan.8:12-13; 11:33-35; Matt.24:4-5; 24:24-25; 2Thes.2:3; 1Tim.4:1), the greatest persecution in world history (Matt.24:9-12; Rev.6:9-11; 7:13-14), and his most direct control over the earth in world history (through his minion, antichrist: Rev.13). By way of the most stark possible contrast, during the Millennium, when God reigns directly in the Person of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of God will be more bountifully available than ever before in the history of the world (Is.12:3; 19:21; 54:13a; Jer.31:34; 32:38-40; Ezek.11:19-20; 36:25-27; Hab.2:14; Heb.8:10-11):

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

Isaiah 2:3

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord just as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:9b

Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.

Isaiah 29:24 NIV

(3) Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. (4) The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.

Isaiah 32:3-4 NIV

(5) The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. (6) He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.

Isaiah 33:5-6 NIV

All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace.

Isaiah 54:13 NIV

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2:14 NIV

(33) "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (34) No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:33-34 NIV

1) The Presence of the Messiah, the True Object of Worship: When our Lord reigns in person in Jerusalem, there will no longer be any reasonable doubt about who He is, the glorious Son of God and the Messiah, worthy of worship as God in His own right and for what He did for us in dying for our sins in His humanity:

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:1-3

"And the name of the city from that time on will be: The Lord is There ."

Ezekiel 48:35b NIV

And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be the only One and His Name the only Name.

Zechariah 14:9

And while Jesus will be the clear focus of all true worship, false religion will no longer be tolerated in His kingdom (cf. Is.1:27-29; 46:1; 65:16; Jer.16:19; Ezek.34:25).

(17) Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. (18) When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. (19) And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 11:17-19 NIV

(2) "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. (3) And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. (4) "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. (5) He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' (6) If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'

Zechariah 13:2-6 NIV

And in that day, the Lord will provide an abundance of worthy teachers who will provide true teaching for salvation and spiritual growth.

Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

Jeremiah 3:15

2) The Pouring out of the Spirit: Ever since the day of the Church's first Pentecost, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, critical to spiritual growth, progression and service in all eras of human history, has been more vividly and dynamically felt. That is because while the Spirit has always been "with" believers, Christ's ascension has made possible the gift of the Spirit whereby believers are baptized with the Spirit so as to have Him on the "inside" (a benefit which even before the close of the apostolic period came to be experienced by all who believe in Jesus: Rom.8:9; cf. Jn.14:17; 1Thes.4:8; 2Tim.1:14; Heb.6:4). The Millennium will constitute a third phase in the Spirit's ministry wherein Jewish believers, at least (cf. Ezek.37:9), will not only be indwelt by Him, but dramatically empowered in the manner of the first Pentecost and the early, apostolic days of the Church. As is evidenced by their lack of (genuine) occurrence today, the empowerment of those earlier, dramatic "sign" gifts was a temporary phenomenon designed to bridge the gap between the incipient Church and the establishment by the apostles of local churches around the Mediterranean world, governed by the teachings of faith and practice set down in a completed New Testament. During the Millennium, however, this miraculous manifestation of the Spirit will not only be universal among the community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Israel, but will also be a permanent feature of the Messiah's Kingdom (rather than a temporary, inaugural phenomenon).

(14) The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks, (15) till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.

Isaiah 32:14-15 NIV

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

Isaiah 44:3b NIV

(20) "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord. (21) "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord.

Isaiah 59:20-21 NIV

(26) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NIV

"I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord."

Ezekiel 37:14 NIV

"I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God.

Ezekiel 39:29 NASB

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication . . ."

Zechariah 12:10a NASB

(28) "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. (29) Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."

Joel 2:28-29 NASB

In this last passage we see most perspicuously the dramatic effects of the millennial outpouring of the Spirit, an event foreshadowed by the parallel fulfillment at Pentecost at which time Peter noted the comparison: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). In each case, the wondrously overt manifestations of the Spirit are unique markers of the inauguration of a new era in commemoration of Christ's victory (on the cross and at Armageddon respectively), the difference being that during the Millennium these gifts will endure just as the

Messiah continues to abide in Jerusalem (n.b., Joel 2:30-32 shifts the subject back to the events preceding the Second Advent).

3) The Resumption of Jewish Spiritual Leadership: The above special gift of the Spirit to Israel is a sign of another major millennial trend, namely, the refocusing of God's spiritual economy upon the Jewish people. For not only will the number of the Jewish people expand massively and the proportion of Jews within the world's believing community come to dominate as it did in the age of Israel, but we shall also see the spiritual leadership of the community of faith in the world come again into the hands of a predominantly Jewish cadre as in apostolic times, a trend which began, as we have seen, the Tribulation. As we have also already seen, the first new wave of millennial believers will be Jews, who, when confronted with the reality of the returning Messiah, will turn to God (Jer.31:31-34; Joel 2:30-32; Zech.12:10; Rom.11:12; Rev.1:7). Secondly, Israel and, in particular, Jerusalem will not only be the political nerve-centers of the Millennium, but also its spiritual focal points and for precisely the same reason: the presence of the One who combines the offices of Great High Priest and King of Kings in His own Person:

(14) "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. (15) Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. (16) In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. (17) At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord.
Jeremiah 3:14-17a NIV

A key function of the "shepherds" referenced in verse fifteen above will be spiritual leadership, and we find this theme of the special divine provision of spiritual guidance a prominent one in millennial passages as the gift and office of prophecy are once more empowered for the edification of the people of God:

(19) People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. (20) Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. (21) Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (22) Then you will desecrate your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"
Isaiah 30:19-22 NIV

(9) "For I am the Lord your God – since [you dwelt] in the Land of Egypt [I have been so]. (10) I shall again make you dwell in tents as in the days of your festival (i.e., Sukkoth representing the second advent regathering). At that time I will [again] speak to

your prophets and will multiply [their] visions. Indeed, through the prophets I will provide you with intelligible teaching."

Hosea 12:9-10

The result of this expanded teaching of the truth, coupled with the special pouring out of the Spirit, will be the ubiquitous presence of the knowledge of God, especially among His people:

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
Isaiah 11:9b (cf. Hab.2:14)

"For" says the Lord, "this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!', because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:33-34

The chief venue for the propagation of truth will likewise be Jerusalem and, specifically, the millennial temple.

(26) I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. (27) My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. (28) Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.' "

Ezekiel 37:26-28 NIV

Just as the second temple whose construction was originally unimpressive compared to the first temple (Hag.2:3) was later elaborately expanded and impressively ornamented, so the tribulational temple, after ceremonial cleansing and repair, will be marvelously embellished and adorned, so as to take on the full form and beauty recorded in Ezekiel's description (i.e., in Ezekiel chapters 40-47). The temple is itself a form of palace (i.e., the Hebrew word *heychal* means either "temple" or "palace"), just as the ark in the Holy of Holies is a representation of a throne (and battle chariot). Furthermore, antichrist, it will be remembered, actually "took his seat" in the temple of God precisely so as to "represent himself as being God" (2Thes.2:4). These facts in conjunction with the return of the Shekinah glory to the temple invite us to postulate that our Lord will indeed be enthroned in the Holy of Holies (Ezek.43:1-12), ruling the world and administering from that very place the one true faith – the worship of Himself as the Savior of the world.

He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever.

Ezekiel 43:7a NASB

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

The temple rites which will take place during the Millennium will constitute a form of worship which while similar to that of the first and second temples will be significantly different in one very important respect: the animal sacrifices and other ceremonies of the past were shadows which represented and looked forward to the coming of our Lord and His death on the cross on our behalf; by way of great contrast, the millennial rites will be memorials of what He has already done (e.g., according to Ezek.39:13, the Day of Christ's glorification will be a special "memorial day"). For as Hebrews 10:18 tells us, following the reality of Christ's work in dying for us on the cross "there is no longer any sacrifice for sin". Therefore these millennial sacrifices will not be the means of any sort of atonement, even ceremonially speaking, but instead they will serve as a kind of group "communion" to teach and remind of what Jesus has done for us all. While Jesus will be ruling in person as the King of Kings, it will still be helpful for people to remember that in the past He was the Suffering Servant who died for all of their sins. For even revering Jesus as the Ruler of the world will not bring salvation; the adherence to the gospel will still require accepting His work on the cross in washing away our sins as well as appreciating Him as the unique God-Man. This purpose of memorialization (as opposed to foreshadowing) could never have been achieved while the second temple was standing, because the rituals practiced there even after our Lord's resurrection followed the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. As such, those who participated in them after the cross were continuing to "crucify the Son of God afresh" (Heb.6:6) even after He had already suffered and died for our sins – making such participation a terrible blasphemy (for which the Jerusalem believers are soundly rebuked in the book of Hebrews). With our Lord present in person and actually enthroned in the temple, we may be absolutely certain that the meaning of the millennial sacrifices and rituals will be seen for precisely what they are, namely, memorials to His work on the cross, rather than shadows of what is to come. The difference in meaning will also result in significant if somewhat subtle differences in procedure between the Mosaic Law and the function of the millennial temple rite. There will be no ark of the covenant in the millennial temple, no doubt because Jesus has already fulfilled everything it and the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement foreshadowed:

(16) "In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made."
Jeremiah 3:16

There will be specific differences in the millennial regime of animal sacrifice as well, reflecting the memorializing aspect of that future practice in contrast with the forward-looking lessons of

the Old Testament. Only one lamb will be offered as a morning sacrifice, representing the "new day" Christ's reign embodies, even as the evening sacrifice is no longer required because all judgment has passed for those who believe (Ezek.46:13-15). Significantly also, the gentiles will now be included in this worship, representing their full inclusion into the family of God (Is.56:3-8; cf. Ps.106:4-5; Is.60:7), all enmity between God and sinful mankind having been dissolved "to reconcile both of them (i.e., Jews and gentiles) to God through the cross" (Eph.2:15-16). Indeed, the feast of Tabernacles, for example, will be a festival to which all the worlds' peoples will be required to send representatives, and it is further reasonable to suppose that all who consider themselves followers of the Lord will want to assemble before Him in Jerusalem once a year (Is.19:18-20; 66:23-24; cf. "three times a year" in ancient Israel: Ex.23:14-17).

"On that day I shall stand David's fallen booth back up, and repair its holes and everything else which has been trampled down I shall [also] stand up. And I shall rebuild it as in days of old, so that the remnant of mankind and all the gentile [nation]s which are called by My name may seek Him, declares the Lord who is going to accomplish this."
Amos 9:11-12 (cf. Acts 15:16-17)

The feast of Tabernacles is significant in this regard because it is the festival which looks forward to the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah (for the Israelites will dwell "in booths" when they re-enter the land, just as that first generation in the promised land had done). Therefore this feast will be a memorial and a celebration of the Messiah's reign (and of Israel's return to the land – God having fulfilled all of His promises to them in this regard). As far as other nations are concerned, failure to be represented at this festival will constitute a grave offense for suggesting by their absence that, in effect, they are displeased with the King's rule (cf. Lk.19:14; 19:27).

(16) Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (17) If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. (18) If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (19) This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

Zechariah 14:16-19 NIV

4) The Evangelizing of the Gentiles and their Response: The Millennium will also see the greatest explosion of evangelism in history (accompanied by a substantial response: Is.19:18-20). Radiating out from its spiritual center, Jerusalem, Jewish evangelists, in the main, will cover the world and bring to fulfillment the prophecy of that great time, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Is.11:9; Hab.2:14):

And I will place a sign among them, and I will send survivors from among them to the nations, to Tarshish, and Put, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubhal, and Yavan, the

islands far away who have not heard my Name, and have not seen my Glory. Thus will they proclaim my Glory among the nations.

Isaiah 66:19

Nor will this traffic for the sake of the truth be one way only, for many whose hearts are drawn to Jesus Christ will come to Jerusalem to worship at His footstool and to receive instruction in His Word of truth, even going so far as take up permanent residence in Israel so as to be closer to Him and so as to drink more deeply and directly from the waters of truth (cf. Micah 7:11-13; 7:17).

"I will record Rahab (i.e., Egypt) and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.'"

Psalms 87:4 NIV

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

Isaiah 2:3

The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.

Isaiah 14:1 NIV

(14) This is what the Lord says: "As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. (15) But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country. (16) And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives'—even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal—then they will be established among my people. (17) But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 12:14-17 NIV

(21) "You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. (22) You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. (23) In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance," declares the Sovereign Lord.

Ezekiel 47:21-23 NIV

"Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people."

Zechariah 2:11 NIV

(20) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, (21) and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us

go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.' (22) And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him." (23) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.' "

Zechariah 8:20-23 NIV

(20) In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the Lord", and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar. (21) Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts in that day.

Zechariah 14:20-21 NIV

e. Millennial Believers: These gentiles along with the great number of Jews who will turn to the Lord after His glorious return will constitute a complement or filling up of the family of God above and beyond the fulness which is the Church at Christ's return. That is, the millennial believers are given to Christ over and above the number needed to replace the devil and his followers on a strictly one for one basis (for that will by this point already have been accomplished by the resurrection of the Church at the 2nd Advent).

The post 2nd Advent believers who are "invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (the uniting of Christ and His Church and its celebration throughout the memorial time of the Millennium: Rev.19:9), will, along with all of their spiritual off-spring, share and enjoy the world-wide blessing and bounty of Christ's millennial reign. Thus the believers of the Millennium constitute an additional blessing for Christ, a "double portion" blessing that is traditionally the right of the first born (Deut.21:15-17; cf. Gen.48:22; 1Sam.1:5; 2Ki.2:9; Job 42:10; Is.61:7; Zech.9:12; 1Tim.5:17). This is most appropriate for the "First Born of all creation" (Col.1:15; cf. Ps.89:27; Col.1:18; Heb.1:6), so that He might truly be "the First Born among many brethren" (Rom.8:29). Given the dramatic and unprecedented repopulation of the earth during the Millennium (treated above; cf. Rev.20:8b), and given that the already resurrected Church constitutes a one for one replacement of the devil's followers, it is likely that the Millennial echelon of believers, being Christ's double portion, will match the Church precisely in number (a thousand years of perfect environment being more than ample time from the standpoint of population growth).

D. The Gog and Magog Rebellion: Revelation 20:7-9

(7) And when the thousand years were completed, Satan was released from his prison, (8) and he came forth to deceive the nations which [reside] in the four quadrants (lit., "corners") of the earth, Gog and Magog (whose number is as the sand of the sea) in order to marshal them together for war. (9) And they went up to the plains of the land [of Israel] and encircled the encampment of the saints and the beloved city [Jerusalem], and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Revelation 20:7-9

The first thing to notice about the last major event in human history before the commencement of eternity is that the Gog and Magog mentioned here bear only a symbolic relationship to the Gog of the land of Magog addressed in Ezekiel 38:2. The latter passage, in mentioning "Gog *of* Magog" (i.e., *not* "Gog *and* Magog as in Rev.20:8), is referencing antichrist, with the context of Ezekiel chapters 38-39 describing the vast coalition the beast will bring against Jerusalem during the final days of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon. However, this last human rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ and His millennial rule, the Gog-Magog rebellion of Revelation 20:7-9, will share much in common with that earlier attack. Both are instigated by the devil's deceit, both seek to unseat God, and both will draw unprecedentedly large numbers of troops from around the world in order to do battle with Jesus Christ at Jerusalem. For these reasons, John's sanctified use of this well-known appellation, "Gog and Magog", makes perfect sense as a generic phrase to indicate the involvement of the totality of the gentile world in this assault.

It seems evident from the verses above that the process of Satan's enlistment of the nations to attack the Great King will be as rapid as it is successful. In spite of perfect government and a thousand years of blissful prosperity more blessed than the world has ever seen, as soon as he is released the devil's efforts will meet with a most enthusiastic response on the part of the vast majority of the millennial population. The fact that what appears to be the entirety of the unsaved population of the world at that time will jump at the chance to rid itself of the absolutely fair and just rule of Jesus Christ only goes to show that free will is not a function of environment. The determination to reject God "no matter what" is deep-seated in the heart of unbelief and cannot be coaxed into genuine change no matter how many material blessings are bestowed.

This should not really surprise us, because if the forgiveness of our sins at no cost to us through Jesus' death on our behalf and the offer of eternal life through faith by grace are not enough to satisfy those who reject Him, why should their dissatisfaction with His perfectly fair and abundantly prosperous millennial reign seem at all odd? Arrogance and avarice can never be satisfied. This Satan knows very well, and his new "platform" of freedom from the temporal rule of Jesus Christ whom his audience has already rejected for salvation will cause a wildfire revolt whose appeal will be so intoxicating to all unbelievers that the devil will be able to muster them for the final battle of the world almost effortlessly and even in spite of a lack of support from his legions of imprisoned fallen angels. The description of Jerusalem at this time as "the camp of the saints" also suggests that despite the rebellion's rapid growth, there will be sufficient time for many who have chosen for Jesus Christ to make their way to Jerusalem before the Gog-Magog invasion and assault begin.

(24) Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. (26) But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. (27) The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' (28) And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' (29) But he

said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. (30) Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (36) Then He left the crowds and went into the house And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." (37) And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, (38) and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; (39) and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. (40) So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, (42) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father He who has ears, let him hear." Matthew 13:24-30; 13:36-43 NASB

The parable of the tares describes the pollution of the millennial kingdom during its last days along with the manner of the divine solution: rebelliousness is allowed to come to fruition, which in this case means the actual assault upon Jerusalem, the Messiah's capital city. After the destruction of the attacking force, the remainder of those who set their hearts against Jesus in response to the evil one will be "uprooted" and "burned" (a metaphorical reference to the last judgment and their final end, the lake of fire; see below). In all this we see a very clear parallel to Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Like our first parents, the millennial population will find themselves living under marvelous circumstances, and yet will still be vulnerable to the offer of something more, not "knowledge", as in the case of Eve, but "freedom" as the devil will deceitfully frame the issue for them (Ps.2:1-3). Thus, the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ will be the third and final paradise which Satan will corrupt, having first suborned one-third of angelic kind and having thus brought about the destruction of the original earth, and having next deceived and corrupted Eve and through her Adam and having thus brought about their expulsion from the garden. Each such action has of course only furthered God's plan, bringing about the creation of mankind in the first instance and initiating the process of human history in the second. At the conclusion of the Gog-Magog rebellion, history will be brought to an end, and the eternal state will commence – after, that is to say, the final disposition of Satan and his followers and the final reward of the millennial believers along with the last judgment of all unbelievers.

As can be seen from the short description in Revelation 20:7-9 (of the complete and instantaneous annihilation of the vast multitudes who will attack Jerusalem in those days), the devil's representations are, as always, mere lies and deceit. For the utter folly of opposing the power of God is something which only blind arrogance can fail to see, and that folly born of arrogance comes through very clearly in the other major passage to treat this revolt, Psalm 2 (cf. Ps.46:6):

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) “Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!” (4) The One enthroned in heaven will laugh. The Lord will mock them. (5) At that time He will speak to them in His anger, and in His wrath He will throw them into confusion. (6) “But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.” (7) I shall relate the Lord's decree. He said to Me, “You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. (8) Ask of Me and I shall give [You] the nations as your inheritance, and as Your possession the ends of the earth. (9) You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, and You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel. (10) So now, O kings, learn prudence! Take warning, you judges of the earth! (11) Serve the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling! (12) Kiss the Son (i.e., pay homage to Him), lest He become angry [with you] and you perish for your [insolent] behavior. For His anger may blaze up in an instant [if you do not]. Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.”
 Psalm 2:1-12

Finally, this rebellion and the disaffection and dislocation it will temporarily cause worldwide, conditions to which the millennial population will be otherwise entirely unaccustomed, will also serve to provide a litmus test for the essential spiritual status of all those inhabiting the earth at that time, soon to be brought up at the final judgments which precede eternity.

(31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him (i.e., after that millennial reign), and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

For this time will truly be a time of testing for the entire world, and those not directly involved in the military aspects of the rebellion will still have to face the issue of how to treat believers being persecuted, opposed, or hindered by satanic forces in their journey to Jerusalem. For their actions towards "the least of these" will be a clear indication of their faith or lack thereof.

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV

E. The Final Disposition of Satan and his Angels: Revelation 20:10

And the devil who was deceiving them (i.e., the millennial rebels, a.k.a. "Gog and Magog") was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet [already are], and they will be tormented day and night for all eternity (lit., "to the ages of the ages").

Revelation 20:10

Satan here meets his final end, joining in the lake of fire the beast and the false prophet who have likewise been deprived of the benefit of any last analysis of their cases or formal pronouncement of sentence.

By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching.

Ezekiel 28:18 NIV

The devil's instigation of the Gog-Magog rebellion constitutes an extraordinary act of rebellion against the perfect rule of the Messiah similar in its egregious temerity to the instigation of the Armageddon campaign (different only in that the latter was designed to resist His return rather than to overthrow His rule). But while the beast and the false prophet are denied any further "last judgment" or process of adjudication because of their non-human status (being nephilim not created in the image of God), and are subjected to this summary though entirely just judgment instead, Satan has already been judged.

(8) "When He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will call the world to account regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: (9) regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; (10) regarding righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you are not going to

be seeing Me any longer; (11) regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been convicted [already]."

John 16:8-11

Man was created for the glory of God (Is.43:7; cf. Eph.1:5-14), and a large part of that glory is won in the responsiveness that some (though sadly far from all) human beings show in coming to God through faith so as to be saved by grace on the basis of Jesus' death to sin. This is so because human history as seen from our Lord's perspective rather than from our myopic human viewpoint was always meant to be the means by which God's condemnation of Satan and the fallen angels would be demonstrated as just. For Satan's case was already adjudicated by the Lord before human history ever even commenced (that is, prior to the reconstruction of the earth during the seven Genesis days and the creation of Adam and Eve).

In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub.

Ezekiel 28:16

With the successful redemption of mankind at the cross and subsequent belief in the work and Person of Jesus Christ by His Church, God has demonstrated not only the willingness of creatures possessed of free will to repent and return to Him, but much more importantly His ability and willingness to provide the means for their salvation at a cost beyond imagination, the suffering and death of His own dear Son our Lord. This is the victory God has won over the devil in human history, not his physical defeat (which God could have accomplished in the blink of an eye and with no discernible effort), but the demonstration of His love and of His justice, of His ability to be true to the one without compromising the other – by means of the cross of Jesus Christ.

(31) Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the prince of this world be driven out.

(32) And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself.

John 12:31-32

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

Colossians 2:15

Inasmuch as Satan's conviction predates human history, his execution, otherwise known as "the second death" (Rev.20:14; 21:8; cf. Rev.20:6), has long since been prepared for him and his followers in the form of the "lake of fire", an eternal place of cursing and separation from God which all creatures who have rejected God the Father and His Christ will share forever.

Then He will say to those on His left, "Away from Me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire [already] prepared for the devil and his angels."

Matthew 25:41

Although the book of Revelation does not say so, the passage immediately above, Matthew 25:41, indicates that the other fallen angels will share the devil's fate (i.e., the lake is prepared for the devil **and** his angels: Job 4:18; 15:15; cf. Jude 1:13b). But while Satan will not have the benefit of a last, official hearing, and while neither their consignment to the lake of fire nor any final judgment for the fallen angels is described in the book of Revelation, other scriptures indicate that this process of their disposition will be the next eschatological order of business:

Will anyone teach God knowledge, since He will judge the high ones (i.e., angels)?
Job 21:22

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but plunged them into Tartarus with its gloomy pits (i.e., the Abyss), **preserving them for the [day of] judgment . . .**
2nd Peter 2:4

And the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) **in anticipation of the judgment of that great day.**
Jude 1:6

So while for the reasons discussed above, Revelation 20:10 singles out the devil for consignment to the fiery lake at this time, there is no reason to suppose that Satan's followers will be granted any further stay of execution. Since the last judgment of human beings follows next in the eschatological scheme of things, it seems certain that the rest of the fallen angels will follow their leader, the devil, into the lake of fire in short order if not immediately after his relegation to the eternal flames. For the eternal state will be a place "where [only] righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13; cf. Dan.9:24), and it is consistently described as being free of every trace of uncleanness (Rev.21:8; 21:27; 22:5; 22:15), a condition that most certainly entails the prior removal of all of the fallen angels. Therefore when we are told that "death and Hades" will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev.20:14-15), we are certainly meant to understand Satan's legions as being included (inasmuch as Hades, and specifically the Abyss or Tartarus, is the present place of incarceration of a goodly number of demons, and their likely place of residence during the Millennium).

The Lake of Fire: Though the Bible uses a variety of terms to describe both the interim and the eternal, self-selected place of condemnation for unbelievers and fallen angels (e.g., "the grave", "Topheth", "Sheol", "Gehenna", "Hades", "torments", etc.), the final "hell" to which all reprobate creatures are condemned is a very real and distinct place, called at Revelation 19:20 "the lake of fire which burns with sulfur" (Matt.25:41; Rev.20:10; 20:14-15; cf. Matt.13:42; 13:50). The interim "hell", or "torments", is one of the three sections of Hades below the earth (Lk.16:23; the other two being the now empty paradise where departed believers resided prior to the ascension of Christ, and the Abyss, the place of incarceration for certain of the fallen angels), and it is there that all deceased unbelievers will remain until the time of the last judgment. As we are told at Revelation 19:20, antichrist and his false prophet will be the first to be thrown into the lake of fire (at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon), with the devil following at the end of the

Gog-Magog rebellion some thousand years later (Rev.20:10), and with his fallen angels following him immediately at that time (as discussed above; 2Pet.3:13; Rev.20:14-15; 21:8; 21:27; 22:5; 22:15; cf. Dan.9:24).

Even though it is presently unoccupied, the lake of fire nevertheless already exists. It has "[already been] prepared" – "for the devil and his angels" (Matt.25:41; cf. Dan.7:9-11). But while the lake has been prepared for Satan and his followers, we see very clearly in Matthew chapter 25 that unbelieving mankind will share this same fate. For in the judgment of "the sheep and the goats", men and not angels are the ones being judged, and the "goats", human beings who have consciously chosen to reject the Father's gracious offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, are likewise commanded to depart into the lake of fire at the conclusion of this "last judgment" (cf. Rev.20:14-15; 21:8). So while neither the fallen angels nor deceased unbelievers are presently in the lake of fire, it is this lake which will be the place of eternal residence for all who deliberately reject God and His love by refusing Jesus Christ.

John answered them all and said, "I am [symbolically] baptizing you with water. But One who is more powerful than me is coming, [One] whose sandal thong I am not sufficient to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit . . . and with fire! His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His threshing floor and gather the grain into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Luke 3:16-17

The fire itself, besides being literal, is also a symbol of the judgment under which all human beings find themselves for their unbelief (Jn.3:18; 16:5-11; 1Jn.3:14 – and no one has ever been completely without sin save Jesus Christ; cf. Rom.3:9; 3:23; 5:8). We are given to see this intimate connection between divine judgment and the fire which fills the lake of damnation in both Isaiah's and Daniel's accounts of antichrist's final end:

Topheth (i.e., the lake of fire) has long been prepared (cf. Matt.25:41), it has been made ready for the king (i.e., antichrist). Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.

Isaiah 30:33 NIV

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire.

Daniel 7:9-11

The lake is thus filled up by a fiery river of divine wrath and judgment (cf. Is.66:15-16; Matt.3:7; Lk.3:7; Jn.3:36; Rom.1:18; 2:5-8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; Eph.2:3; 5:6; Col.3:6-8; 1Thes.1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Rev.6:16-17; 11:18; 14:19; 15:7; 16:1; 19:15), a river of fire which "flows" forth from the throne of God (with this portion of the scene in Daniel 7 referring through prophetic conflation to the Father's judgment of Satan and his angels in eternity past; cf. Jn.16:11). In Revelation chapter 14 we find this now fully prepared lake of fire positioned before Christ's Great White Throne at the time of the last judgment of human beings (which at the point of our present context in this study is about to commence immediately):

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

The passage above portrays the act of execution as part of the process of the final judgment of unbelievers. That is the meaning and the force of the phrase in verse ten above, "before the Lamb". Just as the lake was initially filled directly from the Father's throne during the prehistoric judgment of the devil and his followers, so the final judgment for the human race will likewise take place directly in front of the lake of fire (cf. Dan.7:9-11; Matt.25:41). Upon the passing of sentence, those whose names are found to have been blotted out of the book of life for the cause of unbelief will be summarily cast in "before" or "in the presence of" the Lamb and all of us His followers who will attend the proceedings. We therefore should not take the passage above to mean that the place of the lake of fire will be the New Jerusalem where the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ will reside with us forever, for we know from elsewhere in scripture that "hell" will instead be far removed from their glorious presence:

(6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9

Through the grace and mercy of God the Father, the horrible fate of those consigned to the lake of fire will not trouble us for a moment in the blissful eternity we shall spend with Him and our dear Savior, Lord Jesus Christ (Is.25:8; 35:10; 65:17-19; Rev.7:17; 21:4; cf. 2Cor.5:17; Heb.12:27). That is so even though there are scriptural indications that the lake of fire and its inhabitants will indeed be visible to us in eternity.

(22) "For just as the new heavens and new earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue. (23) And it will come to pass that from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh will come to worship before Me", says the Lord. (24) "And they will go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh".
Isaiah 66:22-24

Since it already exists, since it will be visible in the future (standing as an eternal memorial to the folly of rejecting God and His mercy: Rev.14:10), and since it will be no part of the New Jerusalem (or the new heavens and new earth), the lake is in all probability located within the subterranean realm of the present earth.

This location has much to recommend it. Firstly, the prehistoric filling of the lake in Daniel chapter seven (quoted above) and the adjudication of Satan's case which accompanied it (Jn.16:11) must have taken place after the devastation and inundation of the original heavens and earth within the Genesis gap (that is, following Satan's rebellion which occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2). After this supernatural darkening of the original universe, apart from the third heaven (technically a separate place from "the [twin] heavens and the earth", and, as a paradise in its own right, inappropriate for the location of the lake of fire), only the subterranean earth would have remained unaffected by the judgment upon initial creation stemming from the devil's revolt. For this reason, it would seem to have been the only place available for those proceedings, as well as the only place available for the positioning of the lake of fire, whose filling is described at Daniel 7:10.

According to this interpretation, the third heaven was made and has always remained perfect; the [twin] heavens and earth are the place where creature free will produces imperfection in what was originally created perfect, thus necessitating the choice between mercy and judgment; and the subterranean earth was made as the place for containing and restraining those who choose the latter over the former. It is more than a little interesting to note that while the devil and his angels were not deposited into the lake of fire at the time sentence was passed upon them (it being God's good pleasure to demonstrate the justice of His decision and the mercy which could have been theirs through the process of creating and redeeming mankind), yet He gave them to see the horror of their final end well ahead of time – and yet they made no effort to repent (trusting instead in Satan's ability to defeat the Lord in the contest ahead: human history).

The last judgment (covered directly below) will likewise take place in a very similar interlude, after the destruction of the present heavens and earth (Rev.20:11), but before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Rev.21:1). In this instance too, only the third heaven (inappropriate for the presence of evil or the final place of condemnation) and the subterranean earth will remain. It is within the latter, directly in front of the lake of fire, that the final judgment will take place. Finally, after the creation of the new heavens and new earth and descent from the third heaven to earth of the New Jerusalem (Rev.21:2; 21:10), Isaiah chapter sixty-six above indicates that there will be some sort of visual access to the lake of fire from the new earth (along the lines

of the heavenly sea in the third heaven today which acts as a viewing-port for observing events on the present day earth: compare Rev.4:6 with Rev.15:2-3; and cf. Job 1-2; 1Ki.22:19-22; Lk.15:10; Jn.8:56; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; 1Pet.1:12; Heb.12:1; Rev.6:10). But just as there is a "great fixed-chasm" between the subterranean paradise and the interim hell of "torments" which prevents any access from one place to the other (Lk.16:26), and just as there was little interest on the part of the departed believers in the just fate of those who rejected God in this life (Lk.16:25), so the lake of fire and final end of all those who arrogantly and deliberately chose to oppose our Lord will be of little moment to those of us who are enjoying the ineffable blessings of eternity in the presence of our dear Savior Jesus Christ.

The quotation from Isaiah above and many other such in scripture put the lie to the evil heresy which proclaims oblivion for those who oppose God in this life and trample the precious sacrifice of Jesus Christ underfoot. The torment and cursing to which all who have no use for the Lord in this life will be subjected is very real, and it will be never ending (e.g., Matt.8:12; 13:42; 13:49-50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; 25:41-46; Lk.13:28; Rev.14:10-11; 21:7-8), consisting of four essential afflictions: 1) fire, 2) sulfur, 3) darkness, and 4) separation from God.

The first two "active" forms of cursing are what is doubtless meant in the Isaiah passage above by "their worm" (quoted by our Lord at Mk.9:48). This is an extremely vivid image which evokes the consumption of the present body in the grave by worms, teaching that, in contrast to the finite nature of the decomposition of the present body, the body with which the unrighteous dead will be resurrected will endure forever, but for cursing rather than for blessing. Literal fire and sulfur will form the environment in which unbelievers and fallen angels will pass eternity, the former producing tangible physical pain, the latter generating an unpleasantness affecting the senses of taste and smell. The result will be an agonizing state of suffering which the image of the undying worm brings graphically to mind, resulting in "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk.13:28).

But there will also be passive suffering to experience in the lake of fire: darkness (Is.8:22; Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30), itself a cause of pain and discomfort (Rev.16:10; cf. Ex.10:21-23; Rev.8:12), and a complete separation from the blessed and glorious Persons of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ whose presence defines what paradise truly is. It is more than fitting that those who rejected the light and loved the darkness in life (Jn.3:19-21; cf. Jn.1:3-9; 1Jn.1:5-7) should dwell in darkness forever (cf. Lk.16:24; 2Pet.2:17; Jude 13), and that those who rejected God and His mercy should spend eternity apart from Him. For those of us who have dedicated ourselves to being near to Him through Jesus Christ, this curse of being deprived of the Word, even more than the fire, the sulfur, and the darkness, is the most appalling thing to contemplate of all. And while their terrible fate rightly causes us to shudder, there are no grounds for sympathy for those who rejected the blood of Christ. They chose the lake of fire by rejecting the only One who could rescue them from it. As a result, by their own personal acts of free will unbelievers will be separated from God in eternity, the very God for whom they had absolutely no use in this life. Herein we find the essential significance of the etymology of the most common Hebrew word for hell, "Sheol". Derived from the root *sha'al* (שאל), whose essential

meaning is "to ask", this word for "hell" indicates that unbelievers are getting exactly "what they asked for", namely, "freedom" from God, and would no doubt ask for it again and again in precisely the same negative way, even if they had a thousand life-times to reconsider.

F. The Last Judgment: Revelation: 20:11-15

(11) And I saw a throne, a great white one, and Him who was sitting upon it (i.e., Jesus Christ). From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, both the great and the insignificant, standing in front of the throne. And books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done. (13) For the sea gave up the dead which were in it, [that is] death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and each person was condemned according to what they had done. (14) And death and Hades (i.e., all unbelievers) were cast into the lake of fire. And this is the second death: the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15

The verses above take us rapidly through all that remains of eschatology up until eternity begins. That is to say, they conclude God's plan for human history, with the exception of His blessed creation of the glorious new heavens and new earth and the commencement of the eternal state (covered in Revelation chapters 21-22). The Great White Throne or "last judgment" described above is the final event before darkness, tears and sorrow fade into nothingness forevermore, washed away by the brilliant light of God in the everlasting Kingdom of the Father where we believers shall enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and our Lord Jesus Christ, world without end. Following the melting away of the old heavens and earth (described in verse eleven), the last phase of the resurrection will take place wherein all millennial believers will be raised and rewarded with eternal life while all the unsaved dead will be raised for the judgment described above and the second death. Since the theme of the book of Revelation is one of our Lord's just judgment upon the forces of evil and His total victory over them, it should not be surprising that these latter events, related elsewhere in scripture (and discussed immediately below), give place here to the disposition of the unsaved in order to emphasize the last judgment itself. And there most certainly will be a last judgment of the unsaved dead as the passage above makes clear (along with many other scriptures, e.g., Matt.7:21-23; 16:25-27; Mk.8:35-38; Lk.9:24-26; Acts 24:25, etc.).

Every human being who attains adulthood with normal mental capacity is accountable to God for their free will choices, both their sins and their decisions in regard to seeking out His mercy (or failing to do so). Therefore, just as all are aware of God's existence and character (even if they later deny it or harden their hearts against this universal truth; e.g., Rom.1:18-32), and as all are aware of their own mortality, so all are aware that successfully facing the scrutiny and judgment of a perfect God on one's own merits is an utterly impossible task. All unbelievers know that this last judgment is coming. The truly surprising thing to those of us who love Jesus Christ is the

horrific folly of passively ignoring this problem or even actively rejecting God's grace when such things are true.

(1) The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament tells of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens'/firmament's night sky), (5) and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. (6) Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view.

Psalm 19:1-6

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

(18) God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [in their hearts about God] in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. (24) For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). (25) [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. (26) [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, (27) and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulfulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due for their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, (29) filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, (30) slanderers, God-forsaken-[and]-forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, (31) unthinking,

unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, (32) men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those who made it their practice [to do them].

Romans 1:18-32

(14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do by nature the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of the Law has been written in their hearts when their conscience testifies against them, and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them. (16) [This examination of Rom.2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:14-16

It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that, judgment is in store.

Hebrews 9:27

1. The Destruction of the Universe and the Interlude of Final Judgment

a. The Last Resurrection of the Saved and the Unsaved

At the end of the thousand-year millennial reign of Jesus Christ, there will be a complete "cleansing of His threshing floor", the post-millennial complement to the Second Advent's "baptism of fire" (Mk.1:8; Matt.3:10-12; Lk.3:9-17). At this time all stumbling blocks will be removed from the Messiah's kingdom and cast into eternal fire in preparation for the commencement of the eternal kingdom wherein there will be no evil or unbelief forevermore (a cleansing which requires a prior resurrection and judgment of the unsaved).

(12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 3:12

The wheat are believers; the chaff unbelievers. Bringing the one group into the barn and burning up the other requires the prior resurrection of both and their individual evaluation, an evaluation for reward in the case of believers, but one of judgment for unbelievers.

(47) "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. (48) When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. (49) This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous (50) and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:47-48 NIV

The "end of the age" is the end of human history, coterminous with the end of the Millennium. As in the case of John's analogy to the threshing floor, saving the good fish and throwing out the bad requires their prior resurrection (represented by the collecting of all who remain at the end of the age by the "net") and general evaluation (represented by the fishermen who examine the fish to determine their category, good or bad). This initial separation into two essential categories, accomplished by angels in the passage above, is also represented in the sheep and goats judgment where the Lord will separate the two groups prior to their specific, individual judgment (Matt.25:31-33). The parable of the net also places the disposition of the wicked last in the order of these final events (i.e., they are thrown into the fiery furnace, the lake of fire, only after the righteous have been collected). Thus in this passage we have the same sequence as implied by the sheep and goats judgment, John the baptist's description, and our context, Revelation 20:11-15:

- 1) Resurrection of both groups (i.e., all as yet non-resurrected believers along with all the unsaved from the beginning of human history).
- 2) Separation by group (wheat from chaff, sheep from goats, good from bad fish).
- 3) Salvation and evaluation of the righteous.
- 4) Judgment and final disposition of the unrighteous (into the lake of fire).

Furthermore, we know from Revelation 20:11b ("From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them"), that before the last judgment the old heavens and old earth will be destroyed (2Pet.3:5-13), revealing everything that transpired in all prior history (2Pet.3:10), and that it is only after the completion of this entire process that the new heavens and new earth will be created and eternity will thus begin (cf. Rev.21:1).

(24) Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (26) When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. (27) "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' (28) " 'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' (29) " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' " (36) Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." (37) He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, (39) and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. (40) "As the weeds are

pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (42) They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:24-30, 13:36-43 NIV

The parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) above presents an identical sequence of events, only somewhat more detailed. The kingdom of heaven is the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Matt. 13:47) wherein unbelievers (tares/weeds) grow up in close proximity to believers (wheat). The harvest is the resurrection (step one) wherein the weeds are separated from the wheat and are prepared for but not committed to the fire (step two). The righteous are gathered into the barn (step three), and the wicked are then cast into the lake of fire following the last judgment (step four). Finally, this parable adds the additional detail of showing us the righteous after the conclusion of this entire four-step process, now enjoying life everlasting in the eternal state in "the kingdom of their Father" (i.e., the New Heavens and New Earth as opposed to "the kingdom of heaven", the prior millennial kingdom). For, given that we know from our context in Revelation chapters twenty-one and twenty-two that the Father will only be present on earth after human history has concluded, "the kingdom of their Father" mentioned here as the place where the righteous will "shine like the sun" must certainly be the eternal kingdom of New Jerusalem.

(31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him (i.e., after that millennial reign), and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The sheep and goats judgment agrees with this sequence entirely. Verse thirty-one encompasses the final events of human history from the second advent ("When the Son of Man comes in his glory") to the last judgment ("he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory"), with the throne referring to the throne of judgment whereon our Lord Jesus will render a final evaluation of reward for all remaining believers (the sheep) and of judgment for all unbelievers (the goats). The phrase "and [when] all the angels [are] with him" is an additional indication that the judgment upon which this description focuses is post-millennial, as there are no indications from elsewhere in scripture that the angels will play a visible role in Christ's millennial kingdom. Further, the fact that "all" the angels are present implies that the fallen angels have now been removed from the scene (an event which takes place at the Millennium's close). In this description too there is a separation of the righteous and the wicked, with the righteous receiving their evaluation first, and the wicked last (which evaluation is followed by their sequestration into the lake of fire). Finally, here too we see believers enjoying eternity at the end of the process in contrast to the prior damnation experienced by unbelievers ("Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life").

As suggested under step one above, this process of rewarding the millennial believers and judging all unbelievers requires the prior resurrection of all remaining non-resurrected human beings (i.e., the final phase of the resurrection unto life on the one hand, and the joint resurrection of all the unsaved dead on the other). This resurrection is in fact the very last *earthly* event of human history and a point equally important to emphasize since it underlines the reality of the eternal consequences of our choices in this life and the eternal divergence between the two essential elements of the human race based upon these choices, namely, eternal life for all who respond to Jesus Christ, and the second death for all who refuse the grace of God (cf. Matt.10:34).

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:2-3

(21) Just as the Father raises the dead and brings them to life, so the Son brings to life whomever He wishes. (22) And neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, (23) in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (24) Truly, truly I say to you, that the one who hears My Word and believes in the One who sent Me has eternal life and does not enter into judgment but has passed from death into life. (25) Truly, truly I say to you that an hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will come to life. (26) For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself. (27) And He has given authority to Him to render judgment, because He is the Son of Man. (28) Do not be

amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. (29) For they shall come forth – those who have done what is good to a resurrection of life (i.e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who have done what is worthless to a resurrection of judgment.

John 5:21-29

And I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

Acts 24:15 NIV

b. The Destruction of the Present Heavens and Earth

(25) Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. (26) They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.

Psalm 102:26 KJV (cf. Heb.1:11-12)

Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath.

Isaiah 13:13 (cf. Hag.2:6; 2:21)

All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

Isaiah 34:4 NIV (cf. Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24-25)

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

Isaiah 51:6 NIV

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Matthew 24:35 NIV (cf. Matt.5:18; Mk.13:31; Lk.21:33)

(25) See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? (26) His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (Hag.2:6; cf. Hag.2:21). (27) And this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] transformation of things which may be shaken as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. (28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear. (29) For our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:25-29

(14) And the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place.

Revelation 6:14

And I saw a throne, a great white one, and Him who was sitting upon it (i.e., Jesus Christ). From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them.

Revelation 20:11

As the above passages show, the removal of the present cosmos is an essential prerequisite for the commencement of eternity, and precedes the creation of the "new heavens and new earth" which will be the home of all believers and elect angels forevermore. The reason for their removal is the necessity to remove every taint of sin and unrighteousness, and, as befits such a judgment, the precise manner of their removal will be a fiery destruction (cf. Heb.12:29):

(7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., that "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God. For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.
2nd Peter 3:7-13

The fact that the present heavens and earth have been "preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men" (v.7; cf. Matt.24:35-36; Mk.13:31-32; 1Pet.4:5-6), indicates the same sequence of events: the destruction of the universe will precede the last judgment, which judgment will in turn precede the creation of the new heavens and new earth. Therefore the last judgment must take place in a sort of brief interim between time and eternity, occurring after the final resurrection of the living and the dead and the annihilation of the present cosmos, but before the creation of the new heavens and new earth and the commencement of eternity.

c. The Judgment of the Sheep

Since the last judgment of Revelation chapter twenty occurs in an interval or interim period between the end of time (i.e., following the resurrection and the destruction of the old heavens and earth described at Rev.20:11b) but before the beginning of eternity (i.e., prior to the creation of the new heavens and new earth described at Rev.21:1), and since the sheep and goats are judged sequentially and in the same venue in Matthew chapter twenty-five, we conclude that the final evaluation of the "friends of the Bride", that is, all who are saved from the point of Christ's return until the end of human history, also takes place during this interlude. This is the final phase of the resurrection of the living prophesied by the apostle Paul:

(23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming, [all believers at the 2nd Advent]. (24) Then the end [of human history, the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet.

1st Corinthians 15:23-25

That the sheep are evaluated first (as we have seen above; see also 1Pet.4:17 where judgment is said to "begin" with the "household of faith", and only afterwards descend upon "those who do not obey the gospel") is also established plainly enough by Matthew 25:31-46; for the sheep on His right hand are commended first (vv.34-40), and only after their evaluation are the goats judged (vv.41-45). Moreover, the evaluation of the sheep for reward is completed before the goats are judged (explaining the absence of believers at the Great White Throne; see below). This evaluation will be precisely along the lines of the evaluation of the Church at Christ's 2nd Advent return; it is only the timing which will be different.

Before moving on to the last judgment of all unbelievers, two common misunderstandings about this final evaluation of resurrected believers must be addressed. First, Matthew 25:46 does not in any way conflict with the fact that only unbelievers are seen before the Great White Throne in Revelation 20:11-15. The righteous have already been evaluated, and so of course "go off into eternal life". Nothing in Matthew 25:46 necessitates either that the sheep should have to "wait" until the goats are condemned to experience eternal life, or far less that they must thus be included in the judgment described at Revelation 20:11-15. The sheep have already received their rewards before the judgment of the goats (i.e., the Great White Throne) even begins, as is abundantly clear from the entire prior description in Matthew chapter twenty-five. Verse 46 merely summarizes the contrasting destinies of the two groups (rather than re-writing the chronological sequence).

Secondly, attempts to equate the sheep and goats judgment with Christ's 2nd Advent (rather than seeing it for what it truly is, the final evaluation of the last echelon of resurrected believers and the last judgment of all unbelievers) are misguided for several reasons:

1) The phrases "blessed of the Father" and "the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" in verse 34 are clear references to the Eternal State rather than the millennial kingdom of Christ. For the Father will not make His abode with us on earth until the end of human history (Rev.21:3; 21:22). Therefore, rather than the thousand year "kingdom of heaven" in time (i.e., Christ's millennial kingdom; contrast in Matt.13:24 and 13:43 respectively), it is the Father's permanent kingdom in eternity which these phrases clearly have in mind (1Cor.15:25-28; Heb.12:28; cf. Heb.8:2).

2) The sheep and goats are judged at the same venue and sequentially, and the unbelievers are thrown into the lake of fire immediately at the conclusion of the process of judgment. This only happens following the conclusion of human history (Rev.20:14-15).

3) The righteous go off "*into* eternal life" at the conclusion of their judgment, a condition which (while we believers do possess it positionally now, and will have it experientially from the point of our departure to be in the Lord's presence, and bountifully from the time of our resurrection) is only truly descriptive of our ultimate status once eternity begins (i.e., not from the commencement of the Millennium but from the beginning of eternity proper).

4) The separation of a single mixed group into two entirely discrete groups (of believers and unbelievers) is only paralleled in descriptions of the end of history (e.g., the wheat and the tares of Matt.13:24-30, and the good and the bad fish of Matt.13:47-50).

It is no doubt because of the overall theme of the book of Revelation, that is, its focusing on God's judgment upon evil and His defeat of the devil, his minion antichrist, and the wicked in general, that we do not find our context providing all of the other details about this final evaluation of the millennial believers (details which, in any case, are available to us from elsewhere in scripture, as we have just observed).

2. The Great White Throne of Jesus Christ: The Last Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead

When this life is over, everyone is judged "according to their works" (Jn.5:29; 2Cor.5:10). For believers this judgment is one of determining rewards (Matt.16:27; 19:28; Lk.14:14; Rev.11:18; cf. Rom.14:10; 1Cor.3:10-17; 2Cor.5:10), since our eternal life is based upon having God's righteousness through faith in Christ rather than upon anything we have "done" (Rom.3:21-22; 4:5; 4:13; 3:28; 5:1; 6:7; 8:1; 9:30-31; 10:6; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.2:16; Eph.2:8-9; Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7). By the time we have arrived here, Revelation 20:11-15, all believers have already been evaluated and rewarded. The Great White Throne, the final or "last" judgment in human history, concerns unbelievers only, and is synonymous with the "goats" portion of the "sheep and goats" judgment of Matthew chapter twenty-five. First and foremost it should be observed that although they have now been resurrected, these individuals are nevertheless described as "the dead" in verse twelve, an appellation appropriate only for unbelievers (as our Lord Himself makes clear: "He is the God not of the dead but of the living", Matt.22:32; cf. Mk.12:27; Lk.20:38). Secondly, in contrast to believers who "do not come into [this sort of] judgment" since we have "passed out of death into

life" (Jn.5:24) and are thus evaluated for our service in life for the purpose of reward, all unbelievers from the beginning of time are indeed judged here at the Great White Throne according to their works, specifically, "judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done" (Rev.20:12b). This focus on judgment with a view toward condemnation, the absence of any suggestion of reward in this passage, the context of awe and foreboding (compare Heb.12:18-24), the opening of the books, especially the book of life (on which see below), and, perhaps most significantly, the fact that all those judged arise from places associated with unbelievers only (the sea, death and Hades), make it crystal clear that this passage applies to unbelievers only. The Great White Throne is thus without question the last and the final judgment of "the dead", that is, the venue where all the unbelievers from throughout human history will be judged by Jesus Christ.

[Timothy], I [give] you [this] charge before God and Christ Jesus, the One who is about to judge the living and the dead . . .
2nd Timothy 4:1a

Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men.
2nd Peter 3:7 (cf. 1Pet.4:5-6)

As 2nd Timothy 4:1, the first passage quoted above, indicates (and as scripture frequently confirms: Jn.5:22; 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom.2:16; 14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10; 2Tim.4:8; Jas.5:9; 1Pet.4:5; Rev.2:5-6; 3:1-3; 3:19-20), as the One into whose hands all judgment has been given as a result of His victory on the cross, the Person sitting on the Great White Throne is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is who will render final judgment upon the lost, that is, all who refused in life to value and accept for eternal life His precious sacrifice on their behalf.

When the Son of Man has come in His glory and all the angels with Him, then (i.e., at the last judgment) He will take His seat on His glorious throne.
Matthew 25:31

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me."
Matthew 28:18

(22) For neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son,
(23) in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father.
John 5:22-23a (cf. Jn.5:27)

And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to bear witness that this [Jesus] is the One appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.
Acts 10:42

"For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

[The examination of Rom.2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

In Revelation 20:12, John is given to see "the dead, both the great and the insignificant, standing in front of the throne". This multitude constitutes the entire number of unbelievers from Cain to those who persist in unbelief at history's end following the conclusion of the Gog-Magog rebellion. All are seen to be "standing" in front of the throne (i.e., recognizable as human beings, having been resurrected). But unlike in the case of believers where there are two phases of the resurrection unto life, one at Christ's return (the Church) and one at the end of the Millennium (the Friends of the Bride), those who have rejected Jesus, whether actively or passively, face a single resurrection – unto judgment.

(28) Do not be amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. (29) For they shall come forth – those who have done what is good to a resurrection of life (i.e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who have done what is worthless to a resurrection of judgment.

John 5:28-29

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God].

Daniel 12:2

It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that, judgment is in store.

Hebrews 9:27

Thus this immense assemblage of unbelievers – the vast majority of human beings coming from every race and nation, time and place – must all be judged by our Lord. Having rejected Him or refused to accept Him during their lifetimes, they will now stand before Jesus Christ the King and render an account, not for reward (as was the case of the two-phased resurrection unto life), but in order to demonstrate their inadequacy for eternal life and their refusal to take advantage of God's great grace and mercy while they lived. John's comment about these unbelievers being distinguishable as to the status they possessed in life (i.e., with the words "the great and the insignificant" he gives us the two extremes) shows the value of human achievement apart from God: it will be less than worthless on the day of judgment. The fact that even unbelievers in condemnation will still be recognizable for who they were and what they did in life (cf. Is.14:9-12; Ezek.32:30-32), while no consolation to them since all will share equally in the lake of fire, is surely a solace to us who will all have an equal and eternal share in Jesus Christ: we

will continue to be "who we are" forever, only with all sin, pain and trouble far removed, and every deed which distinguished us in the service of our Master living on with us for all eternity.

And books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done.

Revelation 20:12b

The "books" mentioned twice here are distinguished by John from the "book of life", and importantly so. As we have seen in our prior treatments of the Book of Life in this series, all human beings have their names recorded in the record of life as part of their birthright as human beings. This is made clear, for example, by Psalm 69:28 where our Lord is asked to blot the godless out of the book, since, being "godless", they never would have had their names recorded in the Book of Life in the first place unless everyone was placed in it originally. Moreover, it is entirely just for God to include everyone in the book initially, because Jesus Christ died for all. God desires everyone to be saved (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; 1Tim.2:4; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9), and has made provision for the same by sacrificing His one and only beloved Son for us, judging all sin in Him on the cross. But while this incomparable offer of eternal life at no cost is available to every human being, the number of those who have embraced God's mercy in this life is infinitesimally small. When a person actively and consciously rejects Jesus Christ in this life, or alternatively resists divine truth persistently until the end of life, that person's name is "blotted out" of the book. The Book of Life thus has at least two important functions: 1) it acts as a safeguard to ensure that no one is condemned who did not deserve condemnation (for only those who are not found in this book will be cast into the lake of fire: Rev.20:15); 2) it acts as a witness to the inimitable mercy, love and grace of God (for it is only by a person's own actions or refusal to act that their name is erased from the book – that is, through his or her own free will). Only by way of willfully despising the blood of Christ, His death for our sins, will anyone find themselves standing before our Lord's Great White Throne.

The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son.

John 3:18

The "other books" mentioned in Revelation 20:12 contain the life-record of every human being, preserving their every thought, word and deed. They represent a comprehensive "history", but perfectly recorded and divinely interpreted. For God knows not only the facts of everything our mind conceives, our mouth utters, and our hands undertake – He also knows the motivations behind all that we do, and those motivations will be revealed very clearly and painfully on this day of judgment.

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 NIV

This [examination will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart.

1st Corinthians 4:5a

God the Father is of course under no obligation to have His Son our Lord conduct this final judgment of those who dismissed Him and His sacrifice in life. These unbelievers have already forfeited any chance of eternal life by rejecting the one and only way to avoid death: salvation through Jesus Christ. Thus even though it results in condemnation, the Great White Throne is a gracious act. No unbeliever will go to perdition without the reasons for their damnation, general and particular, being made abundantly clear.

As to the judgment itself, verse 12 of Revelation chapter 20 states that all unbelievers will be "judged on the basis of the things written in the books", and verse 13 affirms that they were "condemned according to what they had done". These two statements demonstrate respectively that in each and every case a thorough evaluation of the person's entire life will prove that:

1) Whatever they may have done, "good", bad or indifferent, unbelievers have no claim on eternal life apart from God's work in Jesus Christ (whose sacrifice they have rejected). Nothing they have "done" in their own power could ever be acceptable "coin" to God (Rom.8:8; Heb.11:6).

(7) Surely, no one can redeem a man [from God's hand], no one can pay a ransom to God for him. (8) For the redemption price of a life is too precious for Him to relent forever, (9) that one should live on forever, and not see corruption.

Psalm 49:7-9

(26) What point is there for a man to come to possess the entire world, if he should then come to lose his life? Or what can a man pay to regain his life? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.

Matthew 16:26-27

2) The expunging of unbelievers from the Book of Life is therefore entirely just; although they knew the truth, yet they did not give God His proper due by receiving His Son, condemned in their place and ours, but chose instead to face judgment before Jesus Christ rather than submit to Him in faith.

(18) [In contrast to the righteousness of God which is being revealed through faith (vv.16-17)], God's wrath is being revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and

unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both his eternal power and his divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. (24) For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). (25) [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. (26) [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, (27) and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulfulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due for their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, (29) filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, (30) slanderers, God-forsaken [and] forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, (31) unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, (32) men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those who made it their practice [to do them].

Romans 1:18-32

"Judged on the basis of the things written in the books": As explained above, these "other books" contain the complete history of every human being's life, including every thought, word and deed along with the true motives behind them. What the books do not contain, what they could never contain in the case of any unbeliever, no matter how noble or self-sacrificing, is any trace of evidence for any action or actions worthy of eternal life. That is true for two reasons. First and foremost, no volume of positive deeds could ever suffice to wipe out sin, any sin, no matter how insignificant. Since there is no possible way for us to gain deliverance from the lake of fire on our own, we human beings have thus been placed in an impossible situation at birth – or we would have been, absent the great mercy of God and the great love of Jesus Christ in giving Himself over to death to pay the penalty for all sins in our place. No form of "substitute payment" exists for this inestimable sacrifice (Ps.49:7-9; Matt.16:26-27; Mk.8:36-38; Lk.9:25-26), and none will be accepted before the Great White Throne. Having refused to accept God's solution to the problem of sin, by definition unbelievers have chosen to stand on their own works instead. Here is no solid ground to stand at all, only unstable sand destined to lead to a catastrophic collapse.

(24) Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: (25) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. (26) And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: (27) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Matthew 7:24-27 KJV

(16) For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His one and only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. (18) The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's one and only Son. (19) And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because their deeds were evil. (20) For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. (21) But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will).

John 3:16-21

(1) Therefore you are without any excuse, my friend, everyone of you who judges. For when you judge someone else, you condemn yourself. For you who render judgment are [in fact] making a practice of doing the very same things. (2) [Yes, you condemn yourself], for we know that God's judgment is [rendered] in [all] truth against those who practice things of this sort. (3) And do you [actually] imagine, my friend, you who judge those who make a practice of such things which you also do, that you will escape the judgment of God? (4) Or do you esteem as being of little account this truly valuable tolerance He [is exercising towards you] in [all] forbearance and patience? [If you do, it is] because you fail to realize that it is this very tolerance of God that is leading you to (i.e., giving you the opportunity for) repentance. (5) But in accordance with your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment (i.e., the Great White Throne). (6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works, (7) to those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life, (8) but to those who out of selfish motivation are disobedient to the truth (i.e., reject Christ) while obedient to injustice, [there will be nothing but] wrath and anger.

Romans 2:1-8

Secondly, even if the blasphemous notion that good works or "charity" ought to weigh in the balance at the last judgment were to be considered (blasphemous, because it necessarily equates what we do with what Christ did), even in such an impossible case, these works would still not

suffice, no matter how extensive, because they are necessarily tainted, since they have been done entirely apart from God who alone is good, and therefore cannot in fact be "good" in God's righteous estimate at all (Rom.4:2; cf. Deut.9:5-6; Is.59:4-8).

(1) For if Abraham really was considered righteous (i.e., in the eyes of men) as a result of the works [he did], then he does have something to boast about – but not in front of God!
(3) What does the scripture actually say? [It actually says that] "Abraham believed **in God**, and [so his faith] was attributed to him for righteousness."

Romans 4:2-3

(8) For you have been saved by [God's] grace through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's gift. (9) Nor did it come from what you have done, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them).

Ephesians 2:8-10

[God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not through our works, but through His own [sovereign] choice [of us] and [His] grace [towards us], [that grace] which was given to us in Christ Jesus in eternity past.

2nd Timothy 1:9

(3) For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, enslaved to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other. (4) But [in spite of our prior sinfulness], when the goodness and benevolence of God our Savior appeared [in the flesh], (5) not on account of [any] works which we had done in [so-called] righteousness did He save us, but through the washing [away of our sins which leads to our] rebirth and [to our] new beginning from the Holy Spirit (6) whom He poured out upon us bountifully through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope.

Titus 3:3-7

True "good" can only be accomplished by the power of God, and, conversely, anything not done in the power of God cannot be truly "good".

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

1st Corinthians 12:3 NASB

For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose.

This impossible situation of being sinful with absolutely no way of redeeming oneself is in fact a great blessing in that it removes the possibility of anyone assuming (in an objective assessment) that there is any way to approach God without Jesus Christ. That is true even for those who attempt to use the only godly standard of works, namely, the Law, for such purposes – and if it is true of works done according to the God-given Law, how much more is it not true for works done according to some arbitrary human standard?

(19) We know that however many things the Law says it says to those under [the authority of] the Law, [and it does so] in order that every mouth may be shut and that the entire world may be [revealed] as guilty in God's eyes. (20) Therefore no flesh shall be considered righteous before Him through the works of the Law, for it is through the Law that we come to acknowledge [our] sin.

Romans 3:19-20

(22) But scripture has locked everything up under [the power of] sin, so that the promise which is fulfilled through faith in Christ might be given to those who believe. (23) Before faith arrived, we were being guarded under the Law[*'s* protection], shut in [in anticipation of] our faith which was destined to be revealed. (24) So the Law acts as a guardian to us [who leads us] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith.

Galatians 3:22-24

The above realization of guilt capable of leading to genuine faith in Christ is of course only true for those who have not yet corrupted their thinking so as to imagine that their sins are "not that bad" (erroneously assuming that God uses a relative standard of condemnation: i.e., they don't need God), or that what they have done in life "ought to count for something" (erroneously assuming that anything but the blood of Christ could propitiate God's perfect character where sin is concerned: i.e., God needs their help), or that this last judgment will "never happen" (erroneously assuming that God has no right to judge them: i.e., God should worship them). These are blasphemous notions which turn God's true righteousness on its head, ignoring His mercy in Jesus Christ and imagining that His love will overlook His justice in their case in spite of their rejection of His sacrifice of His one and only beloved Son. Such thinking reflects the satanic world view, and only takes hold once our common human appreciation of the true objective reality of life (brought about by natural revelation) has been supplanted by hardness of heart. Since the recognition of the insufficiency of human deeds to effect salvation is universal (until this naturally revealed truth is rejected and the devil's lies accepted in its place), individual judgment will no doubt focus upon the motives behind all such purportedly "good" works wherein the unbeliever placed earthly confidence. The result of divine inspection of these will be to demonstrate without a doubt that even here the deficiency is complete. And that is easy enough to see, for if they have rejected God and His solution in Jesus Christ (as they patently have), how could the blasphemous offering up of a substitute for Christ's work ever be separated from the rebellious motives of heart that steadfastly refused to accept Him in the first place? Therefore the unbelievers' true motivations, more often than not invisible to us here on earth, are

quite different than presently may be assumed (especially in those cases where the charitable actions themselves appear beyond reproach). At the Great White Throne, all of these secrets will be completely exposed, for the Lord knows all the true details (Job 34:21; Ps.90:8; 139:1-18; Jer.16:17; 23:24; Heb.4:13), and these will all be brought perspicuously to light at the last judgment (cf. Job 19:29; Eccl.3:17; 11:9; Is.26:21; Matt.10:26-27; 12:36; Lk.2:34-35).

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 NIV

(2) There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. (3) What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

Luke 12:2-3 NIV (cf. Mk.4:22; Lk.8:17)

[This examination of Rom.2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

So then each of us will give an account to God concerning himself.

Romans 14:12

The Lord is the One who judges me. Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.

1st Corinthians 4:4-5

For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in which (i.e., over the course of which) the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection].

2nd Peter 3:10

It should be emphasized here that whatever use is made at this judgment in the analysis of a particular individual's life of the sins he or she has committed, while these are most definitely a part of the record and will no doubt be introduced to demonstrate patterns of behavior, they are not the basis for condemnation. Jesus Christ died for the sins of all mankind, and in doing so atoned for all sins. However, for the forgiveness God provided as a result of that cleansing, His gracious offer of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ had to have been accepted in life (Matt.12:32; cf. Jn.8:24). After death in torments, and even more especially here at the last judgment, there will no longer be any gap between perception and reality; therefore there will no longer be any possibility of exercising faith or free will. In life, while it is true that the consequences for spurning God's grace are unimaginable, it is entirely possible for a person to shut out that truth. It is in large measure this very deniability of the divine, this ability to reject

the truth, that serves as the test of each person's heart. Thus this judgment is not at all about sin; it is instead all about demonstrating definitively how and where and when and why every unbeliever repeatedly rejected the grace of God and His truth. It is all about how everyone condemned chose hell instead of God at every earthly opportunity.

For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead.”

Acts 17:31

"When I choose the appointed time, I will judge righteously."

Psalm 75:2

As these verses demonstrate, the standard of judgment at the Great White Throne will be divine righteousness, not human righteousness. It matters not a whit if a person imagines that what they are doing or have done in this life is "right" or "righteous" or "good", not even if most other human beings should happen to agree with him or her, for it is God's perfect standard that counts.

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 14:12 NASB (cf. Prov.16:25)

Righteousness, true divine righteousness and the unbeliever's lack thereof, will be the touchstone that invalidates all of the unbelievers' so-called "good works". God's character in perfect righteousness demanded a truly perfect and righteous substitute to propitiate sin, and Jesus Christ provided that perfect sacrifice which did indeed satisfy the righteous character of God. But those who reject the gift of Jesus Christ have rejected God's righteousness, choosing to stand judgment on their own self-righteousness instead. We believers have substituted God's righteousness for our own (Rom.1:17; 3:22-26; 4:5-22; 5:18; 5:21; 6:16; 8:10; 9:31; 10:4-10; 1Cor.1:30; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.3:6; 5:5; Eph.4:24; Phil.3:9), and for that reason are considered righteous by God in spite of our own many failings and imperfections. But unbelievers have rejected God's righteousness in the blasphemous assumption that God will somehow accept their "works" in place of the work of Jesus Christ (cf. Is.64:6; Ezek.33:13; Jn.16:8-10; Tit.3:5; Heb.11:7; Jas.2:23; 2Pet.1:1). In truth, not only could no amount of charity ever suffice to wash away the most insignificant sin, but nothing done outside the power of God has the remotest chance of being truly "good". For everything that is produced by sinful man is tainted and unacceptable to the perfect character of God.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Revelation 19:8 KJV

The pristine integrity of God's righteousness and the perfect standard it embodies is seen perspicuously in the appearance of the Great White Throne, with that color indicating that no

pollution from sin, no matter how small, can be allowed in the new heavens and earth which are about to be created, a place "where righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13). All sinful human beings must first have been completely cleansed of all of their sins through faith in Jesus Christ to be allowed to enter the eternal state, the ultimate paradise (cf. Is.1:18). That is why we shall wear white in eternity as the above passage indicates, namely, as sign of the perfect righteousness we now possess through faith in Jesus Christ, the One who washed away our sins with His blood, His spiritual death on the cross (Rev.3:4-5; 3:18; 6:11; 7:9; 19:14).

(13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 7:13-14

But while believers are known by their white attire devoid of any stain or mark, representing the righteousness of God which we possess through faith in Jesus Christ, unbelievers by way of contrast are perspicuous in God's presence in their lack of suitable attire, representing the absence of God's righteousness (and the consequent impossibility of dwelling in His presence). The parable of the wedding banquet illustrates the latter very clearly:

(8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, **both good and bad**, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. (13)" Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Matthew 22:8-14 NIV

The banquet is the Millennium, and the "good and bad" represent the entrance into the thousand year kingdom of unbelievers as well as believers, everyone who survives the Tribulation (with the exception of those who take the mark of the beast). While those without God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ will enjoy the bountiful blessings of the millennial kingdom along with believers, when they come up for inspection at the last judgment (as in the case of the individual in the parable above), they will be condemned – not for any particular offense, but for lack of the righteousness which comes by faith alone. For this reason, blessing attends all believers who not only have God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, but who guard it zealously by guarding their faith – lest both be lost in the Great Apostasy in the times of trouble ahead of which the book of Revelation warns:

Happy is he who both stays awake and guards his clothing, in order that he may not walk about naked and [people] see his shame.

Revelation 16:15b

Happy are they who are washing their clothing (cf. Rev.7:13), so that they will have a right to the tree of life and they may enter by the gates into the city [of New Jerusalem].

Revelation 22:14

In contrast to the unacceptable works of unbelievers accomplished in the energy of the flesh, believers have been given works to do in the Spirit (Eph.2:10). As we saw above, believers' works, since they are of God, are evaluated for the purpose of reward (to show their value, and also to eliminate from consideration anything that may have been done in the flesh instead of in the Spirit: 1Cor.3:11-15). Rather than pseudo-works proceeding from fleshly motivations, therefore, all believers will have at least one truly "good" work to offer before the Lord on the day of their evaluation – the "work" of putting their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, of accepting the offer of His righteousness in place of their own:

(28) Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (29) Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

John 6:28-29 NIV

Therefore true faith is the "work" God requires, not a mere intellectual appreciation of who Jesus is and what He has done (for "even the demons" know this), but an acceptance and commitment of heart to this truth as the way of salvation. It is this change of heart that produces the new birth wherein the human spirit is given to see the truth unimpeded by the sin nature (whereas hardness of heart is the complete subordination of the spirit to the flesh). The struggle between the two led by the Spirit of God then characterizes the believer's life after being born again (Gal.5:15-25), with all who have appropriated the righteousness of God by faith having something "good" to show for their time on earth as a result, the basic "good work", their faith preserved, if nothing else. But unbelievers have no share in any of this. Their "works" are material and of the material with no element of the spiritual whatsoever. Since they were not done by God or through God, and certainly not for God, by definition they are not acceptable to God.

(41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Matthew 25:41-46 NIV

"The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Luke 3:9 NIV

It should thus not be missed that since this is an absolute judgment, there will be no question of degrees of guilt or innocence. All human beings are guilty before Him to whom we must give an account, and our guilt is only removed and replaced by righteousness through the justification we have in Jesus Christ. For unbelievers it will not be a question of "relative worth" or "relative evil". It will avail nothing to have led a moral life, a patriotic life, a life characterized by charity and amity and lawful behavior. It will not make any difference that a person has lived "very well" in comparison to others – these things do matter in *this* world, but not before the Great White throne.. For even the most noble and virtuous unbeliever who has ever lived (whoever that may be) has still been steeped in sin from birth, and will still have no answer to the charge that though he or she knew about God and His righteous demands, yet they refused to accept the gift of the One Person whose work would have provided them entrance into eternal life: the blood of Jesus Christ, His work in expiating all sins at the cross.

(23) For all sin and fall short of God's glory, (24) [but we believers are all] justified without cost by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (25) God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, (26) so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.
Romans 3:23-26

"Condemned according to what they had done": As the above should make clear, the condemnation of unbelievers in Revelation chapter 20 verse 13 is based not upon their deeds (the examination of which has merely served to demonstrate the truth about their life-choices), but upon their rejection of God's offer of salvation through faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This judgment has shown that nothing they "have done" could ever possibly save them – and indeed has instead been the chief exhibit of evidence against them: they have chosen to stand upon their own inadequate, tainted works and self-righteousness instead of upon the sacrifice of Christ and the righteousness of God through faith in Him. Their resultant condemnation is therefore absolutely just.

I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you.
Isaiah 57:12 NIV

Thus the operative portion of "what they have done" in terms of the most important question of life, "What think you of Jesus Christ?", is to have refused God's gracious and merciful offer of eternal life through His Name. It is for this reason that their names were blotted out of the Book of Life.

"He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."

John 12:48 NASB

As the pertinent section of Romans chapter one (translated above) makes clear, we should not weep for these unbelievers as if what they are about to suffer is unjust or comes as some sort of surprise. In fact, they knew the issues quite clearly. They knew full well about God, for He made His existence and nature evident to them from the way He has constructed the world and from every aspect of life. They realized full well their own mortality, and the conscience we all possess made it abundantly clear to them just how far from perfection they fell short. At some point in their lives, every unbeliever recognized the reality of God, and the problems posed by the fact that they would one day face the perfectly holy Creator – as soiled, imperfect creatures. For all those who have no desire to have a relationship with God on any terms, these are uncomfortable truths indeed, so that it is no great wonder that unbelievers make concerted efforts to blot these divine realities out of their thinking. For all those who respond to the truth in humility and truly desire an eternal relationship with the Almighty, the gospel of Jesus Christ is made available in every case. But for all who have no such desire and merely wish to be “left alone” during this life in spite of the horrific consequences of ignoring life's fundamental truths, a degeneration of their thinking in respect to these truths inevitably sets in, namely the “hardening of the heart” which makes it possible for those who choose against God to go on with their lives with no further qualms about such matters after decisively rejecting Him. This process and the specific decision points where God's truth was rejected and the devil's lies accepted in its place will be made obvious before the Great White Throne. And, these things being so, the condemnation which all unbelievers suffer at this point as recorded here at Revelation 20:13 will thereby be seen for what it truly is: not only just and justified, but absolutely necessary and self-selected in the case of every unbeliever.

(5) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (6) God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (7) To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. (8) But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (9) There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; (10) but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (11) For God does not show favoritism.

Romans 2:5-11 NIV

(3) For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. (4) They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. (5) But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (6) For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who

are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

1st Peter 4:3-6 NIV

Finally, although they refused to submit to Jesus in faith out of free will during their lives on earth, all unbelievers will nevertheless in any case be forced to acknowledge Him as Lord at the last judgment.

(9) Therefore God exalted [Christ] to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11 (cf. Is.45:23; Rom.14:11)

3. The Sea, Death and Hades

For the sea gave up the dead which were in it, [that is] death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and each person was condemned according to what they had done.

Revelation 20:13

The passage above is frequently misquoted and just as frequently misunderstood. To interpret these verses properly it is first necessary to understand what "the sea" means in scripture.³ While many of us romanticize the ocean, in the Bible the sea is nearly always associated with evil and with judgment upon evil since it is God's ultimate means of judgment (e.g., on the original universe following Satan's revolt, and upon the earth of Noah's time, to name the two most extreme sea-judgments). That is its primary meaning here, that is, we have to do with a general reference to the place of judgment (the residence of all unbelievers who died prior to the end of history), rather than the literal sea per se. For in biblical "geography", the sea covers and conceals the entire tripartite underworld, "death and Hades"⁴ (the place of the unsaved dead), the Abyss⁵ (the place of incarcerated fallen angels), and "paradise" or "Abraham's bosom"⁶ (the place of the righteous dead before Christ's ascension). Thus in the passage above "the sea" is meant as a sort of short-hand for what we would call "hell" (or *Sheol*), and naturally enough from a biblical point

³ This principle of interpretation is covered in detail in The Satanic Rebellion Part 2: The Genesis Gap, section II.3, "The Sea".

⁴ See "Hades", in section II.6.d of The Satanic Rebellion Part 1: Satan's Rebellion and Fall from Grace.

⁵ See "The Abyss", in section IV of The Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement.

⁶ See "Paradise", in section II.6.d of The Satanic Rebellion Part 1: Satan's Rebellion and Fall from Grace.

of view since the sea is the restraining capstone or "lid", so to speak, upon the entire underworld where the unsaved dead presently reside. This is made clear as well by the fact that the phrase "death and Hades" is in apposition to "the sea" in Revelation 20:13 above. That is to say, "death and Hades" is the same as the sea, and the phrase is offered as an explanation of who the dead are that the sea is seen to disgorge: all of previously departed unbelieving humanity (in contrast to those who were still alive at history's end when they experienced the "resurrection of judgment").

The spirits of the departed are in torment under the waters, even all who reside [there below].
Job 26:5

Death and Hades are therefore a single place (one could punctuate the phrase as death-and-Hades). This is the abode of those who died without God and without salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whatever name be used to describe this portion of the netherworld, *Sheol* (the Hebrew equivalent of Hades), be it the grave, torments, death or Hades. Further indications that we have only unbelievers here include:

1) the fact that these individuals are "dead" and are being kept in "death-and Hades" is a further indication that no believers appear among their ranks. For our God is the God of the living, not the dead, and we exit this life for eternal life, not for death (cf. Jesus' argument based on precisely this principle: Matt.22:29-32).

2) the fact that this group is an undifferentiated mass whereas the biblical practice in places where the two groups really are combined is to show the difference between believers and unbelievers (cf. "tares and wheat"; "wheat and chaff", "taken and left", "sheep and goat" or "dead in Christ" vs. merely "dead").

3) the fact that if any of these people were believers, they would not be coming from below the earth (and all of these people come from below the earth), since all believers have gone to be with the Lord in heaven since His ascension.

4. The Final Disposition of the Unsaved Dead

(14) And death and Hades (i.e., all unbelievers) were cast into the lake of fire. And this is the second death: the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire.
Revelation 20:14-15

The absence of these unbelievers names from the Book of Life is not the result of any arbitrary decision on God's part. Their names were blotted out either as a result of their active choice (i.e., overt rejection of God and His Son in life), or by default of choice (i.e., stubbornly refusing to come to God in Christ throughout the entire span of their lives). It is on this basis, namely, failure to accept God's free gift of eternal life and righteousness through the blood of Christ, that all of history's unbelievers are condemned (Rev.20:13). The checking of the Book of Life described

above is therefore not a means of judgment but a safeguard which ensures that no believer will experience the second death, being cast into the lake of fire. Clearly, the Lord knows who are His (2Tim.2:19), and just as clearly He is incapable of making any such mistake. This check is provided and described for our benefit, that we may have complete confidence in our eternal status through faith in Jesus, and that we may also come to understand the entirely just process whereby those who are condemned are consigned to eternal fire: it is only through their own choice in rejecting eternal life in Jesus Christ who died to provide it that their names are blotted out of the Book of Life.

(3b) They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations; (4) so I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread. For when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, no one listened. They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.

Isaiah 66:3b-4 NIV

Every single unbeliever who stands judgment before the Great White Throne will be shown to have rejected Christ's work in preference to their own works. As a result, every single unbeliever will be condemned at the last judgment, and these all share a common fate: being "cast into the lake of fire". As explained above, the lake of fire is a real place, a place of eternal torment, not of temporary purging nor of oblivion. As bad as the suffering of that place of darkness and fire will be, however, from the believers' point of view the worst thing about it will be the eternal separation from God which residence therein will entail.

For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal *separation* [from God].

Daniel 12:2

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction *away from the presence of the Lord* and the glory of His power, (10) when He comes on that [great] day to be glorified in the midst of His saints (i.e., resurrected believers) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed – as our testimony has been believed in your case.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-10

Thus the Great White Throne judgment is the last stone to be put into place in the edifice of human history before we enter the eternal Kingdom of the Father in the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth. On that day it will be clear to all, believers and unbelievers, men and angels alike, that God has worked His perfect will in every way and in every individual case from

the beginning to the end, with grace and mercy and blessing forever more in abundance for all who would but come to the grace and mercy and blessing He has freely provided through the sacrifice of His one and only Son, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

G. New Jerusalem and the Eternal State

1. The New Heavens and the New Earth

(1) And [then] (i.e., at the conclusion of the last judgment) I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth [appear]. For the previous heaven and the previous earth had passed away (Rev.20:11), and the sea [now] no longer existed [on this New Earth].
Revelation 21:1

As we have seen, the old heavens and the old earth had already been consumed before the Great White Throne judgment (Rev.20:11), so that John's mention of that event in Revelation 21:1 is retrospective (i.e., they "had" [already] passed away previously, before this coming of the New Heavens and New Earth). The purpose of the repetition here is to emphasize that the New Heavens and the New Earth cannot exist in tandem with the old, that the making of all things new requires the prior destruction of the old, and, most importantly, that the New Jerusalem cannot exist side-by-side with anything sinful or corrupt or tainted in any way (also indicated by the absence of the sea; see immediately below). For the New Jerusalem is the abode of God, and God the Father will only come to abide with mankind again when the universe has been purged of every trace of evil and has become instead a place where only righteousness dwells (2Pet.3:13).

It is important to understand precisely what is being described in Revelation 21:1. First, the New Heaven mentioned here consists of both the sky (the first heaven) and the universe (the second heaven), but not what we often call "heaven" per se (i.e., the third heaven, the abode of God: 2Cor.12:2). The third heaven is "not part of this [part of the] creation" (Heb.9:11; cf. Heb.7:26 where our Lord ascends to the third heaven which is "higher than the *heavens*", pl.), and has not been contaminated by sin so as to require the same cleansing by fire undergone by the rest of the visible universe (i.e., the earth and the twin heavens of atmosphere and space beyond). Indeed, the reason for the existence of the third heaven in the first place was to carve out, so to speak, a locality where God and the elect angels could continue to commune despite the pollution of the physical heavens and earth by Satan's rebellion. This deliberate separation and sanctification of God's presence from the corrupt universe was essential in order to preclude its immediate destruction (a judgment which the direct contact of holy God with anything profane necessitates: Ps.5:4-5; cf. Gen.1:6-7; Job 38:4-7; Heb.9:11). This separation of the third heaven from the rest of the cosmos is seen most perspicuously in the symbolism of the veil which closed off the holy of holies in the tabernacle-temple and shielded the Shekinah glory of God: only the high priest could enter once a year, and did so as a type of Christ. The earthly veil was split after Christ's death for sin (Matt.27:51; Mk.15:38; Lk.23:46), symbolically demonstrating that the way back to

perfect God had now been opened up – for all those cleansed by Christ's sacrifice (Heb.10:19-21).

That John is using the singular "heaven" here to mean the twin heavens taken together as one (i.e., the atmosphere and universe beyond the sky) can be clearly seen from his practice elsewhere in the book. While many biblical writers pluralize the word following the Hebrew custom (i.e., in Hebrew the word "heavens", *shamayim*, שָׁמַיִם, is always in the plural or, more accurately, the dual), of the fifty-one times in Revelation where John uses the Greek word for heaven, *ouranos* (οὐρανός), he employs the singular in every passage save one (Rev.12:12 – to emphasize the totality of the devil's exclusion from the celestial realms and his confinement to earth exclusively). Whether John means by this word the third heaven (as is frequently the case; cf. Rev.8:1) or the twin heavens of the physical cosmos (as in, e.g., Rev.8:10) must be determined from context, but the meaning is always evident as it is here. We may therefore be sure that, although John's habit of expressing this concept is somewhat different from that of other biblical writers (Peter and Isaiah, for example), with the word "heaven" he is indeed referring both to the sky and to the physical universe beyond it, namely, the visible "twin heavens", although not to the third heaven. For John, then, the term "New Heaven" means precisely the same thing as the phrase "New Heavens" found in Isaiah and 2nd Peter: the physical sky and the physical universe beyond earth's atmosphere – but not the third heaven, God's present dwelling place.

The replacement of the old earth by the New Earth described in Revelation 21:1 means precisely that. That is to say, we have to do here only with the substitution of the New Earth for the old earth, but not the replacement of the areas "under the earth" (places "not of this cosmos" which, like the third heaven, are separated from the physical world and not a true part of it). It is true that following the Great White Throne judgment, with all believers resurrected and with all unbelievers and fallen angels consigned to the lake of fire, there will be no further need for three of the compartments of Hades below the earth (i.e., Paradise, a.k.a. Abraham's Bosom; the Abyss, a.k.a. Tartarus; and Torments, a.k.a., *Sheol*). However, it is more than likely that this now otherwise empty nether region is also the place of the Lake of the Fire. The Lake of Fire and Hades, the (theologically but not materially) subterranean realm wherein the lake most probably exists, will continue in that existence forever, completely separated from the New Heavens and the New Earth. Theologically speaking, the third heaven and Hades are the two opposite poles which bound the present universe, and, like the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, respectively represent the choice which faces every human being: eternity with God through the reconciliation which the sacrifice of Jesus Christ effects for all who desire it, or eternal separation from God. The old cosmos has a limited life-span and will pass from existence in what is, compared to eternity, the blink of an eye. Heaven and hell are, therefore, the only two possible eternal residences, and neither is part of this present creation. But while hell in its permanent iteration will continue to be separate from the New Creation just as it was from the old (with the major difference being that the Lake of Fire will unquestionably be worse than the present day abode of deceased unbelievers, namely, Torments), heaven and earth will be separated no more. No longer will God reside apart, having deliberately and necessarily

sequestered Himself from the material universe. With the descent of the New Jerusalem, heaven will come to earth, and there will no longer be any differentiation between the two.

(25) Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. (26) Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.
Psalm 102:25-26 NASB

"For behold, I am going to create New Heavens and a New Earth, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind."
Isaiah 65:17

"For just as the New Heavens and New Earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue".
Isaiah 66:22

(7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God. For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting New Heavens and a New Earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.
2nd Peter 3:7-13

As it says in Isaiah 65:17 quoted above, the wonders of our eternal existence will be so fantastic, that with an eternity to spend, the old order of things will not only not be remembered but will never even come to mind. It is on this New Earth that God will reign forever, an earth restored, remade, and specifically reconstructed for saved mankind's eternal blessing. It will be better than the garden of Eden by untold orders of magnitude, better even than Jerusalem in the Millennium. The New Jerusalem will be the paradise par excellence, matchless, eternal, filled with all the blessings exemplified in the previous paradises but superior in ways and to degrees which we cannot even begin to contemplate at present. It will be without sin and without end; it will be the place where we will live forever in the presence of God Himself. The glory, the wonder, and the blessing of the New Heavens and the New Earth can only be dimly imagined at present, "for now

we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1Cor.13:12 KJV). Nevertheless, the Bible does allow us to say a few things about that blessed eternal state, keeping in mind our present perceptual limitations.

First, the absence of the sea mentioned here in verse one has a significance beyond its mere lack of presence on the New Earth. For one thing, without any sea the entire planet will be available for direct use (instead of the present one fourth or so of dry land). Coupled with the greatly expanded size of the New Earth (see below), this will result in ample and abundant space for all of us destined to inherit eternal life. Even more significant, however, is the symbolism behind the removal of the sea. In terms of biblical symbolism the sea signifies evil, for the sea is one of God's most prominent instruments of judgment.⁷ So while many of us today may enjoy certain aspects of the world's oceans, their absence from the New Earth represents the complete and concomitant removal of every aspect of sin and evil with which the present cosmos has been permanently marred by Satan's rebellion (2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:7-8; 21:27; 22:14-15; cf. Is.52:1). Thus the lack of any sea is tangible proof that every trace of evil has now been burnt away (2Pet.3:7) so that on the New Earth only righteousness will dwell (2Pet.3:13): even God's most conspicuous reminder of judgment now past will no longer exist. The absence of the sea, therefore, constitutes a promise of eternal peace, blessing and prosperity. Just as the rainbow reminds us of God's pledge not to destroy the present earth by means of the sea (Gen.9:12-17), the fact of the sea's complete removal will be a pledge of the replacement of death and judgment with eternal life and limitless divine blessing, world without end. Once the glory of God has melted away every last trace of corruption, there will be no further need of any sea as a means of judgment and separation from God:

- The sea represents death (Rev.20:13); but from now on there will be only life eternal.
- The sea represents judgment (Gen.6-7); but from now on there will be only divine favor.
- The sea represents evil (Rev.11:7; 17:8); but from now on there will be only goodness and blessing.
- The sea was the source of antichrist (Rev.13:1); but from now on we will live with Jesus Christ.
- The sea (the "lid" on the underworld) represents separation from God (Gen.1:7; 1:10; Job 26:5; Ezek.1:22-28; 2Pet.2:4-5; Rev.4:6); but from now on the Father will tent with us (Rev.21:3).

The heavenly sea in the present third heaven, the "waters above" as seen from the heaven-side of things, constitutes a sort of viewing-port for the observation of all that is currently happening on the present earth (Rev.4:6; 15:2; cf. Ezek.1:22-28; 10:1). We are told in Isaiah's final verse (i.e.,

⁷ See The Satanic Rebellion Part 2: The Genesis Gap, section II.3, "The Sea".

Is.66:24), that saved humanity will "go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh". So while the earthly sea will be no more, it is likely that the heavenly sea will come to earth along with the New Jerusalem, with the words "go forth" indicating that this viewing-port will be somewhere outside of the city.

Second, we may draw some comparisons between the New Heavens and the New Earth and what the Bible tells us about the blessed resurrection body which every saved person will enjoy for all eternity. The New Heavens and New Earth appear to be "resurrected" in a fashion analogous to our rising from the dead: they are also transformed completely, but still bear a close enough resemblance to their previous forms to retain the names "heavens" and "earth", even though they will be fundamentally "new". Just as the new covenant is in truth a fulfillment of the promises of the old covenant (and better in every respect: Heb.8:6), and just as the resurrection body is a fulfillment of the promise we now possess of eternal life (and better in every respect: 1Cor.15:35-58), so the New Heavens and the New Earth are the fulfillment of the promise of the present cosmos, a perfect world not only for the absence of all that is imperfect, but also for the presence of all that is good and right and blessed and delightful. Moreover, there is certainly a direct relationship between the resurrection body and the new cosmos, since the new order of things has been specifically designed by God for us as the place in which to enjoy our eternal life:

- Just as the resurrection body will still be recognizable, merely inestimably better than before (cf., Lk.24:31; Jn.20:16; 20:20; 20:26-28; 21:12), so the New Heavens and New Earth will represent an improvement of unfathomable proportions over the old order (while still being discernible as "heaven and earth").
- Just as the resurrection body will retain all of its legitimate functions, merely adding to them in ways as yet not fully understood (Matt.28:10; 28:18-20; Lk.24:15; Lk.24:43; Jn.21:13-15), so the New Heavens and New Earth will provide all their previous joys and benefits to an infinitely greater degree, and with many other wonders added thereto.
- Just as the resurrection body will no longer be subject to pain, disease or death (Rom.6:9; Rev.21:4), so the New Heavens and New Earth will lack any trace of anything pernicious, harmful, or disagreeable.
- Just as the resurrection body will be perfectly attuned to the glory, the power and the spirituality of the eternal life which will be ours (1Cor.15:41-44), so the New Heavens and New Earth will be perfectly adapted to us and for our eternal life.
- Just as the resurrection body will be a body of light with all trace of darkness utterly and eternally absent (1Cor.15:43; Rev.1:16b), so the New Heavens and New Earth will be refulgent with the glory of the Father and Son, a place of light without darkness forever for all those who are "light in the Lord" (Eph.5:8).

In short, the transformation of the universe described here is in no way a subtraction of anything good (only of everything evil); rather it will be a multiplication of the good to something better by orders of magnitude we can only superficially and imperfectly limn at present. As will be the case with our eternal bodies, the New Heavens and New Earth will be neither immaterial nor intangible (cf. Matt.28:9; Lk.24:39; Jn.20:17; 20:27); rather they most definitely will be both tangible and material, only without any hint of sin or evil forevermore, like to the Garden of Eden, only without the presence of the tree of knowing good and evil (or any further need for it).

Third, as we have seen and remarked many times in the past, the New Heavens and New Earth are the seventh and the ultimate Paradise. As such, the new cosmos shares all the essential characteristics of the Edens which preceded it.

- Beautiful and Awesome Topography (Gen.2:10-14; Is.14:13; Ezek.28:14-16; compare with Rev.21:10; 21:16).
- Sensual Delightfulness (the name Eden means "delight"; Gen.2:9; 2:18; compare with Rev.21:15-21; 22:1-2).
- Enjoyable Occupation (Gen.2:15; Lk.16:25; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.21:26; compare with Rev.2:7; 2:17; 2:26; 3:12; 3:21; 21:14).
- Peace and Prosperity (Gen.2:16; Is.51:3; Joel 3:18; Mic.5:5; compare with Rev.3:5; 21:26; 22:12).
- Presence of and Fellowship with God (Gen.2:22; 3:8; Ezek.48:35; 1Pet.3:19; compare with Rev.21:3; 21:7; 21:22-23; 22:5).

Fourth, we can get a glimpse of how much better the New Heavens and New Earth will be by comparing their magnitude to that of the present cosmos. The habitable proportions of the New Jerusalem are 1,440,000 times greater than those of the millennial Jerusalem (i.e., 1,200 times greater in both length and width; see below). Since the promises of inheritance to Israel will still be valid in the eternal state, we may posit that the eternal territory of Israel, and by necessity the size of the New Earth (and most likely therefore also of the New Heavens) will be expanded to the same, proportional degree. Yet we know from our Lord's resurrection body that our own physical shapes will be of approximately the same size. Whether or not the New Heavens and New Earth will be 1,440,000 times bigger – and therefore that much better – the imponderable factor remains that while we are now quite limited in our ability to enjoy the universe (spatially, temporally, and morally), at that time there will be no such limitations. Whatever its future size, it is safe to say that the eternity will not suffice to plumb its wonders. Best of all, of course, will be the complete and unfettered fellowship we shall enjoy with our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ as well as with God the Father. That will be an inestimable joy for which there exists no present point of comparison.

2. The Descent of New Jerusalem

(2) And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, beautified as a bride adorned for her [future] husband.

Revelation 21:2

The fact that the New Jerusalem is here described as descending is not meant to suggest that it never comes to rest upon the New Earth, staying suspended above the clouds (as some have suggested). The meaning here is clarified by the similar language used to describe this glorious event earlier in the book:

The one who wins the victory I will make a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again. And I will write upon him the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down from heaven from My God), and My new Name.

Revelation 3:12

The point in both passages is the provenance of New Jerusalem: it comes down from heaven. This phraseology places the emphasis on the eternal city's origin and upon the symbolism of its return to earth (for earth is the original paradise: Is.14:13; cf. Ezek.28:14-16). New Jerusalem is the abode of God (2Cor.12:4; Gal.4:26; Heb.12:22). It cannot return from its sequestration in the third heaven (i.e., "from God") before eternity begins, not until all sin and evil have been removed from the cosmos, and the earth and (lower twin-heavens) find themselves renewed, purged of everything and anything unholy: imperfection cannot stand in the presence of holy God (Ex.33:20; Ps.5:4). This descent from the third heaven of the New Jerusalem, holy and pure, signifies the holiness and purity of the New Heavens and New Earth along with all who will inhabit them forever, and heralds the return of the Father to abide with His creatures in this blessed new creation for all eternity (Rev.21:3).

Just as each iteration of paradise manifests certain important common features, so every Eden, every "place of delight", has its own unique characteristics. That is also true of the New Jerusalem, even though the city itself in its archetypal form presently exists in the third heaven (from which it shall descend) in the form of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the present paradise whither all departed believers now go to be with the Lord.

(2) I know a man, [a believer] in Christ – fourteen years earlier such a one was snatched up to the third heaven (in his body perhaps, or out of it, I don't know – God knows). (3) And I know that this man (in his body perhaps, or out of it, I don't know – God knows) (4) was snatched up to paradise, and heard inexpressible words which are not permissible for a man to speak.

2nd Corinthians 12:2-4

But the Jerusalem above is free (i.e., the heavenly Jerusalem as opposed to the present, earthly Jerusalem which is in bondage to the Law), [and it is she] who is our mother.

Galatians 4:26

(20) For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence (cf. in the Greek text: Acts 23:1; Eph.2:19; Phil.1:27), and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself.
Philippians 3:20-21

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of that city (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God.
Hebrews 11:8-10

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).
Hebrews 11:13-16

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai but] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], and to the Church of the firstborn enrolled [as its citizens] in heaven (i.e., all believers, living or dead), and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] completed [their tasks] (i.e., departed believers in interim state now residing in the Heavenly Jerusalem), (23) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[']s sacrifice].
Hebrews 12:22-23

For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to the city that is destined [to come] (i.e., the New Jerusalem).
Hebrews 13:14

The main differences we may discern from scripture between the present, Heavenly Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem to come are all explainable by the fact that the ultimate paradise will be

attuned to the presence of believers in resurrection and to the New Earth which we shall inhabit forever. For example, in the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is still a temple (Rev.7:15; 11:19; 14:15-17; 15:5-8; 16:17), for the sanctification of God's holy Person against all that is profane is still a necessary symbol (i.e., the temple precinct represents the separation of the holy); no temple will exist in the New Jerusalem (Rev.21:22), since at that blessed future time no longer will any such distinction be necessary with all sin and evil having been cleansed from the New Heavens and New Earth. In the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is no discernible sign of the river of living water nor the tree of life (cf. Rev.4-5); in the New Jerusalem these will be central features of the city, designed for the blessing of the inhabitants, all of whom by that time will occupy resurrection bodies capable of enjoying these delights to the full. In the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is no discernible sign of any walls, or gates or foundations, and reasonably so since it does not rest upon the earth; but all of these features are notable additions to the New Jerusalem to come, familiar forms from our prior earthly existence, only exceeding the most magnificent of any such in human history by untold orders of magnitude.

3. The Advent of the Father

(3) And there was a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is [now] with men. And He has taken up residence with them, and they will be His people, and He Himself will be their God."

Revelation 21:3

With the descent of New Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God" (a structure which by its name is designed for temporary use) has become a permanent city (with all the accouterment of a fixed abode). The conflict that was human history is now over; God is here with mankind to stay – forever. The return of the Father to take up residence on earth once more and to dwell with saved mankind for all eternity is the final punctuation, the ultimate exclamation point, on what we know as "history". Satan's revolt, an event occurring untold eons before the creation of human beings, had occasioned the departure of the Godhead from the original earth. The devil's insurrection eventually met with severe divine judgment, executed upon the world of that prehistoric time, but not yet carried out upon Satan and his angels. Human history would constitute God's demonstration to all His creatures of the justice of all He had done in creating them with free will, and of all He was willing to do in His boundless grace and mercy to save those willing to repent of rebellion against Him. Mankind (some small portion of it at least) would do what the rebel angels would not: respond to God's gracious provision, not initially in the garden of Eden, but eventually by way of the cross which opens the way that leads back to paradise and to the presence of God through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Throughout all the ages of Man, God has never left Himself without a witness to the truth, for the whole creation sings of His existence and of His goodness (Ps.19:1-6; Acts 14:17; Rom.1:18-23), and when the fullness of times arrived (Gal.4:4; Eph.1:10; cf. Mk.1:15; Rom.5:6), He sent His one and only Son our Lord to make the promised reconciliation a reality by the sacrifice of Himself on Calvary's cross. Christ's initial return at the conjunction of the ages was the decisive event of the relatively short seven-thousand-year period which followed known to us as "human

history". At the cross, He "put death to death" through His own death on our behalf (2Tim.1:10). Heaven has now received our Lord Jesus since His resurrection and ascension (Acts 3:21), and from the Father's right hand He awaits the time of His return when all His enemies will be made the footstool for His feet (Ps.110:1-7). Between the two advents of Christ, we believers of the Church Age, that time wherein the greatest number of His assembly is being called out, have been blessed to experience the advent of the Holy Spirit who empowers all our efforts on behalf of our Lord Jesus. His return too will be interrupted – not for two thousand years, but for the seven year period of the Tribulation (2Thes.2:6-7), after which He will return along with the Son, being poured out abundantly during the glorious millennial reign of Jesus Christ (Joel 2:28-39). At history's end, the Father will join the Son and the Spirit and the restoration will be complete. Eden, paradise, will then have been restored in its perfect and eternal form with the establishment of the New Jerusalem on the New Earth. From this point forward without end and forever, elect angels and saved mankind will enjoy sweet fellowship with the Trinity on earth as it was always meant to be, but in a universe superior in every way to all that went before. When God judges, restores and replaces, it is always for the better, and that beyond comprehension.

(21) For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. (22) For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive. (23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., all believers at the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet.

1st Corinthians 15:21-25

With the vanquishing of all God's enemies, even death (Is.25:7-8; Hos.13:14; 1Cor.15:26; 15:54-57), and with the removal of sin and unrighteousness from the world (2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:7-8; 21:27; 22:14-15), the way will be cleared for the return of the King, that is, the taking up by the Father of His residence once more on earth. He will return not to the original Eden which Satan defiled, but to a new and extraordinary paradise, the New Jerusalem, likewise a paradise of divine design, now constructed in the form of a city, that is, a paradise specifically designed for mass human habitation (Heb.11:10; cf. Heb.2:16). At that time, the Glory will truly return to earth (cf. Ezek.10:18), and God the Father, who gave His Son to take on true humanity in order to save it (Heb.2:14-15), will, along with Christ through whom He made the world and around whom He fashioned the history we are now contemplating, dwell with us and we with Him forevermore. At that time, God will "be all in all" (1Cor.15:28; cf. 1Cor.3:21-23), and that will be the most sublime completion to His creation imaginable.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.
Matthew 13:43 NIV

4. The Passing away of the Old

(4) And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will no longer be any death, or cries of pain, or grief. For the previous things have passed away.

Revelation 21:4

Before moving on to the splendors of the New Jerusalem, John is given to assure us here that in addition to all the positives of the eternal state, all of the negatives of this present earthly life will have "passed away". Whatever grief and trouble we know in this world, God will comfort us in eternity. "Wiping away all of our tears" means the removal of every source of heartache and discomfort in a complete and absolute way.

[A]nd the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Isaiah 35:10 NIV

Simply put, we will no longer even remember how to cry, we will no longer be capable of experiencing physical or emotional distress, nor will there be any possible source of such things any longer. Death, the ultimate cause of all our trouble and sorrow, will be no more (2Tim.1:10). Absent also will be any thought of or occasion for physical agony ("cries of pain") or emotional affliction ("cries of grief"). Totally apart from the wonders and blessings of the eternal life to come, all of the things that bring heartache to our present existence will be banished forever. They will not even be remembered.

"For behold, I am going to create New Heavens and a New Earth, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind."

Isaiah 65:17

We should also understand this verse in a positive way, suggesting as it surely does the bliss we shall have from our fellowship with God Himself who is the One described here as wiping away our tears. Just as the old material environment has now been replaced by an entirely new one, so also the old spiritual environment will be completely transformed in eternity. Everything in the past that clouded our view of our dear Savior and interfered with our ability to focus on Him, everything, that is, that disturbed the perfect peace which is our heritage as sons of the Living God and members of the Church of Jesus Christ, has now been taken out of the way. Given our inability now to appreciate or truly understand the blessedness of this aspect of our eternal life to come, this verse concerns itself with communicating to us this future ecstatic spirituality in terms of our present frame of reference by expressing it as the lack of our present-day negatives. For although believers of great spiritual maturity do begin to get an inkling of the rapturous nature of the peace and presence of the Lord (Is.26:3; 51:11b; 54:13; Jn.14:27; 16:33; Rom.5:1; 15:13; 1Cor.7:15; Phil.4:7), we cannot at present truly begin to appreciate how that eternal peace and spirituality will suffuse and illuminate every aspect of our eternal existence. Since we cannot as yet even dimly assess this positive feature of our coming life with Jesus, scripture expresses it in terms of the comfort we shall have in the removal of all temporal negatives. While false pagan

pictures of the afterlife invariably focus upon the sating of material lusts, the true, biblical picture of eternal life with God is one of spiritual ecstasy beyond our present capacity to apprehend.

5. The Nature of New Jerusalem

(9) Then one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls filled with the seven final plagues came [up to me], and he spoke with me, saying, "Come. I will show you the Bride, the Lamb's wife". (10) Then he carried me in the Spirit to a mountain, great and high, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, (11) and [it shone] with the glory of God. It was radiant like an extremely precious gemstone, like a [purple] jasper stone, [only] translucent like crystal. (12) It had a wall, great and high with twelve gates, and at the gates were twelve angels. Names were written on [each of] the gates which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. (13) Three gates faced east; three gates faced north; three gates faced west; and three gates faced south. (14) And the city wall had twelve foundations, and on [the twelve foundations] were [written] the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (15) And the [angel] who was speaking with me had a golden measuring rod [which he used] to measure the city [along with] its gates and its wall. (16) The city was square in its design with its length equal to its width. And he measured the city with his [golden measuring] rod, and [it came] to 12,000 stadia (i.e., approx. 1590 miles): its length and its width and its height were precisely the same. (17) He then measured the [city's] rim, 144 cubits (i.e., approx. 84 yards) in human measurement which is the same [here] as the angelic standard. (18) The wall of [the city] was composed of [purple] jasper, and the city [itself] of pure gold [which was] transparent like crystal.

Revelation 21:9-18

The Bride: We have already been told (Rev.21:2) that the New Jerusalem appears "beautified as a bride adorned for her [future] husband". Here we see the eternal city actually described *as* "the Bride, the Lamb's wife". Of course we know – and at this point scripture expects us to know – that the believers resurrected at Jesus' return are "the Bride of Christ". Equating the place with its people is a figure of speech (technically known as a metonymy) where the residence takes on the name of the residents (cf. 1Cor.3:9-17; 6:19; Eph.2:19-22; 1Pet.2:21 and Rev.3:12, where believers are also compared to structures in whole or in part). Apart from the reference to our Lord, John is not given at any point to see the human or angelic residents of New Jerusalem. But since this is to be the Church's eternal residence it is certainly understandable that he is given to describe it as "the Bride" (since that is where the Bride will indeed live forevermore).

The Mountain: The existence of this mountain, "great and high", on the New Earth is a clear indication that, apart from the absence of the oceans, its topography will be similar to that with which we are now familiar (though undoubtedly grander in every way as this description suggests). John is taken up to the top of this mountain in order to receive a better perspective of the whole of the new city (in a manner similar to the view the Lord gave Moses of the promised land: Num.27:12; cf. Ezek.40:2). This is our first hint of the massive size of New Jerusalem and

also of its essential layout: like the prehistoric "Mountain of God" (Is.14:13) and the miraculously elevated millennial Jerusalem (Is.2:2; Ezek.40:2; Zech.14:10-11), so too the center of the new city must be of considerable height to necessitate this action.

The Exterior of the City: In verse eighteen of Revelation chapter twenty-one we see that "the city [itself was composed] of pure gold [which was] transparent like crystal", although initially in verse eleven we are told that it appeared to John "radiant like an extremely precious gemstone, like a [purple] jasper stone, [only] translucent like crystal" and that it "[shone] with the glory of God". The apparent discrepancy between the two descriptions has to do with John's change of perspective. Later, he has apparently been conveyed by the angel around the city's exterior and then into the city proper (otherwise he would never have been able both to see the gates on all sides of the city, and later also the throne, the tree of life, the river of living water, and the other sights within its walls). Within, the true nature of the city is plain to see: it is composed of translucent, crystalline-gold. Without, the city has a purple "radiance": the illumination of its exterior by the glory of God gives it an incandescent appearance of translucent, crystalline-[purple] jasper. This exterior covering has a similar function to the tent of the tabernacle (which was similarly composed of blue, purple and red materials), defining and visibly demarcating the holy space wherein the Glory of God dwells.

The Wall: John employs precisely the same description for the wall, "great and high", as he did for the mountain. This fact alone makes it clear that the 144 cubits mentioned in verse seventeen is not referring to the height of the wall (indeed, it is not referring to the wall per se at all; see below). For as monumentally massive as a seventy-yard high wall would be in our present-day experience, those proportions are dwarfed by the size of the city. For someone given to see New Jerusalem in a panoramic view (one wide enough to take in the entire city at once as John is given to do), a structure of such relatively meager dimensions would be nearly invisible. We are not, in fact, ever given the dimensions of the wall, but they must be prodigious in order for it to be noteworthy from John's perspective, and especially in order for him to describe it as "great and high" even in comparison with the enormous size of New Jerusalem. We may expect that its dimensions are in perfect proportion to those of the perfect city. We should also note here that by the time the wall becomes visible New Jerusalem has now come to earth where John is seeing it in situ.

The Twelve Gates: As in the case of the millennial Jerusalem described in Ezekiel 48:30-34, the New Jerusalem will also have twelve gates bearing the names of the tribes of Israel. There are differences between the two, however, and those differences are profound:

1) The naming of the gates of millennial Jerusalem proceeds in a clockwise fashion (i.e., north to east to south to west), whereas the New Jerusalem's gates are enumerated counterclockwise (east to north to west to south).

2) Millennial Jerusalem has a gate for Levi and combines Ephraim and Manasseh into one tribe, Joseph, whereas the New Jerusalem has no gate for Levi and separate gates for Ephraim and Manasseh.

3) While in the New Jerusalem the order of the gates and tribes associated with them has everything to do with rank (see below), the gates of millennial Jerusalem are ordered according to birth by means of a formula which takes into consideration both age and motherhood:

North: the three eldest sons of Leah, Reuben, Judah and Levi.

East: the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin, along with Dan, the first son of her maid, Bilhah.

South: Leah's three other sons, Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun.

West: Gad, Asher, the two sons of Leah's maid (Zilpah); and Naphtali, Bilhah's second son.

As will be seen, by comparing the arrangement of the jewels of the high priest's ephod with the gemstones which serve as foundations for the wall (along with the gates with which they are thereby necessarily associated), it is possible to determine the specific tribes associated with each gate (and the probable significance of the linkage). For the moment, it is important to point out that each gate represents a division of the Church, and it is for this reason that each gate has one of the twelve apostles and an angel associated with it. The angels are positioned "at the gates", while the apostles names are inscribed on their respective foundation stones. In terms of the apostles, they would seem to be in charge (or at least to be the titular heads) of the twelve divisions of the Bride of Christ; in terms of the angels, they would seem to be the liaisons to and/or comparable heads of the angelic divisions which correspond to and are eternally associated with the divisions of the Church (and we will suggest the particular identification and assignments of each college of twelve below). This magnificent vision given to John to see in all its glory is not only one of breath-taking beauty, but it also will give us a key to the possibilities of our eternal status, depending upon "what was accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless" (2Cor.5:10).

The Measurement and Design of New Jerusalem: Revelation 21:16 tells us that the city will be a cube measuring 12,000 stadia on each side. The *stadion*/stadium was a Greek measurement of 600 feet (cf. Herodotus 2.149), although the precise length of the "foot" varied from place to place. It is important to note, however, that the precise standard used here is the same one employed for the millennial Jerusalem in Ezekiel chapters 40-48. That is clear for two reasons; first, in verse seventeen we are told that the human and angelic measurement are identical here (i.e., the longer, angelic standard is being employed just as it was when the angel measured the temple for Ezekiel: Ezek.40:5); second, the length of the sides of the New Jerusalem are precisely 1,200 times longer than those of the millennial Jerusalem (i.e., millennial Jerusalem

measures 4000 cubits or 100 stadia per side, subtracting the area for the temple-sanctuary which is not present in New Jerusalem: Ezek.45:2; 48:30), thus indicating that the same heavenly standard is to be understood. Based upon the above, the dimensions of the New Jerusalem would be approximately 1590 of our own statute miles in length, breadth, and height. In terms of the present day earth, the city would not only cover all of the expanded, millennial Israel, but also most of the middle east, with its border running roughly from the river Danube to the Caspian Sea to the Red Sea to the Libyan desert and back north again to the Danube (we know that New Jerusalem's borders run due north to south, and due east to west, because of the orientation of its gates: cf. Rev.21:13). Given the necessity for the eternal territory of Israel to continue to exist outside of this massive city, as suggested above we most likely have to do with a greatly enlarged New Earth which has been expanded proportionally so as to accommodate this need.

The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.
Genesis 17:7 NIV

One aspect of the New Jerusalem which sometimes leads to confusion is its height, described in verse sixteen as equal to its length and breadth. However, we should not think of the city as having "floors" stacked some sixteen hundred miles into the sky. Rather, this third dimension will be largely vacant, with the surface of the city functioning in precisely the same way as every other iteration of Jerusalem and of paradise, a habitable two-dimensional surface, but enclosed by a sanctified exterior of three dimensions. The holy of holies in the tabernacle furnishes us with the pattern of interpretation we are to use here. After all, we are explicitly told that the tabernacle was a model of heavenly types (Ex.25:40; Heb.8:5). We have seen before (and will consider below) some of these representations (for example, the ark of the covenant representing the chariot-throne of God, and the threefold illustration of Jesus Christ provided by the altar of incense, the menorah, and the table of the bread of presence). Apropos of our current discussion is the similarity between the holy of holies and the New Jerusalem in terms of spatial proportion, arrangement of pertinent contents, and exterior covering.

Both the holy of holies in the tabernacle and the New Jerusalem are perfect cubes (cf. Ex.26:16; 36:21). The holy of holies contained the ark of the covenant (corresponding to the throne of God the Father and Lamb: Rev.22:1-2), with the mercy seat and the cherubim overlooking it (corresponding to the angelic presence in the New Jerusalem). However, most of the actual space within the holy of holies was empty. In a similar fashion, only the surface of the New Jerusalem will be furnished (with the throne, the tree of life, the river of the water of life, the main street, and no doubt with other unnamed glories, our own personal, eternal habitations included). The throne will be found at the center of the city and will be elevated, and, given the proportions of the city, it is probable that the height of the central "mount" will be great (as indeed in relative terms the ark and mercy seat are proportionally quite high as compared to the floor-level of the tabernacle). This is in keeping with the residence of God throughout creature history:

Before the creation of mankind:

For you said in your heart, "I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God.

Isaiah 14:13-14

In Eden:

Now a river was flowing forth from Eden (i.e., downhill), in order to water the garden, and from there (i.e., after passing through the garden) it divided so that it turned into four headwaters.

Genesis 2:10

In the present day third heaven:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Hebrews 12:22a

And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads.

Revelation 14:1

In the millennial Jerusalem:

At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it.

Isaiah 2:2

The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar.

Ezekiel 47:1 NIV

And in the glorious New Jerusalem to come:

And He showed me the river of the water of life, bright like crystal, coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb (i.e., and so flowing downhill as in every other such case).

Revelation 22:1

As indicated above, just as the tabernacle was completely covered with an exterior curtain, so the New Jerusalem will have its own distinctive, three-dimensional border. The inner layer of the tabernacle's curtain was composed of linen: blue (reflecting the heavenly origin of the only One who can give us access), purple (reflecting the royalty of the only One who can give us access),

and scarlet (reflecting the sacrifice of the only One who can give us access). This layer was also embroidered with cherubim, symbolizing the holy abode of God, the third heaven lying above the firmament of sky and space (unreachable apart from Christ). The outer layer of the tabernacle curtain was composed of dark, leathery "sea-cow skins", symbolizing the firmament of the sky, glistening, shimmering, with a blue-black watery appearance, and impenetrable to the eye. In eternity, there will be no need to shield the glory of God from His creation. Instead of an intricate, multi-layered curtain, New Jerusalem will be clothed with translucent jasper, and through that covering the glorious light of His being will illuminate the universe:

And night will no longer exist. And those [with the Name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads] will not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun: the Lord God will shine upon them.

Revelation 22:5a

Just as the tabernacle was illuminated by the lamp and indwelt by the Shekinah glory of God, so the New Jerusalem will be illuminated by the true glory of God, with that glory illuminating the exterior covering from within and everything without as well, in keeping with the proclamation that He will be "tenting with us" from this point forth forever.

For my tabernacle will be over them. Then I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Ezekiel 37:27

The City's Rim and Exterior Wall: Contrary to what is found in most translations of Revelation 21:17, the dimensions of the wall surrounding New Jerusalem are not given. As suggested above, if the 144 cubits mentioned referred to the wall, it would indeed be most odd if this wall with its gates of pearl and foundations made of gemstones had even been visible to John in comparison with the massive dimensions of New Jerusalem. Most (though not all) of the versions take the 144 cubits to refer to the height of the wall, though, strangely, height is not mentioned. The 1984NIV is closer to the truth in understanding the measurement as referring to the width of the wall, thus allowing the structure the height necessary in order to be proportional to the towering city. In fact, it is not the measure of the wall that is being specified (where we would need to know whether width or height was being conveyed), but rather of the rim or standoff space between the city and the wall. The reading found in most manuscripts, *teichos* (Gr., "wall") is incorrect. Sinaiticus preserves the correct reading: *cheilos* (Gr., "lip", or "rim").

Just as in the case of the tabernacle furniture which also has rims around its sides symbolizing sanctification (Ex.25:11; 25:25; 37:12), and just as in the case of the millennial Jerusalem where there is an area of free space immediately outside the sanctuary (Ezek.45:2), and also outside the city proper (Ezek.48:17), so it is appropriate for the wall of the New Jerusalem to be separated from the city by a symbolic distance (i.e., 144 cubits; cf. the 144,000 martyrs, and the twelve thousand by twelve-thousand-stadion sides of the city).

The construction of the wall is the same as that of the exterior of the city, translucent purple-jasper, demonstrating the intrinsic oneness of city and wall. The wall, of course, will not be necessary either for defense (for never will anything hostile to the Lord exist in the new universe) nor for sanctification (for never will anything unholy exist in the new universe). Rather, as evidenced by the foundation stones which as we shall see are memorials to the level of service to the Lord we His people evidenced here in time, the wall will serve as a memorial to the fact that the Lord has always been our bulwark of defense.

"For I will be a wall of fire for her, roundabout [Jerusalem]", says the Lord, "and I will be her glory [shining forth from] within".
Zechariah 2:5

6. The Foundations and Gates of the Wall

(19) And the foundations of the wall of the city were dressed with every [sort] of precious gemstone . . .

[The Southern Gates]

The first foundation was jasper (the gate of Gad).
The second foundation was sapphire (the gate of Simeon).
The third foundation was carnelian (the gate of Reuben).

[The Eastern Gates]

The fourth foundation was emerald (the gate of Zebulun).
(20) The fifth foundation was sardonyx (the gate of Issachar).
The sixth foundation was sardius (the gate of Judah).

[The Northern Gates]

The seventh foundation was chrysolite (the gate of Dan).
The eighth foundation was beryl (the gate of Asher).
The ninth foundation was peridot (the gate of Naphtali).

[The Western Gates]

The tenth foundation was chrysoprase (the gate of Ephraim).
The eleventh foundation was jacinth (the gate of Manasseh).
The twelfth foundation was amethyst (the gate of Benjamin).

(21a) And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each gate was made entirely of a single pearl.

Revelation 21:19-21a

In addition to its role as a memorial to the perfect protection and deliverance which the people of God have experienced throughout human history, the specific features of the wall, namely, its gates and its foundation stones, also serve to demarcate the particular division along with its "colors" to which each believer will belong for all eternity. The description of the foundations of the wall is nested in-between the initial description of the 12 gates in verses 12-13 (where we are told of the orientation of the gates) and their specific description in verse 21 (where we are told that the gates themselves are identical, made of a single pearl each). Thus the foundations are intrinsically connected to the gates; and, specifically, each gate is associated with a corresponding foundation. This is important for analyzing the particular identification, position, and rank of each foundation stone.

Gemstones were used by the Lord to represent in a memorial way the angelic clans (Ezek.28:13). They were also used on the high priest's breastplate to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex.28:17-21; 39:10-14). The tribal structure of Israel is the ultimate organization into which all members of the assembly of believers in Jesus Christ (i.e., the *ekklesia* or "Church") will be distributed (Rev.2:17; cf. Ezek.47:21-23; Zech.2:11). This distribution will not be based on heredity (gentiles from before Abraham until the return of Christ will be included), nor on specific lineage (Jewish believers themselves will be rearranged in terms of tribe), but according to merit. We see an indication of this in the fact that the twelve apostles are specifically said in verse 14 to have their names inscribed one to a foundation, with each serving in the capacity of prince for his respective echelon of the duodecad. However, while it is not known to which tribe each of the apostles belonged, it is very clear that they cannot be literal descendants of the twelve tribes, one from each tribe. That is because several of them are brothers (e.g., Peter and Andrew, James and John). We may also be sure that Paul, the greatest of the apostles, will have a grander position than prince of seventh-ranked Benjamin (his ancestral tribe). Therefore we may surmise that the distribution of apostles will take place according to merit rather than genealogy, and that this will be the rule for individual believers in regard to their eternal assignments as well (cf. Gen.48:13-20; Is.66:21; Heb.7:13-14; and Rev.7:5-8 [where Dan is omitted on account of being the tribe from which antichrist arises]). Just as the remaining angelic clans which stayed faithful to the Lord were rearranged after Satan's rebellion, and just as individual angels were apparently shifted within these clans as well (especially in regard to those of the three rebel clans who refused to follow the lead of their natural affinities), so also will it be with the 12 tribes (cf. Rev.3:4). In eternity, in addition to any individual rewards won, including our "new name" which will be perfectly reflective of who we are and what we achieved in time (Rev.2:17; 3:12; Is.65:15; cf. Is.62:2b), we shall all have a very definite rank and a very specific place in the eternal hierarchy of the New Jerusalem (for we are all individually "precious stones" to God: Zech.9:16; 1Pet.2:5).

Although not generally understood (largely due to a failure to read the correct sequence of John's viewing of the gates, i.e., east-north-west-south), careful attention to the details provided in Revelation chapter twenty-one in comparison to the information about the gemstones and tribes as they appeared on the high priest's breastplate reveals that the order of the gemstone-foundations is identical to the order found on the breastplate. John's tour of the gates

began on the east (the highest ranking side), and proceeded counter-clockwise to conclude on the south. His description of the gemstones now begins from that southern perspective. That is to say, John's enumeration of the gemstones does not begin with the southern-gate foundation stones because they rank first, but because this side of the city wall is where he now finds himself after his first "lap" around the city. Moreover, not only do the gemstone-foundations reflect the breastplate-order in terms of rank (once the ordering is properly understood: Ex.28:17-21; 39:10-14), but they are also identical to the encampment-order of the tribes around the tabernacle (Num.2:1-31; cf. Num.10:11-33).

CHART Breastplate Gemstones

The positioning of the tribes in their encampment-order is identical to the positioning of their respective gates in New Jerusalem. There is, however, a difference in ranking nonetheless. The west-gate tribes in their encampment-order have the same rank as they do on the high priest's breastplate: Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin (for Ephraim was the leader of this triad: Num.2:18-24); however, while the eastern and southern groups maintain their rank, in the case of the north and west-gate tribes we see the first and last of each triad swapping rank in the circular ranking system of New Jerusalem. That is because the encampment-order was designed to facilitate the commencement of the march, whereas the New Jerusalem order reflects status in an absolute way. The result is the relative promotion of Benjamin and Naphtali (from 9th to 7th and from 12th to 10th respectively), and the relative demotion of Ephraim and Dan (from 7th to 9th and from 10th to 12th respectively). The spiritual application that we do not all end up in the order wherein we begin the Christian race, whether outperforming our station or failing to live up to our advantages, should not be overlooked here. All six of the west and north-gate tribes remain in the same geographic position as was the case when tenting around the tabernacle, but the significance in terms of rank has changed in the cases mentioned on account of the change of system from march-order to one of consecutive ranking.

In terms of that rank, the true order begins with Judah in the first position at the northernmost eastern gate and proceeds clockwise until we reach Dan in twelfth position at the easternmost northern gate. John's actual listing of the twelve is given in a counter-clockwise fashion, and begins in the middle of the order, and on the south at that (because that is the place where he starts his consideration of the foundations, and it is in that direction in which he is given to view the city). John begins with the foundation stones of the southern gates (because that is where he commenced his second lap around the wall), and concludes on the west:

(S.) 6, 5, 4 — (E.) 3, 2, 1 — (N.) 12, 11, 10 — (W.) 9, 8, 7

Given the impressive nature of the gemstone-foundations and the gates, it is likely that both are correspondingly massive in size so as to harmonize with the "great, high wall" – which itself matches in magnitude the monumental New Jerusalem – with the gates of pearl reaching perhaps to half the wall's height or some such pleasing proportion. Since they are described as impressive and therefore highly visible features, the most likely layout of the foundation jewels is that, in the

case of the middle gates, they occupy half of the distance on each side of wall before touching the corresponding foundations of the two exterior gates, and that the foundation stones of the exterior gates reach all the way to their respective corners of the wall. The wall itself will then appear above the layer of foundations and gates as a perfect band of uninterrupted, translucent jasper.

The actual ranking (along with the reasons for it and the correct identification of the gemstones) proceeding in a clockwise direction and beginning with the position of honor is as follows:

*CHART: New Jerusalem: the 12 foundation gemstones and their tribal affiliations.

East-side Tribes: The east side is the place of greatest honor, facing our Lord (cf. the orientation of the tabernacle and temple), and therefore the place of greatest fellowship with the Father and the Son (cf. Ex.25:22; 29:42). Members of the three eastern tribes have all fulfilled the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually, passing the tests of spiritual maturity, and completing the ministries assigned to them by the Lord. This level of achievement is represented in the visible human-face of the cherub who guards the front of the throne. East-side tribal members have advanced to the point of reflecting the Person of Christ (2Cor.3:18; cf. 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21), having become "complete" in their Christian walk and production of their assigned ministries (Eph.4:13; cf. Jas.1:4; 2:22). While all three eastern tribes share the honor of having accomplished their God-given missions, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. **Judah:** Sardius: Hebrew: **יָדָה** / *'odhem*; Greek: *sardion* / *σάρδιον* (Gen.49:8-12; Deut.33:7).

2. **Issachar:** Sardonyx: Hebrew: **יִשָּׂכָר** / *pitedhah*; Greek: *sardonyx* / *σαρδόνυξ* (Gen.49:14-15; Deut.33:18-19).

3. **Zebulun:** Emerald: Hebrew: **זְבֻלֹן** / *bareqeth*; Greek: *smaragdos* / *σμάραγδος* (Gen.49:13; Deut.33:18-19).

South-side Tribes: The south side is the place of second greatest honor on our Lord's right-hand. Members of the three southern tribes have all made great progress in the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually, and passing the high-level tests of spiritual maturity. This level of achievement is represented in the visible lion-face of the cherub who guards the right-hand side of the throne. South-side tribal members have advanced to the point of honoring the Person of Christ (1Cor.6:20; 2Cor.8:23; Phil.1:20; 1Pet.1:7), having courageously acquitted themselves in the Christian life (Prov.28:1; cf. 1Pet.5:8). While all three southern tribes share the honor of having trusted the Lord in significant testing, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. **Reuben:** Carnelian: Hebrew: נֹפֶךְ / *nophekh*; Greek: *chalcedon* / χαλκηδών (Gen.49:3-4; Deut.33:6).

2. **Simeon:** Sapphire: Hebrew: סַפִּיר / *sappir*; Greek: *sapphiros* / σάπφειρος (Gen.49:5-7; cf. Deut.33:8-11).

3. **Gad:** Jasper: Hebrew: יַהֲלֹם / *yahalom*; Greek: *iaspis* / Ἴασπις (Gen.49:19; Deut.33:20-21).

West-side Tribes: The west side is the place of third greatest honor in the special guardian position behind the throne. Members of the three western tribes have all made progress in the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually. This level of achievement is represented in the visible eagle-face of the cherub who guards the rear of the throne. West-side tribal members have advanced to the point of trusting the Person of Christ (Ex.19:4; Is.40:31; Col.1:10; 2Thes.1:3; 1Pet.2:2; 2Pet.3:18; cf. Eph.4:15-16; Col.2:19), having grown to the point of spiritual maturity in the Christian life (Eph.4:13; Col.4:12; Heb.5:13; Jas.1:3-4). While all three western tribes share the honor of having advanced in the knowledge of the Lord, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. **Benjamin:** Amethyst: Hebrew: אַחַלְמָה / *'achalamah*; Greek: *amethystos* / ἀμέθυστος (Gen.49:27; Deut.33:12).

2. **Manasseh:** Jacinth: Hebrew: לֶשֶׁם / *leshem*; Greek: *hyacinthos* / ὑάκινθος (Gen.49:22-26; Deut.33:13-17).

3. **Ephraim:** Chrysoprase: Hebrew: שֶׁבֶהוּ / *shebho*; Greek: *chrysoprasos* / χρυσόπρασος (Gen.49:22-26; Deut.33:13-17).

North-side Tribes: The north side is the final place of honor, to the left-hand side of the throne. Members of the three northern tribes have all responded to the plan of God for their lives, not only by believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but maintaining their faith safely intact until the end. This level of achievement is represented in the visible bullock-face of the cherub who guards the left-hand side of the throne. North-side tribal members have endured the trials of life while holding firmly to their faith in the Person of Christ (Is.1:3; 1Tim.1:18-19; 6:12; 2Tim.4:7; Heb.4:14), having refused to exchange that precious faith for a mess of pottage (Heb.10:35-39; Heb.12:16; 2Pet.2:21-22). While all three northern tribes share the honor of having kept faith with the Lord, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. **Naphtali:** Peridot: Hebrew: יַשְׁפֵּה / *yashepheh*; Greek: *topazion* / τοπάζιον (Gen.49:21; Deut.33:23).

2. **Asher:** Aquamarine-Beryl: Hebrew: שֹהַם / *shoham*; Greek: *beryllos* / βήρυλλος (Gen.49:20; Deut.33:24-25).

3. **Dan:** Chrysolite: Hebrew: תִּשְׁבֵּית / *tarshish*; Greek: *chrysolithos* / χρυσόλιθος (Gen.49:16-18; Deut.33:22).

It is important to note here that the exceptional achievements of some will not in any way disparage the lesser accomplishments of others. Regardless of the "regiment" into which we are eternally enrolled, just as each believer is a special living stone memorialized before the Lord (Zech.9:16; 1Pet.2:5), so each tribe receives its own unique blessings (as can be seen from a comparison of the blessings of Jacob and Moses cited above). Moreover, each tribe is worthy of special, distinctive memorialization, as evidenced by the beautiful gemstone which is uniquely its own, and by its own individualized gate, each being associated with a specific, high-ranking angel and apostle-prince. Even the lowest-ranking person in the lowest-ranking tribe of Dan, that is, the believer who has earned the least possible reward of everyone in the entire Church, will still be blissfully happy for all eternity, possessing a full share of Jesus Christ, access to the tree of life, and an eternal lodging in the New Jerusalem. Thus even the absolute least in the eternal kingdom has "won the victory" (1Cor.15:54-57; 1Jn.5:4; Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21), receiving as a result "glory and honor and immortality" with eternal peace and blessing (Rom.2:7-9), and will be inestimably better off than the least unrighteous unbeliever of all condemned to the Lake of Fire.

Martyrdom and Eternal Rewards: It will be noted from the above that the tribe of Levi is not assigned a gate in the New Jerusalem. Levi, of course, was selected from the other tribes for special ministry to the Lord. As such, Levi was not represented by a gemstone inscribed with its name on the high priest's breastplate. That did not mean, however, that Levi had no place or inheritance in Israel. Quite to the contrary, the members of that tribe had chosen the Lord over their own flesh and blood (Ex.32:26-29). As a result, Levi's place was special (Deut.33:8-11), and the Lord Himself was their inheritance (Deut.10:9). The Levites were specially "set apart to the Lord" (Ex.32:29), being uniquely blessed on account of their dedication to the Lord rather than somehow left out. We see evidence of something similar in the existence of special colleges of elect angels (e.g., the cherubs, the archangels, the four angels of the winds, etc.), namely, specific individuals who have been set apart entirely from the organization of angelic clans, no doubt for exemplary service. In this regard, therefore, we may posit that in addition to these twelve divisions of the Church, there also exists an elite cadre of individuals, analogous to and represented by the tribe of Levi, who have an especially close relationship to the Lord – in reward for their esteeming Him beyond all other things in this life (cf. Is.66:21). The unnamed two who will sit at Jesus' right and left hands clearly belong to this category, and no doubt the apostles too, despite their princely leadership of the twelve divisions (analogous here to the archangels who likewise form a group apart). We may also expect the Old Testament prophets to be included in this elite group (inasmuch as the Church is built upon the foundation of "the apostles and the prophets": Eph.2:20). The key characteristic which will merit inclusion into this most august number, however, will be martyrdom (Rev.20:4). The 144,000 definitely seem to be included (cf.

Rev.14:1-5), for example, and while some of the great prophets and apostles may not have been put to death for the Lord (and while some who die of persecution may not be accorded the honor of inclusion into this exclusive group), martyrdom on the part of exceptional believers who have otherwise achieved the highest level of reward and right to membership in the highest ranking named tribe (i.e., Judah), would seem to be the most common basis for inclusion into the number of the unnamed tribe of Levi, specially set apart to the Lord for all eternity. At the very least, we may expect that all such believers will have come to the point of experiencing serious persecution for the Name of Jesus, not only believing, trusting, honoring, and reflecting the Person of Christ, but also of sharing His sufferings (1Pet.4:13; cf. Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.3:10; Col.1:24; cf. 2Cor.12:7-10).

(19) For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision that comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (20) in keeping with my expectation and hope that I will in no way be put to shame, but that now as ever, holding nothing back, Christ will be magnified by means of this body of mine, whether through my life, or through my death. (21) For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
Philippians 1:20-21

While not specifically named, we may expect that the distribution of apostles and angels associated with the twelve gates and their tribes and gemstones is likewise based upon merit. Therefore it would be most unlikely if Paul were not the apostle of the Judah gate (with John and Peter filling out the east-side tribes). As to the angels, it is perhaps not unwarranted to speculate that the same angels who were associated with the seven eras of the Church are likely to be the individuals who continue in a mission of symbolic human-angelic liaison. To them we may add the unnamed head-angels charged with similar duties during each of the four millennial days preceding the Church, and the angel with this mission during the Tribulation (a special joint period between Israel and the Church, not covered under the seven angels' mandate).

Finally, as suggested above, it is entirely appropriate that the names of the twelve tribes should be given to the divisions of the eternal organization of the Church; we are all now one in Christ, made near through His blood with the middle wall of partition which divided us removed by His sacrifice (Deut.32:8; Micah 5:3; Rom.11:17-21; Gal.6:15-16; Eph.2:11-21). Moreover, as we have noted in the past, based upon the information given by the Jewish ceremonial calendar the final composition of the family of God (Church and Friends of the Bride taken together) will likely be of original gentiles and original Jews in equal proportion (with Jews streaming to the Lord in disproportionate numbers during the Millennium).

7. The Interior of the City

(21b) And the city's [network of] main streets was pure gold as if [made of] diaphanous crystal. (22) And I did not see a temple in the [city], for the Lord God the Almighty is its temple, and [so is] the Lamb. (23) And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminated it and the Lamb was its lamp. (24) And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. (25) And

the gates of the city shall never be closed in the daytime. Indeed, there will be no night there [at all]. (26) And they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations (i.e., everything valuable and fine) into it. (27) And nothing profane and no doer of abominations or any liar will enter into [the city], only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.
Revelation 21:21b-27

The Streets: The Greek word *plateia*, usually translated "street" (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB; the NIV has "great street"), is actually referring to the main road-network which connects all the aforementioned gates to the city's central hub, "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev.22:1; 22:3). Obviously, for a city of over 2.5 million square miles in area, there is more than one, single street. And just as obviously, each of its twelve main gates must have a major artery entering and exiting through it (for, after all, it must be through these gates that "the kings of the earth bring their glory into [the city]": Rev.21:24). Often, the Greek word in question is used of a city square, and we may imagine that each of the twelve major arteries in this network possess extreme width (in keeping with the vast size of the city and its gates). That is especially so when one considers that these streets will have the river of living water running down through their midst, with a veritable forest of trees, the tree of life, populating both banks in each case. These twelve massive streets must radiate out from the center of the city like spokes from a hub, intersecting the wall at their respective gates. While it is possible that the angles separating them are equal (i.e., 30° each), thus determining the positioning of the gates, it seems much more likely that the courses of these main avenues are determined by the need to intersect their corresponding gates (which are most likely spaced proportionally along the wall). As impressive as this network of boulevards will be, it is its composition which seems to have caught the apostle's attention. The grid is described in terms which are similar but not identical to those of the city. The crystalline gold of which the streets are composed is not merely translucent but "diaphanous". These words are synonyms in English, of course, but the latter word brings out the additional quality which the Greek adjective *diaphanos* (διαυγής) is meant to convey: not merely transparent but possessing an illuminative property which makes the golden avenues stand out perspicuously even in the midst of a city made of translucent gold. It is certainly appropriate for this network of radiating streets to figure prominently even in the midst of a city more beautiful than the mind of man could ever conceive. In this way, both the entrances into the city (which will likewise be exceptionally conspicuous as gigantic, white, shining pearls) and the avenues which lead through the gates to the center of the city will symbolize what was most important in this life: they will lead to and point towards the One who is the Gate to eternal life (Jn.10:7-9; cf. Matt.7:13-14), the One who is the only Way to the Father (Jn.14:6; cf. Matt.7:13-14), our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For the throne in the city's center will be the hub from which the twelve illuminated arteries radiate and whence they lead, towering above the city below (cf. Zech.8:3; Rev.22:1), and shining forth with the glory of God Himself (Rev.21:23; 22:5).

Lodgings: John's impression of the interior of the city as made of transparent gold (Rev.21:18b) is our only indication of the nature of the lodgings New Jerusalem contains. We have already seen that the city's major avenues will provide an abundance of open space. It also goes without saying that around the throne in the center of the city must be a very large open space to

accommodate the assembly of the Lord's people in His presence as it was in the past (Job 1:6; 2:1), and as is presently the case (Rev.5:11; 7:9). Also, we should not imagine that the rest of the city area is entirely "built out" anymore than would be the case with a contemporary *polis*. That is to say, the Greek word *polis* (found twelve times in Rev.21-22) may envisage an entire country, including all of its territory (and the size of New Jerusalem, after all, is nearly the size of the continental United States). We can say that the buildings must produce a profoundly moving impression to rate the general description John gives of the city proper.

Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe also in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also.

John 14:1-3

Given the enormous size of New Jerusalem and Jesus' promise above, it is clear that every believer will have an eternal lodging in the golden city, and we may be sure that even for the least and the last that residence will be wonderful beyond description. The present heavenly Jerusalem is also the abode of angels (Heb.12:22), and we may expect that to be the case in New Jerusalem as well (cf. Gen.3:24; Ex.36:8; Ps.36:7 [Hebrew]; Rev.4:4-10; 5:11; 21:12). We cannot say whether or not our eternal dwellings are already presently in place in the heavenly Jerusalem, but as the final full-complement of the Church is apparently precisely equal to the number of fallen angels, the possibility exists that believers will occupy the former residences of Satan's followers, just as we have replaced them in the family of God (cf. Lk.11:22).

One possibility for the distribution of the twelve tribes may be the occupation of the area on both sides of its main avenue to a parallel which is equidistant from the neighboring avenue on either side. If such is the case, the geometric effect will be that the territories of the four tribes occupying the four central-gate regions will be significantly smaller than those of the eight tribes on either side of each of the four corners – that is, assuming, as certainly appears to be the case, that the gates of the city are spaced at equal distances around the wall (and such would certainly seem to be so from the description given in verses nineteen through twenty-one, with the foundations stones appearing to be identical in size, filling the intervals between the gates). For New Jerusalem is a square, not a circle, and therefore the angles at which the twelve major arteries will radiate outward in order to intersect with the gates so positioned will not be identical. The geometric result will be a noticeably smaller area for the tribes occupying the four central-gates regions. Certainly, this disparity might be offset in a number of ways (e.g., if the central square is positioned obliquely, with its four corners touching the east-west, north-south axes, then at some magnitude its expansion could theoretically render all twelve areas equal, though the unknown width of the avenues makes that point impossible to compute). However, it may also be the case that, as in all other things in the Christian life, extremes whether good or bad tend to be more frequent occurrences than the mean between the two. It may very well be that in all four classes of response to the plan and will of God, more believers have tended to cluster around minimal and maximal effort than to find a medium between the two. In terms of the particular location of our eternal dwelling within the tribe of our final allotment, it is clear

that being closer to the Lord will be more desirable, and farther away less so. So it is also possible that the tribes will be distributed concentrically with the higher ranking ones closer to the throne (with Judah nearest to the central assembly area), and with the lower ranking tribes closer to the wall (with Dan directly next to it). We may expect that in each case the greater the reward earned in this life, the larger the habitation and the higher up the hill upon which the throne resides and the closer to the Lord it will be. But although a place near the wall is for these reasons the least desirable situation, it will still be infinitely better to be “a doorkeeper in the house of God” than to rate the most prestigious place “in the tents of the wicked” (Ps.84:10).

The Throne:

(2) Immediately I came to be in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it]. (3) And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius. And there was a rainbow (i.e., the glory of God) around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald. (4) And encircling the throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden crowns. (5) And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder. And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. (6) And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal. And in the midst of the throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back. (7) And the first living-creature was similar to a lion. And the second living-creature was similar to a young bull. And the third living-creature had a face similar to a man's. And the fourth living-creature was similar to an eagle in flight.

Revelation 4:2-7

Apart from the absence of the indications of judgment (i.e., flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder), and the absence of the crystal sea (unnecessary as a view-port to earth since the city has now come to earth), the mentions in the context of Revelation chapter twenty-one (Rev.22:1; 22:3) suggest that the throne will be the same one upon which the Father and Son presently sit in state. There will be no temple building in New Jerusalem, however, as "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev.21:22; contrast with Rev.7:15; 11:19; 14:15-17; 15:5-6; 16:1; 16:17). Situated at the precise center of the city and on elevated ground from which the river of the water of life flows forth, the glory of God in the Persons of the Father and the Son will illuminate the world with a brilliant rainbow of light more intense than seven suns (Is.30:26), as the Shekinah glory can finally be unveiled without destroying the now perfected creatures privileged to gaze upon the Lord as He actually is (Ex.33:18-23).

Outside the City: The gates of New Jerusalem will always be open (Rev.21:25). For there will nevermore be any night (Rev.21:25; 22:5), no time of insecurity and danger, nor will anything profane even be able to enter in, since all sinfulness has been burnt out of the New Heavens and the New Earth. The "kings of the nations" will "bring their glory" (i.e., everything valuable and fine produced in the perfect new universe) into the city (Rev.21:24; 21:26), and the nations they

represent will "walk by its light" (Rev.21:24). Furthermore, the leaves of the tree(s) of life will benefit these nations outside the city wall (Rev.22:2). From this compound description it is very clear that there will be a sizeable population living outside of the city wall. It is also clear that they, and in particular their leaders, will enter the city on a regular basis. Therefore this elect group must be carefully distinguished from those mentioned by John at Revelation 22:15 (i.e., "outside are the dogs", etc.). For those reprobates are being deliberately contrasted in that passage with this group which precedes it in verse fourteen, a whole host of people who have "the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city". The "dogs" are those who have been committed to the Lake of Fire, with "outside" referring to the "outer darkness" (Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30); the key idea in both cases is one of complete separation from God (the Greek words are *exo* and *exoteros* respectively, the latter being the comparative form of the former). That is to say, "outside" refers not just to the New Jerusalem but to being "outside" the Lord's eternal state entirely (i.e., in the Lake of Fire). For only the names of believers will still be found "in the book of life" as the names of outside-believers are said to be (Rev.21:27).

Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor,
O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.
Isaiah 52:1 NIV

The population of the New Earth outside of New Jerusalem will be composed of the Friends of the Bride, that is, the contingent of millennial believers not resurrected and rewarded until history's end. In number, these will equal the Bride, so that together saved humanity will be equal in number to elect angelic-kind (Satan and his followers having been replaced one for one by the Church, with the millennial cohort furnishing Christ with His "double portion"). The Friends of the Bride will be composed of gentiles (whose kings are described in Rev.21:24), but also of Jews in disproportionately large numbers (we have posited elsewhere that the proportion of three to one of gentiles to Jews in the Church will be exactly reversed during the Millennium). Directly outside of the city, therefore, we may expect to find the New Israel, in proportion to its capital city greatly expanded in its territory:

"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."
Genesis 28:14 NIV

The remainder of the greatly enlarged New Earth (and possibly also the rest of the New Heavens, for that matter), will be occupied and husbanded by the Friends of the Bride (Ps.45:14-15; Rev.19:9).

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided the sons of men, He established the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.
Deuteronomy 32:8

8. The River of the Water of Life and the Tree of Life

(1) And He showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal[s of ice], coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (2) In the middle of the [New Jerusalem's network of twelve main] streets and on both sides of [this] river [of the water of life which ran through them] was the tree of life, producing twelve crops, offering its fruit every month, month by month. And the leaves of the tree are for the enjoyment of [all] the nations, (3a) so that there will no longer be any division.

Revelation 22:1-3a

Just as the river proceeding from Eden (which watered the garden) and the river from the millennial temple (which will water the Arabah and western sea) are prominent elements of their respective paradises, so the river of the water of life will be a dominating feature of New Jerusalem. The same also applies in all three cases to the tree of life. For New Jerusalem, however, this prominence will be abundantly true not only from the tangible aspect of the blessings they will provide forever, but also for their important symbolism. The tree of life represents our Lord Jesus, and eating of its fruit symbolizes placing our faith in Him; the truth about Jesus is the spring of living water welling up to eternal life for all who drink thereof:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. The one who comes to Me shall not hunger, and the one who believes in Me shall not thirst forever".

John 6:35

And all of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water symbolizing the truth in which one believes). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ.

1st Corinthians 10:4

For those who put their faith in Jesus in this life, the water of life and the tree of life will provide spiritual sustenance and physical blessing beyond present understanding and for all eternity.

(7) [Lord,] how precious is your mercy! Both the mighty ones (i.e., angels) and the sons of men will take shelter under your wings. (8) They will drink their fill from the richness [that flows] from your house, for You will give them drink from your river of delights. (9) For with You is the fountain of life. Through your light [on that day] we shall see [true] light.

Psalms 36:7-9

The River of the Water of Life: Just as the river that watered the garden came forth from God's place of "delight", Eden, and just as the millennial river of water which enlivens the Dead Sea comes forth from the temple, so the eternal river of the water of life will come forth from the throne of God, demonstrating clearly the source of eternal life and the source of everlasting blessing. Instead of the river of fire which had flowed forth from the throne for judgment

(Dan.7:10), this river emanates from the throne in its final resting place on earth as both a symbolic and tangible source of God's grace for His people.

Ho, everyone who thirsts, let him come to the waters!
Isaiah 55:1

As discussed above, the "street" mentioned in Revelation 22:2 above is really the New Jerusalem's network of streets. Therefore the river of the water of life which comes forth from the throne of the Father and the Son does not descend from the eternal Mount Zion in one channel only, but in twelve, flowing down the middle of each of the twelve capacious boulevards, and exiting the city through each of the twelve gates to water the face of the eternal Israel and the New Earth (cf. Ezek.47:1-12: while Ezekiel is given to see only the eastern stream issuing from the millennial temple, there are in fact two: Zech.14:8). The water itself, "sparkling like crystal[s of ice]", will be a delight to behold and will provide physical and spiritual blessings for all who partake of it. Since water is a biblical symbol for God's Word of truth (Is.55:1-3; Jn.3:5; 3:8 [Greek]; Jn.4:10; 4:13-14; 7:37-39; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Heb.10:22; 1Jn.5:8 [of the Trinity]; Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17; cf. Ex 17:5-6; Num. 20:8; Ps.42:1-2; 63:1; 84:5-7; Is.41:17; 44:3), it will perhaps be the case that the particular spiritual nourishment the water provides is precisely that, namely, truth about the Lord, all He is and all He has done. For Jesus is the true spring of living water (Is.8:6; Jer.2:13; 17:13; Jn.4:10-14; 7:38; Rev.7:17). It is thrilling to consider that these waters will never run dry, and that even were a person to drink from them without pause for all eternity, it would still not be possible to drain to the depths the source of truth about the God who made us, loved us, and saved us in Jesus Christ our dear Lord.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.
Psalm 27:4 NIV

And the Spirit and the bride say "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.
Revelation 22:17

The Tree of Life: There are several important things to note about the tree of life which may not be immediately obvious from an English version. First, the word "tree" is used here in a collective sense. What we have to do with here is a veritable forest of trees. Second, this forest lines both sides of the river of living water along all twelve channels, over 20,000 miles of network, and on both sides of the river channels at that. We can also only guess at the width of the river or of the breadth of the wooded area occupied on each side, but the proportions of the city and the likely extensive span of each of the twelve avenues argue for a not inconsiderable distance. Simply put, the tree of life will cover a good deal of territory in New Jerusalem. Third, the twelve crops are not produced sequentially, but simultaneously, regardless of the time of the year (that is the meaning of "every month, month by month"). Rather than being temporally separated, the fruit is geographically separated: the trees along each of the twelve branches of the

river bring forth a different type of produce, one for each tribe (in a manner analogous to the twelve loaves of the bread of presence set out in the tabernacle to represent the twelve tribes of Israel: Lev.24:5-9). This diversity of location will encourage the visitation of residents of every tribe to all other areas of the city, in order the better to enjoy and appreciate the whole of New Jerusalem.

(12) Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, (13) consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Psalm 48:12-14 NIV

When the people of the land come before the Lord at the appointed feasts, whoever enters by the north gate (of the temple) to worship is to go out the south gate; and whoever enters by the south gate is to go out the north gate. No one is to return through the gate by which he entered, but each is to go out the opposite gate.

Ezekiel 46:9 NIV

There are three important aspects to the tree of life and its fruit, all of which are symbolized by the furniture in the tabernacle-temple; and all of these symbols are inextricably bound to the Person of the One who is the revealed member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the true tree of life (Jn.15:1-8; Rom.11:17-24). The golden lampstand symbolizes the appearance of the tree of life (Ex.25:33-34); the bread of the presence on the golden table symbolizes its fruit (Lev.24:5-9); and the incense from the golden altar recalls its fragrance (cf. 2Cor.2:15). For Jesus is the light of the world (Jn.8:12), the bread of life (Jn.6:35), and the sweet savor of salvation which expiates our sins (Eph.5:2; cf. Heb.7:27; 9:14). The tree of life will thus be the source of palpable joy in its appearance, fragrance, and taste (cf. Gen.2:9; Ezek.47:12). And in this last blessing in particular, the feature emphasized in our context with the reference to the twelve crops, the benefits and delights of partaking of the various fruits will be enormous, eternal manna from God, everlasting communion in the participation of the Body of Christ, a pleasurable experience that will surpass to infinity anything offered by this present, visible world.

We are also told that the foliage of the trees will likewise produce great benefits, though here again the English versions can be misleading. The Greek word *therapeia* (θεραπεία), the source of our "therapy", may indeed have a medicinal meaning, but not necessarily so. Its primary application has to do with care and oversight, a function which does not require some prior problem as in the case of illness (cf. Lk.12:42). Therefore "positive use" or "enjoyment" is a far preferable translation in this context where all tears have now been wiped away forever. This benefit of the tree of life will then be some sort of pleasurable activity apart from eating, and one of its prime applications will be the production of unity among all believers. For the occurrence of the word "curse" found in most of the versions in verse three of chapter twenty-two is based upon a misreading of the text (as we have seen, the "curse" of Genesis chapter three had already been removed at Christ's return: Rom.8:21; cf. Zech.14:11 NASB only). As Sinaiticus makes clear, the correct Greek text reads *katagma* (κατάγμα) "division", not *katathema* (κατάθεμα) "curse". In New Jerusalem there will be no further divisiveness between the tribes, now

composed of Jews and gentiles both, nor between the Bride and the Friends of the Bride, nor, for that matter, between saved human beings and elect angels. The therapeutic foliage of the tree of life will provide a pleasurable means of fellowship and harmony between all believers forevermore (Ps.47:9; Zech.2:11; Jn.10:16; 11:52). In that blessed time to come, there will no longer be anything separating us from each other – and, most importantly, nothing separating us *from God*.

Happy are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to [access] the tree of life, and [the right to pass through] the gates so that they may enter the city.

Revelation 22:14

9. The Blessed Eternal State of the Saved

(3b) And the throne of God and of the Lamb is within her (i.e., New Jerusalem), and His servants will worship Him, (4) and they will see His face, and His Name will be on their foreheads. (5) And there will no longer be any night nor will they have any need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them, and they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 22:3b-5

The Character of our Eternal Life: As to the precise construction of the New Earth and New Heavens and our activities therein, scripture gives us only a little information. That is decidedly a good thing, because if we knew in great detail how wonderful the eternity we anticipate will be, we might be tempted to think of nothing else. Such detailed knowledge also might remove some of the challenge to our spiritual growth. As it is, believers have to exert a certain amount of sanctified will-power to "think about the things above" (as we are commanded to do: Col.3:1-2).

We are given to know certain things, however, and it is possible to make some sanctified assumptions from the information we do have. For example:

- We will inhabit an amazing, perfect body forever. We know some important things about our future resurrection body from the example of our Lord in resurrection, since "when He appears, we shall be like Him" (1Jn.3:2).
- We will enjoy the visual and sensual delights of the New Jerusalem, the city itself, the river of the water of life, the fruits of the tree of life and leaves of blessing, the beauty of the city, its walls, gates and foundations, the novelties produced and brought into the city, eternal fellowship with all our kindred believers in Jesus Christ, etc. All these will be eternal joys which will be all the more enjoyable because of the perfect body we shall command, being not only incapable of any ill-feeling, but also possessing a greatly expanded capacity to appreciate the wonders to come.
- We will likely have the expanded and perfected new universe to explore forever. Since our Lord is capable of walking through closed doors, moving immediately from one far

distant place to another, and ascending through the universe to the third heaven, it would seem to be rather incongruous not to give us His Church bodies capable of such swift, amazing travel, than restrict us to one particular place (viz., we shall be superior to angels, and they currently ply the heavens).

- We will have direct access to the Son and the Father for all time, and that will be by far the "best of the best" of anything anyone could ever possibly have or experience. We only understand that now in principle, but on that glorious day of days we will "know even as we are known" (1Cor.13:12).

In a word, we cannot yet truly appreciate what is to come. We behold that future glory only dimly as a distant reflection (1Cor.13:12), but we can take great encouragement from the contrasts scripture provides between the difficult life we now patiently endure and the blessed existence that awaits us on the other side of the veil.

- Instead of death, only life (Jn.3:15-16).
- Instead of sin, only righteousness (2Pet.3:13).
- Instead of tears, only joy (Ps.16:11).
- Instead of pain, only blessing (Rev.22:2).
- Instead of want, only plenty (Rev.21:24).
- Instead of trouble, only peace (Lk.20:34-36).
- Instead of darkness, only light (Rev.22:5).
- Instead of separation from God, eternity in the presence of God (Rev.22:4).

That this last contrast encapsulates all that will be truly good and wonderful in New Jerusalem may be seen from the context of our passage, Revelation 22:3b-5. For this passage summarizes our blessed eternal status by listing five salient characteristics of our glorious life to come, all five of which are focused not on us or our resurrection bodies but on the Lord:

1. Our Worship of God: "His servants will worship Him": The word often translated "serve" here is better rendered as "worship", for that is the substance of which our eternal service to the Lord will be composed. These acts of worship which we shall thoroughly enjoy, "with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng" (Ps.42:4 NIV), will not consist of the shadows of the Law or hollow, invented liturgies which are really only "the teachings of men" (Is.29:13; Col.2:22). Rather, they will be genuine and heart-felt acts of worship occurring in accordance with a perfect and specifically prescribed pattern. This perfect worship arranged, designed, and ordained by

God Himself will thrill our hearts in an unimaginable way, and we will never have to wonder about when to come before Him, what to bring, what to do, or whether a particular hymn or rite or ceremony or expression is right or correct. Our worship, our service of adoration to the Lord will be perfect on that great day, and incapable of being otherwise, for we will be an eternal "kingdom of priests" (Rev.1:6; 5:20; 20:6).

(23) But the hour is coming, and in fact has already arrived, when the true worshipers [of God] will worship the Father in spirit (i.e., spiritually: our spirit responding to His Spirit) and in truth (i.e., truthfully: our heart responding to His truth). Indeed, it is just such worshipers that the Father is seeking. (24) For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so spiritually (lit., in spirit) and truthfully (lit., in truth).

John 4:23-24

2. Our Fellowship with God: "they will see His face": While at present, no one living has seen God (Ex.33:20; Jn.6:46; 1Tim.6:16), on that great day we shall all see Him face to face (1Cor.13:12); we shall all be with and enjoy the presence of our dear Lord Jesus in Person (Jn.14:3; 2Thes.1:10). For the Bride and the Groom will be united as one forevermore (Ps.45:9-11), never to part (Rev.3:12; cf. 1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19; 1Pet.2:5). For we shall be His people, and He will be our God (Gen.7:17; Jer.31:33; Ezek.37:27).

3. Our Relationship with God: "His Name will be on their foreheads": The levitical priests wore a plate of pure gold on their turbans inscribed "Holy to the Lord" (Ex.28:36). As a kingdom of priests, we too will have a special identification of our status as God's eternal possessions. For He will place His sacred Name on our foreheads that all who see may know that we belong to Him forever (Is.43:7).

4. Our Capacity to Appreciate God: "the Lord God will shine upon them": The darkness of this present world which symbolized divine judgment has now given way to a universe of light in which darkness has ceased to exist. The presently unapproachable brilliance of the glory of God on that day will be given to us to view in awe and reverence. Indeed, it will be the source of light, infinitely brighter than anything presently imaginable (cf. Is.30:26), which will illuminate the entire New Heavens and New Earth. In resurrection, we will not only have the ability to look upon the Shekinah glory without being immediately destroyed, but will also be able to appreciate the wonder of it. One in Jesus, the Light of this present world (Jn.8:12), we will no longer have any need of lamps or the sun or any other indirect source: from the eternal Mount Zion, the "Place-of-Light", the glory of God will suffuse the entire universe. Nor will there ever be another night, nor any need for us to sleep: there will be no need to miss a moment of eternity, and we shall have the capacity to appreciate and enjoy this and every other eternal blessing to the full.

5. Our Sharing of God's Reign: "they will reign forever and ever": Under the Genesis curse, hard work is required to survive in this present world. But mankind was never created to be idle. Even in the garden, Adam was given a desirable and enjoyable occupation, "to work [the garden] and take care of it" (Gen.2:15), and Eve was designed as a "helper compatible with him" (Gen.2:18). Therefore if the blessings already alluded to do not seem sufficient to pass eternity, we may be

sure that we will not find ourselves without delightful and pleasurable tasks to perform, work that is in no way burdensome, but instead perfectly complements who we each are. Beyond all question, the most wonderful such occupation to contemplate is that of sharing in the rulership of the universe with our Lord, a blessing of which our context makes clear even the lowest gatekeeper of New Jerusalem will partake. While the devil and those who chose his side had as their ultimate objective the wresting of universal rulership from God, we who have humbly chosen to follow and serve Jesus in this life will find Him and His Father generously sharing their eternal rule with us forever.

Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.

Daniel 7:27 NIV

But of all these things, our greatest source of joy and surprise, engagement and wonder will be the Person of God Himself in the face of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We who have trusted God to bring us through the tough times of this life can certainly trust Him that, after the testing and trials of this life are past, He will provide us with only the brightest and the best, things beyond comprehension, "eternal delights at Thy right hand forevermore" (Ps.16:11). For Jesus has been our fortress and our refuge in this life, our Shepherd and our Friend. Jesus is our true home, and He will be so forever. Amen.

Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe also in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also.

John 14:1-3