

The Coming Tribulation: a History of the Apocalypse

Part 6: Last Things

Revelation 20:1 - 22:5

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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Contents of the Series: The Coming Tribulation

Part 1: Introduction (Revelation 1:1-20)

Part 2A: The Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1-3:22)

Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude (Revelation 4:1-7:17)

Part 3A: The Tribulation Begins (Revelation 8:1-11:14)

Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom

Part 4: The Great Tribulation (Revelation 11:15-15:4)

Part 5: The Second Advent and Armageddon (Revelation 15:5-19:21)

Part 6: Last Things (Revelation 20:1-22:5)

Part 7: Preparing for Tribulation (Revelation 22:6-21)

Contents of Part 6:

I. The Second Advent Judgments: Revelation 20:1-3

1. Babylon
2. The Armies of Armageddon
3. The Beast and the False Prophet
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons
5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel
7. The Judgment of the Church

II. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

III. The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ: Revelation 20:4-6

IV. The Gog and Magog Rebellion: Revelation 20:7-9

V. The Final Disposition of Satan and his Angels: Revelation 20:10

VI. The Last Judgment: Revelation: 20:11-15

1. The Destruction of the Universe and the Interlude of Final Judgment
 - a. The Last Resurrection of the Saved and the Unsaved
 - b. The Destruction of the Present Heavens and Earth
 - c. The Judgment of the Sheep

2. The Great White Throne of Jesus Christ: The Last Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead

VII. New Jerusalem and the Eternal state: Revelation 21:1 - 22:5

1. The New Heavens and the New Earth
2. The Descent of New Jerusalem

3. The Advent of the Father
4. The Passing away of the Old
5. The Father's Proclamation of Encouragement
6. The Nature of New Jerusalem
7. The Foundations and Gates of the Wall
8. The Interior of the City
9. The River of the Water of Life and the Tree of Life
10. The Blessed Eternal State of the Saved

Introduction: With the dramatic return of our Lord and His signal victory over the beast and his armies at Armageddon, human history now enters its final and most glorious phase. For a thousand years our Lord Jesus Christ will rule the world from His royal capital of Jerusalem, and the earth will see a time unlike anything that has come before. For the Millennium will be a unique period of blessing, one not only of material prosperity, but of complete justice and spiritual blessings beyond imagination. Indeed, this is the very time toward which much of Old Testament prophecy looked. These references are far too numerous to catalog in their entirety, but a few examples will suffice to show how the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, His victory over the devil, His deliverance of Israel, His entrance into Jerusalem with His concomitant coronation and session, and His rule of blessing are ubiquitous themes in the Old Testament, with this anticipated time of future bliss constituting the positive pole of the Day of the Lord paradigm upon which so much of prophecy depends.¹

1. The Victory of Messiah:

(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.”

¹ To such a degree is this true that the large number of passages quoted in this section is only a representative sample (cf. Ps.65). See part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b, “The Day of the Lord Paradigm”.

Psalm 2:1-12²

(1) God is our refuge and strength. [He is] our help in [times of] tribulation, [and] very quick to be found. (2) Therefore we shall not fear when the earth totters, when the mountains quake in the heart of the seas, (3) [when] its waters roar and foam, when the mountains shake on account of its swells. Selah (i.e., “rest”). (4) There is a river whose streams delight the city of God (Ezek.47:1-12; cf. Is.33:20-21; 41:18), the holy residence of the Most High (i.e., Messiah’s capital). (5) God is in her midst. She will not be shaken. God will help her, before morning [comes]. (6) The nations were in an uproar. The kingdoms [of the world] tottered. He gave forth His voice. The earth melted. (7) The Lord of Hosts (i.e., Jesus Christ) is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge! Selah (i.e., “rest”). (8) Come, see the wonders of the Lord, [even] He who has wrought devastations on the earth, (9) [even] He who makes wars cease to the very end of the earth. He will break [every] bow and shatter [every] spear and burn [all] chariots with fire. (10) “Cease [your agitation] and know that I am God. I shall be exalted over [all] the nations. I shall be exalted over the [entire] earth.” (11) The Lord of Hosts (i.e., Jesus Christ) is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge! Selah (i.e., “rest”).

Psalm 46:1-11

(1) God is known in Judah; His name is great in Israel. (2) His tabernacle is in Salem; His dwelling place also is in Zion. (3) There He broke the flaming arrows, the shield and the sword and the weapons of war. Selah. (4) You are resplendent, more majestic than the mountains of prey. (5) The stouthearted were plundered, they sank into sleep; and none of the warriors could use his hands. (6) At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse were cast into a dead sleep. (7) You, even You, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry? (8) You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still (9) when God arose to judgment, to save all the humble of the earth. Selah. (10) For the wrath of man shall praise You; With a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself (i.e., those “left over” Messiah will take to Himself). (11) Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared. (12) He will cut off the spirit of princes; He is feared by the kings of the earth.

Psalm 76:1-12 NASB

(1) In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. (2) Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." (3) With joy you will draw water from the wells of

² Verses 1-6 find their complete fulfillment only at the end of the Millennium in the final rebellion against Messiah (Rev.20:7-10), but, in addition to the applicability of verses 1-6 also to Armageddon, the remaining verses use the future incident of the Gog-Magog rebellion as a point of departure for describing Christ’s millennial reign.

salvation. (4) In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. (5) Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. (6) Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

Isaiah 12:1-6 NIV

2. The Deliverance of Messiah:

(8) Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. (9) He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. (10) Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. (11) You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). (12) 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).

Psalms 66:8-12

(1) Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. (2) The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. (3) He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (4) Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; (5) make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, (6) with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the King. (7) Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (8) Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; (9) let them sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit., "has come") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Psalms 98 NIV

(9) O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! (10) Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. (11) He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Isaiah 40:9-11 KJV

(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

(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

3. The Triumphal Entry of Messiah into Jerusalem:

(7) Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (8) Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (10) Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty – he is the King of glory. Selah

Psalms 24:7-10 NIV

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 (cf. Rev.19:11).

Zechariah 9:9

(4) The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. (5) Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. (6) While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. (7) He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.

Ezekiel 41:4-7a NIV

4. The Coronation of Messiah:

“But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

Psalms 2:6

(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.

Psalm 47:5-8 NIV

(24) Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. (25) In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines. (26) Praise God in the great congregation; praise the Lord in the assembly of Israel. (27) There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them, there the great throng of Judah's princes, and there the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali.

Psalm 68:24-27 NIV

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.

Psalm 97:1 NIV

The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim. Let the earth shake.

Psalm 99:1 (cf. Ps.80:1; Is.37:16)

5. The Rule of Messiah:

(1) Shout with joy to God, all the earth! (2) Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! (3) Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. (4) All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name." Selah (5) Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf! (6) He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot – come, let us rejoice in him. (7) He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations – let not the rebellious rise up against him. Selah
Psalm 66:1-7 NIV

(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.

Psalm 96:10-13 NIV

(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

(17) Your eyes will gaze upon the King in His beauty, and you will see the land expanding out [before you]. (18) Your heart will meditate on [the former] dread: “Where is the [beast’s official] who counted? Where is the [beast’s official] who weighed? Where is he who administered the fortified posts (lit., “towers”)?” (19) [But] you will no longer behold [that] merciless crowd, those people too deep of lip to be understood whose tongues babbled things which could not be understood. (20) Behold Zion, the city of our festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem [as] an untroubled habitation, a tent which will not be moved; her stakes will not be pulled up forever, nor will any of her ropes be pulled down. (21) For the Lord our Mighty One will be there. It will be a place of rivers, majestic and wide which no boat will cross with oars, which no mighty ship will sail. (22) For the Lord will be our Judge, the Lord will be our Lawgiver, the Lord will be our King – He is the One who will deliver us!
Isaiah 33:17-22

We will have occasion to examine many other aspects of our Lord’s millennial rule likewise prophesied in scripture as they occur in chronological sequence below. But it is also important to note at the outset that the coming of paradise to earth (the sixth and penultimate paradise to be precise³), will not change sinful human nature. Mankind will be no more satisfied with its lot than before, no more inclined to justice and righteousness, and no more interested in seeking God, despite experiencing on that great day the wonders of the personal rule of Jesus Christ and the blessings which He and His Father will shower upon the earth of that time.

I. The Second Advent Judgments: Revelation 20:1-3

For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).
Isaiah 26:20-21 (cf. 2Pet.3:10b)

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

(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

³ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1](#), section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

Earlier in the book (i.e., Rev.10:1-11), John was given to hear the voices of the seven thunders, but then ordered not to write down what he had heard. As explained in part 3A of this series, these seven voices of thunder are predictions of future judgment which respond to the lion-like roar of the angel of chapter eleven who, as we have seen, is portraying Christ's Second Advent return.⁴ Just as the first half of the Tribulation is begun with seven judgments of warning (the trumpet judgments), and the Second Advent is preceded by seven judgments of punishment (the bowl judgments), so the actual return of Christ is accompanied by these seven "thunder" judgments. These three sets of seven judgments are thus part and parcel of the coming of the Day of the Lord, and, specifically, of the Tribulation which forms the Judgment part of phase II of the Plan of God: Completion.⁵

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

- 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.
- Restoration II: the Millennium: earth is restored to an environment of blessing.
- Replacement II: Christ the King replaces Satan, the de facto ruler of the earth. The Church is resurrected in replacement.

The seven thunders represent the 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 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.⁶ As the One to whom all judgment has now been committed (Jn.5:22; 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom.2:16; 14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10; 2Tim.4:1; 4:8; Jas.5:9; 1Pet.4:5; Rev.2:5-6; 3:1-3; 3:19-20), it is appropriate that Jesus Christ administers them directly and personally. These seven judgments are as follows:

⁴ In Psalm 29:3-9 the "voice of the Lord" is also expressed in thunder and the phrase occurs seven times. Since the ending context of the Psalm is one of Christ's millennial session (v.10b), it is likely that we are meant at the very least to have this passage in mind when reading Revelation 10:1-11. I owe this observation to Ms. Susan Phillips.

⁵ See the Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

⁶ The context in Revelation chapter ten is that of the coming of the powerful angel who is meant to represent Christ and His Second Advent. It is for this reason that the judgments accompanying that return are represented (by the thunders), but not yet explained (since that would have to wait until their chronological occurrence later in the book).

1. Babylon destroyed (Rev.18).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed (Rev.19:1-21).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet consigned to the lake of fire (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3).
5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands (Ezek.39:6; cf. Rev.20:9).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel (Ezek.20:34-38; cf. Rev.21-22).
7. The Judgment of the Church (Rom.2:16; 2Cor.5:10; cf. Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

Thunder is a sign of lightning. Just as the echoing of earthly thunder often heralds the approach of an oncoming storm we cannot yet see, so John was not given to see before their chronological occurrence the actual judgments or “bursts of lightning” which the seven thunders presaged. As the storm draws nearer, however, the lightning becomes visible for each in turn. The fiery lightning represents the judgment of God. This is often the case with fire generally (cf. Deut.4:24: “our God is a consuming fire”), and is also often the case with lightning in particular which is variously described as the arrows, spears, and sword of the Lord (2Sam.22:13-15; Ps.18:12-14; 144:5-6; Ezek.21:8-14; 21:28-30; Hab.3:11; Zech.9:14; cf. Ps.29:7; 77:18), and “the fire of God” (2Kng.1:12; Job 1:16 Ps.97:3-4; Ezek.1:4; 1:13-14; Hab.3:4; cf. Rev.4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). All seven of these divine judgments associated with Christ’s return likewise involve fire as the instrument of judgment in one fashion or another.

1. Babylon destroyed: “she will be consumed by fire” (Rev.18:8).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed: “the Lord is coming with fire” (Is.66:15).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet: “they were thrown alive into the lake of fire” (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3): compare “lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding” (Ps.148:8), with “Who makes his angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire” (Ps.104:4); in the Abyss, the fallen angels will have nothing to do but to anticipate their own imminent end in the lake of fire.
5. Magog and the Coastlands: “I will send fire” (Ezek.39:6).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel: “He will cleanse [them] . . . with a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire” (Is.4:4).

7. The Judgment of the Church: “if anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss, but he himself will be saved – but in this way as through fire” (1Cor.3:15).

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. As we have seen since the beginning of this series (see in particular part 1), 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 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). We have covered this judgment where it is described in detail, namely, Revelation chapter 18 (section II of part 5 of this series: “Judgment on Babylon”).⁷

2. The Armies of Armageddon

The Second Advent and our Lord’s destruction of the armies of the beast at Armageddon was the subject of the previous installment of this series. Following Babylon’s destruction and occurring

⁷ See also in particular Isaiah chapters 13-14; 46-47; and Jeremiah 50.

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). As was pointed out in the previous installment of this series, 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).

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.⁸

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).⁹

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.

⁸ See part 4 of this series, section III, "Michael"; part 3A section I.1 "The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets"; and part 2A of Bible Basics, section II.9.3.3, "Archangels".

⁹ See part 3A of this series, section III.6 "The Second Woe: Demon Destruction".

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.2:14-10; Jude 1:5-7). 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 (Luke 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).¹⁰ 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.¹¹

(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.

¹⁰ See "The Abyss", in section IV of the Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement. The reference in Revelation 18:2 about Babylon as a "dwelling place for demons, and a place of confinement for every [sort of] unclean spirit" refers to the condition of that country after divine judgment: that is now all that it is suitable for (e.g., Matt.12:43; cf. Is.13:31-32; 34:13-17).

¹¹ Apocalyptic references to the "blacking out" of the "hosts of heaven" and the "falling of the stars" to earth may also anticipate this glorious moment of demonic removal (e.g., Is.34:4; Joel 3:15; Mk.13:24-25; Rev.6:13; cf. Jer.10:11).

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***.

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,¹² 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).¹³ 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.¹⁴

The Lord came from Sinai¹⁵, 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.

Psalms 149:5-9 (cf. Song 2:15)

¹² See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.8.c, under “The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar”.

¹³ However, it is true that elect angels do this where such activity is recorded elsewhere (Rev.20:1-3; cf. Rev.9:1-3; 12:7-9).

¹⁴ See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section IV.2.c, “Replacement II: Christ the King and His Church” for the principle in the plan of God of Christ and the Church replacing Satan and his angels.

¹⁵ For passages which describe the southerly approach of our Lord’s Armageddon campaign, see the previous installment of this series, The Coming Tribulation, part 5, note #75, and section VII.5.c, “Israel Fights”.

“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. 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; and see section I.6 immediately below). 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. While refusal to receive the mark exempts those who so refused (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 (2Kng.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).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).

¹⁶ See the discussion in part 4 of this series, section VII.2.c, under “Torment in fire and sulphur”. Revelation 14:9-11, while technically referring to the ultimate state of those who receive the mark, is yet a sobering warning about the more immediate consequences discussed here: a fiery death which transitions the offenders to Torments in Hades, followed by an eternity in the Lake of Fire as a result of the Last Judgment.

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 (and receiving 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; see section VI.2 below). 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 (see section I.6 immediately below), 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.¹⁷ 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 race¹⁸, since all believers alive at the Second Advent are resurrected "to meet the Lord in the air"; 1Thes.4:17).¹⁹ 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 (covered in part 4 of this series). 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 (cf. Ps.21:7-10)

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, 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", a reference to the persecution of believers referred to in 2Thes.1:7 quoted above), including the Great Persecution.

¹⁷ We have studied before the subject of prophetic conflation for simplicity's sake of end time events: see Part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b, "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm".

¹⁸ And we know that there will be survivors who are not believers (Is.66:19; Rev.1:7; cf. Is.2:2-3).

¹⁹ See part 5 of this series, section V., "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride".

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 our introductory passage, Ezekiel 39:6, 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; 66:17). 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

a. The Regathering of Israel: The return of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is at once one of the most blessed and most frequent 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. Directly after Armageddon, our glorious Lord

will 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.”

Psalms 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 surviving Jews, 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*, רִבְדִם מִיַּמֵּעָה). 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 “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.²⁰ 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, as we have seen in part 3B of this series, 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

²⁰ See the excellent discussion on this point by C.F. Keil in v.9 of Commentary on the Old Testament (rpr. Grand Rapids 1980) *in loc.*

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 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 close a 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")²¹, and who are not subsequently found wanting during the judgment in the

²¹ Cf. Daniel 12:1: "but during that time your people will escape, [that is,] everyone who[se name] is found written in the book [of life]"; that is, the names of all those who refused the mark remain in the Book of Life and so that they are not subject to the baptism of fire.

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.

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, as we have already seen in the prior installment of this series, 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 this present judgment:

(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 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; 23:19-20; Joel 3:17; Zech.12:10-14; Rev.1:7; cf. Is.31:6; 50:20-21; 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 (covered below in section VI.1). 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 of the Church

Also known as “the judgment seat of Christ”, this judgment is Christ’s evaluation of His Bride, the resurrected Church (i.e., believers from Adam and Eve to the last person to accept Christ before His return). 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 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 where trials are held indoors and generally not made widely available, 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).²² 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.²³

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

²² Even positing a very conservative and almost certainly far too small total number of believers at 1.2 billion over the prior six thousand years, nevertheless some 68,000 years of day and night judgment would be required in “real time”, with only one half an hour available for each person to receive the promised personal judgment from our Lord.

²³ Satan was able to show our Lord the kingdoms of the world and all their glory “in an instant of time” (Lk.4:5). If a mere creature (and an evil one at that) were capable of such time compression in the present *kosmos*, we can be sure that our Lord can compress the time of our judgment into the blink of an eye in human chronological terms.

“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 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 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.

(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 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.²⁴

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), and the final

²⁴ Our Lord’s synoptic “telescoping” of the entire process of eternal judgment into one (although in terms of its actual process it will involve two evaluations of believers and one of unbelievers) is a standard prophetic device known as “prophetic foreshortening” (covered in part 1 of this series, section IV.1.a).

“last” judgment of all unbelievers which follows it immediately (i.e., the “goats” of Matthew 25). 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 is it 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 up²⁵ 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

²⁵ Literally, "treasuring up" from the Greek *thesaurizo* (θησαυρίζω; cf. English "thesaurus"), the same verb used by our Lord Jesus to commend our "storing up" of treasures in heaven instead of on the earth (Matt.6:19-24).

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 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.***

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. (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”. 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 lay 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. Despite opposition from enemies numerous and strong, He always has and always will give us the victory. 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 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 example is not of “dead faith” but rather is one 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 tested nor having accomplished the ministry intended for him. 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 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” and genuine production for Jesus Christ which receives a reward. 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); 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.

"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

Indeed, 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 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 despite, 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.

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. (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 Gods’ 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 believing what is right (i.e., “faith”, Greek: πίστις, *pistis*) and of giving our complete allegiance (Greek: ἐπίγνωσις, *epignosis*) to 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 *pistis*, faith (i.e., “believing”) and “complete allegiance” (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 **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 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 blessed 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 is *epignosis* assimilated, God’s truth made usable for the Spirit in the believer’s heart, and spiritual growth attained.²⁶

(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, 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

²⁶ These two extensive topics, spiritual growth and Christian epistemology, introduced only briefly here, will be covered in detail in parts 5 and 6A of the Basics series, “Pneumatology” and “Peripateology” respectively. I am indebted to Col. R.B. Thieme Jr. for recognizing the critical distinction between *gnosis* and *epignosis*: The Grace Apparatus for Perception (Houston 1969).

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).²⁷ 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

²⁷ See the Peter series, especially lessons #13-18.

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.

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

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

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 life must first necessarily have attained spiritual maturity, and 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 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 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*.

Hebrews 13:12-13

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).²⁸

(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.

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

²⁸ It would also certainly stand to reason that our "jobs" during the Millennium will be compatible with our present spiritual gifts (an observation I owe to Mr. Lynn Murray).

II. 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.

Psalm 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.

Psalm 47 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 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, 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 (in part 5 of this series, section V, "The Resurrection of the Lamb'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 circles²⁹), 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:

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A maskil.

A wedding song.

1 My heart is stirred by a noble theme
as I recite my verses for the king;
my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.

2 You are the most excellent of men
and your lips have been anointed with grace,
since God has blessed you forever.

3 Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one;
clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.

4 In your majesty ride forth victoriously
in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;
let your right hand display awesome deeds.

²⁹ e.g., see the notes on the Song of Solomon in the 1599 Geneva Bible.

5 Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies;
let the nations fall beneath your feet.

6 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy.

8 All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia;
from palaces adorned with ivory
the music of the strings makes you glad.

9 Daughters of kings are among your honored women;
at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.

10 Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear:
Forget your people and your father's house.

11 The king is enthralled by your beauty;
honor him, for he is your lord.

12 The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift,
men of wealth will seek your favor.

13 All glorious is the princess within her chamber ;
her gown is interwoven with gold.

14 In embroidered garments she is led to the king;
her virgin companions follow her
and are brought to you.

15 They are led in with joy and gladness;
they enter the palace of the king.

16 Your sons will take the place of your fathers;
you will make them princes throughout the land.

17 I will perpetuate your memory through all generations;
therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.

Psalm 45:1-17 NIV

Notable in the verses above is the presence here 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, 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.³⁰

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 (see section I above):

(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)

³⁰ We may expect that this also involves some sort of supernatural accommodation for the extremely large number of participants (analogous to the supernatural compaction of time during the judgment of the Church).

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; 76; 95 - 100; Is.26).

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).

Psalms 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

III. 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).³¹ (6) Blessed and holy is the one 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,

³¹ The sentence “*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished*” (KJV), is a later, non-scriptural addition, and is not a part of the actual biblical text. While Revelation is not as well attested in terms of mss. as other books of the NT, it does occur in some of the oldest and best uncials; this half-verse is absent from codex Sinaiticus, the oldest and best witness to the original text, as well as from most other mss. which include the book of Revelation, and occurs only in a few mss. such as codex Vaticanus and the Latin versions of the Bible. It is safe to say, therefore, that this half verse is a gloss, added by a later copiest to explain “This is the first resurrection” and the (only) apparent absence of other believers besides those who were martyred (though, in fact, scripture is merely emphasizing the special rewards which come to the martyrs, and not saying that the rest of the Church is not resurrected at this time too – which it most certainly is). As is often the case in the transmission of ancient mss., marginal explanations such as this (known as glosses), erroneous material has made its way into the text in one tradition when the ms. was recopied (since the copiest wrongly assumed that this was not an explanation but an actual part of the text accidentally left out and placed in the margin later). The presence of this half verse in most English versions has to do with tradition based upon the Latin Vulgate favored by the Roman Catholic church, and the fact that the translators of the KJV did not have access to many of the earlier mss. such as Sinaiticus (that ms. having come to light only in the 19th cent.).

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 will 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.

Introduction:

(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 the garden of Eden and until the ultimate Eden commences, the eternal state and New Jerusalem (see section VII below).³² For the storm of the Tribulation has passed (Jer.25:32), and Jesus Christ Himself will now preside over an unprecedented time of calm, peace and plenty, ruling His kingdom in perfect righteousness and justice under Edenic 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.³³ 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 Eden.

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

³² See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

³³ These are Phase I restoration and Phase II restoration respectively (with Phase III being the Eternal State). See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

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.³⁴ 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),³⁵ 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. 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 of section I above, and the final judgments of men and angels covered in sections IV-VI 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:

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.

³⁴ See The Satanic Rebellion series, especially part 5, section II.8.b, "The Seven Days of Re-Creation".

³⁵ See The Satanic Rebellion Part 4: Satan's World System: Past, Present and Future.

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. Psalm 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 the psalm immediately above, penned by Solomon who, as David's son, is here 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; 61:3-7; 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

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* (i.e., season) *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

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., crime and war; cf. Zech.5), 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; Mal.3:2-5).

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. 1Kng.8:56). Indeed, the Millennium is the penultimate Eden.³⁶

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.

³⁶ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

Zechariah 9:10 NIV

4) The Most Profound Blessing of All: The Presence and Personal Rule of Jesus Christ (see also Ps.2; 45; 48; 72; 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.³⁷ 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

³⁷ See the introduction above, and The Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section IV, “Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III”).

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, He 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, He 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, He 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, He 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 His 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).³⁸
- Resurrection confirmed the prophecies of His 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 (Heb.10:19), with believers who had died prior to the cross led to heaven by Him 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 His 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 (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; 45; 48;

³⁸ On this subject, see R.B. Thieme, Victorious Proclamation (Houston, 2nd ed. 1977).

72; 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.

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?"

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).³⁹ 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. 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.

³⁹ Since the prince can give allotments “to his sons”, we may be sure that a descendent of David and not David himself is meant by this title. Ezekiel 46:16-18 does not actually contemplate the prince dying; he will have “sons”, and will give them an inheritance while he is still alive – probably all the way to the end of the Millennium (in keeping with the return during this penultimate Eden to pre-flood life spans; see section c, immediately following).

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 section III.2.c 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 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 experience (e.g., crime and war). 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.
Psalm 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 Edenic 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)⁴⁰, 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.

⁴⁰ See The Coming Tribulation, part 2B, section III, “The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit”.

As mentioned above, there are seven “Edens” in the history of God’s creation.⁴¹

1. The Original Earth (before Satan’s fall)
2. The Third Heaven (before the creation of mankind)
3. The Garden of Eden (before the fall of Adam and Eve)
4. The Subterranean Paradise (a.k.a., “Abraham’s Bosom” – visited by Christ: 1Pet.3:19-20)
5. The Third Heaven (now the abode of departed believers following Jesus’ victory at the cross and subsequent ascension)
6. **The Millennial Jerusalem** (our present focus)
7. The New Jerusalem (in the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth)

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)

⁴¹ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

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."

Psalm 87 NIV

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

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.

Psalms 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, finally emptying into the Dead Sea (while another branch flows west to the Mediterranean: Zech.14:8). 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 blessing 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 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., “God will plant”). (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)⁴², and also from direct tribute from all of the other nations, the "double portion" of

⁴² Not an unparalleled phenomenon (2Kng.7:5-8; and cf. Libya's status as a major iron and steel scrap exporter for years after World War II), but in scope far beyond anything in the prior history of the world.

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.

Psalm 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.⁴³
Isaiah 65:19-20

⁴³ On this translation (which is the author's), see Irenaeus *Adv. Her.* 5.34.4.

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 (which could, however, be alternatively explained; see section III.1.b above). 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 current seven or so billion human beings who inhabit planet earth, a population which could very well be pushing some ten billion at the time of the Tribulation's commencement. 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 100 million survivors under the conditions of millennial blessing and enjoying expanded human life-spans would be certain to rebound to the previous level in very short order (and to surpass it significantly by the Millennium's end). That is no doubt true even if the figure of 100 million survivors turns out to be far too high. This would also seem to be borne out by 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 eight), both under sub-millennial 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 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.

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 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 (see section III.1.e below), but we shall also see the leadership of Christ's Church come again into the hands of a predominantly Jewish cadre as in apostolic times. As we have 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

"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).⁴⁴ 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)⁴⁵. 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

⁴⁴ The prophecy of Zechariah 6:12-13 (quoted immediately below) does not necessitate that there be no temple in place when our Lord returns. Rather, the Hebrew verb *bahah* indicates in this instance just such a process of ornamentation, that is to say, Messiah will "build it up" rather than "build it from scratch"; cf. the precise same use of the bare verb *banah* in Psalm 147:2: "The Lord builds up [*boneh* fr. *banah*] Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel" (NIV), where, obviously, Jerusalem already exists when it is thus beautified.

⁴⁵ On the ark of the covenant as symbolizing both God's throne and battle-chariot, see part 2B of Coming Tribulation, section I.1.2.b, "The Throne".

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 memorializing purpose (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, they continued to "crucify the Son of God afresh" (Heb.6:6) even after He had already suffered and died for our sins, making participation in them 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

And there will be differences in the millennial regime of animal sacrifice, reflecting the memorial 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; Ezek.45:13-46; cf. Ps.106:4-5; Is.60:7), the enmity having been dissolved by 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":

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.'" Psalm 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).⁴⁶

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; 2Kng.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 (see previous footnote), 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).⁴⁷

IV. 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

⁴⁶ See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"; and, specifically, for a discussion of these millennial believers as Christ's "double portion", see "Day 7" in section II.8.b of the same study.

⁴⁷ See the discussion in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion, section II.8.c., "The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar".

of the land of Magog addressed in Ezekiel 38:2.⁴⁸ The latter reference is to 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. This last human rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ and His millennial rule 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, 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

⁴⁸ For example, fire consumes the rebels here, whereas there are no "birds" summoned to eat the corpses as at Armageddon, and no seven years necessary for burial (as history will conclude immediately following this battle in any case; see section VI below). See part 5 of the present series, section III, "The Beast's Armageddon Crusade", for the full discussion concerning "Gog of Magog".

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 section VI 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,⁴⁹ 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 – following, that is, the final disposition of Satan and his followers (section V), and the final reward of the millennial believers along with the last judgment of all unbelievers (section VI).

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

⁴⁹ See part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Genesis Gap".

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."
Matthew 25:31-46 NIV

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

V. 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, as we have previously had cause to consider at length (i.e., in the five part Satanic Rebellion series which serves as an introduction to this present series), 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 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 (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.⁵⁰ 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

⁵⁰ It is also likely that the demons (who are very aware of God’s existence: Jas.2:19), know very well that this day is coming. That is best way to understand the response of the legion of demons at Matthew 8:29, “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us **before the appointed time?**” (NIV). I am indebted to Ms. Nancy Lamoureux for this observation.

of incarceration of a goodly number of demons, and their likely place of residence during the Millennium; cf. section I.4 above, “The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons”).

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 sinful conduct (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:

(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

(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 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; see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion: The Genesis Gap). 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; 1Kng.22:19-22; Lk.15:10; Jn.8:56; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; 1Pet.1:12; Heb.12:1; Rev.6:10).⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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

⁵¹ Compare the description at Rev.19:3 of Babylon’s destruction being visible “forever”.

⁵² Isaiah is making his point in a poetic fashion (this chapter, as with most of Isaiah, is in poetic form in the Hebrew text). We find a very similar usage in Isaiah 14:9-11, where the "king of Babylon" goes down "to the grave" and is covered with "maggots and worms". Isaiah is thus combining here a picture of the literal "grave" with that of the eternal "grave" of the non-believer.

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.

VI. 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 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 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 Unsav

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; see section I.5 above). 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 our context, 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, 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).⁵³ 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*

⁵³ The NIV's "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles *to be burned*" is an accurate rendering of the Greek text of verse thirty, *pros to katakausai auta* (πρὸς τὸ κατακαῦσαι αὐτά), indicating the preparation of the chaff for burning. However the wheat is brought into the barn first, reflecting the fact that the wheat is more important: there will be plenty of time to burn the bundled chaff later once the wheat has been safely stored in the barn.

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.⁵⁴

(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."

Matthew 25:31-46 NIV

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 as we saw in section V above). 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

⁵⁴ I.e., Matt.13:43 parallels the picture given in Rev.21:3 precisely.

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).⁵⁵ 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

⁵⁵ The actual separation of the resurrection of the living into phases (i.e., after our Lord, the pre and post-millennial resurrections of the living: 1Cor.15:23-25) is, of course, a “mystery” (1Cor.15:51-52) not revealed until apostolic times (explaining the conflation of the resurrection in passages such as Dan.12:2-3).

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.**

Psalms 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.⁵⁶ 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

⁵⁶ Despite appearances, passages such as Psalm 104:5 and Ecclesiastes 1:4 are not in fact inconsistent with the clear teaching of fundamental renewal quoted above. The earth will endure as it is presently constituted “until eternity”, but it is precisely at the commencement of eternity when the new heavens and earth will replace the old.

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 the next section immediately below). This evaluation will be precisely along the lines of the evaluation of the Church at Christ’s 2nd Advent return (described in section I.7 above); 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 "to 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. 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 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, 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 His precious sacrifice on their behalf for eternal life.

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 verse twelve of our passage, 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 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 and one at the end of the Millennium, 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 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,⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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 verse twelve 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.

⁵⁷ In section 5 of part 2A, and in section VI.1 of part 4.

⁵⁸ The doctrine of unlimited atonement is discussed in section II.3 of part 4A of Bible Basics: Christology.

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 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”.⁵⁹ 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.

Psalms 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) Their expunging 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

⁵⁹ Reading *kata-krino* in verse 13 with Sinaiticus in the second instance (rather than the simplex form *krino*).

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.
Galatians 5:17

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).⁶⁰ 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

⁶⁰ See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Satan’s World System”, section IV, “Tactical Doctrine” for a discussion of these three essential satanic lies.

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 (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 personal 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 (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 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 in section I.7 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. For even the most noble and virtuous unbeliever who has ever lived (whoever that may be) will still be 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, maculate 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."

As Romans chapter one (translated at the beginning of this section) 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 in verse 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. 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).⁶¹ 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" (the place of the unsaved dead), the Abyss (the place of incarcerated fallen angels), and "paradise" or "Abraham's bosom" (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 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 verse 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

⁶¹ This principle of interpretation is covered in detail in part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Genesis Gap", section II.3, "The Sea".

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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 in section V 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.

VII. New Jerusalem and the Eternal state: Revelation: 21:1 - 22:5

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 saw in the previous section (VI.1, “The Destruction of the Universe and the Interlude of Final Judgment”), 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 here 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 maculate 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 here in verse one of chapter twenty one. 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). 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*”), 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). 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.⁶² 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 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 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).⁶³

⁶² See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

⁶³ This is also why believers were only transferred to “heaven” from “paradise” below the earth after Christ’s ascension. See Bible Basics 4A: Christology, section I.5.o.2.3, “The Transfer of Believers from the Subterranean Paradise to the Third Heaven”.

That John’s use of the singular “heaven” here means the twin heavens (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 devil's fall and confinement to earth). Whether he means by this word the third heaven (as is frequently the case; cf. Rev.8:1) or the physical cosmos (as in, e.g., Rev.8:10) must be determined from context, but, as here, the meaning is always evident.⁶⁴ 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 here both to the sky and to the physical universe beyond it, namely, the visible “twin heavens”, but 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.

And the replacement of the old earth by the New Earth 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 which, like the third heaven, are separated from the physical cosmos 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.⁶⁵ 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

⁶⁴ In the Gospel of John, we have at least one instance where the singular *ouranos* is used to translate *shamayim* (i.e., Jn.6:31 compared to Ps.78:24b). John uses *ouranos* seventeen times in his gospel, and only (possibly) once in the plural in John 3:5, where a good textual case can be made for reading “kingdom *of God*” instead of “kingdom *of heaven[s]*”.

⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that in Daniel 7:10, the river of fire (which fills the Lake of Fire, cf. Dan.7:11) proceeds directly from the throne, indicating a very close proximity between the throne and the lake.

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. As we have seen in the past (especially in part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion: The Genesis Gap), in terms of biblical symbolism the sea signifies evil, for the sea is one of God’s most prominent instruments of judgment. 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.

Finally in this regard, we have seen in previous installments of this series that the heavenly sea, 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).⁶⁶ We are told in Isaiah's final verse (i.e., 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).

⁶⁶ See "The Sea", in section I of Coming Tribulation part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude.

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 section VII.6 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* 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], (23) 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), (24) 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 12:22-24

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.⁶⁷

(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.

⁶⁷ See the Satanic Rebellion series, and, in particular, part 5, "Judgment, Restoration, and Replacement".

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 satiation 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 Father's Proclamation of Encouragement

(5) Then the One sitting upon the Throne said to me, "Behold! I am making everything new." And He says to me, "Write that these words are faithful and true." (6) And He says to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts [the right] to drink from the fountain of the water of life without cost. (7) The one who conquers (i.e., maintains the victory of faith to the end of life: 1Jn.5:4) will inherit these things (i.e., the blessings of the New Jerusalem), and I will be His God and he himself will be my son. (8) But as for the cowardly and unbelieving and foul and murderers and the sexually immoral and those involved in the occult and idolaters and all those who are liars (i.e., all who for a variety of reasons have rejected Christ) – their portion (i.e., "inheritance") will be in the lake burning with fire and sulfur which is the Second Death."

Revelation 21:5-8

John is still viewing the descent of the New Jerusalem from his heavenly perspective (i.e., the same one he has had throughout this extended vision since he was told to "come up here!" at Rev.4:1). Just as he heard a voice coming from the heavenly throne in verse three proclaiming the advent of the Father, now the Father Himself is heard to speak from this throne in the present third heaven. With these words God the Father proclaims the blessings of eternity soon to be dispensed upon His children, thus offering very great encouragement for all believers to persevere through the Tribulation ahead:

1) "Everything new": The fundamental change of things which will obtain in the eternal state is hereby assured. Nothing will remain of the previous corrupt world; nothing will remain of our prior mistakes, regrets, troubles or tears. All that is to come will be "new" and intrinsically so. We are now "of" the new creation (cf. 2Cor.5:17-19; Gal.6:15; Col.1:2), and we ourselves have in resurrection also been made completely new, having been made to bear "the likeness of the Man from heaven" (1Cor.15:49) in order that we may live with God forever in the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven.

2) "Words faithful and true": In an analogous way to the oath God took to Abraham which confirmed the promise (for his benefit and encouragement: Heb.6:13-20), so the Father here affirms the truthfulness and unchangeable reality of the blessings to come, reiterated here that we too may take courage during the dark days ahead. All scripture is God-breathed (2Tim.3:16), but here we may be confident of the truth of these encouraging words because the Father not only proclaims them in His own voice, but also underlines their eternal immutability for our benefit by pronouncing them "faithful and true".

3) "It is done": History is over. The plan of God is complete. All that was meant to happen, all that had to happen, all that God willed and His creatures chose, written in the divine book of history since before the initial creation of the universe, has now been consummated. The old book has now been closed; the new one has now been opened – and will remain open forever. Those who chose for God have been saved; those who chose against Him have been removed

from His Kingdom. Whatever deeds of faith had been accomplished by His faithful creatures have received their reward; and lost opportunities have been lost forever. The trials and tribulations of the life we now know are at this future point gone forever, even the most horrendous persecutions and plagues the earth will ever experience during the Tribulation. We may take great consolation and comfort in the sure and certain knowledge that even that terrible period to come has a definite end, so that even if it is given to us to cross through that terrible sea, we will at this point stand safely on its far bank, looking back at our deliverance and our Lord's great victory. The conclusion of history also means the end of any possibility of further change of status. All moral creatures have now made their choice and have been confirmed in that choice forever. For those who chose death, there is no further avenue back to life. And, blessedly, for those of us who have chosen life and have persevered through fire and water safely to the other side, there is no further possibility of falling away from God. In eternity, there will be a tree of life, but there will be no tree of knowing good and evil. For through the process of history, divinely directed, evil has been thoroughly repudiated and defeated. All that is left is "good".

4) "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end": The end of history is nothing to be mourned. God's creatures are created to live with Him. He is our all and our everything, and when this present world passes away, when the Kingdom is handed over to the Father (1Cor.15:24), when these limited bodies are transformed into their eternal form, when we are capable of fellowship with Him in a complete and unencumbered way, He will be our "all in all" (1Cor.15:28), our Alpha and Omega, our beginning and our end, our prime delight forevermore.

5) "The right to drink the water of life": All who overcome, that is, all who give their faithful allegiance to Jesus Christ and maintain that faith firmly until the end, will drink this water of life. Salvation is here promised free of charge to all who are willing to be saved, to all who are willing to choose for Jesus Christ, to all who are willing to endure whatever may come in this life without relinquishing that precious faith, even if that means persevering through the coming Tribulation (see section 9 below for the further blessings this water of life accords).

6) "The one who conquers will inherit these things": All who overcome will not only be delivered from death and punishment, but will have a full share in Jesus Christ and in the New Jerusalem. Our Father makes this statement as John watches the New Jerusalem descend, no doubt a magnificent and overwhelming sight whose true splendor words cannot adequately express. Our eternal home and all it contains, eternal lodgings of transcendent beauty, the river of the water of life, the tree of life, the gates and the glory of the New Jerusalem, and most of all the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Father and ours will belong to us forever – in perfect, eternal bodies, decorated and blessed with the rewards we have won in the short span of time all history comprised. Seeing the goal in such a vivid fashion is surely encouragement for us to keep running the race, even if its course takes us through the gathering storm.

7) "I will be His God and he himself will be my son": Perhaps the most encouraging thing of all is this promise of the complete restoration in every single facet of the relationship with God

which is ours by virtue of His creation of us. No longer will He be hidden from our view, and our relationship with Him will not merely be formal and will be well beyond amiable: it will be the perfect relationship of Perfect Father to sons made perfect through the sacrifice of our dear Savior Jesus Christ. For those who love Jesus now, the Bible promises sweet fellowship in the midst of this turbulent world, in tribulation and even during the Tribulation (Jn.14:23). For those who remain faithful to the end, this promise of the full experiential reality of the sonship which is ours by position in Jesus today is great encouragement indeed.

8) “The Second Death”: As is common in biblical parlance (e.g., 1Cor.6:9-10; Gal.5: 19-21; Eph.5:3-7), the list of offenses given in verse eight is not meant to be comprehensive, nor is it meant to define those who choose against God solely by means of their conduct. Rather, just as godly works are a clear indication of salvation (Jas.2:14-26), so in the case of unbelievers their conduct demonstrates what it is they truly love, having chosen one manner of detestable behavior or another as a characterization of “who they really are” (cf. our Lord’s use at Mk.4:40 of “cowardly” as the equivalent of “lacking faith”). For all those who reject the truth in order to embrace the lie in whatever manifestation, instead of having an everlasting inheritance in the New Jerusalem, their portion will be eternal residence in the lake of fire. No more powerful inducement exists for the believer than this reminder of the great benefit of perseverance – eternal life instead of the second death – and of the great calamity of allowing ones’ faith to lapse in the trial of life: loss of every good thing which the Father has sworn here to provide for all those who, despite the cost, remain faithful to His beloved Son.

6. 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

One of the Seven Angels: As mentioned in the previous installment of this series, these seven are the college of archangels of which only two are known by name, Michael and Gabriel. While we are not given his name here, Gabriel would seem to be a likely candidate for the angel speaking with John. For Gabriel is known to us from his explanation of eschatological visions to Daniel (Dan.8:16; 9:21), and from his proclamation of the coming of the Messiah and His herald (Lk.1:19; 1:26), and here we have both categories of prophecy combined into one: the Advent of the Father and of His eternal abode, the capstone of all eschatology in the coming of the New Jerusalem where Father and Son will rule forever.

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” (cf. Is.60:14b). 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, describing it as “the Bride” (since that is where the Bride will indeed live forevermore) certainly makes perfect sense.

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.⁶⁸

The Exterior of the City: Later in verse eighteen we will find that “the city [itself was composed] of pure gold [which was] transparent like crystal”, although here 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 into the city proper (otherwise he would never have been able to see the gates on all sides of the city, or the throne, or the tree of life, or the river of living water, or any of the other sights within its walls). Within, the true nature of the city is plain to see: it is composed of translucent, crystalline-gold.

⁶⁸ Elevation and/or separation as an indication of the rank of deity is a common feature of paradise in all its iterations: see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

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.⁶⁹

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 most likely come to earth where John is now 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).⁷⁰

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.

⁶⁹ See The Coming Tribulation, part 2B, section I.1.d, “The tabernacle and the first curtain”.

⁷⁰ This is the order actually described in the Greek text. Many versions incorrectly reverse south and west in verse 13. The tradition reflected in Alexandrinus (codex A) is in fact the one followed by the queen of biblical manuscripts, Sinaiticus (codex ⳨), despite what one may gather from various textual apparatuses. There was a scribal error in ⳨ (accidentally writing “north” twice), but the correction to “south / west” instead of “west / south” is late and incorrect. After writing north a second time, the scribe next wrote “south” and there ended the series (proving that “south” is the final set of gates).

3) While in the New Jerusalem the order of the gates and tribes associated with them has everything to do with rank (see section VII.7 below, “The Foundations and Gates of the Wall”, for the identification of the gemstones with their particular tribes and the significance of their ordering), the gates of millennial Jerusalem are ordered according to birth by means of a formula which takes into consideration both age and motherhood:

- **north:** three of Leah's eldest sons, Reuben, Judah and Levi (Judah as the tribe of the Messiah replacing Simeon).
- **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 below, 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). This will be covered below in our treatment of Revelation 21:15-21 where these foundations are actually described and ranked. 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). As we shall see, 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, because in verse 17 we are told that the human and angelic measurement are identical here (i.e., the longer, angelic standard is being employed here for John just as it was when the angel measured the temple for Ezekiel: Ezek.40:5); second, because 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).⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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

⁷¹ See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.5.b “The Illustration of the Tabernacle”, and part 2B of the Coming Tribulation series, in section I, “The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple”.

⁷² Herein we see a parallel to the universe as a whole which is, and will no doubt remain, mostly space with a small percentage of material; the perfect cube of the holy of holies and of the New Jerusalem argue for this being the true shape of the material universe as well. Compare Is.40:22 where the universe is described as God's “tent” (and that would by definition be a perfect cube after the fashion of the holy of holies and the New Jerusalem).

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, however, 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

(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

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 particularly noticeable 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 NIV 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, however, no particular dimension is mentioned in regard to the 144 cubits because 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”). It is easy enough to see how the former (identical in all letters except for the *tau* in place of the *lambda*) was accidentally read for the latter, especially since the “wall” is in view both immediately before (vv.12, 14, 15) and after (vv.18, 19) verse 17. That is to say, this could be either an error of sense (“wall” is what we have everywhere else, so we expect to have “wall” here as well), or of vision (with *teichos* occurring throughout the context it would have been very easy for a scribe’s eye to slip to a neighboring instance of the more common word).

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 standoff therefore can only be one of width, and it is for that reason that the text does not give us a dimension (whereas if the 144 cubits really were a dimension of the wall, we would be told which dimension).

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 below) 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

7. 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).⁷³ 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

⁷³ Nine such stones were worn by Satan before his fall. Additionally, stones of memorial for each angel, the “stones of fire” of Ezekiel 28:14-16, were present in the initial paradise. Three of the nine clans seceded to join the devil in rebellion against God. See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series for discussion, section III.3.b.2, “Angelic Elders”, and part 1 of the same series, section III.1 “Walking Amidst the Stones of Fire”. Since the Church replaces the fallen angels one for one, it is possible that each believer will receive one of these stones as a demonstration of the replacement (cf. Rev.2:17).

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; Rev.7:5-8 [omitting Dan]). 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; see section I.7 above, "The Judgment of the Church"), 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).

See chart #1 at rear.

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.⁷⁴ 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:

See chart #2 at rear.

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

⁷⁴ We find a similar adjustment of relative rank in the reorganization of the angelic clans evident from comparison of Ezekiel 28:13 with Exodus 28:17-21 and 39:10-14. See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section III.3.b.2, "Angelic Elders".

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: מִדָּם / *odhem*; Greek: *sardion* / σάρδιον (Gen.49:8-12; Deut.33:7).

2. **Issachar:** Sardonyx: Hebrew: הַדְּטָט / *pitedhah*; Greek: *sardonyx* / σαρδόνυξ (Gen.49:14-15; Deut.33:18-19).

3. **Zebulun:** Emerald: Hebrew: בַּרְקֶת / *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: נֹפֶחַ / *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: יָהָלֹם / *yahalom*; Greek: *iaspis* / ἰάσπις (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: המלחא / *achalamah*; Greek: *amethystos* / ἀμέθυστος (Gen.49:27; Deut.33:12).

2. **Manasseh:** Jacinth: Hebrew: לשל / *leshem*; Greek: *hyacinthos* / ὑάκινθος (Gen.49:22-26; Deut.33:13-17).

3. **Ephraim:** Chrysoprase: Hebrew: רבש / *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: הפשי / *yashepneh*; Greek: *topazion* / τοπάζιον (Gen.49:21; Deut.33:23).

2. **Asher:** Aquamarine-Beryl: Hebrew: שהם / *shoham*; Greek: *beryllos* / βήρυλλος (Gen.49:20; Deut.33:24-25).

3. **Dan:** Chrysolite: Hebrew: שישרת / *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 referenced 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.

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 (Duet.33:8-11), and the Lord Himself was their inheritance (Duet.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.

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.⁷⁵ 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).⁷⁶

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).⁷⁷ 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).⁷⁸

8. 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

⁷⁵ See part 1 of Coming Tribulation, in section V, "The Seven Churches' Angels".

⁷⁶ No *operative* liaison will be necessary during the Millennium because of the presence of the resurrected Church. The presence of the angelic liaison "at the gates" indicates that these will do double duty for the Church per se within the city and the Friends of the Bride outside of the city.

⁷⁷ See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.b.i, "Israel the Ultimate Organization".

⁷⁸ See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.b.i, "The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings".

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* (πλατεῖα), 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 *diauges* (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 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 πόλις (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).⁷⁹

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,

⁷⁹ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.c, point 5 under “The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings”, “Israel is the Ultimate Organization”: “Thus the final organization of the family of God would seem to be as follows: 6 clans of elect angels represented by 24 elders on the one hand, complemented by and ***equal in number to*** 12 tribes of saved and resurrected human beings, organized into 24 echelons on the other, both ruled over by the God Man Jesus Christ.”

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: We have had occasion to treat the present-day, heavenly throne along with the angelic elders and cherubs who attend it in our coverage of Revelation chapters 4-7 (in part 2B of this series).

(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 text suggests 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”).⁸⁰ 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).⁸¹ 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 (cf. Gen.17:7):

⁸⁰ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.b, under “Day 7”, “Evidence for the “Seven Days” Interpretation”.

⁸¹ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.c, point 5 under “The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings”.

“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 gentile Friends of the Bride.

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

9. 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 Him⁸²; 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.

⁸² Compare the identical symbolism behind the bread of presence in the tabernacle. See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.5.b “The Illustration of the Tabernacle”, and part 2B of the Coming Tribulation series, in section I, “The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple”.

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.
Psalm 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 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]; 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 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 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)⁸³; 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

⁸³ The lampstand or menorah is meant to represent the almond tree, the ultimate of the “best fruits of the land” (Gen.43:11), and, significantly, the form taken by Aaron’s rod when it budded (Num.17:8).

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. 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).

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

10. 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).⁸⁴
- 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 to give us His Church bodies capable of such swift, amazing travel, then 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).

⁸⁴ In addition to the information on this subject to found in section I.7 above, “The Judgment of the Church”, see also part 5 of this series, section V, “The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride”, and lesson #20 of the Peter's Epistles, “The Resurrection”.

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.⁸⁵ 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).⁸⁶

(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 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.17:7; Jer.31:33; Ezek.37:27).

⁸⁵ For this usage of the Greek verb *latreuo* (λατρεύω), compare especially Acts 7:7; 24:14; Heb.9:9; 10:2; Rev.7:15.

⁸⁶ God is the object of our worship in this verse, and by this time Christ has subordinated the millennial Kingdom to the Father (1Cor.15:25-28). Yet there is only one throne, occupied by “God [the Father] and the Lamb”, showing that while the Father is now revealed as the ultimate Person to be worshiped, the Lamb, our Lord Jesus, is most certainly not excluded from our eternal adoration. Compare Revelation 5:13: “To the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever!”.

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

Breast-Plate



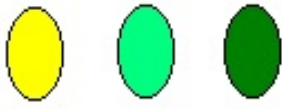
Sardius Judah
Sardonyx Issachar
Emerald Zebulun



Carnelian Reuben
Sapphire Simeon
Jasper Gad



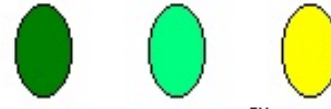
Chrysoprase Ephraim
Jacinth Manasseh
Amethyst Benjamin



Chrysolite Dan
Beryl Asher
Peridot Naphtali

Chart #1

Encampment



Peridot Naphtali
Beryl Asher
Chrysolite Dan



Chrysoprase Ephraim



Jacinth Manasseh



Amethyst Benjamin

Tabernacle



Jasper Gad



Sapphire Simeon



Carnelian Reuben



Sardius Judah



Sardonyx Issachar



Emerald Zebulun

