

WHAT
HAPPENS
WHEN
I DIE?

From Here To Eternity

A Meditation

GEORGE N PATTERSON

*“How stern are the woes of the desolate mourner
As he bends in still grief o’er the hallowed bier,
As enanguished he turns from the laugh of the scorner,
And drops to perfection’s remembrance a tear;
When floods of despair down his pale cheeks are streaming,
When no blissful hope on his bosom is beaming,
Or, if lulled for a while, soon he starts from his dreaming,
And finds torn the soft ties to affection so dear.
Ah, when shall day dawn on the night of the grave,
Or summer succeed to the winter of death?
Rest awhile, hapless victim! and Heaven will save
The spirit that hath faded away with the breath.
Eternity points, in its amaranth bower
Where no clouds of fate o’er the sweet prospect lour,
Unspeakable pleasure, of goodness the dower,
When woe fades away like the mist of the heath.”*

Percy Bysshe Shelley

What Happens When I Die

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FOREWORD

The first reaction of any person reading the title of this book is: why would anybody want to read about a morbid subject like death? Then (surely not accidentally?), I read an unusual article entitled "TEOTWAWKI" in a new international journal, "Intelligent Life". The meaning of that intriguing headline was given as "The Ending Of The World As We Know It ". Admittedly it was not about the subject of death, except in the sense that the ending of the world as a subject involves the inevitable death of everybody.

The writer of the article had the usual 21st century approach supercilious, cynical, sardonic, and laconic. Introducing the article the editor sets the tone with a lightweight summary of the options: "These seem to boil down to three: wait for help from the authorities, run for it, or rearrange your bookshelves."

The writer begins the article with his concept of the problem: "What to do when history runs out", and details his "private apocalypse" as he is "about to have a baby...a sort of year-end and a year-zero beginning". After a few infantile gibes about different Hollywood films of the previous two decades he concludes with the assertion that he planned to put up in the delivery room where his baby was born a poster which reads "KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON".

That about sums up the socially fastidious attitudes of most people when the subject of personal death as well as the ending of the world ever arises. It is a vacuous and contemptible reaction that is insulting to every family where a member is dying, especially when the world news has been of a potential two millions deaths in Burma from a monumental tsunami, and the estimate of a possible 10,000 deaths in China from a catastrophic earthquake. "KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON" is a juvenile and insulting response to what is a serious question for everyone facing death in any form. Even in another article in the same journal, discussing *"the Apocalypse"*, the editorial comments *"that rare beast, the environmentally friendly joke"*. It does little for the reputation of a journal whose title and declared purpose is *"Intelligent Life"* when it cannot deal sensibly with *"the end of life as we know it"*.

I was especially irritated with the journal because at the time I was contemplating writing about the fact of death, and the possible ending of the world as I knew it. I was approaching my 88th birthday and, with an asymmetric heart condition (after a heart attack my heart had stopped beating on several occasions causing instant black-outs for varying minutes), I was vulnerable to death as a very real possibility at any moment.

Six years previously I had lost my wife, Meg, in a soul-lacerating three years of accelerating suffering from her unexpected stroke until her eventual death. At the time, although we were both in our late-seventies, we were in Mexico and had been planning a world-wide expansion of her unique NeuroElectric Therapy (NET) drug treatment process, with no thought of death other than the usual future expectation.

Meg and I had retired to bed as usual the previous evening, thrilled with the initial progress-reports of the first patients in the Mexican Clinic, and the potential for NET elsewhere in the future. During the night I was vaguely aware that Meg had got up, when she seemed to stumble in the dark. I asked sleepily if she was alright and she murmured a short response and apparently settled down to sleep again before I did. In the morning, as was my custom, I made early morning tea and took a cup through to the bedroom for

Meg. At my call she opened her eyes, and just looked at me blankly.

"Here's your tea," I said to her encouragingly, thinking that she was coming out of a deep sleep.

She never moved, looking at me blankly, but seeming to struggle to speak. I felt a rush of fear, and ran to pick up the telephone and call our colleague, Dr John West, to tell him what had happened. He said to call 911 immediately and have her taken to Hospital Emergency as it sounded like a stroke. The Emergency ambulance was at the house within minutes and rushed Meg to the Hospital. Dr West and I followed behind them in his car.

We talked quietly in the waiting room for the next few hours. As it happened, the hospital where Meg was taken was also the place where John had served as chief surgeon for a number of years on his return from missionary service in Taiwan, and he was well-known to the medical staff. They gave him a running commentary on what was happening, and it seemed Meg was in a serious condition from a massive cerebral invasion in the left lateral lobe of the brain, paralyzing her right arm and leg, peripherally blind in the right eye, and rendering her speechless and apparently without memory.

They were only words to me, even although John quietly explained in detail, and with great sympathy, what they signified. My own brain seemed to be paralyzed with the immediate unfolding circumstances, and I was unable to comprehend any actions or consequences, personal or professional. When, several hours later, John and I were allowed to visit Meg in the ward allocated to her, she looked already dead to me, pale and unresponsive. John said he would stay with Meg, while I went off to inform the family. As it happened, our daughter, Myrrh, and her family were living only two hours away, in Long Beach, California, where her husband, Joe, was working on a business project at the time. She came to San Diego right away with her three daughters. By the time she arrived at the hospital, Meg had come out of her paralyzed coma, but she was unable to respond to our questions asking if she recognized any of us. It was some hours before she acknowledged with a slow nod of her head that she knew us.

Over the next several months my own mental and spiritual

paralysis gradually unfroze enough for me to begin the process of coming to terms with what was happening, and what it might mean for us. The every-day involvement with the details of Meg's necessary therapy shut out everything but the demands of her present crisis as she struggled to walk and talk and feed herself with my assistance at every stage. The professional therapists that she required for rehabilitation instructions usually took an hour for each session, and from them I learned how to supervise the subsequent exercise activities alone with Meg throughout the remainder of the days and nights.

In it all I was unable to communicate with Meg at any significant level. She slowly and painfully learned to talk again in short and stumbling phrases, but her comprehension was minimal. As I watched her eyes closely for responses I lived with the constant horror that she knew everything that had happened and was happening but was unable to communicate it to me in any way. She was unable to read anything and when I read to her she appeared to listen, but never remembered anything that was read. Her memory was virtually wiped out, both long-term and short-term. She gradually recognized family and close friends, but did not know that she had been a doctor or a surgeon. The speech therapist eventually reported that she was unable to get Meg to remember three single items, even after a single silent minute.

The neurology specialist said that he had never seen such a complete wipe-out of both short and long-term memory following a stroke. Her right arm and leg regained a little movement, but she had to learn to use her left-hand to eat and write, and her balance was so unstable, and her sight uncertain, that she fell many times. I found it difficult to be away from her side to cook a meal as she might attempt to get out of the chair and suddenly fall. Even if I went out of the door for a few minutes—to collect mail or see someone off—I found on my return that she was shuddering with spasms of terror at being left alone for what she thought was a long time.

After over a year of treatment the specialist concluded that her condition and limited prognosis was such that she would not improve, and, in his opinion, would either die quickly with a single

recurrence of a major stroke, or from a series of mini-strokes. His advice was that I should make plans for the future with this possibility in mind. I had been investigating Retirement Homes providing Assisted Care for the Disabled in the United States, and Myrrh and Joe were in the process of planning changes to their home to accommodate us with them. But the specialist's report was so grave that it was clear Meg would have to be under constant professional medical care as her condition inevitably worsened. If she was to travel anywhere it would have to be done quickly in case a sudden fall or another stroke rendered her incapable of travel.

Now that I had to anticipate Meg's inevitable decline and demise, I recalled a visit I had paid to my sister, Margaret, some years before, in a Retirement Home in Scotland run by a Christian Brethren Trust. I telephoned the chairman, Stuart Brown, and was immediately warmly invited to go there, and the Auchlochan Trust would make every provision for us. We had not met before, but after we arrived in Scotland he told me he had read my book, *God's Fool*, as a young man and had been so impressed by it he had given up his job as director of an engineering company and established the Trust for elderly retired missionaries, and was glad to be of help to me now.

It was April 27th, 2001 almost four years to the day since we arrived in San Diego en route to set up the NET clinic in Mexico—when we came back in Scotland, and travelled to the Auchlochan Trust Residential Community. My niece, Esther Anne, had met us with her car, and Norman Stone my television producer friend, was also at the airport with his colleague, Andi Hunt, to film our arrival at the airport and Auchlochan for television archive purposes. I had met Norman in London at a media conference and we had worked together professionally on a few occasions. He had married the Scottish BBC television presenter and author, Sally Magnusson, and they were now living in Scotland.

Since Meg's initial stroke my life had been narrowed down into caring for her daily and nightly needs. Auchlochan Trust was a Residential and Assisted Care centre, some forty miles from Glasgow, located in over thirty acres of beautifully landscaped

floral and wooded gardens; with cream-coloured and medieval-turreted residences built around four lochs, or lakes. There were about four hundred residents, with almost the same number of staff providing individual care twenty-fours a day, seven days a week. It was an earthly paradise with a heavenly ambiance. I was reminded of the words—*“If there is paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here”*.

Even with Meg’s increasingly withdrawn condition she responded to the beauty and serenity and wonderfully caring atmosphere of Auchlochan. She had little to say but seemed content to sit quietly, absorbed with whatever thoughts her condition permitted, but occasionally giving a small smile and holding my hand. Since the day of her stroke I had been living in a kind of goldfish environment, isolated within metaphorical glass walls and only peripherally conscious of all that was happening outside. My world was Meg and her daily—even hourly—decline. We had virtually no communication between us as her condition worsened and she moved remorselessly away from me into her own darkening world.

I lived with the daily and nightly horror that she still had a part of her brain where the memories of her, and our, memorable past were stored and active, but her loss of speech made it impossible for her to communicate this to the doctors—or to me. I could see that anguish as she sought unsuccessfully to communicate in her eyes, but her lips could only form a few words—*“I can – can – can’t – ”*—and then despairing silence, and I was locked out. Every hour of every day and night I could only watch her increasing isolation and inability to articulate anything and, worst of all, see her slipping away from me into her increasingly restricting world. It was like a nightmare of seeing a loved one fall into a slow but remorselessly swirling current of a river towards the roaring waterfall ahead, and being unable to do anything about it.

The nights were the worst, not just because of the our sleeplessness and her increasingly evident physical pain, which she could not describe where or what was the cause, and the obvious mental and spiritual anguish, as she struggled to say *“Help—*

please"—" help—Pat-la" (my nickname used by Tibetan friends when we first met)—"help—God"—every few minutes and, eventually, every few seconds in her mounting dementia and desperation. Then she had two mini-strokes within a few weeks of each other and her condition became worse at every level. Even the few words she spoke became garbled into "Help—mum—mum", or even a single inarticulate "Oh"—"Oh"—"Oh" at some excruciating pain spasm. In one unforgettable night she grasped me desperately and managed to gasp a rare voiced plea "Pat-la—let—me—go". I guessed she was appealing to me either to use my supposed influence with God to take her to Him, or—even more terrifying—asking me to terminate her life in some way.

I was in mental and spiritual agony. I had no more words left to pray to God; I had used them all in days and nights of beseeching for both of us in our desperation. Nothing worked. The doors to heaven were shut. It appeared God was no longer present or listening. I was beyond even the experience of Job when he said:

"When I go to the east, he (God) is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him . . . He stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases. He carries out his decree against me, and many such plans he has in store. That is why I am terrified before him; when I think of all this I fear him. Go has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me."

Job went on to say, *"Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick darkness that covers me"*. But I was *"silenced by the darkness, the thick darkness"*; not the darkness of the Abyss experienced when I was rebellious against God in the past, but the darkness of defeat when one can no longer move forward a step, think of a prayer, or speak a word. I had never felt so helpless in all my life. In fact, I could not ever recall feeling totally helpless. I either had confidence that God would provide me with some resource in whatever circumstance; or I would get tired of waiting and would come up with some course of action of my own. Now I was utterly, unremittingly, helpless to think, bereft of faith to act, inspiration to imagine, words to speak.

In the early hours of one night, I found myself mentally repeating over and over like a thoughtless mantra *"In acceptance lieth peace"*, *"In acceptance lieth peace"*, and *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee"*. The former were the words from Amy Carmichael's poem of that name: not in forgetting, not in endeavor, not in aloofness, not in submission, which were all in vain, she wrote, but *"in acceptance lieth peace"*.

When that temporary solace, too, passed, it helped—for a little while—as Meg's condition got even worse, to say *"Thy will be done"*. But then I found such acquiescence all too quickly became resignation under the onslaughts of sleepless nights, debilitating physical weakness, and relentless satanic interventions; when resignation became numbness with the automatic repetitions of *"Thy will be done"*; and numbness became spiritual paralysis.

When I could descend no further into the abyss of despair, it seemed, Meg was removed from our apartment to the Nursing Home for professional nursing observation as her condition reached a critical and terminal stage. I was alone in my room now with a single bed declaring Meg's final absence, face to face with God alone at last. Stripped of all activities, all exploits, physical and spiritual, emptied of all verbalising, as I would one day soon stand before Him in heaven to give account of all words spoken and actions done.

I opened my Bible without any actual thought of reading, just for something to do with my now empty life; not just the loss of a life companion, and unparalleled lover, but the loss of a lifetime's vision of God, and began to read where it had opened: *The Epistle of James* chapter 1—and stopped as if I had been hit by a hammer at the words:

" . . . Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything . . ."

The words leaped out of the page at me and I read them again and again: *"Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many*

kinds . . ." "CONSIDER IT PURE JOY . . ."

Not just "Peace" as a balm for my pain: but "Joy" "PURE JOY"! – because it was God's ultimate intention to make Meg and me "mature and complete, lacking nothing"- or as it said in another context, "perfect as He is perfect"! Not just satisfied with a lifetime's commitment to God's service; but to learn an appreciation of His own heart of love in giving His beloved Son over to death—and the Son's JOY in the indescribably torturous experience: "who for the JOY that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame . . ."

As I stood looking at the words I recalled how God had called on the Prophet Ezekiel to pass through a similar experience:

*"The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead . . . So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died . . ."*¹

I felt a flicker of understanding, a shaft of light in the all-encompassing darkness, a cracking of the icy grip encircling my heart as I began, like the Apostle Peter discovered, to "share in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed". This had to have some divine meaning not yet revealed in the context of our lives until now, so unique in so many ways.²

All this suffering for both Meg and me, so meaningless to us in the present, was that we might "share in God's own holiness". No suffering at the time is pleasant, but extremely painful. Nevertheless, in the light of eternity and God's unfolding revelation and love, it was but "a little affliction for a season, that was working a great and exceeding weight of glory" for us. I no longer felt a helpless pawn in the hands of a too-distant unresponsive God, but an intimate sharer in the divine purpose again, a weapon honed to a finer steel in the hands of an all-powerful God.

I informed the family about Meg's deteriorating condition, and Myrrh and her three daughters came over to Scotland to be with us in this final stage. Meg barely recognized them, except by a faint nod of her head when she was asked. She had no responses left to give.

¹Ezekiel 24 verses 15-18 ² See Meg's autobiography *Searching for the Impossible*; and my autobiography, *Patterson of Tibet*, both available on the Internet at www.classicbooks.com and links to www.drmege.net and www.georgepatterson.net

I had to take her out of the communion service one Sunday morning because of her constant spasmodic and uncontrollable cries of pain. She no longer agreed to be taken on walks around the lovely lochs and walled garden in her wheel-chair. She was wracked by the constant spasms of pain, and calling out agonizingly and heart-wrenchingly every minute or so with their intensity and her helplessness. The medications being prescribed by the doctors were at the limits they could provide, but were apparently useless to alleviate her agony.

In her room in the Nursing Home she lay on the bed, not seeing me or Myrrh or the grand-children. Her eyes were turned inward, and fixed on something it was apparent that she was seeing but unable to communicate to us or anyone. *"It is as if she's looking into heaven"*, Myrrh said, and I agreed. But every minute, over days, when she spasmed with her pain, her gaze came flickeringly back to us, yet never enough to recognize us in any real way. Her hand in mine was as unresponsive as her gaze, and somewhere within me another part of me died at this physical evidence of her departing and our inevitable separation.

Next day, a Monday, for the first time, I told Meg, as she gazed at me unseeingly, that I was now going to ask God to take her home. As Myrrh and I held her hands, and the three grand-children stood quietly beside us, I prayed specifically for this to happen. Previously, I had prayed this privately in my room, in bewilderment, helplessness and despair. But now I prayed with the calm assurance that was aware of, and accepted, the ultimate beneficent purpose of God. Our almost-three-years, lingering, mind-numbing and spirit-anguished separation, was ending in accepting His will in a silent goodbye. We sent word to our sons, Lorne and Sean, and our relatives, that the end was near, and they made arrangements to come to Scotland.

On the Wednesday, Myrrh called in her girls to say "goodbyes" to their beloved grandmother, but Meg was far away at the gates of heaven, willing her own departure. The doctors and nurses continued to battle for her life with medications, seeking to assure us that Meg might still linger for some time yet as her vital

signs were still good. But we knew otherwise.

As the day ended, Myrrh, before retiring for the night at 11-30 pm, asked the nurses to be kept informed of any deterioration. Myrrh's room was much closer to Meg's than my room, a couple of hundred yards distant. At 3-25 am a nurse wakened her with an urgent call as Meg was deteriorating. Myrrh was only about twenty yards away but by the time she got to Meg's room she was gone. A nurse was in the room with her, holding her hand, and she told Myrrh that she had finally slipped away quietly in her sleep. She was holding woollen toy in her hand that Arianne had given to her.

Home and pain-free at last. Home with the Lord she had loved and served so well. She now knew all the answers that I still had to resolve. She can walk and talk and sing freely and joyfully—and I am glad; not yet with the joy of Jesus or the Apostle James, or even with the sudden rapturous joy which both Meg and I had experienced when we discovered our love for each other; but the slow eternal joy which sees beyond the earthly anguish to the glories of the presence of God. I sat down and wrote:

*"It came in the dark of night
unheralded.
The day had ended as usual
in the quiet joy of shared visions.
In the morning, silence is a dim memory
of movement, but no danger;
the dawn was bright with sun
and the normality of waking tea.*

*Your eyes blinked open, but
no dawning smile of calm anticipation;
no word of greeting,
no motion of response.
The eyes that lit my life with promise
were blank, unknowing,
and I knew with growing terror
that I had lost my wife.*

*I was not yet alone. You lingered, and
I limped beside you, a damaged shell,
where once we strode together
in rapt communion,
our minds as free as spirits
in our joyous plans to share
what we had been gifted from God
with a listening world.*

*The former rush of words
as thoughts gave birth to deeds
was gone, and left a blank loneliness
in a shrunken world.
It did not end even then
as each day you went further down
the shadowed valley
where I could not follow.*

*I watched in helpless pain
you merge with darkening mists,
alone in death's beckoning bourne.
I heard, inert, your dying cries
as distance and the dark of night
enclosed you
in silent agonized goodbye.*

*Still you did not pass for good
from that dark valley of shadowed evil.
The shell of that once vibrant life
lingered in mute and agonizing pain
to fill our days and nights
with clamant cries to God to answer
and to act, as He had so often
in storied past for both.*

*"In acceptance lieth peace", they said.
But acceptance died
in repetitious days and nights
of unremitting grief.
The brazen skies and iron earth
of an unresponsive heaven
in tortured days and nights
was only added pain.*

*Then, "Consider it pure joy" James said,
"in adverse trials;
for patience makes all plain."
At last the sun broke through the gloom.
"Pure joy"! Was that not what the Master had,
enduring agonies of cross and shame?
Before He left He promised joy and peace
and everlasting life.*

*Now, you are gone. I live on
through days and nights in glad anticipation
of that great day of union
with both Lord and wife.
Soon, the trump will sound
the end of pain and sorrow.
Then I, too, shall leave this world
in silent goodbye"*

I certainly had never given death more than passing thought in a very eventful life. On second thoughts, that is not strictly correct. I have spent a good portion of my life as a committed Christian preaching about death—the crucifixion death of Jesus, and the eternal consequences for myself and others arising from that. But that aside, except for the occasions when I have been threatened with death by the Chinese authorities for my journalistic anti-communist activities in assisting Tibet, or by the Chinese secret societies in Hong Kong, or by international criminals for my drug

and money-laundering investigations, I had not given much thought to the possibilities of imminent death.

But now, reaching the age of eighty-eight with the unavoidable deterioration of all my physical and mental faculties; and the related necessity for making my will because of the potentiality of suddenly acquiring considerable wealth from the success of the NET drug treatment, focussed my mind wonderfully. I was no longer able to drive or travel, only able to read or type laboriously, and the fading athletic abilities of walking, jogging and swimming were remorselessly disappearing. Until now my life had consisted of absorption with the *past*; reading, preaching and living the purposes of God for me based on the Biblical revelations; and the *present*, living out the circumstances derived from the unfolding realities based on these spiritual convictions.

At the age of twenty-three, after being actively involved in Christian activities since the age of sixteen, I decided to test the existence of God by challenging Him to speak to me directly instead of through the lives of others in the Bible. When He did this by sending me to Tibet it changed my life totally, because I chose to live my life daily directed by God as I have recorded in my book, *Patterson of Tibet*, as well as a series of others³. In addition to my political journalism I preached in "house churches" in China, in nomad encampments among the warrior tribes of East Tibet, and in "house churches" in India, as well as in other churches in Britain and the USA

Then recently two totally unexpected events focussed my mind as never before: one, I bought a DVD disc of the narrated Bible as a listening aid to my usual but now diminishing capacity of reading five consecutive chapters to complete the whole Bible every year. Listening to the words of the Scripture being spoken by an articulate narrator was like hearing the voice of God speaking to me directly rather than reading about God from Adam, Moses and others through the printed pages. It made the exercise a realistic series of events involving the individuals concerned, rather than an intellectual exercise of absorbing or dissecting past history.

The second dramatic intervention in my life recently was

³See list of books in www.georgepatterson.net; www.classictravelbooks.com and www.thelongridersguild.com

reading a commentary on the *Book of Revelation—The Apocalypse*, (meaning “*appearing, unfolding*”) by Dr JA Seiss, consisting of fifty-two lectures, the best exposition I had encountered over the years. After completing it I began a second, more serious study, together with other notable commentaries on the *Book of Revelation’s* future events given by Jesus Christ to the Apostle John regarding what was to happen at the “*end of the age*”. *Revelation*, or *Apocalypse* as I prefer, is the written record of one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus, his most intimate companion, experienced and recorded when he was alone in exile on the Isle of Patmos, banished by the diktat of the Roman Emperor Donation. The unfolding of the divine communication to him was more real than the daily news bulletin I have just seen and heard on television.

The combination of morning listening to the narrated chapters of the Bible, followed by daily meditation on the unfolding *Apocalypse* of what was to happen at the foretold “*second coming of Jesus Christ*”, was a new and exciting revelation to me. I had read the *Book of Revelation* many times, I had often preached from it, but never had it had such an immediate impact as it had now. It was like being with the Apostle John in his island exile—also at ninety years of age!—during his whole experience of divine revelation.

The following manuscript is not a book in the accepted sense of that term, namely, the creation from an idea, through various stages from beginning, middle to end through the related variations giving it identity. This is really an extended meditation, a conversation with the reader rather than a sermon, or exposition, or commentary, of what I expect to happen after my approaching death—and the “*end of the world as I now it*”. It will be up to the seriously interested reader to apply the conclusions to his or her own life, and the inevitable death and future “*from here to eternity*”.

PART ONE
LAST DAYS ON EARTH

TIMELINE

DEATH__ "*Changed*" __Hades__Judgements____Rewards____

Hell or Paradise

"The rich man died and was buried, and in Hades, where he was in great pain, he looked up and saw Abraham, far away, and Lazarus at his side. So he called out, 'Father Abraham! Take pity on me and send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water and cool my tongue, because I am in great pain in this fire.'"

Luke 18:22-24 Good News New Testament

Let it be stated right at the beginning that the only person with any claim to legitimacy regarding the details of an after-life is Jesus Christ. No-one else has said *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me"*. No-one else has stated, and demonstrated by acts of divine power, that he came from God and was God. Jesus is either who he said he was or he was a fool, impostor or mad. In his lifetime even his religious enemies accepted that he was at least a prophet. After his death his resurrected body

was seen by his eleven incredulous disciples, several individuals, and more than five hundred people who were addressed by Jesus in Galilee. Billions of people across the world have believed some or all of these statements and in one form or another expect to be with Jesus in heaven after their death.

After a lifetime personally proving that he was and is the Son of God I have no hesitation in accepting his many statements regarding life after death being as true as the accounts of his life while on earth. Speaking to his disciples on one occasion he gave a factual description of the life after death of two different individuals, a poor man called Lazarus and a rich nameless man. This was not a parable but a real event in which Jesus stated emphatically: *“There was a rich man...and a beggar named Lazarus...”*

At this point there is little difference in the account from other existing traditional stories, but then Jesus introduces a new emphasis and diversion to describe the different situations of the two men after their deaths. Jesus recounts how the poor man died and went to *“Abraham’s side”*, a Jewish expression meaning *“the place of the righteous”*, or heaven; and the rich man died and went to hell (using the word *hades*), a place of torment. As Jesus gave the account there was *“a great unbridgeable chasm”* between the two places and between the poor man and rich man; the poor man enjoying the blessings of the righteous, and the rich man suffering the agonies of the damned. Their different situations had nothing to do with the fact that the rich man went to hell because of his wealth, or the poor man to heaven because his poverty.

It is implied, but not stated, that the poor man was *“righteous”* during his lifetime; and the rich man knew the poor man from sitting outside his door *but did nothing to help him*. Then

there is the implied judgement of the two men which determined their respective places and experiences in the hereafter. Who authorised the fates and ultimate destinations of these two individuals as their lives ended? Were their deaths predestined by the kind of life they lived and were they conscious of the ultimate consequences before they died? There is a hint in the words *“Remember, my son, that you were given all the good things, while Lazarus*

got all the bad things . . ." That indicates that both men received their different circumstances from the same source, and were responsible to this source in their lifetimes for acknowledging it. This "source" is identified by the rich mans as "Father Abraham", a pseudonym for God in Hebrew culture, and that Lazarus had been "righteous" in his recognition and acceptance of this in his deprived lifetime, while the rich man had been neglectful and suffered the consequences.

While reflecting on this disposition of circumstances, and the responsibility of individuals on earth to God in their daily lives impacting on their future post-death circumstances, I recalled that there is a remarkable incident recorded in the *Old Testament*, about two kings, Ahab and Jehoshaphat, going to war over the disputed border city of Ramoth-Gilead which the Assyrians had previously acquired. Ahab, king of Israel, had just participated in a successful war against Assyria, and he wanted Jehoshaphat, king of Israel, to join him in a military action to recapture the city. King Jehoshaphat agreed, but demanded that the renegade King Ahab first consult a prophet of God for a decision.

King Ahab agreed reluctantly because he was an idolatrous follower of Baal, and he nominated a prophet called Miciaih. A reluctant Micaiah agreed after persuasion to find out from God whether they would be victorious in the anticipated battle. This was his remarkable reply:

"I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right hand and left. And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth-Gilead and going to his death there? . . . Finally a spirit came forward and said I will entice him . . . I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets . . . And the Lord said 'Go, and you will succeed in enticing him.'"⁴ (my emphasis)

To cut the long and interesting story short, both kings decided to avert the prophesied death of the God-defying Ahab by exchanging their royal robes as a disguise. But someone drew a bow "at random" and hit King Ahab between the sections of his armour despite the disguise, and he died in battle as predicted. But it was not an "accident"; it was the chosen predisposition of Ahab to listen to

⁴ I Kings 22 vv 1-50

“lying spirits” that destined his death. He deliberately rejected the decision of the prophet of God.

The significance of that historical account here lies in the astonishing revelation of the intervention of God in determining the death of Ahab. From the perspective of earth it looked as if King Ahab was the victim of an unlucky accident, but from heaven it was part of an ongoing example of the mechanics of divine decision and direction, including the angelic spirits’ participation in deciding King Ahab’s fate—and even the apparent directing of the arrow causing his death.

This is not an isolated instance of individuals responding to the voice of God, which could be easily dismissed, but one of many: the voice of God to Abraham to leave Ur and go to Canaan; the voice of God to Moses from the constantly burning bush to confront Pharaoh to release the Israelis from Egypt; the instructions to Joshua to circle Jericho seven times for the walls to fall down; the colourful activities of Samson including slaying three hundred Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass; Elijah calling down fire from heaven to devour the sacrifices on the water-doused altar. The list of divine instructions from God, and the obedience of those who heard and obeyed, is constant in the *Old Testament* and magnified by the works of Jesus and his disciples in the *New Testament*. These are the more obvious instances of individuals responding to the voice of God, but they are evidence that there is a channel of communication between individuals and their creator, which determines their standard of acceptance or rejection before God at the time of death.

To return to the story of the rich man and poor man already in their respective places in hell and heaven because of their respective decisions on earth, from the above account of the two kings and the fate of King Ahab, it would appear the divine decision to bring about the deaths of the poor man and rich man seems to have taken place some time before the deaths of both rich and poor men, with their judgement and post-death destination determined by their previous conduct. This is more clearly demonstrated with the rich man when in hell he remembers he has family still alive in their self-centred lifestyle, with their circumstances so similar to his own. The rich man

is suffering the agonies of remorse of missed opportunities to believe what God had revealed while alive on earth; while the poor man remembers the benefits he receives from his dramatically changed circumstances. When the rich man pleads with God *“to send Lazarus”* to convince his family that there were after-death consequences to their lives on earth, God tells him that they had *“Moses and the prophets”* to warn them, the rich man said:

“That is not enough! . . . But if someone were to rise from the dead and warn them then they would turn from their sins.”.

God’s reply was that if they did not listen to what Moses and the prophets had said of their experiences they would not believe—even if someone were to rise from the dead to talk to them. This was later verified from the death and resurrection of Jesus, when the Jewish religionists did not believe it was possible, and resorted to persecuting those who did believe.

The conclusion would seem, therefore, to those who are willing to believe, that there is a judgement tribunal in heaven determining the destinies of all individuals on earth immediately before and after their actual deaths. This is possibly what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he said, *“Man is destined to die once, and after death the judgement”*. That judgement is the time and occasion when every word and deed of one’s lifetime is judged by God and rewarded or punished accordingly immediately following death.

The most significant fact to be deduced from this divinely revealed account is that both poor man and rich man, while on either side of the great chasm, *are able to see, and recognise each other but not communicate*. In other words, both are in the same *“spirit” state* of being able to remember the past, while not having the same *“physical” body* as in life. This *“spirit” state* can suffer blessedness or pain later when not having an earthly *body*, and this *state* is eternally irreversible.

Both of these positive and negative states occur in two different places of one region, namely, *hades*, a term that is used in other Scriptures for both *“hell”* and *“paradise”*, so the poor man is in paradise, but the rich man is in hell, able to see each other but not to

communicate across "*the great chasm*". It is clear from what Jesus says that hell is not a *physical place* in the bowels of the earth where there is sulphurous heat and flames, but rather a *spirit-state* of eternal fire-like remorse over opportunities rejected, and eternal worm-like regret over mercy lost.

What can be concluded from this incident, therefore, is that immediately after death an obedient believer can confidently expect to be in a "*paradise*" where there is memory of people and events in past life, because they have accepted that Jesus is the Son of God and he died in order they might share that spiritual "*paradise*" with him, while others who have not believed and live their lives accordingly will go to a demonic "*hell*", to suffer the irremovable consequences of the self-chosen condemnation. .

After-Death Changes

“Someone will ask: ‘How can the dead be raised to life? What kind of body will they have? You fool! When you sow a seed in the ground, it does not spring to life unless it dies. And what you sow is a bare seed, perhaps a grain of wheat or some other grain. not the full-bodied plant that will later grow up. God provides that seed with the body he wishes; he gives each seed its own proper body’.

I Corinthians 15:29-32 Good News New Testament

Having considered the circumstances following death, the question arises about the appearance of individuals after death. If they were “*spirit-states*” how did the poor man and rich man recognise each other? I mean, when I die my body and mind will cease to function, and my spirit will “*return to God who gave it*”, according to the Scriptures. Then, according to the Scriptures, “*After death (comes) the judgement*””; which, I take to mean,

the time of my accountability at “*the judgement seat of Christ*” regarding “*deeds and words*” during my lifetime. When this is completed there is either “*Well done, my good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of the Lord*”, or the rebuke of “*Depart from me . . . When did you ever give me a cup of water?*” and the appropriate rebuke. After my conversation with my Lord, I anticipate he will say, “*Here is your wife, mother, father, brother, sister,*” etc and all the others. But, what then? Is the spirit by which I see Jesus and my family members, and they see me, some form of regeneration which can be activated at will made possible by the “*new life*” I had received at my “*new birth*”, but never used during my earthly lifetime? Or is it something that only happens after death?

I found it an interesting speculation until I was reminded of another incident in the life of Jesus relating to this question. On this occasion Jesus took his three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, up a nearby mountain with him.⁵ The three disciples had fallen asleep when they were awakened by voices—and found Jesus talking with two other individuals. What was startling to them was that the person of Jesus was totally transfigured from his normal appearance: his face shone like the sun, and his clothes were dazzlingly white, and he was talking to what looked like Moses and Elijah.

Moses had been dead for about two thousand years at this point, and Elijah about a thousand years, so how did the disciples recognise them? Also, why Moses and Elijah and not, say, Samuel and David? One answer could be that both Moses and Elijah were unique in that neither of them experienced death as we know it. At the command of God Moses left the people of Israel encamped in the desert of Sinai into a nearby mountain, died there, and was “*buried by God*”; Elijah was “*caught up to heaven in chariots of fire*” while his prophet colleague, Elisha, watched. It is recorded that Elijah’s cloak was left behind and used by Elisha to part the waters of a river,⁶ but no mention of what became of Elijah’s body. So the common experience of both Moses and Elijah was that their bodies were never recovered; also, Moses was a witness to the *Old Covenant* between God and Israel; and Elijah was to be a witness to the *New*

⁵Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2

⁶2 Kings 2 :12-14

Covenant yet to be initiated by Jesus. The subject they were discussing now with Jesus was the imminent death by crucifixion of Jesus and his eventual resurrection.

The first question that occurred to me was not why did the translucent person and clothes of Jesus change so rapidly, but how did the disciples know that it was Moses and Elijah? Also, it was not just the clothes of Jesus that had changed but "*As they looked, a change came over Jesus . . .*" The disciples knew it was Jesus, because they could identify him, but his normal earthly state had changed apparently into the same as that of Moses and Elijah, or vice versa. The word used in the Scriptural record for "*changed*", or "*transfigured*", is the Greek word for "*metamorphosis*", meaning "*to change from one essence into another*". But what had activated the metamorphosis? There was one intriguing difference in that it is recorded that the face of Jesus was "*shining like the sun*", but not used of Moses or Elijah who "*appeared in heavenly glory*", an indication that the incarnated God-like essence of Jesus was different from the spirit-state of Moses and Elijah, but significantly both were compatible and could co-exist after-death as the disciples saw and heard them converse.

Peter's reaction was to blurt "*Master, how good it is that we are here! We will make three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah*". The whole experience was obviously bewildering for the three disciples, James and John stunned into silence; but Peter, in his usual impetuous fashion, suggested encapsulating the three distinctive former functions of the three men as respectively "*lawgiver, prophet and Messiah*" in some kind of shrine to celebrate their after-death visitation for public demonstration.

While Peter was still speaking a voice reverberated from the cloud above them saying "*This is my son, whom I have chosen – listen to him!*" The three disciples were stunned as they tried to absorb all that happening around them. They had just heard the voice of God speaking. I repeat it for emphasis: *they had heard the voice of God speaking aloud to them!* This was something that had never happened in their three years' daily experience of companionship with Jesus, although it had happened apparently when John the Baptist was

baptising Jesus. Now, with the voice of God together with the transfigured appearance of Moses, Elijah and Jesus, they were chastened into silence. They had seen and done many miracles in their association with Jesus but now they were faced with the reality that God had just personally endorsed Jesus as His Son, they had seen a resurrected Moses and Elijah, had seen Jesus in a different God-like dimension., and heard them discussing the significance of the future death and resurrection of Jesus—which would not happen for another six months.

It is very significant that not only Jesus had the ability to change his appearance, but that Moses and Elijah had *“appeared in heavenly glory”* also, and their *“spirit-state”* capacities had retained their own distinctive identities. It can be safely assumed that Moses and Elijah had been selected to appear by Jesus, both for his own purposes and also as a revelation to his disciples at that time, and to us at this present time, as an indication of the eternal existence of a *“personalised”* God and His human creatures. It is also safe to assume that this was a further revelation by Jesus as to what all his followers could anticipate in their after-death futures, not only recognition of identities but also a transformed ability to appear and talk afterwards on earth if or when required. This had tremendous significance when Jesus spoke of the later aspects of the kingdom of God when his disciples would *“rule”* on earth, especially during the millennium period of peace and prosperity. For myself, it had growing significance as I considered my own after-death spiritual desire to *“rule with Christ”*, obviously during the prophesied period known as the *“millennium”*, or thousand-year ruling with Jesus in a post-Armageddon and purged earth, as will be described later.

How did the body of Lazarus get out of the tomb?

“What shall we do? Look at all the miracles this man is performing! If we let him go on in this way the Roman authorities will take action and destroy our Temple and our nation”.

John 11:47-48 Good News New Testament

While Jesus was in Bethabara on his final journey to Jerusalem he received a message from Mary in Bethany that her brother Lazarus was sick and could Jesus come quickly.⁷ His reaction surprised his disciples who knew of the close friendship of Mary and her family, as Jesus just said, *“This sickness will not end in death. It is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”* Then he stayed on in Bethabara for another two days. Finally, he said to his disciples, *“Let us go back to Judea.”*

⁷John 11:1-45

They looked at him in consternation. *“But, rabbi,”* they said, *“a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?”*

“Are there not twelve hours of daylight?” Jesus said in his teaching manner, and the disciples knew that he meant there was an appointed time for work; that the hours of the day were not affected by external circumstances; they were there to be used. Jesus continued:

“A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

The disciples were puzzled at the remark. *“Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better”*, they said, thinking that Jesus meant natural sleep and not understanding that he meant Lazarus was dead—but in a different state from what they understood: it was the possibility of a divine intervention into the natural world. It seems he wanted them to understand that from now on they should walk in the light of a world in which there were no apparent limits and they should adjust their spiritual attitudes in relation to this.

“Lazarus is dead”, he told them categorically; (that was the *“night”* in which an unbeliever walked) then added, *“and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe* (that was the *“light”* by which they must make judgements from now on). *But let now us go to him.”*

The disciples looked at each other in bemusement. If Lazarus was dead in Bethany, it was too late to do anything about it now. The disciple Thomas Didymus, always pessimistic, shrugged his shoulders fatalistically, and said, *“Let us go too, that we may die with him.”*

By the time they arrived at the outskirts of Bethany they heard the news that Lazarus had been dead four days already. Martha had slipped away from the house with its mourners to meet Jesus.

“Lord”, she said to him regretfully, *“if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”*

Those around Jesus noted the implication in Martha's petition: on the one hand, Lazarus was dead four days and beyond hope; on the other hand, Jesus was the master of life and death who had already raised others from death—the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain - but never after being four days' dead. In theory she admitted the possibility of a divine intervention, but in fact the situation was beyond retrieving.

Jesus noted the confusion, and the hope and restraint. *"Your brother will rise again,"* he told her gently.

Martha nodded her agreement. She knew from the Scriptures that there was a resurrection of the righteous to eternal life, so she answered Jesus confidently, *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*

"I am the resurrection," Jesus stated, emphasising his divinity, *"and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

Martha and those nearby hearing the words were startled. This was beyond anything the prophets had written in the Scriptures. Jesus was actually claiming *to be the resurrection in person*, and not just expounding a doctrine.

Martha smiled at Jesus through her tears. *"Yes, Lord,"* she said firmly, *"I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

Jesus nodded his acknowledgement of her limited admission, and then sent her to call her sister Mary to meet him at the burial tomb of Lazarus outside the town. Mary left quickly, with some of the mourners running after her. When she saw Jesus, she knelt, choking with tears, at his feet and said like Martha, *"Lord, if you had been here, I know my brother would not have died."*

Seeing Mary weeping, and the people around also sharing her grief, Jesus was deeply moved, too. It was not because he simply identified with the sorrow at Lazarus' death, which was ludicrous after he had just stated he was master of life and death; but because his delay had been a source of their unbelieving grief.

"Where have you laid him?" he asked Mary. They had met in the garden burial place belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, and she led

him, with Martha and the other mourners, to the family tomb where they had buried Lazarus. It had been constructed out of a cave-like opening in the mountain with a few stone steps leading down into the interior, with shelves on each side where other bodies could be placed when required. According to the usual custom the family had anointed the dead body of Lazarus with myrrh, aloes, hyssop, rose-oil and rose-water on the linen shrouds wound around the body. The entrance to the tomb was closed with a large, circular stone set in a groove so that it could be rolled to open or close.

When they had reached the entrance of the burial tomb, and everyone was standing silently in respect, Jesus suddenly ordered, *"Take the stone away"*. There was a gasp from the observers at this unusual command, and Martha protested, *"There will be a smell, Lord. He has been dead for four days"*.

"Did I not tell you", Jesus reproved her gently, *"that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"* Mary was too confused to notice that Jesus did not say *"You will see a miracle"*, or even *"You will see me raise Lazarus"*; but a much greater revelation: *"see the glory of God"*.

Martha remained silent, and some of the men mourners moved forward to roll back the stone from the entrance to the tomb. Jesus tilted his face heavenward, and prayed:

"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

Then to the incredulity of those watching Jesus declared in a loud voice, *"Lazarus, come out!"*

The ensuing silence was broken by a rising murmur from the crowd; then a startled cry of astonishment arose as the figure of Lazarus appeared, *floating above the ground because he was still wrapped with strips of embalmed linen and a cloth around his face*. Noting this incredible detail some authorities have speculated that the legs of the body of Lazarus had been bound separately so that he was able to walk out of the tomb, but that is not what the record states, as follows:

"He (Lazarus) came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave-clothes, and with a cloth around his face. 'Untie him', Jesus said, 'and let him go'".

Others, including myself, believe that Jesus, as Creator, "*Lord of Life*", had the power to cause the dead and clothed body of Lazarus to metamorphose from the dead state to life outside the tomb with the same powers he had demonstrated with the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain, both of whom would have been prepared for burial.

There was tense silence as they unwound the grave-clothes from Lazarus, noticing that there were vestige odours of the burial spices and perfume, but there was no smell of decaying flesh. When the grave-clothes were removed, and Lazarus stood in his undergarment, he was revealed to be healthy as ever, smiling now as the sisters embraced him. There was a rising murmur of astonishment from the surrounding mourners which became an excited barrage of questions, mostly directed at Jesus and Lazarus.

The only reply Jesus gave was, "*Did I not tell you that if you believe all things are possible?*"

Lazarus could only reply to the barrage of questions that he knew nothing of the four days; he just felt as if he had wakened from sleep. With meaningless irony, when the startling news was brought to the religious leaders, they called a meeting of the Sanhedrin Council to plot the death of Jesus, "*the Lord of Life*"!

"Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

The resurrection of Lazarus caused the greatest controversy of all the acts of Jesus. On the one hand, it led many to become believers on the spot, because of the manifestation of divine power; but, on the other hand, it was an intolerable affront to the professional religionists. If Jesus were allowed to get away with miraculous actions like these in support of his claims to be the Messiah at the very gates of Jerusalem—each act more provocatively supernatural than its predecessor it seemed—then what might he not do next? Not only Jews in Palestine, but those scattered throughout the world would believe in him.

For me, the greatest truth emerging from the Lazarus episode is

not his raising from death, but the remark of Jesus to his disciples when the news of the death of Lazarus was first brought to them on the way to Jerusalem, when he said, "*Lazarus sleeps . . .*" The disciples naturally thought that he had made a mistaken diagnosis, but Jesus had really given a profound explanation of what happens immediately after death; namely, that Lazarus was really in the state similar to sleep, when the body is in a state of "*little death*", all actions suspended but the mind still active. Lazarus, instead of being brought to the usual after-death experience of facing "*the judgement seat of Christ*", was held in a form of sleep because his earthly state was only suspended for a few days until the earthly Christ called him back to life a few days later.

What is “The end of the World?”

“As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him in private and said, ‘Tell us when all this will be’, they asked, ‘and what will happen to show it is the time for your coming and the end of the age?’”

Matthew 24: 3 Good News New Testament

The Messiah of the Jews

After over three years association with Jesus his disciples still had a hard time understanding his “*after-death*” teachings. They had been brought up with the standard Judaism of the rabbis in the synagogues, which taught the total earthly predominance of the people of Israel “*when the Messiah comes*”. They knew about the prophecies of *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel* and other prophets about the “*last days*” when Israel would be restored to its divinely declared destiny, but they also believed that there would be a period before that “*end time*” when they would be

“the enlightenment and ruler of nations”, while waiting for the return of the Messiah.

The three kingdoms of Daniel’s prophetic visions—Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece —dominated these four centuries, and under their rulers the two former Israelite kingdoms of Ephraim and Judah became known as Samaria and Judea, tributary provinces to the predominating powers. At the beginning of the second century BC (198 BC), Judea was conquered by Antiochus III, *“the Great”*, and annexed to Syria. At this time, Judea was divided into five sub-provinces—Galilee, Samaria, Judea (the three collectively known as Judea), Trachonitis and Peraea.

Meanwhile, a combination of priests, scribes and *rabbis*, or *“teachers”* in the Babylon Exile, had institutionalized what had been divinely revealed to them through *Moses*, the *Psalms* and the *Prophets* by independently creating a body of literature, and a system of theological administration which effectively removed God from their lives. The body of literature was a compilation of traditional comments and interpretations given the titles of *Mishna*, *Gemara* or *Talmud*, *Midrashim* and *Qabbala*, which eventually superseded the *Law of God* and *Moses*, and excluded God casuistically by arguing that the 613 *“palings”*, or *“hedges”*, were to preserve God’s awesome unapproachable majesty. In that four hundred years between Malachi and John the Baptist the Remnant Jews returned to a much-reduced Israel in what had become known as Roman *“Palestine”* and developed observance of a religion known as *“Rabbinical Judaism”* in place of God. Judaism not only excluded God from the lives of the Jews it also excluded Jews from the lives of other people in its social isolationism⁸. It was unlawful for a Jew *“to associate with a Gentile or to visit him”*, and every Gentile child as soon as it was born was regarded as unclean.

Between the last of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi, and the first of the *New Testament* prophets, John the Baptist, there was a gap of some four centuries during which God was silent. The history of the Israelites had begun with four hundred years of divine silence, from Joseph to Moses; and it ended with the same.

In Palestine, as the first century BC drew to a close, everything

⁸Acts 10:28

centred on the Judaic religion - institutions, customs, law, manners, relationships—and the expectation of the traditional Messiah. In order to attract the support of the sceptical Jewish people the unpopular Herod built a magnificent Temple modelled on Solomon’s, and this structure physically dominated the city of Jerusalem and was the focus of pilgrimages by the Dispersed Jews of the world. The tax-exempt Temple treasury, generously supported by Jews everywhere, gave the Jewish religious leaders of the official Sanhedrin, or Council, in Jerusalem enormous influence through the millions of world-wide Jewry of the Diaspora, and created an uneasy balance of power between them and the Herodian political faction in Roman Palestine.

The chief beneficiaries of the post-Ezra Judaism were the rabbis, who were arbiters of all disputes, the final authority on everything pertaining to the Judaism created by their scribal ancestors. The rabbis of the institutionalized Judaism arrogated to themselves the authorities of Moses’ Levitical priesthood, but with the focus on their self-serving misinterpretation of Israel’s unique destiny of religion as ritual, instead of the historical prophets’ interpretation of Israel’s unique devotion to holiness.

The post-Babylon *Remnant-Israel* was totally confused by the appearance of the first prophet in over four hundred years, John the Baptist, and his dynamic demand for Jewish repentance and baptism in anticipation of the imminent revelation of the kingdom of God and the long-awaited Messiah. What was new about John’s message was *the imminence* of the “*kingdom of heaven*”, distinct from their orthodox expectation of the “*kingship of Israel*”; the *incarnation* of a divine Messiah without kingship attributions; and the *individualizing* of the expanded kingdom of God in the person of the coming Messiah.

But then Jesus had appeared and declared himself the promised Messiah, supported by the much-admired prophet, John the Baptist, and that his current purpose was to declare and initiate “*the kingdom of God*” —including every believer everywhere. Over the following three years of their discipleship his followers had difficulties in understanding the implications of his hundred-plus mentions of this

extended kingdom of God, and the additional twenty-nine parables which included blessings for other nations. When Jesus added to this the expectation of another “*second coming . . . at the end of the age*” they were completely baffled.

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

John the Baptist had taken up where Daniel⁹ and the other prophets left off, by declaring that the imminent advent of the Messiah would permanently establish the true spiritual relationship between king and kingdom, by introducing an everlasting righteousness, by sweeping away all creedal barriers, and by integrating all nations in this kingdom. As the prophets had foretold, the kingdom would be universal, holy and eternal.

The Jews at the beginning of the first century AD were incapable of understanding such a world-wide kingdom because of the rabbinical indoctrination of their self-generated Judaism. They could comprehend the historical form of the Davidic kingdom from their writings and *Traditions*, but they could not understand the spiritual substance of the kingdom because they had no longer believed in or practiced a personal relationship with the God of the kingdom. The *New Kingdom* was a mystery which, John declared, would be revealed by the advent of the divinely-ordained king among them. John prophetically proclaimed:

*“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*¹⁰(my emphasis)

At the peak of the continuing unprecedented public response to John’s preaching he was joined by his second-cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, whom John immediately proclaimed by divine revelation as the Messiah—in Isaiah’s terms, as “*Lamb of God*”¹¹, or *Servant-Messiah* rather than the commonly expected *Ruler-Messiah*. John’s announcement of this *Sacrificial Messiah*, with the related Spirit-and-fire baptism, prepared the way for the revelation of the mystery of the new “*Spiritual Kingdom*” foretold

⁹Daniel 7:13-14

¹⁰Matthew 3:11-12

¹¹John 41:25-36

by Daniel and now preached by Jesus.

From the time when John was put in prison by Herod because of his uncompromising demand for holiness of life even from Herod, Jesus began his own distinctive public ministry – the imminence of the kingdom of God, and the need for Israel’s repentance and holiness as a prelude to the expansion of the message to the other nations of the world:

“From that time Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’”¹². (my emphasis)

There are a number of ways in which the importance of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ life and teachings may be assessed. In the four *Gospels* Jesus is quoted teaching about the kingdom 47 times in Matthew, 13 times in Mark, 31 times in Luke, and five times in John. A comprehensive survey of the *New Testament* shows 119 passages where the expression “*kingdom*” occurs; an analysis of which indicates that it meant comprehensively the rule of God which was manifested in and through the Church of the Messiah, initiated by Jesus but detailed by the Apostle Paul, grew in the face of opposition, and will be ultimately triumphant at the second coming of the Messiah in the new heavens and new earth.

The unique “*message of the kingdom*” presented by Jesus was in three aspects: (i) it was *present* (“*at hand*” – Matthew 4 v 17) in the person of God’s own Son, Jesus himself; (ii) it was *preached* in seven mystery parables (Matthew 13), followed later with others by Jesus, *as fulfilled in that time*; and (iii) it would be *prophetically* realized at the *second coming of the Messiah as King* as foretold by David and Daniel (Matthew 24, 25).

These three aspects of the “*kingdom of heaven*” were taught predominantly by Jesus in five distinct segments of his three-year life, each segment terminated with the expression “*When Jesus had finished, or ended . . .*” For example, (i) when he ended his “*Sermon on the Mount*” (Matt 7 v 28); (ii) when he sent the twelve disciples to preach “*to Israel*” on their own (Matt 11 v 1); (iii) when he finished recounting and explaining the seven “*mystery parables*” and turned away from Israel and his own family to “*the world*” (Matt 13); (iv) when he introduced the subject of the “*Church*” and its relation to

¹²Matthew ch 4 v 17

the kingdom (Matt 19 v 1); and (v) when he provided the details of the end of the world at his second coming (Matt 24, 25)

These mentions of the kingdom of God are presented in different forms, such as “*kingdom of heaven*”, “*kingdom of the Messiah*”, “*kingdom of our Lord*”, “*kingdom of Jesus*”. Some of them, according to circumstances, customs, or subject matter, differ in presentation but not in generic substance. For example, some Jews were reluctant to use the name of “*God*” and used “*heaven*” instead. The use of “*kingdom of heaven*” at other times was related to the contrast with the “*kingdom of God*” on earth to some degree. The “*kingdom of the Messiah*” was taken to mean the *future rule* of the Messianic age. The “*kingdom of Jesus*” related to the interim living history period—“*the kingdom and patience of Jesus*”.

But, whatever aspect of the presentation, there was no doubt that the important teaching emphasis of Jesus was fundamentally concerned with the explication of the kingdom of God. In his first personal encounter with an individual—Nicodemus, a highly respected Jewish leader—he confronted the bewildered and noted Sanhedrin official with the categorical *theological odium* assertion: “*I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*¹³”.

This esoteric characteristic of the kingdom of God as spiritual regeneration to a traditionalist Jew was further emphasized by Jesus’ explanation that it required being “*born by water and by the spirit*”¹⁴ when, later, in selecting the Twelve Apostles, Jesus made it clear that *only they were initiates of the arcana of the “mysteries of the kingdom”* in the words: “*The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them*”. Therefore, although the general knowledge of the Messianic kingdom of God was known to all Jews through the ancient Scriptures from Abraham onwards, Jesus was emphatic that they did not know the “*mysteries*” of that kingdom. It would only be known to those who listened to and obeyed his teachings. Later, when he sent out the seventy disciples on their evangelistic missions, their principal task, he told them, was to declare, “*The kingdom of God is near.*”

Most of Jesus’ teachings were couched in the form of

¹³John 3:3

¹⁴John 3:5f

"parables"—earthly stories with heavenly meanings—and, in the 29 parables Jesus used, 17 of them definitely include explicatory aspects of the kingdom of God. The other 12 parables, while not mentioning the kingdom of God *per se*, in more than half of them it is clear that the concept of the kingdom of God is paramount.

The mission of Jesus, therefore, in manifesting the kingdom of God to and through his disciples was four-fold: (i) *to delineate the New Israel* prophesied by Isaiah; (ii) *to define the New Covenant* prophesied by Jeremiah; (iii) *to deliver the New Kingdom* prophesied by Daniel; and (iv) *to declare the New Temple* prophesied by Ezekiel.

In *delineating the New Israel*, he taught that it was not Abraham's *fatherhood* of Israel that was acceptable to God, but his *faith*. In *defining the New Covenant*, he said *he would die* vicariously for sin, and not an animal, thereby delivering through redemption all who were in bondage to sin. In *delivering the New Kingdom*, he declared he would conquer Satan and confer authority to disciples to use "keys" to enable entrance through a "Church" for all Gentiles as well as Jews. In *declaring the New Temple*, he stated he would destroy the existing institution of rituals *and build a "Church" of spiritual values*. All of these would be incorporated in the eternal kingdom of God.

The *New Remnant*, *New Kingdom*, *New Temple* were all incorporated by Jesus into the *New Israel*, through a *New Covenant*. This *New Covenant*, Jesus taught, would be more comprehensive than the *Old Covenant*. It would include "a people who were not a people", be a "treasured possession" from the nations instead of a single favoured people like Israel, a "circumcision of the heart and not of the foreskin", a *single body* of Holy Spirit-indwelt priests instead of a *tribal priesthood*.

The *New Covenant* was not only confirmed by God it was also consummated by Jesus' shed blood on the cross as a sacrificial Lamb. At the Last Supper, when he instituted the "feast of remembrance" he declared: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you".¹⁵

Then there was Jesus' five-fold *New Covenant* commission to the *Church* : (i) "I will build my Church . . ." (Matt 16 18); (ii) "I will give you the keys of the kingdom . . ." (Matt 16 v 19; 18 v 18); (iii) "I will be present where two or three are gathered in my name . . ."

¹⁵Matthew 26:26-28

(Matt 18 v 20); (iv) *“I will send the Comforter (Holy Spirit) to you . . .”* (John 7); and (v) *“I will prepare a place for you . . .”* (John 14 v 2).

The Kingdom Principles

In Jesus’ presentation of the *New Kingdom* nothing and no-one was excluded from attaining to it—if its conditions were observed. His abiding passion was the restoration of the lost kingdom forfeited by Old Israel, under the *Old Covenant*, and its replacement by the *New Kingdom* based on the *New Covenant*.

Jesus made a clear historical division relating to the kingdom of God when he said *“the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and every one is forcing his way into it”*.¹⁶ The condition for entrance into the kingdom of God, as was noted earlier in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, was *“unless a man is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter”*. Jesus went on to emphasize the distinction with the words, *“flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”*. An individual could not be born into the kingdom of God through family, fortune or favour, but only by faith in the provision of God. An individual had to forcefully suppress all natural claims, and equally forcefully lay hold on God’s prerequisite of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God.

Reward and Inheritance

The important distinction of proportionate *rewards* for particular spiritual qualities, and the associated *inheritance* of the kingdom of God for identifying with the Messiah, was further articulated by Jesus when he was emphasizing the nature of the inheritance of the kingdom:

*“Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*¹⁷ (my emphasis)

Both of these categories of *reward* and *inheritance*—*“least”* and

¹⁶Luke 16:16

¹⁷Matthew 5:19-20

“great”—were in the kingdom: the former, those who “break the least commandment” and “teach men so”, were “least” in the kingdom; and the latter, “those who practise these commands” and “teach others”, were “great in the kingdom”. It was also stated by Jesus that there was a righteousness practiced by the professional religionists that had to be surpassed before anyone could enter the kingdom of God.

Once it was clear to Jesus that his disciples understood the kingdom, and after Peter had acknowledged him as the Messiah, Jesus concentrated his teaching on the catastrophic personal and universal consequences—first for himself, and then for those who chose to follow him:

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day raised to life . . .

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’.”¹⁸

Jesus and the Church

With the disciples’ understanding of the truth of the *New Kingdom* established, Jesus immediately introduced for the first time a completely new universal concept (“my Church”), and new mediation principle (“I will give you the keys of the kingdom”), as part of the *New Covenant* and *New Remnant Israel*.

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”¹⁹ (my emphasis)

The Scriptures immediately record a new emphasis from the previous almost three years of teachings about the *New Kingdom*, to the remaining few months’ impending of his death and resurrection: *“From that time forth Jesus began to show to his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem . . . and be killed . . . and be raised the third day”*

At the time Jesus was unquestionably addressing Peter alone as “the rock”—but a perceptive, visionary Peter, and not just because he

¹⁸Matthew 16:21-24

¹⁹Matthew 16:18-19

had an onomatopoeic name—*petros*, “a stone”; and *petra*, “a rock”. There was no indication either that the function or authority were transferable to others by any means other than divine approval. What is of greater significance than Peter’s mediating function was that Jesus placed his statement regarding “my Church” in immediate proximity with the kingdom of God—twice—and in opposition to the kingdom of Satan (“the gates of Hades will not overcome it”). The clear implication of Jesus’ words was that the “Church” was a spiritual entity, militantly active, and was triumphant over Satan.

What it was not was a universal entity distinct from the people of Israel. Jesus, a Jew, went on to declare to both Jews and Gentiles that his Church would have a two-fold function in time and among all nations on earth: (i) the gates of hell would not prevail in the inevitable confrontations; and (ii) that initially by Peter, and then through all associated charismatically with the Church, entrance to the kingdom of God would be effected and divinely approved.²⁰

Following on his initial declaration about the Church, Jesus addressed his disciples corporately as a body, a church. The word for “church” which Jesus used was a common Greek word, *ekklesia*, meaning “an assembly of people called together for a special purpose”. It had been used in the *Old Testament Scriptures* to denote the people of Israel as a religious unit, or congregation, so the term was familiar to all Jews. It was Jesus’ use of the word to designate a personal and universal entity within the kingdom of God incorporating both Jews and Gentiles, which was new.

This “Church of the Messiah” would be the centre of moral authority and spiritual power. This was enshrined in its manifesto: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” The divine principles practiced in daily living in the world, and the discipline associated with their breach, would be the responsibilities of appropriate spiritual people in the Church, and not the chartist proclamations of an institution and enforced by committee. The spiritual power would be evident in the presence of the Messiah in even small gatherings (“For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them”); and in the perceptions of spiritual decisions of spiritual people (“If two of you on

²⁰Matthew 18:18

earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven"). Finally, Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God was being removed from *Old Israel* and given to people who would practice its principles: *"I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*²¹ (my emphasis)

With the initiation of the *Church of the Messiah* the responsibilities of the kingdom of God were transferred to a new theocracy, which would be more different and more glorious than David's theocratic nation was to Saul's democratic failure. It would be Daniel's prophesied *"The sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey Him."*

This Jewish term *"end of the age"* is more accurate than *"the end of the world"* because prophetically they knew from the former prophets of Israel that world would be catastrophically purged but not ended at the divine Apocalypse—when there would be initiated *"a new heaven and new earth"*. In his fifth Olivet Discourse Jesus set out to meet their concerns with a dramatic description of *"what will happen and what will be the signs"* of his prophetic "after-death" second coming:

"Many will come in my name claiming, 'I am the Christ', and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows . . ."

Jesus went to enlarge these *"beginning of sorrows"* into another three successive categories: *"tribulation . . . great tribulation . . . and day of the Lord's (or God's) wrath"*. These he divided up into fifteen episodes and related consequences, each beginning with the significant and sequential prophetic term *"Then"*, listed as follows:

*"Then they will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death"*²²

*"Then many will backslide, betray, hate, deceive . . . but many will stand firm . . . gospel preached . . ."*²³

²¹Matthew 21:43, 24:1, 28:1, 27:19

²²Matthew 24:9

²³Matthew 24:10

"Then shall the end come." ²⁴

"Then let them in Judea flee." ²⁵

"Then shall be great tribulation" ²⁶

"Then shall arise false Christs, signs, wonders, deceits . . ." ²⁷

"Then the Son of Man will return with power and great glory to gather the elect . . ." ²⁸

"Then you see all these things and know that the end is near . . . then shall the coming of the Son of Man be" ²⁸

"Then there shall two in bed . . . one taken the other left . . ." ³⁰

"Then the kingdom of heaven is like the ten virgins . . . five wise and five foolish" ³¹

"Then he that had five talents traded . . . likewise he with two talents . . ." ³²

"Then the Son of Man will sit upon the throne judging all nations . . . separating sheep from goats . . ." ³³

"Then shall the king say, 'Come, you blessed, inherit the kingdom . . .'" ³⁴

"Then shall the king say (to those on his right hand) . . . 'Inasmuch as you have done it to the least . . . you have done it to me . . .'" ³⁵

"Then shall the king say to those on his left hand 'Depart into everlasting fire' . . ." ³⁶

Several of the prophecies were fulfilled within that and the following century in Jewish history, but these and the remainder of the prophecies were equally valid for *"the end of the age"*, as will be seen in the latter stages of this book. I have recorded them here as the literal words of Jesus regarding what was to happen after his death, the deaths of the listening disciples, and the potential deaths of future readers of the Scriptures. They are a record of what the only person who claimed to be God said, one who would rise from death himself to demonstrate what would happen after his death and the deaths of all others.

He prophesies not only what is going to happen in the immediate after-math of the followers' death experience, but also what was likely to happen to those who rejected his words, in two metaphorical categories of people—sheep and goats, wheat and tares, wise and foolish, rulers and servants, good and bad—otherwise *believers* and *unbelievers* in God. Death is not the end of the individual in a nirvana of nothingness, but rather the introduction to

²⁴⁻³⁰Matthew 24:14—24:40

³¹⁻³⁶Matthew 25:9—1-43

a limitless after-death experience of self-chosen eternal bliss or eternal damnation

I had made my personal choice to follow Jesus with total commitment so my expectation was the "eternal bliss" but the closer I came to the start of that my interest was in the many events listed in the Scriptures with tantalising infrequency. What I wanted to know now were the details to be expected in the after-death experience, the specified "*rewards and inheritances*" of the parables and statements of Jesus for those who had performed a life commitment to his service.

What Is Hell Like?

“If your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose one of your limbs than for your whole body to go to hell.”

Matthew 5:29-30 Good News New Testament

Jesus and the Dying Thief

There is only one person who can speak authoritatively about heaven as well as hell, because he has been in both, and that is Jesus. The final stages of his journey to hell began when the Roman governor, Pilate, condemned him to death by crucifixion, because the pre-crucifixion flogging was a hellish experience often causing death.

The place for the crucifixion of Jesus was only a short distance from the Fortress where his trial and scourging took place, reached

by a narrow, stepped street leading past the rear walls of the Temple and exiting at the Damascus Gate. It was a Roman law that the criminal condemned to death by crucifixion must carry his cross to the place of execution. Usually this was only the cross-beam, the upright part having already been installed by soldiers sent ahead to prepare the site known locally as “*Golgotha*”, or “the place of a skull”. Two other condemned men, thieves, were also in the crucifixion procession with Jesus.

The crucifixions cross-beam to be carried weighed some thirty pounds and this, combined with the sleepless night, the hellish scourging which left his bones exposed and his skin in bloody shreds, the oppressive noonday heat, and the pressure from the gawking crowds in the narrow street, drove Jesus to the brink of unconsciousness and he stumbled. Some of the crowd jeered, and asked him to perform a recovery miracle now on himself. The Roman escort eventually picked out a burly Cyrenian from the watching crowd, known as Simon, and ordered him to help carry the Nazarene’s cross.

During the delay a group of women forced themselves to the front where Jesus had collapsed on the road. They wept as the Roman guards helped him to his feet, mourning as if at a funeral. The Sanhedrin representative, who was present at every sentence of death to observe that the Roman decision was being fulfilled, waved them away. He had been instructed to see that there were no public protests in Jesus’ favour.

Jesus stopped to recover his breath, and then gasped: “*Don’t . . . weep for me . . . weep for yourselves . . . and for your children . . . The time is coming soon . . . you will run and hide . . . If men do this . . . in a time of law . . . what will they do . . . when there is no law?*” He was giving them a final warning of the imminent national holocaust that would sweep them all away into despair and oblivion.

When the procession reached Calvary the transverse beam of the cross, which Simon of Cyrene had helped to carry, was placed on the ground and Jesus led forward. He was offered the usual drink by the soldiers—a bitter mixture of wine and myrrh, which had a numbing effect on the senses—but Jesus refused. His clothing was

removed and his bloody, shredded body was laid naked, with his hands outstretched on the transverse beam, his feet on the upright beam, facing forwards to the watching public. Only women were permitted to be crucified facing the cross and with backs to the public.

The soldiers first nailed the hands to the beam, and tied the arms with ropes around the wrists. The rope was passed over the shoulders and under the arms and the transverse beam lifted to fit against the upright beam, then was nailed and roped together. A small wooden seat-rest, with a jutting horn-like projection devised to pierce the rectum, was nailed to the upright beam, and Jesus' legs were straddled ignominiously on either side of this. Nails were driven through his feet on the foot-rest under the feet, to support the body in a knees bent position, when the excruciating agony of its weight on the nailed hands and feet caused the body to slump. The foot-rest and horned seat-rest were not there to comfort the criminal, but that death through strangulation from a collapsed rib cage would not occur too quickly, and so that the torturous agony would be intensified and prolonged for up to three days or more as a warning to the watching public. The body, suspended by the nails on the cross, contracted in spasms into agonizing rigidity; wounds swelled and festered in the fly-ridden heat; heart, lungs and head became congested, and breathing was agonizing and often impossible. In order to breathe the individual had to push downwards on the horned seat-rest—but this only served to brutally intensify the agony. The whole exercise of crucifixion was to utterly humiliate as well as cruelly intimidate the criminal being crucified in order to deter all others.

When the soldiers had finished the work of crucifying the three men - the two robbers on the right and left, and Jesus in the centre—they stood back to admire their work. Jesus, watching them out of pain-filled eyes, gasped, "*Father . . . forgive them . . . they don't . . . know what . . . they are doing.*" The soldiers ignored the words, and picked up the scattered bloody clothing to divide among themselves. Seeing that Jesus' garment was seamless they decided to gamble for it whole, instead of cutting it, while they waited for Jesus to die.

The crowds who had followed the procession began to disperse. Once the nailing of the individual on the cross was completed there was little left to hold their attention. They had to prepare for the imminent Passover celebrations, and the body of Jesus would have to be taken down before the Sabbath due in a few hours at midnight. Also, in their haste to get rid of the body of Jesus they were ignoring the historical irony that they were already killing the Scripturally true *"Passover Lamb"* at the exact time—*"between the sixth and ninth hours"*—ordained by God through Moses and the Tabernacle services about two thousand years before.

Those who had hoped for a miracle of some sort from Jesus were disappointed, and they jeered:

"He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, the Chosen One."

"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

"You who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!"

"Messiah, king of Israel, come down now from the cross so that we may see and believe!"

"He trusts in God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'

Even one of the criminals on the cross next to Jesus hurled abuse at him: *"Aren't you . . . the Messiah?"* he sneered with laboured breath. *"Save yourself . . . and us!"*

At these words the criminal on the other side gasped a rebuke: *"Don't you . . . fear God . . . We are . . . punished justly . . . This man . . . has done . . . nothing wrong."* Turning his pain-contorted face towards Jesus, he added, *"Jesus . . . remember me . . . when you come . . . into your kingdom."*

The shadow of a smile flickered on the torn and bloodied face of Jesus, and he said, *"I tell you . . . the truth . . . today you will be . . . with me . . . in Paradise."* The repentant criminal was only barely conscious with his own pain so that the promise of Jesus was not just physical release now, but to be present that day—not three or four days of torture later—with Jesus through death to the eternal Paradise beyond. By his own words the dying thief was dying justly, yet Jesus

had stated that before midnight the thief would be with him in Paradise—the same “*Paradise*” experienced by the poor man and rich man.

The Roman centurion in charge, who had seen thousands of these incidents, gazed inscrutably from the jeering Jewish religious leaders responsible for this man’s death to the face of Jesus: “*Surely this was a righteous man*”, he said wonderingly. He thought for a moment that Jesus had heard him, for he was gazing in his direction, but what had drawn the attention of Jesus was the small group next to the centurion, three women and a man. Unknown to the centurion this was Jesus’ mother, Mary, and the former courtesan Mary “*the Magdalene*” of Bethany, and another sister of Jesus’ mother, also called Mary, the wife of Cleopas and John, “*the beloved disciple*” of Jesus.

Tears streamed down Mary’s face as she gazed on the tortured form of her beloved son, and she remembered again, the words of the prophecy that had haunted her life: “*A sword shall pierce through your heart also.*” She had thought that meant the agony of separation from the one who was primarily God’s Son as he did his heavenly Father’s will, but she knew now that this was the sword—the nation of Israel’s brutalized and ravaged rejection of one whose only crime was that he loved too much. The women clung together, weeping and occasionally covering their faces at the spasms of agony wracking the body of Jesus.

Jesus looked from them to John. Addressing his mother he said in pain-rasped tones, “*Dear woman . . . here is your son.*” To John he gasped, “*Here is . . . your mother.*” John nodded his acceptance of the responsibility.

Although it was only past noon the sky began to darken inexplicably. There were none of the usual signs of a storm, and it was not an eclipse, for it was the time of the full moon. The spectators began to move away uneasily, less voluble in their jeering as they cast worried glances at the darkening sky. Was God going to intervene on behalf of Jesus after all? The religious leaders were less superstitious, but they had their own problems with the darkness, for it meant that someone might try to remove the still

living body of Jesus. Also, according to the *Law of Moses*, they had to make certain that the body should not be left hanging overnight, and the Passover Sabbath would be due at sunset only two or three hours away. They hurried from the scene to see Pilate, to request that the Galilean's legs might be broken to make certain that he died before the start of their Sabbath.

Pilate did not inform the high priest's messengers that he had already received an earlier delegation—also distinguished members of the Sanhedrin—with a request. This was the influential Nicodemus, captain of the Temple, and Joseph of Arimathea. They said they were friends of Jesus, and asked Pilate courteously if he would give them permission to remove the dead body of Jesus for private burial, and he had agreed.

On the cross Jesus, released from his last ties with earth in attending to his mother, entered his dark night of the soul—his God-prophesied “hour” and the “hour of Satan” when the “heel of Jesus” would be “bruised”, but the “head of Satan” would be fatally wounded in a contest that would result in destroying Satan's power over death for ever. As he struggled alone in the raging nightmare of Satan's onslaught a hoarse cry was torn from his lips: “My God . . . my God . . . why have you . . . forsaken me?”

Some of those standing near him, hearing the Galilean dialect “Eli, Eli” for “God”, mistakenly thought that he was calling for Elijah the prophet. One of them ran and got a sponge and dipped it in the mixture of wine and vinegar kept for the purpose, and offered it to Jesus. But the religious leaders pushed them aside, and said roughly, “Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah will come and save him.”

As the day darkened still more it became difficult to see the features of the men on the crosses. When Jesus whispered hoarsely, “I thirst”, the man with the cup of wine and vinegar ignored the protests of the rabbis and gave it to Jesus. There was now an oppressive and ominous silence over the whole hellish scene. The usual noises of the city had disappeared as the unaccountable darkness drove people off the streets and stopped all normal daylight activities. There were only a few people around the crosses to hear Jesus shout triumphantly, “It is finished . . . Father . . . into your

hands . . . I commit . . . my spirit." Then, unexpectedly, and inexplicably in the appalling circumstances which were anticipated to last three or four days, his suspended body slumped and he died. So sudden and unusual was it that the experienced Roman centurion who had earlier observed that Jesus was "*certainly a righteous man*", exclaimed reverently, "*This man was certainly the Son of God!*"

As Jesus died it is recorded:

*"The earth shook, the rocks split apart, the graves broke open, and many of God's people who had died were raised to life. They left the graves, and after Jesus rose from death, they went into the Holy City, where many people saw them."*³⁷

Jesus in Hell

So, according to Jesus, while his body was on the cross and his mind dead with it, his spirit was in "*hades*" with the thief, as he had promised. But Jesus went on from there to the lower region of Hades to accomplish a divinely historic purpose—to confront Satan in his own domain. This entailed Jesus crossing "*the great gulf*" that was "*fixed*" in the account of the poor man and rich man. The physical agonies Jesus was experiencing on the cross were as nothing compared to the spiritual anguish of his unseen cosmic confrontation with Satan as he battled for God's redemption of the creation corrupted by Satan in Satan's own territory of hell.

The prophet Isaiah had recorded the overthrow of Satan:

*"How are thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, who weakened the nations. You said in your heart 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to hell (hades) . . ."*³⁸

To find out what happened in *hades*, and afterwards, we have to go forward some fifty days to listen to Peter preaching in the Temple. Speaking of the departed Jesus he said,

"God raised him from death, setting him free from its power, because it was impossible for death to hold him prisoner. For David said about him . . . 'you will not abandon me in the world of the dead, you will not allow your faithful servant to rot in the grave' . . ."

³⁷Matthew 27: 51-54

³⁸Isaiah 14: 12-15

Peter amplified this later when writing his *Epistle* and said,

“He was put to death physically, but made alive spiritually, and in his spiritual existence he went and preached to the imprisoned spirits. These were the spirits of those who had not obeyed God when He waited patiently during the days that Noah was building his boat . . .”

It is obvious from these statements that the experience of Jesus is not necessarily the experience of others. He had a specific mission to fulfil, primarily to take the “keys” or powers of death and hell from Satan in what Jesus had classed as “*the hour of Satan*”, and what God had described after the disobedience of Adam and Eve as “*the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the Serpent, and the seed of the Serpent would bruise his heel*”. That is, Jesus would be “wounded”, but Satan would be fatally defeated.

When Jesus went into hell one task was to “preach to the imprisoned spirits”. As the rest of the passage indicates these were those before the Flood who had not had the opportunity to repent and believe before the time of Christ. With these tasks completed in hell Jesus left the lower region in triumph over Satan. From now on he could function as an advocate before his Father in heaven on behalf of both Israel and the Gentiles, and with his relationships before God established in heaven he could make the “after-death” statements to the disciples regarding his bestowing on them the Holy Spirit from heaven.

Jesus After Death

Ironically, the professional religionists believed more in the possibilities arising from Jesus’ resurrection than did his disciples. From the time they took the lifeless body of Jesus from the cross, bathed the bloody and torn flesh, put on the spices and grave-clothes, his followers, without exception, accepted the finality of his death. Even the thought of removing his body, so feared by the religionists, never crossed their minds as they contemplated the inevitable physical corruption over the next few days of the Passover. If they expected anything, it was a vague memory of what he said about his “*second coming*” in the distant future. The disciples and other close followers had scattered, partly because of the Passover Sabbath requirements for families, and

partly in fear of the rabbis, to different meeting places in Jerusalem, and they were meeting behind closed doors for the inevitable arrests they anticipated following the death of Jesus. The startling news of the torn Veil in the Temple, at the time of the darkness, earthquake, opened tombs, and other raised bodies, only created further confusion and dangers.

The women—Mary the mother of Jesus, her sisters Mary and Salome, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s adviser, the wealthy and patrician Susanna, and Mary Magdalene—busied themselves with the burial spices they had prepared for a less hurried application to Jesus when the Sabbath was ended.

Early on the Sunday morning following the Sabbath, at the first light of dawn, Mary Magdalene left Bethany to go to the tomb in Joseph’s garden where she had arranged to meet with the other women the day before. There was some discussion as to who would help them move the tomb-stone, and it was suggested that Joseph of Arimathea would probably have a watchman or gardener at the scene to help them; but others pointed out that the tomb-stone was traditionally made so that several men would be required to move it. In the city, while they were on their way to find the disciples, they were terrified by the shudders of another earthquake, but it passed quickly and they hurried on.

The earthquake had preceded the arrival of an angelic messenger in Joseph’s burial garden, before whom the Roman and Temple guards reeled away, blinded and unconscious, and the heavy tomb-stone moved backwards at the angel’s command to open the way. When the guards recovered they saw the resplendent heavenly messenger sitting quietly on the rolled-back tomb-stone and, after a terrified glance at the obviously empty tomb, they ran from the garden to report to their superiors.

When the women arrived at the tomb, as they still gazed overwhelmed and dumbfounded at the open and empty tomb, a dazzling angel had appeared outside and addressed them confidently:

“Don’t be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, just as he said. Come and

see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him''. (my emphases)

After an initial hesitation the women had approached the open tomb—and saw another angel sitting where they had laid the body of Jesus, but no sign of Jesus. The women noticed that both angels took up positions where the head and feet of Jesus had been placed. Like most tombs of wealthy Jews, Joseph's tomb in the hill-side had a low entrance, opening into a deeper inner chamber, with shelves along each side for the bodies of the family. Because this was a new tomb prepared by Joseph, there were no other bodies on the shelves. The women had backed out of the tomb, filled with a diminishing fear and a rising tide of joy and excitement: Jesus had risen from the dead! There was no body! There was an empty tomb! There were angel witnesses with a clear and commanding message! They left the tomb and the angels to tell the disciples.

Meanwhile Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb, and she found the large stone sealing the entrance to the tomb rolled back, the soldiers guarding the tomb gone, and the tomb empty. Then Peter and John arrived and they discussed the significance of the removed body of Jesus, his folded burial clothes, the angels and the possibilities. Had the angels carried away the body of Jesus like Elijah? What did they mean by "*He has risen*"—his spirit from his body, or his spirit to his Father in heaven? Why was there no body? Had the angels taken the body away and then returned? Why leave the clothes behind? Somehow it was easier to accept that the furious religious leaders had stolen the body away from Jesus' friends in their own interests.

Mary had a sudden thought and went outside to look at the entrance stone. The violated Roman official seal—with death as the punishment for removal—was still there on the rolled back tomb-stone. She called to Peter and John to look at it, and after some discussion they left her at the tomb while they went back into the city to report to the other Apostles.

Mary sat on a stone outside the tomb, thinking and occasionally weeping with bewilderment and futility, and after a time went back

into the tomb—and found two angels, dressed in white clothing, sitting where the body of Jesus had been. She was gazing at them blankly in astonishment when one of them addressed her: *“Woman, why are you crying?”*

“They have taken my Lord away”, she said hesitantly, trying to adjust her mind to accept that she was talking with an angel, *“and I don’t know where they have put him.”*

She had a sense that the angels were looking past her, and turned to see who had approached. She saw only a figure outlined in shadow against the sunlight outside the tomb. She thought it was Joseph’s gardener arriving at last, and that he might know what had happened to the body of Jesus. But, before she could say anything to him, he said, *“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”*

Mary gave a huge sigh of relief. At least, he knew she was looking for a body, so it must mean he knew what had happened. *“Sir,”* she pleaded with him *“if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”* She stepped forward to him in the urgency of her plea.

“Mary,” the man said to her quietly. There could be only one voice that spoke her name like that, Jesus her Lord.

“Rabboni! Teacher!” she called out joyfully and incredulously, stepping forward to throw herself into his arms.

Jesus held up his hand to hold her off. *“Do not hold me”,* he said to her warningly, *“for I have not yet returned to my Father. But go to the others and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*

A week later all the inner circle of Apostles, except for the absent Thomas the Doubter, had gathered at the house of Mary of Jerusalem for the evening meal. They discussed excitedly the various reports of sightings of Jesus but no-one mentioned the fact that, in all his after-death appearances, Jesus had suddenly appeared from nowhere, and also had disappeared just as mysteriously. Could it just have been a spirit and not the resurrected real body of Jesus? Why had he not permitted Mary Magdalene to touch him? And what had he meant by giving as his reason that

he had not yet returned to his Father?

Probably this was the thought uppermost in everyone's minds when they were preparing to eat the evening meal, and once again Jesus suddenly appeared. They had carefully locked all doors against any surprising visit from the religious leaders, and the sudden appearance of Jesus among them convinced them that he was indeed an apparition who could pass through closed doors. Seeing their doubts and fears Jesus said consolingly,

"Peace be with you! Why are you so worried and suspicious? Look at my hands and my feet and see the nail-marks. Touch me and see; a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

He spread his obviously scarred hands and feet for them to examine, but nobody moved to accept his challenge. Their minds were racing with tumultuous thoughts as they tried to reconcile his sudden appearance at the tomb, his strange words to Mary Magdalene, the appearances to Peter, and the women near Bethany, and the two men in Emmaus, and now through closed doors here in Jerusalem. He had just said, *"A spirit does not have flesh and bones such as you see me have . . . Touch me and see."* Yet in the morning in the burial tomb he had said to Mary, *"Don't touch me"*.

What had happened between morning and evening, and between him and his Father? Reconciliation? Celebration? Consecration? All three? Was the meeting with his Father in heaven or on earth? His work on earth was completed. *"It is finished,"* he had said in his last words on the cross. He was no longer a person of time. God had created sun and moon, evening and morning, but time was a measuring device of man. Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man was no longer necessary. He was now Spirit, one with the Eternal Spirit—and he had promised to send the Spirit as *"Counselor"* when he had gone. Yet here he was saying he was both spirit and flesh and bones.

"Do you have anything here to eat?" Jesus asked, looking at the set table. The disciples wondered what would happen when the food was placed in front of him; it was well-known that a spirit could not eat food. Yet had not the Angel eaten a meal with Abraham?

Jesus was given a helping of broiled fish and honeycomb, and he ate it calmly, while the Apostles watched him in awed silence. If

anything they were more confused than ever. While it was accepted wisdom that a spirit could not eat food, they were puzzled what to expect from a body that had died, that had emptied itself of a great deal of its blood in scourging and stabbing, and if Jesus still had blood in his body. They knew the spirit released from the body returned to God at death—and now was able to appear and disappear at will, and even pass through locked doors and eat food.

Jesus seemed to understand their confusion, but looked beyond the present to the future.

“This is what I told you while I was still with you Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city here until you have been clothed with power from my Father in heaven.”

Then, lifting his hand, he breathed symbolically on all of them and said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”* With these words once again he disappeared from sight—obviously some form of metamorphosis, one minute he was there, and the next he was gone. This must be what happened to everyone after death; it would be eternal life as a spirit with mental and physical faculties in a different dimension—heaven or hell—opened to everyone.

Before Jesus left his disciples he told them of another meeting he would hold with them shortly. They were to get the Eleven together, and proceed to the place in the foothills of Mount Hermon where he had gone with them for prayer occasionally in the past. He told them to invite as many of the other known disciples as were interested, and he would address them there.

At the appointed time there were five hundred people gathered together on the slopes of the mountain to meet with Jesus. There he gave them their great commission to fulfil God’s eternal purpose for His chosen people so often betrayed by Israel in the past—*“to enlighten all nations of the world.”* He was leaving them shortly, and

they would see him no more, but the gospel he had given to them they were to communicate to all men everywhere. He concluded:

*“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised by the Holy Spirit”*³⁹

But the disciples were still fixated on their own conception of their mission, and they

asked him: *“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

Jesus replied: *“It is not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

When Jesus had said farewell to the gathering he drew the Eleven Apostles to one side and told them to return to Jerusalem immediately, so that they would be there for the *“Feast of Weeks”*, or *“Pentecost”*, occurring fifty days after the Feast of Passover, to celebrate the dedication of the first-fruits of the corn harvest, the last crop to ripen, God’s blessings of seed-time and harvest, of sun and rain. He would meet with them there and they would receive the promised empowerment of the Holy Spirit for their great worldwide task of *“bringing in God’s spiritual harvest”*, beginning at Jerusalem, then spreading into Judea and Samaria, and on into the furthest parts of the earth.

Then Jesus met with the Eleven Apostles and followers for the last time. They were gathered as usual in their favoured upper room, but, unlike the previous occasion, when they were petrified with fear, now they were discussing excitedly their plans for the future. He joined them in their meal, and then addressed them regarding the message they were to preach:

“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. This is what they say: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses that these things have happened as written. I am now going to

³⁹Acts 1:4-10

send you the Holy Spirit my Father has promised; but you must stay in the city until you have been clothed with this power from on high. John has baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (my emphasis)

When he had finished talking with them Jesus did not disappear as he had on the previous occasion. Instead he signalled for them to come with him, and he led them through the streets of Jerusalem on the familiar way to Bethany. They walked openly, returning the startled greetings of those who knew them and Jesus, but never stopping to talk with anyone. They crossed over the Kidron Valley, past the fateful Garden of Gethsemane, to the spot where they had so often stopped for a last look over the city of Jerusalem, on the ridge where the path dropped down to Bethany on the far side. Here Jesus stopped once more, and looked at the city he loved. Then, turning, he embraced each Apostle and follower.

They knew this was the last they would see him. “Lord,” one of them said, “Are you in the immediate future going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Jesus shook his head.

“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

With those words Jesus lifted his hands and blessed them and, as they watched, he disappeared from their sight into a cloud drifting above them. As they were still gazing skyward speculatively two angels appeared and announced to them:

“Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”.

They returned to Jerusalem, rejoicing, making for the Temple to begin their task of bringing the Messiah’s message of eternal salvation to the world. They knew from personal experience of three years with Jesus that he was indeed the Son of God, that they had a message to the world from God, and that they, too, would join him again in heaven.

They had a message of salvation from sin and death a and hell for the world given to them by the Son of God himself. They had a promise from the lips of the Son of God that they would join him in heaven, and that the bodies they would have would be like his own. They had a vision of sharing the rule with him in a renewed heaven and earth. The door to the after-life following death had been opened by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Their task was to let the world know, and leave it to God, to reveal the details of the life after death through others in the future.



Personal Note

I had verified the words and promises of Jesus in my own lifetime of almost seventy years of Christian service in many lands but, as physical abilities declined, I was now intensely interested in what happens after death. Theoretically, I knew I would have a "spirit/body" vaguely "like Jesus", and the capacity to inter-change between one and the other like Moses and Elijah, but how and when would my lifetime commitments be evaluated in the hereafter? Moses had been defiant and a disappointment to God when he struck the rock angrily instead of speaking the words of God; and Elijah had fled from an angry Jezebel after God had miraculously answered his prayer to send fire and consume the altar offering. Yet Peter and the other two disciples had seen Jesus discussing his coming crucifixion with them as friends. What had happened in the meantime to explain this intimacy?



How Perfect Am I?

*"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect".
Matthew 5:45: New International Version*

Perfection and Perfectibility

Someone has said, *"Salvation is free, but sanctification costs everything"*. Looking back on almost seventy active years of my life I can confirm these words as true. I did not set out to *"be perfect"* as a goal, but somewhere about the middle of my life, as I grappled with something I knew God wanted me to do and I did not want to do it because of the commitment, it dawned on me that the issue was not my *"obedience"* but God's ultimate purpose, my *"perfection"*.

Like so many of my Christian contemporaries I had assumed that my sanctification after salvation was assured so long as I was obedient, that the righteousness of Christ was imputed to me. But at that critical point of struggle I learned that my true goal as a Christian was *"to be perfect as my Father in heaven is perfect"*; that I was not just expected to *"be good"* but my righteousness had to exceed *"the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"*, or I would not *"enter the kingdom of heaven"*, as Jesus stated.

So, striving for perfection became my goal or, strictly speaking,

for “*perfectability*” since perfection is beyond any creaturely capability. As the Apostle Paul described it, “*I count not myself to have attained . . . but I strive towards the goal*”. Now, at almost ninety years of age, and all my striving behind me, I reflect on where I am on the divine assessment scale before I enter heaven.

In his book, *The Promise of the Holy Spirit*, Dr. William Barclay, the noted Scottish theologian says:

“It is one of the significant features of the present time that the word and experience of conversion have been rediscovered in the orthodox Church. With that rediscovery there has come a very real danger, the kind of danger which comes from the confusion of half the truth with the whole truth. The danger is that the experience of conversion may come to be looked upon as the end of the road, and that the person who has undergone the experience of conversion may regard himself as a completed and perfected Christian unless he realizes that there is such a person as the Holy Spirit, unless he lays hold of the power of the Holy Spirit . . . Unless the Holy Spirit daily lives more in him and he in the Holy Spirit, then the experience of conversion will necessarily lead to nowhere but disappointment, disillusionment and frustration. That is why so many of those who experience conversions which accompany mass evangelisms never last the course, but relapse into their old way of life.” (my emphasis)

Possibly that is why, too, there were only 120 committed but fearful believers in post-resurrection Jerusalem—even the eleven Apostles were meeting in a room with locked doors—and why tens of thousands left following Jesus and “*went away because these sayings were too hard for them.*” They wanted to be perfect, but they did not want the necessary perfecting process—like the rich and religious young ruler who came to Jesus.

It would be morally inexcusable for both God in the *Old Testament* and Jesus in the *New Testament* to command “*be perfect*” to creatures and followers and not to provide the means for accomplishing this. It is obvious, also, that they expect it to be possible of attainment in the lifetime of every individual aspirant, and not just a benevolent

act of divine grace of “*imputed righteousness*” in the hereafter. Let it be clear at the beginning of this search after holiness: *perfection as a state is not possible for a sinful creature; but perfectibility as a goal is possible for every kind of sinful creature.*

I agree with those who believe sanctification and holiness are the same, having the same root word, *hagios*, but too many expositors, both in the past and present, confuse sanctification with *godliness*—which is different from holiness. Godliness has a different root word, *eusebeio*, and is often confused with holiness. It is important to distinguish between the words that are often confused by Christians: sanctification, holiness, godliness, and righteousness.

It is not necessary to be a Christian to be righteous, as Jesus made clear when he said that unless the righteousness of his followers exceeded the righteousness of the Pharisees they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. “*Righteousness*”, or “*right actions*”, by its very nature requires a prior moral law and not just a sense of “*common good*” or decency; a recognition of a Creator who has provided an intellectually understandable design for living acceptably with and for Him. That “*intelligent design*” divides the world of *homo sapiens* into two distinct camps: believers in a Creator who has provided the blueprint as the standard; and unbelievers who create standards for themselves based on self-generated morally relative projections.

The difference between the righteousness of the Christian from the non-Christian is the goal: the Christian’s goal is godliness by the obedience of faith in the Creator, and the gift of the Spirit in acquired holiness. The goal of the unbeliever, or moral relativist, on the other hand, is a constantly changing series of theories and practices based on contemporary circumstances. In this process Christ, by the grace of God, is made unto believers “*holiness, righteousness and redemption*”;⁴⁰ but, at the same time, believers are called to work at all three attributes for themselves: (i) “*Be holy as your Father in heaven is holy*”, (ii) “*your righteousnesses*”, and (iii) “*work out your own salvation.*”

First, let us look at what the much-used and much-abused term “*sanctification*” means. Dr. William Barclay has defined the word:

⁴⁰1 Corinthians 1:30

“The Christian is sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:2). The word for sanctification is hagioσmos. All Greek names ending in —asmos describe a process, and not a finished event. Hagioσmos, therefore, may best be translated the road to holiness. Hagioσmos is the noun which is connected with hagioσ, the word which is generally translated holy, and which is also the word for the people whom the New Testament calls saints . . . A saint in the New Testament sense is, therefore, an individual in whom there is something which is unattainable in our own power. The Holy Spirit is the person through whose power upon us we can day by day walk the road to holiness, day by day acquiring this quality of difference, day by day becoming more and more hagioσ, that is, more and more like God. But, we must note, this change is not an effortless thing on our part. We are sanctified for obedience. It is a power which demands our own effort, our own self-discipline, as the price of its cooperation. When our will begins to cooperate with the power of the Holy Spirit, then things happen in life.” (my emphases)

It can be seen, therefore, that sanctification differs from regeneration, in that regeneration is instantaneous, a single creating act. No one is more or less regenerated than any other; every believer is equally regenerate. But sanctification is a progressive work of the Spirit, and subject to degrees of experience. One individual may be more sanctified and more holy than another—who is still to a degree truly sanctified and truly holy. The work of holiness is the seed of the Spirit that is implanted in the believer at conversion; the work of sanctification is like the activity of the farmer who cultivates the seed, waters it, reaps it, threshes it, grinds it, bakes it, and makes it into the perfected bread of life. *Holiness is the inherent life in the seed; sanctification is the work which brings it to fruition.* Holiness is wholly the work of the Spirit; sanctification requires the obedience of the believer in faith appropriating the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to fulfil its purpose.

A “*sanctified heart*” is just another way of saying a “*holy heart*”—a heart from which all self is excluded and only God reigns supreme in reciprocal love. This is why sanctification was

also known as “*perfect love*”, or “*pure love*”. Madame Guyon, writing of her spiritual experiences poetically said:

*“My heart is easy, and my burden light;
I smile, though sad, when God is in my sight.
The more my woes in secret I deplore,
I taste Thy goodness, and I love Thee more.”*

*“There, while a solemn stillness reigns around,
Faith, love, and hope, within my soul abound;
And while the world suppose me lost in care,
The joys of angels unperceived I share.”*

It is this “*quality of difference*” which distinguishes the true Christian from the false, as well as the Christian from the non-Christian. The Jews, nationally, were different from the other nations around them, such as Egypt or Syria; but they were also uniquely different in that they had been conditionally chosen by God to fulfil a destined purpose in the world. The operative words there are “*conditionally chosen*”. God said that He would keep His promises concerning them “*if you keep my commandments*” in the *Covenant* between them.

The same is true of the Church of Jesus the Messiah. In the *New Covenant* between God and the followers of Jesus the condition laid down by Jesus is still “*If you love me, keep my commandments*”; and the divinely destined purpose is to “*be perfect as God is perfect*.” If that goal is ignored, or neglected, for whatever reasons, then the divine promises and rewards here and hereafter are no longer tenable.

There are several variations of the Hebrew and Greek words used for “*perfect*”. In Hebrew, the primary root of two of them—*tamam*, *tamiyim*—is used most often; a third is *shalem*. The first two mean: “*complete, accomplish, come to an end, come to the full, make perfect, whole*”; the latter means: “*complete, friendly, make ready, peaceable, perfect(ed)*”. In the Greek of the *New Testament* the words used for “*perfect*” are *teleios*, in its various forms; and *katartizo*, a derivative of *artios*. The former means: “*to complete, accomplish, consummate, finish, make perfect*”; the latter means: “*to complete thoroughly (i.e. to repair)*”,

to mend, join together, prepare, restore, make perfect."

With these definitions in mind let us look at what God said regarding them to and through His servants in the past. The first important fact to be noted is that God was not propounding an esoteric doctrine when he used the term. He was using it very specifically in relation to individuals and their daily conduct.

Noah

The first time ever it was used was when God was speaking of Noah:

"Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God."

This tells us three things about Noah: one, he was justified by faith in God; two, he was blameless in his family responsibilities before God; and, three, he lived an inner life of communion with God and outwardly observed the commands of God. This made Noah "perfect" in the sight of God.

Abraham

Of Abraham it was said:

"The Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be perfect."

Abraham was ninety-nine years old at the time, and he had been "walking with God" for over thirty years, ever since God called him out of his pagan native home in Ur of the Chaldees to go to Canaan. This was the first time that the Lord God appeared to Abraham; previously He had "spoken", or "came to him in a vision". Whatever this meant in physical revelation, the introductory words of God established the majesty of His identity: "I am El Shaddai—the Almighty God—the All-Powerful—the All-Sufficient." It was the beginning of an unfolding series of revelations regarding the nature of God, each marking an epoch in human history. Yet it was in this declaration of divine majesty and omnipotence that God said to a very fallible man, "Walk before me and be perfect." In other words: "I am All-Powerful and All-Sufficient, and I expect you to act perfectly in the light of this."

Israel

The next use by God of the word “*perfect*” is found in Deuteronomy, (although the word “*holy*” is used 150 times in Leviticus) where God is speaking to His “*chosen people*”, Israel, through His servant Moses. He had just been instructing them regarding their conduct in the Promised Land of Canaan, and He had warned them against the heathen practice of idolatry and spiritism—divination, horoscopes, familiar spirits, talismans, witchery, and necromancy. Idolatry and spiritism were the major sins spawned by pagan Babylon, and exported into the surrounding regions. Any powers other than human or divine were sought, cultivated, and worshipped, in the world’s early rebellion against God, in the widespread pursuit of self-interest rather than divine intention. It was in this extremely unpromising context that God declared emphatically: “*Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God.*”

The initial anti-God rebellion had been led by Satan in his own self-centred ambition to be like God—a likeness on his own terms, and not God’s. Satan himself had known what it was to be perfect. It was said of him:

“You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless (perfect) in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you . . .”⁴¹

The flawed Prince of Angels, implacably committed to the destruction of all that God desired in and through men and women on earth as well as angels in heaven, eagerly corrupted all those willing to pay his price for his forbidden powers. It was in this challenging environment of occult powers, demonic temptations, and titillating defiance of God, that the people of Israel were commanded by their God to “*be perfect like the Lord God.*” It was not so much the perfection of faith that God was requiring of the Israelites as the perfection of obedience, of works. His words to them had been:

“I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws, then you will live and increase,

⁴¹Ezekiel 28:15f

and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.”⁴²

God went on to “call heaven and earth as witnesses that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.” But what they received depended on their choice and their commitment. God’s desire for them, as He demonstrated in His love and provision for them, was;

“Now choose life, so that you and your children may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.”

The nations around them might worship strange gods and cultivate occult powers, but the Israelites were to keep the commandments given them by God, and in those observances of conduct they would be perfect before God. To help them in this God would provide a succession of prophets, as His spokesmen, guides and instructors. In this way, at different times, they would always know the mind and will of God in changing circumstances.

David

With David and Solomon there is introduced a different word for “perfect”; not the *tamam* used so far, but *shalem*. Both carry the primary meaning of “complete”; but, whereas *tamam* emphasizes the completeness of a circle, or making a purposed whole of something, *shalem* means to make ready, to be at peace about an intention. The former is the certainty of an artist who starts with an idea, and is satisfied when he has completed the work that it reflects his intention; but at the same time it never fully satisfies him that it completely reflects the scope of his creative urge. The latter is the assurance of the builder that his completed construction accurately represents the design of the architect. Another comparative analogy might be that the former is like the artist, while the latter is like the photographer; both can be satisfied with the respective perfection of any given work, but the former is more dependent on intuitive gifts while the latter is more dependent on physical skills.

David, of whom it was said he was “a man after God’s own heart”, was a murderer, an adulterer, a betrayer of a loyal commander, a liar, a deceiver, an inadequate parent. But, at the end of his life, David, in his last words, could say, “God makes my way perfect.” These words

⁴²Deuteronomy 30:15-30

were said in the context of his acknowledgment of his God-given skills and strength:

*“With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall. As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze . . .”*⁴³ (my emphasis)

There is never any doubt from David’s words, here or elsewhere, that he was more concerned with the perfecting of his spiritual walk with God than with all his physical skills and professional accomplishments. From the *Psalms* he wrote it is evident he was conscious of his own capacity for evil, as well as others, and of God’s great willingness to love and to forgive in order to rise above the baser elements. In the *Psalms* “being perfect” is mentioned five times: Psalm 18:32 speaks of a “perfect way”; Psalm 19:7 speaks of a “perfect law”; Psalm 37:31 speaks of a “perfect man”; Psalm 101:2 speaks of a “perfect heart”; Psalms 138:8 speaks of a “perfect goal.”

David was aware of the evil around him, and the evil within him. His life as a shepherd, warrior, ruler, statesman, poet-musician, had shown him human nature in all its capacities for vice and virtue and vision. In all his circumstances—the bad as well as the good—he sought out the purpose and direction of God. He established the first, and only, theocratic nation-state, and in the process saw unparalleled massacres and hatreds and greed and betrayals by foes and friends. Yet he wrote confidently that there was a perfect way, a perfect law, a perfect heart, a perfect goal, that a perfect man could follow—even when he and others fell short. David not only knew he was not perfect; he never lost sight of the possibility of being perfect.

Solomon

This could not be said of his son, Solomon. Solomon was groomed by God and by David to be a pre-eminent king. God granted Solomon’s request for divinely bestowed wisdom,

⁴³2 Samuel 22:30-35

knowledge and understanding. Solomon built the first Temple in which God agreed to dwell on earth with His creatures. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon renewed the consecration of the people of Israel to God's great destiny for them in the words:

"May he (God) turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers. And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the people of Israel according to each day's need, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God. But your hearts must be fully committed (perfect: KJV) to the Lord our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time."

For all his great potential Solomon fell far short of the ideal he set himself, and the goal God had set for him. His undisciplined family life led him to take seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines; and they, in turn, led him into conspicuous idolatry. Eventually, God said of Solomon:

"When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father". What is particularly interesting about this epitaph is that it implies Solomon had an opportunity to be perfect, but threw it away; and that David, his father, despite his many faults, was *"perfect with the Lord his God."* This is later expanded to show how Solomon *"did evil"* progressively, in first following his wives' gods, then building shrines for them, finally building a temple for Chemosh *"in the hill that is before Jerusalem, the mount of Olives."* No doubt Solomon continued to attend the ordained Temple services, observe the stipulated Feasts, offer the required sacrifices; but these became less as his commitments to other gods and other practices increased. Somewhere, and for some unstated reason, he lost his focus on, and his interest in, God, and it all became a matter of performance and not meaning. His father, David, on the other hand, never lost his focus on, or interest in, God, and he responded to *"follow the Lord perfectly"*.

Asa

The same word for “perfect”, *shalem*, used for David and Solomon, is used of Asa, one of Israel’s later kings. Because of Solomon’s flagrant sins of disobedience and idolatry God vowed to punish his royal line, and the people of Israel, who had followed him. A prophet of the time, Azariah, described the situation to Asa, the king:

“For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them. In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the land were in great turmoil. One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress.”

Azariah went on to inform the king that, if he followed the words of the Lord he would be helped by Him. Asa began dismantling all the temples, shrines and altars set up by Solomon, and he repaired the altars to Jehovah that had fallen into disuse, and initiated the sacrifices once again. Any Israelite who would not worship the God of Israel was put to death. He even deposed his powerful and evil grandmother, Maacah, because she had set up an idolatrous Asherah pole.

But Asa, it is said, although he removed idolatry from the cities, *“did not remove all the high places”* (heathen worship sites on hills, mountains and passes). Nevertheless, the Scriptures said of him: *“the heart of Asa was perfect all his days.”* This was allowed to be said of him despite the fact that he later used the sacred Temple vessels as a bribe for help from a heathen king. God’s message to him was:

“Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed (perfect:KJV) to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war”⁴⁴.

The judgment made Asa angry, and he responded by throwing the prophet into prison and brutally intimidating his people. Shortly

⁴⁴2 Chronicles 16:7-9

afterwards he was afflicted by a loathsome gangrene of his feet, and it is said *"he sought doctors but not the Lord"*. He died in great distress, and had to be buried with flowers and perfumes to conceal the putrescent odour.

The lesson from Asa is that, while he knew how to *"be perfect"*, and could walk in this way before God, it was no guarantee that *"once perfect always perfect."* He did not reach a perfect state; he attained a process, at least, of perfectibility. It was because he mistook the latter for the former that he failed to maintain the process, and lapsed into defeat and ignominy.

Job

Of Job it was said he was *"perfect and upright, feared God and shunned evil."* God said: *"There is no-one on earth like him."* When God used these words about Job he did so in heaven, in the presence of the witnessing Satan and angels. Satan did not challenge their veracity, but he accused God of providing Job with circumstances in his life which made it easy for him to be perfect.

In his great work on *Faust*, Goethe has Mephistopheles reply to God in circumstances similar to Job's:

Mephistopheles:

*"Forsooth! He serves you after strange devices:
No earthly meat or drink the fool suffices:
Half conscious of his frenzied, crazed unrest,
The fairest stars from Heaven he requireth,
From Earth the highest raptures and the best,
And all the near and far that he desireth
Fails to subdue the tumult of his breast.*

The Lord:

*Though still confused his service unto Me,
I soon shall lead him to a clearer morning.
Sees not the gardener, even while buds his tree,
Both flower and fruit the future years adorning?..."*

Job's subsequent history, under the most intense sufferings

imposed by Satan, and permitted by God, were a test of his desire to be perfect before God. Between the parameters of “*fearing God*” and “*shunning evil*”, in a situation of utmost extremity and unremitting attack by Satan, even in the midst of his most vitriolic diatribes against God for His absence and apparent neglect, Job did not sin. So that at the end his time of trial God twice said of him to his companions: “*You have not spoken of me what is right like my servant Job has.*”

Deprived of family, wealth, possessions, health, home, and social acceptance, Job continued perfect before God. Satan could laugh with delight, and angels tremble with apprehension, at the vehemence of Job’s language to and about God as he challenged every attack on his integrity, but still *Job remained perfect before God*. Job himself was not conscious of that perfection—in fact, he could say of himself, “*I am vile . . . If I justify myself, my own mouth condemns me: if I say, ‘I am perfect’, it shall prove me perverse.*”

Job went on to argue that “*although I were perfect, yet would I not know my own soul; I would despise my life.*” He knew that to be self-consciously perfect was a contradiction in terms. To be perfect it was necessary to be humble enough not to be aware of it. Job had no concern for himself, or for what others thought of him. His only concern was to live a life well-pleasing to God. His conclusions regarding himself were:

“Though I were righteous in my own apprehension, and my own heart did not condemn me, yet God is greater than my heart, and knows there are secret errors and faults of mine which I do not and cannot understand, and therefore I would not answer.”

If God chose to designate his life “*perfect*”, then that satisfied him.
Hezekiah

Hezekiah was king at a crucial period in Israel’s history, when the northern and southern portions of the nation were being torn apart by internal strife and wars with Egypt and Assyria. Hezekiah had restored the services and worship of the Temple, according to the instructions of David; or, at least, he initiated them, but because few really knew how to conduct them properly, and few of the priests were properly sanctified, he ordered the ceremonies to take place on

the fourteenth day of the second month, rather than of the God-commanded first month. He asked God to pardon them for this alteration, and God agreed. In the fourteenth year of a reign in which he sought to bring the Israelites back to obedience to God's commandments, he became seriously ill. Isaiah the prophet came to him to confirm that God's time for him to die had arrived.

Hezekiah was distressed. He was only thirty-nine years of age. So he prayed intensely to God:

"Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight."

God did not confirm that Hezekiah had a "perfect heart", but neither did He deny it. And he answered Hezekiah's prayer by giving him another fifteen years of life. But this respite for Hezekiah did not result in a more consecrated life. During this period, when, it is said, "God left him to try him, to see what was in his heart," in a fit of pride he foolishly showed his possessions, and the sacred treasures of the Temple, to visiting Babylonians. This stimulated their avarice, and they determined to possess them for themselves. Isaiah told Hezekiah the judgment of God:

"The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Hezekiah let pride destroy his acknowledged perfect walk with God.

After Hezekiah—or, perhaps more correctly, after the Dispersion of Israel to Assyria and Judah to Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple—there is no mention of anyone else being perfect before God. Until the time of Jesus and his public ministry.

Jesus

The gospel of Jesus the Messiah—bridging the gap between God and His alienated creatures—was established on two "pillar-imperatives": one, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well"⁴⁵; and, two,

⁴⁵Matthew 6:34

its related, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter into the kingdom of heaven”.⁴⁶ These two “pillar-imperatives” support the third “span-imperative” bridging the gap between the creature and the Creator: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”.⁴⁷

These three imperatives comprise “the truth of the gospel” — all the remainder of Christ’s teachings—as contained in the Christian Manifesto, the Sermon on the Mount. All truth is not contained in the Sermon on the Mount, but all truth is certainly enshrined within it, does not exist without it, and is represented in the person of Jesus himself who delivered it. The fundamental principles of all later revelation conditioning individual and social conduct are contained in the moral and ethical standards of the kingdom of God uttered by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

The kingdom of God in both *Old* and *New Testaments* was, and is, not an entity with boundaries; but rather a state, or condition, where God is acknowledged as sovereign. The citizens of that kingdom in both *Old* and *New Testaments* are “priests, holy priests, offering spiritual sacrifices”, and as such are to be perfect before God, because without holiness no person can be in the presence of God.

Jesus follows the above-mentioned “three imperatives” immediately with the words:

“Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them; if you do you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

From this it is clear that there are two forms of “righteousness” required of Jesus’ followers in their aspirations to be perfect: God’s own righteousness, and our acts of righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees, etc. The former is what all evangelical Christians believe to be the “imputed righteousness” bestowed on all believers who accept Christ as their personal Saviour through his sacrificial death on their behalf, and which allows them to present themselves “blameless”, or “perfect”, before God in heaven.

Unfortunately, they usually stop there and—if they think about it at all—they might grudgingly and uneasily concede that what the Apostle Paul designated “deeds done in the body” could be considered “acts of righteousness”, and suitably rewarded or punished by God in

⁴⁶Matthew 5:20

⁴⁷Matthew 5:40

their commission or omission.⁴⁸ Yet, as we shall see later, the Apostles Paul, Peter, James and John, all accepted and taught not only an aspiration to be perfect, but a positive commitment to a walk devoted to that as a possible goal in their own lifetime.

What is even more significant is the context in which Jesus declared that goal. He did not state it in the context of an inspirational discussion on holiness or Spirit-power, but interspersed with challenges such as *“Do not resist an evil person . . . turn the other cheek . . . if someone sues you, give away your tunic . . . give to whoever asks you . . . love your enemies . . .”*

When he said *“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”* he had just been talking about that same heavenly Father sending sun and rain on the good and evil alike. He was not asking them to donate money ostentatiously to worthy causes, or to go conspicuously to places of worship, or to witness publicly in the streets, or to pray sanctimoniously and repetitively, or to draw attention to their excessive piety and humility, as contributions to that spiritual perfection. In fact, he specifically denounced all of that as sheer hypocrisy. All of this kind of self-conscious *“righteousness”*, he said, is what the religious professionals and hypocrites practice. Whatever self-examination was involved in these performances was both mindless and mordant.

Jesus did not teach perfection of the believer because of the ideal state that it offered, nor even of the transforming power that it bestowed, but because of the ultimate goal that it inspired: *“ . . . as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Then he immediately applied it to the practical demands of daily living: *“do your acts of righteousness . . . give to the needy . . . Your will be done on earth . . . daily bread . . . forgive debtors . . . temptations . . . the evil one . . .”* Nor was it just something to spread over one’s lifetime; it was to be done now.

For Jesus, in his personal responsibility, that meant rejection of his family and to be thought *“insane”* by them; to be despised, and homeless, and misunderstood by his closest companions; to touch lepers, fraternize with social outcasts, refuse to conduct healing campaigns, seek solitude instead of personal acclaim, not call on angels as evidence of his closeness to God, and die an apparent

⁴⁸1 Corinthians 3:13-15

failure by the political, social, and religious standards of his time.

Jesus not only aspired to be perfect before God in his lifetime, and not only expected his disciples to aspire likewise, he also expected it from a practicing Jew. When a rich young ruler came to him to ask about obtaining eternal life Jesus first told him, *"If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."* When the young man heard the list recited by Jesus he said that he had kept them all and still lacked something. Jesus then said to him: *"If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor . . . Then come, follow me."* The rich young ruler was unable to meet such a challenge, and went away sad, because, it is said, *"he had great wealth."* Presumably, had he responded to Jesus' challenge he would have been able to realize the goal so explicitly stated by Jesus—*"If you want to be perfect."*

In his last great conversation with his disciples before going to be crucified, Jesus prayed to his Father on their behalf. In the course of that prayer he said,

"The glory that Thou hast given me I have given them; that they may be one as even we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one . . ."

This is the ultimate goal for every believer: to be made perfect in one with the heavenly Father. This goal was made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for every one. But it is something that will only be realized in its completeness experientially in heaven; here, on earth, it is anticipated spiritually by faith. On earth, even Jesus knew what it was to be separated from his Father when, on the cross, he said, *"My God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Here on earth the true Christian has to live the promise and experience implicit in Jesus' prayer—*"they may be perfect in one"*. That means the *capacity* to be perfect as God is perfect, to be holy as God is holy, to be perfect related to our heavenly Father at all times by faith in the promises of God and His Son, Jesus the Messiah.

Paul

The Apostle Paul taught about the possibility of being perfect to *Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,*

Thessalonians—possibly to *Hebrews* in almost every chapter, if he was the author of that *Letter*—and to his young protégé, Timothy.

In *Romans* he speaks of knowing the “*perfect will of God*” (12:3); in *I Corinthians* of “*perfect wisdom*” (2:6); in *II Corinthians* of “*strength being made perfect in weakness*” (12:9), and again of “*our prayer is for your perfection*” and to “*be perfect*” (13:9); in *Galatians* against “*being made perfect by the flesh*” (3:3); in *Ephesians* of “*growing into the perfect man*” (4:13); in *Philippians* of “*to many as be perfect*” to press on to perfection (3:15); in *Colossians* of “*presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus*”, and that they might be “*perfect and complete in all the will of God*” (1:28); in *I Thessalonians* that God’s “*might perfect that which is lacking in your faith*” (3:10); in *2 Timothy* that all Scripture is given by God that “*the man of God may be perfect*” (3:17).

In the *Epistle to the Hebrews* Jesus is “*made perfect*” (2:10); believers are urged to “*leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on to perfection*” (6:1); the Law “*made nothing perfect*” (7:19); the offerings of the Tabernacle and Temple “*did not make him that did the service perfect*” (9:9); the Christ is “*a more perfect tabernacle*” (9:11); that “*(the faithful) might together with us be made perfect*” (11:40); the “*spirits of just men made perfect*” (12:23); pray that “*the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do His will*” (13:21).

James

The Apostle James followed Paul in his emphasis on seeking to be perfect. He opened his *Epistle* by advocating “*let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing*” (1:4). He goes on to show how through works faith is made perfect; and that anyone who is never at fault in what he says is “*a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check*” (3:12).

Peter

The Apostle Peter prayed in his *First Epistle* that “*The God of all grace . . . after you have suffered a while, make you perfect*” (5:10).

John

The Apostle John speaks in his *First Epistle* of “*herein is our love*

made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment" (4:17); that *"perfect love casts out fear"* (4:18), and *"he that feareth is not made perfect in love"* (5:10).

In his *Book of Revelation* he records the condemnation of Christ against the Seven Churches, especially Sardis, *"for I have not found your works perfect before God"* (3:2).

It seems incontrovertible from these Scriptural examples from *Old and New Testaments*, that God's will is for men and women to strive for perfectibility in their lifetimes, and that He provided for them to aspire and to realize that goal. The fact that few attained perfection for any length of time, if at all, does not diminish in any way from the Christian's responsibility to aspire to reach the prize. In the words of Paul: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me . . ."* That is perfectibility on the way to perfection.

Not to strive for perfection is an indication of a lack of faith in reaching for that prize. It is easier to believe that perfection or perfectibility is not possible, or even that it is not important, and do nothing about it, than to admit to oneself that for most of our lives we have been remiss in not laying hold of all that God has provided for us in Christ Jesus. There are even the casuists who argue that to desire such a thing is an indication of an unhealthy spiritual arrogance, a desire to be part of an unScriptural elite, a Gnostic heresy. These people are the most dangerous of all to the true witness of the faith that is provided for all believers in Christ Jesus.

In his essay, *"Christian Perfection"*, Dr PT Forsyth says:

"Christian perfection is not a perfection of culture. It is not a thing of ideas or of finish. Such perfection is for the select few, for a natural elect. It is the perfection of an elite. This is so even with ethical culture. Its fine programme is yet no gospel. The soul's true and universal perfection is of faith. It is a perfection of attitude rather than of achievement, of relation more than of realization, of trust more than of behaviour . . ."

"Look to the faith and the conduct must come. True faith has all ideal conduct in its heart and, what is more, in its power. And it is the

only thing that has it...What Christ always demanded of those who came to Him was not character, not achievement, but faith, trust. It was faith in Himself as God's Grace. It was trust, not in His manner but in His message, His gospel. That was the one demand of God; and to answer it is perfection. Obedience to God's one comprehensive demand must be perfection . . . That is to say, perfection is not sanctity but faith . . ." (his emphasis)

Perfection, as Jesus taught it, was not a matter of the believer's performance before God as Judge, but of his or her relationship to God as Saviour. Whatever emphasizes personal achievement at the expense of spiritual commitment is a departure from the divine record of perfection. Like Paul each believer must "*press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*", a perfectibility that makes us ultimately "*perfect like God*".

Now, as I look backward at my life, and look forward to my death, I realise how often I have fallen from the divine standard; but I am glad that I have made the attempt. I am acutely aware that immediately after death I will shortly face my Lord at his judgement seat to give an account of words spoken and actions done. But once that is completed, and I have met Meg and the other members of my family in heaven, I will eagerly await a whole eternity of expectation ahead.

PART TWO
TRANSLATION OF THE
OVERCOMERS
OR
RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

TIMELINE

1st Trumpet_7 Judgements (Wars)_7th Trumpet_2nd Coming
RAPTURE_”Overcomers”_7 Year Tribulations_Red Dragon_
Armageddon_Millennium

What is the after-death body like?

“There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; the beauty of heavenly bodies is different from the beauty of earthly bodies. The sun has its own beauty, the moon another beauty, and the stars a different beauty; even among the stars there are different kinds of beauty.”

I Corinthians 15:40-41 Good News New Testament

Spiritual Transformation

The Apostle Paul said to the Philippian believers regarding his own anticipated death: *“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Or, put another way, *“For me, to live on earth is Christ in me, and to die is more Christ with me.”* He went on to add: *“I am torn between the two (that is, living or dying); I desire to die and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body”*.⁴⁹

In his final years Paul was isolated in prison in Rome, yet he produced his inspirational *Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*.

⁴⁹Philippians 1:20-21

While my physical circumstances are not comparable in any way with Paul's, compared with my former life I am limited in health, in travel, and in personal relationships. My life has been narrowed down to a single room, a computer, and time to reflect on what lies ahead; and even these are slowly diminishing as eyesight fails, hands tremble, and memory disappears. But as physical abilities diminish it means more time to reflect on present and future realities.

Regeneration, or new life, in a Christian believer is more than mere conversion (meaning "*to turn around*"); it is an implantation of the resurrected Christ by faith of the individual which transforms him or her into being "*a new creation in Christ Jesus*", born anew to become like Christ in every aspect of his or her life. Jews believing in Jehovah, or Islamists believing in Allah, are *subjects* in the "*kingdom of God*" if they accept the sovereignty of God in their daily lives, but they are not *children* in the "*family of God*" through new birth by the Spirit of God. This major distinction means there is no way that such "*subjects in the kingdom of God*" can be made "*perfect like God*" or "*children in the family of God*"; they are without the perfecting action of the Spirit of God in their lives. With their minds they may have chosen to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in their daily lives, but their spirits are without the transforming power of the Spirit of God to change them from sinners into saints.

This is a very important distinction, because after death it determines the transformation of the *regenerated* individual to be with "*Christ in*" him or her in "*a glorified body*" as the Bride of Christ fit for Paradise and the eternal Presence of God. The Apostle Paul describes it being nothing less than "*like the body of Christ*":

*"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await our Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transfer our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body".*⁵⁰ (my emphasis)

This does not mean that the believer will become like the physical person of Jesus at the age of thirty-three when he died; but rather the maturity of the perfectly balanced character of Christ Jesus our Lord⁵¹. This transformation after death into a "*glorified body*" altogether different from the human physical shell, or "*tent*" or

⁵⁰Philippians 3:20-21

⁵¹Ephesians 4:13

"envelope" used in one's lifetime, into a body like Christ's own, is explained by the Apostle Paul in a magnificent illustration in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain. But God gives it a body as he pleases, and to each seed its own body".⁵²

In other words, as Jesus explained to his disciples, the grain or seed that is sown—small, shrivelled, hard, ugly—bears no relation to the growing stalk of ripened wheat, or beauty of the full-grown rose. Yet the one is contained within the other, and is not only identified with it but is actually energized by it and a vital part of it. What both Jesus and Paul are saying is that the human body contains a vital element, analogous to the vital germ in a seed of corn, which does not perish when the enveloping husk of the seed dies in the soil, but becomes the fruitful seed of the new living shoot being transformed to live in a new environment. The post-resurrection body of Jesus was able to pass through a locked door into the room where incredulous disciples were gathered; and at the same time it could turn up several miles away to others on the roads to Bethany and Emmaeus, and then dramatically disappear. His after-death body was also able to eat food on two occasions, and presumably had the natural consequence to excrete it.

Obviously, the resurrected body, the after-death glorified body, is not the same as the pre-death physical body or *"shell"*, whatever extra powers it may have. When the body is buried or burned after death it disappears and cannot be reconstituted. If buried, it decomposes and eventually it becomes one with the soil, is absorbed into plants and grass, is eaten by insects and animals, and is no more. But the mind does not die with the body, because as was noted in the story of the rich man and poor man, the rich man at least has the mental recollection of his past life. The body's spirit returns to God who gave it originally when He *"breathed into man and he became a living soul"*.

⁵²1 Corinthians 15:35-38

C.S. Lewis has written in *Beyond Personality*:

“The records represent Christ as passing after death (as no man had passed before) neither into a purely, that is, negatively, ‘spiritual’ mode of existence nor into a ‘natural’ life such as we know, but into a life which has its own, new nature. It represents Him as withdrawing six weeks later, into some different mode of existence . . . This presumably means that He is about to create that whole new nature which will provide the environment or conditions for His glorified humanity and, in Him, for ours . . . We must, indeed, believe the risen body to be extremely different from the mortal body; but the existence, in that new state, of anything that could be described as ‘body’ at all, involves some sort of spatial relations and in the long run a whole new universe. That is the picture—not of un-making, but of re-making . . .”

As Christians it has been said: *“We die once, but are born twice”*. Another quotation about after-death, this from the Scottish theologian, Dr P. T. Forsyth, in his *God the Holy Father*: reads

“The New Testament connects the idea of immortality with that of resurrection. Its nature is given in Christ’s. It is not the resurrection of the flesh but of a body—not of matter but of form. The idea of resurrection means much more than repristination (or, recovering) of the old life under happier circumstances . . . Christ came back to give effect to what He had done. He came back, His body (not His flesh), His person came back to be the Holy Spirit of all that He had done. That is the real value of the resurrection. It gives the next life a realism drawn from its moral reality common and continuous with this . . . We take with us the character we made . . . The other life is not the negation and arrest of this. Nor is it mere restitution . . . it is not happiness and it is not power, but it is perfection—which is the growth of God’s image and glory as our destiny”. (my emphasis)

This is the vision which inspired the Apostle Paul, especially when he said:

“While we live in this earthly tent we are depressed with a feeling of

oppression; not because we want to get rid of this earthly body, but we would prefer to have the heavenly one to overlay it, so that what is mortal will be transformed by life. God is the one who prepared us for this change, and He has given us His Spirit as the guarantee of all that He still has in store for us."

What I understand from this divine revelation to the Apostle Paul is that when I die my spirit, which has been "changed" by sixty years of being controlled by the Spirit of God, leaves the body and returns to God who gave it to me. But before my spirit enters the presence of God I must first appear before the "*judgement seat of Christ*"⁵³, the forum where all the words I have spoken and all the deeds I have done are weighed in the balance to determine their value. This evaluation was stated by the Apostle Paul to be metaphorically either "*gold silver, precious stones*" for spiritually approved activities; or, alternatively, "*wood, hay, stubble*" for spiritually worthless activities.

With this purging process completed I hope to be found worthy of the attributed "*Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of the Lord*". This is what I think Paul means when he made the earlier statement of "*the heavenly body put on . . . (and) transformed by life*". The earlier earthly body, with its earthly activities, is characterised by the Greek word *bios*, "*life*" in its crude mortal form; but the after-death "*changed*" body is "*transformed by life*", and the word used is *zoë*, "*life*" as a principle, "*life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in himself and which He gave to His Incarnate Son to have in himself.*"⁵⁴ With this life implanted in me I will be fit to live in the presence of God, and partake of all that He has said will follow and which will be detailed later in the book.

One of the most beautiful earthly examples of the transformation which takes place is when a butterfly is born. At first simply a worm, crawling on the earth, it is tied to the lower world of dirt and darkness. Then it seems to die, folded up in the narrow shell of the chrysalis. Finally, out of that restraining "*coffin*" it struggles forth into the glorious winged splendour of the dipping, darting creature that delights all eyes. Science informs us that the gloriously varied beauty of designs in the wings of different butterflies is already determined in the ugly chrysalis.

⁵³2 Corinthians 5:10

⁵⁴W.E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words—page 336

To the individual being “*transformed into Christ-likeness*” while still alive the challenges of life’s circumstances comprise both the cosmic and personal conflicts between “*good and evil*”, between God and satanic evil in the life of that individual. Spiritual growth is determined by the increasing amount of values acquired through experience in those conflicts, whose worth and relevance was pre-determined by God. As the spiritual values are proved so is the individual’s faith increased, and expectation and confidence raised to meet the next challenges. The idea, or conviction, that attending a weekly church service, or even several weekly church services, accumulates spiritual values, is ludicrous; that is only a “*seat-warming*” exercise, with no spiritual value in God’s sight. The spiritually transformed Christian has a direct communication with God through the implanted Holy Spirit at conversion, and God expects that communication to be used in a daily relationship with Him in a “*sanctifying*” process that turns a sinning individual into a saint fit for the presence of God. The object of the death and resurrection of Jesus was not just to make individuals care-free, but to make them “*perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect*”, in the words of Jesus.

Immediately after death, the Scriptures inform us, there comes judgement—“*the judgement seat of Christ.*”, as described earlier. At that judgement seat there is divinely determined the “*gold, silver and precious stones*” spiritual *inheritances* of those in the family of God who have victoriously earned the princely crowns to “*reign with Christ*”; and there are those whose earthly activities are worthless “*wood, hay and stubble*”, and whose heavenly *rewards* are commensurate with what survives the fire of purging judgement.⁵⁵ At that judgement seat the heavenly “*Book of Life*” containing the names of all those who have chosen to be identified with Christ as “*Christians*” will have to give an account of how “*Christ-like*” they lived their lives, not how often they attended church services or donated to charities.

When that individual stands in the paradisaal presence of God and hears the divine words of approval, “*Well done, my good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of the Lord*” there are two possibilities for

⁵⁵1 Corinthians 3: 12-15 and Revelation chapters 2 and 3

that individual: (i), the translation, or rapture, of the true believers at *"the end of the age"* foretold by Jesus; or (ii), the *"purging"* process of being *"saved as by fire"* in passing through the apocalyptic judgements at that time.

The “Overcomers”

“To him who overcomes, who conforms to my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations, to rule them with a rod of iron and break them to pieces like clay pots, with the same authority I received from my Father”.

Revelation 2:26-28 *Good News New Testament*

Believers and Unbelievers

When the “gospel”, or good news of God’s offer of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, was first preached by the Apostles, there was a clear distinction between “believers” and “unbelievers”. This was probably because to become a believer involved persecution and punishment from both Jewish rabbis and Roman officials. But, within the lifetime of the Apostles, and the rapid spread of this gospel throughout the then Middle East, a third category emerged, “converts”, or “God-fearers”, who practiced a superficial version of a selection of the moral teachings of Jesus or of the Apostle Paul. When Jesus was still alive

he had warned such individuals:

*“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters,—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple, And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple . . . Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple . . .”*⁵⁶ (my emphasis)

Let me give a personal experience of this challenge as presented by Jesus. We had scarcely settled into a home in California, USA, temporarily provided by a former patient of Meg’s, when I was completely incapacitated by an excruciating neck pain. From her own experience Meg diagnosed it as a pinched nerve between the sixth and seventh cervical vertebrae, rendering me helpless, and it seemed that nothing could be done about it. I could not drive the van (and Meg had not been able to drive it, either, because she had a chronic back pain from her youth and could not manipulate the stiff clutch and gears), nor go shopping. I could not even move from the downstairs couch to go to the toilet. We had no money or health insurance to see doctors or go to hospital. It looked as if we had reached the end of the road of Meg’s research at last. For even if we returned to Britain we had no home, no money and, if I had an operation on my back, it only had a fifty per cent chance of being successful.

As if that were not enough gloom, the family news from UK was bad. I had not been able to go to my father’s funeral; my mother had a series of shocks, and was left very frail; our daughter, Myrrh, had been worryingly sick for months, and had just been diagnosed as suffering from mononucleosis; Sean, our younger son, had been struck by a car while cycling home from university.

I was lying on the couch one day, contemplating our disastrous situation, and trying to work out some kind of scenario for the present and future, when Meg brought in the morning’s mail. She passed me over a letter, holding it in front of me to read where I lay on the couch, because I was unable to sit up.

It was from Luci Shaw, an old friend and probably America’s leading Christian poet. She and her husband owned a publishing company and wanted to know if Meg would write a book about her

⁵⁶ Luke 14: 25-27, 33

treatment. She also included in her letter a copy of her most recent poem. I read it, then read it again and again, while my despairing and darkened world changed around me:

*"Perform impossibilities
or perish. Thrust out now
the unseasonal figs
among your leaves. Expect
the mountain to be moved.
Hate parents, friends and all
materiality. Love every enemy.
Forgive more times than seventy
seven. Camel-like, squeeze by
into the kingdom through
the needle's eye. All fear quell.
Hack off your hand, or else,
unbloodied, go to hell.*

*Thus the divine unreason.
Despairing now, you cry
with earthy logic - How?
and I, your God, reply:
Leap from your weedy shallows.
Dive into the moving water.
Eyeless, learn to see
truly. Find in my folly your
true sanity. Then, Spirit-driven,
run on my narrow way, sure
as a child. Probe, hold
my unhealed hand, and,
bloody, enter heaven."*

I let the words flow through me, permeating my spiritual being with their inspirational Scriptural meanings, lighting up the dark corners where despair had lurked, frustrating all vision. Perform impossibilities or perish! How true these words were in my own experience, yet how easily forgotten in the harsh circumstances of life.

My gaze wandered from the couch to the kitchen where Meg was working; to the staircase which I had not climbed for some weeks. And I thought of the van outside, the road steeply winding down the hillside to the stores, and then to the highways leading out across America, and the airways of the world. I ruminated on the plans we had made, and the challenges that lay beyond them yet to be considered. I remembered other occasions when I had to make decisions involving possible death, and concluded that the issues facing me now, while not so urgent nor so critical from a physical standpoint, were spiritually more immediately critical.

God had brought me to this moment for a purpose. He had made it important for His own reasons. What were they? The seemingly impossible situation was only, in Luci's phrase, "*the divine unreason*" to me; not to God. It took me several days to work out but at the end I knew not only "*why?*" but "*how?*"

To drive home the lesson, Jesus gave the account of a man who gave a great banquet and invited many guests. But one said he must be excused as he had just bought a field and must inspect it. Another said he had just bought a yoke of oxen and must try them. Still another said that he had just got married and could not come. The host who made the offer was angry and he ordered his servants to go out in the streets and alleys of the city and bring in the poor, crippled, blind and lame, saying "*Not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.*"⁵⁷

In other words, Jesus was emphasising that all those who chose to be his disciples must be "*overcomers*", not only of this world's challenges, but also of the nether world's satanic temptations. In modern terminology, they were to be "*fundamentalists*", meaning those who passionately practice primary beliefs of any system of values. It is not the derogatory attribution that has emerged recently in political circles with fundamentalism as a pejorative derivation from the time of the French Revolution "*Enlightenment*" in the late eighteenth century to decry and dismiss anything beyond the duality of "*mind and body*" as religious rubbish. Jesus was a fundamentalist teacher and prophet who said to his disciples regarding witnessing for him, "*Don't be afraid; I have overcome the world.*"

⁵⁷ Luke 14: 14-34

So, according to Jesus, these are "*overcomers*", true believers who will inherit all the promises of God reserved for children of the family of God who are faithful to the commands of their Master; These "*true believers*" are the "*overcomers*" in the battle of life's challenges, the children of the family of God who form the true "*Church of Jesus Christ*" who will inherit "*ruling with Christ*" in their promised future. The "*converts*", or lukewarm believers in any religion will have rewards in the hereafter appropriate for their performances on earth; "*citizens in the kingdom of God*", subjects who will be ruled over by the "*overcomers*" in the hereafter. The "*unbelievers*" are those who make no attempt, through carelessness or outright rejection of God, to find out their destinies and, like "*the rich man*", will be cast into their self-chosen hell for all eternity.

From the first until the eighteenth century most of the few people able read the Bible did so as a form of realistic narrative written by servants or prophets of God of previous centuries. It was understood as a God-inspired and God-purposed record of the world from the Creation to the Apocalypse. But since the eighteenth century European "*Enlightenment*", and the emergence of "*secular democracy*" with its implicit when not explicit exclusion of God from daily life, the Biblical Scriptures were adapted to fit into "*secular reality*". Where their duality world did not they were dismissed as "*myths*", and the Scriptures no longer regarded as "*real*".

Revelation or Apocalypse

The so-called *Revelation of St John the Divine*, to give the final book in the Bible its most common *Authorised Version* title, was a special victim of this process. *The Apocalypse*, to give the book its proper title, in its record of the experience of the Apostle John is a "*real*" story, a divinely authorised account of the consummation of history from God himself, an affirmation of all that was foretold by the prophets and validated by Jesus himself. The *Apocalypse* is unfolded through a series of consecutive "*Visions*" revealed by God to the Apostle John, with the interpretations either given by Jesus himself or by appointed angelic messengers. It is the only book in the whole canon of Scripture of which it is said – not once but twice⁵⁴

⁵⁸ Revelation 1:3, 22:7

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it, and take to heart what is written in it . . . Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”

It should be noted that there is a distinct difference between the “prophecy” and “apocalypse” associated with the Visions. The Apostle Peter described prophecy:

“. . . the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ which was in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things . . .”⁵⁹

Prophecy is concerned with events in the future and their impact upon contemporary earthly circumstances; on the other hand *apocalypse* is principally concerned with events in heaven, and only peripherally concerned with their impact on earth, if at all. Further, *prophecy* is usually associated with easily understood imagery, while *apocalypse* is usually oblique and esoteric. This is evident from the statement of Jesus to John regarding the *Apocalypse*: “*And now I have told you before it could come to pass that, when it came to pass, you might believe.*”

In the *New Testament* the word *apocalypse* is used in two ways: subjective and objective:⁶⁰ the subjective is that which is presented to the mind directly, usually to demonstrate the acts of God, or person of God; the objective use is when something is presented to the senses, sight and hearing, such as the revelation of Christ to Paul on the road to Damascus. The *Apocalypse*, meaning “*revealed*”, is often confused with Armageddon; or even the Apocrypha having the opposite meaning “*concealed, not authentic*”; the latter arising from confusion with the collection of books appearing in some Bibles between the *Old* and *New Testaments* adopted and held sacred by the Roman Catholic Church

Historically, the esoteric character of the last book of the *New Testament* with its many metaphorical visions has elicited a

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 1:10-12

⁶⁰ W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*—page 292

prejudice, and even antagonism, that has militated against it being preached in churches let alone being appreciated or its contents applied in practical terms to the lives of believers. Even the major institutional churches avoid the first two chapters concerning the *Letters to the Seven Churches* of the *Apocalypse* to be read in their public services. According to the noted Archbishop Trench of the Church of England it is impossible, if the canons of the Anglican Church are to be followed, for these *Seven Letters* to be read:

"It is very much to be regretted that, while every chapter of every other book of the New Testament is set forth to be read in Church, and wherever there is a daily service, is read in Church, three times in the year, and some or portions of some, oftener, while even of the Apocalypse itself two chapters and portions of others have been admitted into the service, under no circumstances whatever can the second and third chapters ever be heard in the congregation". (his emphasis)

Historically, the *Apocalypse* has been subjected to three broad schools of interpretation: (i) the *Visions* were said to be of early Christian events which were the product of human ingenuity, and not divine revelation: (ii) the *Visions* were real prophecies regarding the course of the Church's history from the fall of Jerusalem to the return of Christ and, as such, were highly colourful and complex exegeses, with political and religious prognostications and timetables: or (iii) the *Visions* were interpreted as allegorical and spiritual

This reluctance, prejudice or fear, in interpretations of the *Apocalypse* did not exist in the Plymouth Brethren "*assemblies*", or churches, amongst which I grew up, and still have a peripheral association. In the mid-nineteenth century they emerged with a remarkable group of scholars who believed and taught a return to the first century Biblical principles of church practice. From among them emerged two distinguished scholars, John Nelson Darby and Dr C.I.Scofield who, between them, produced a prophetic theory of interpretation emphasising the distinction between Israel and the Church, a literal interpretation of events, an emphasis on the future of the events, and the pre-millennial reign of Jesus Christ, which still predominates in evangelical circles. But another Brethren scholar,

GH Lang, taught a different aspect of the “*second coming*” of Jesus known as “*partial rapture*”, which divided the second coming into two segments: a coming “*to the air*” for his “*overcoming*” saints before the time of Tribulations, and a coming “*to the earth*” with his saints before the Millennium. I identify myself with GH Lang’s interpretation.

Jesus Christ is central in all the *Four Visions* recorded in the *Apocalypse*. In the *First Vision* the Apostle John is taken from the island of Patmos into the presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of the “*Overcoming Church*”; (1 v 13); in the *Second Vision* he is taken into heaven and shown Christ on the throne with authority over the world (4 v 12); in the *Third Vision* he is taken into the wilderness to see Christ confront Satan (17 v 3); and in the *Fourth Vision* he is taken up into a mountain to see Christ in all his glory for eternity (21 v 10). The *Four Visions* are divided into three sections: (i) “*the things which I saw*” —*past*; (ii), “*the things which are*” —*present*; and (iii) “*the things which shall be hereafter*” —*future*. The first two of the three sections, *past* and *present*, are covered quickly in the first few chapters of the *First Vision* and then, from that point forward, are revealed the *future* events.

Within this bird’s-eye view of the overall eternal purpose of God there is the inter-related purpose of God regarding the destinies of the *Old Testament Israel* and the *New Testament Church*. The veil between heaven and earth is drawn aside, showing how the angelic administration operates the divine will, and how this heavenly administration will be replaced and/or expanded to include the “*faithful Remnant Israel*” and the Church—defined in the first two chapters as “*overcomers of the world through faith*”. The *Apocalypse* most of all is an unveiling of the delight God the Father has in his Son, Jesus Christ—“*the Lamb and Lion of the royal tribe of Judah*”—and the glories of his divine inheritance in both earth and heaven.

The other, more catastrophic aspect of the *Apocalypse*, is the unveiling of the final judgement of God on all unbelievers who have rejected his provisions in both *Old* and *New Testaments*; and who have chosen instead to follow the great adversary, Satan, in his cosmic rebellion against God throughout earth’s history. Because

these rebellious human creatures and demonic angels have wreaked destruction on earth and in heaven, their related punishments are described in a series of cataclysmic "*Judgements*", culminating in the horrendous final Battle of Armageddon and eternal hell-fire.

I had been brought up absorbing these teachings but found them part of a Biblical academic framework, like Newton's mathematics or Einstein's relativity. It is only now as I face the reality of an imminent death, and consider them as a spiritual reality affecting me personally in the near rather than distant future, that they take on a new and challenging significance. How do the events relate to me personally as a potential participant, and not just to the Apostle John as a Biblical experience?

The details of the *Apocalypse* do not constitute a divine calendar to be "*ticked off*" as read; they are the explications of the divine consummation of earthly and heavenly history in view from before the foundation of the world. All divine history from Creation moved forward to the appearance of Jesus Christ and the three-plus years of his ministry; all final divine history will be concentrated in the second *Apocalypse* of Jesus Christ in the world's "*last days*". Everything between these two divine interventions—the rise and fall of empires, the ebb and flow of Jew and Gentile political circumstances, the successes and failures of the claimed "*divine revelations*" of Judaism, Christendom and Islam—are significant but irrelevant in the context of the looming *Apocalypse* of the "*Last Days*".

The early Church of the first few centuries experienced little of the later controversies regarding the significance of the *Apocalypse* because they anticipated an early return of their Messiah and Lord. The majority of early authors and commentators—Papias, personal friend of the Apostle John, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Jerome and Augustus—all accepted the Apostle John as the true author of the *Apocalypse* and its application to the early Church. The shift in emphasis in both expectation and interpretation began with the "*Papal Rome*" institutionalising of the Church under Constantine in the fourth century, and the "*city of God*" eschatology of Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century.⁶¹

In the *New Testament* the Apostle Paul, writing to the believers in

⁶¹ See my book GOD'S SECRET TRUTH: Church of the Messiah or Churchoid of Satan: available from www.classictravelbooks.com

Corinth, speaks of them as being enriched in every spiritual gift, confirmed in the testimony of Christ, and *“waiting for the Apocalypse, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”*. So, also Peter, writing about the trials of faith among his fellow believers, *“being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ.”*

Prophetically, Daniel’s visions incorporated three empires, and anticipated a future fourth empire. The first empire is named as Babylon; the second empire is named as Persia, the third empire is named as Greece; but the fourth empire is not named at all. Among Christian evangelicals in the twentieth century the fourth empire is generally thought to have been Rome, but there is absolutely no basis for this interpretation. The fourth empire has no name in Scripture. What is significant is all three empires were only Scripturally important when their central capital was *in Babylon*. Rome’s ambitions were to reach Babylon but their empire never reached there. Hitler’s ambition was to reach Babylon, but he was never successful. No empire since Greece has had its centre in Babylon. The fourth empire is a spiritual one—Daniel’s *“stone out of the mountain”*—which will crush all others, to be revealed *“in the last days”*.

Meanwhile, the promise of Jesus to *“build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it”* continues to be evident world-wide—in the continents of Asia, Africa and South America, if not in Europe—with the number of *“overcomers”* multiplying daily. In Europe the number of both believers and converts is diminishing as the desire for life insurances, *“property ladders”*, twenty-five year mortgages, three bedrooms, two cars, two television sets, computers and mobile telephones for the family, is now the norm for Christians as well as unbelievers. Semi-believers, superficial converts who have *“made a profession”* at popular evangelical crusades, and then only attending a church once on Sunday, their bottoms on pews and their minds elsewhere, are at best *“nominal Christians”* whose only reward will be as subjects of the kingdom of God but with no association in the Church of the Messiah throughout eternity.

It is the *“overcomers”* who have suffered as they struggled,

as the Scriptures have described,

*“ . . . through faith, subdued kingdoms, fought for justice, shut the mouths of lions, triumphed over the fury of flames, faced down the terrors of persecutions and battles. They were tortured, chained, flogged, burned, scourged, blinded, raped, stoned, sawed, exiled from homes and countries”. None of them received what had been promised in the Scriptures, but God had prepared something better for these overcomers — they would be made ‘perfect like God’.”*⁶² (my emphasis)

⁶² Hebrews 11:33-40

What is God's True Church?

"God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things. The church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere."

Ephesians 1:22-23: *Good News New Testament*

Church of the Messiah and Jews

The use of the term "*Christian*" is unfortunate because it is based on the Greek word *christos* and hides the true application of the historic Hebrew word and description of the "*Messiah*". This would have made the true Church of Jesus properly the "*Church of the Messiah*", with its roots in the *Old Testament* prophecies, rather than the "*Church of Christ*" with its separatist connotations often mistakenly associated with the Apostle Paul in the *New Testament*. Jesus, while still alive on earth, declared: "*I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it*", and the Apostle Paul clearly stated "*the head of the church*

is *Christ*", but also made it clear that Jesus was the bridge between Israel and the Church and not the divider. What Jesus denounced throughout his lifetime was the Babylonian Judaism of the post-exile Jewish rabbis and not the *Pentateuch* of Moses. He declared emphatically, "I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."⁶³

The word for "church" which Jesus used was a common Greek word, *ekklesia*, meaning "an assembly of people called together for a special purpose". It had been used in the *Old Testament* Scriptures to denote the people of Israel as a religious unit, or congregation, so the term was familiar to all Jews. It was Jesus' use of the word to designate a personal and universal entity within the kingdom of God which was new. The pictorial imagery used by Jesus to describe the "Church" provided two totally new concepts: (i) the use of the word "build" indicated *building a house*, using the word "house" in its most comprehensive sense—e.g. "the house of the Lord"—but also in its single unit sense of adding brick to brick ("living stones"), or individual to individual; and (ii) the use of the word "prevail", in the confrontation with Satan, indicated *a body of people in contest or war*. The "Church of the Messiah", therefore, would be (i) a *Mediatory Building* composed of identifiable individuals (as in a "House of Justice"); and also (ii) a *Militant Body* composed of committed activists (as in the hymn "Like a Mighty Army is the Church of God").

The *Church of the Messiah*, according to Jesus, would be the centre of moral authority and spiritual power in any community. This was enshrined in his manifesto: "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The divine principles practiced in daily living in the world and the discipline associated with their breach were the responsibilities of approved spiritual people in the Church, and not some denominational accretions from the mists of the past, academically certificated clergy, or businessmen selected from the community. The spiritual power of the church would be evident in the presence of the Messiah in even small gatherings ("For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them"); and in the perceptions of spiritual decisions of spiritual people ("If two of you on earth agree

⁶³ Matthew 5:17

about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven").

Finally, Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God was being transferred from Old Israel and given to people who would practice its principles:

"I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."⁶⁴

But Paul did not mean permanent separation with this statement for he has made it clear in several places that a repentant Israel would also be forgiven by God, even if only a "Remnant" of the whole nation. Writing to the Roman church, composed mostly of Gentiles, he declared:

"The Jews are God's people; he made them his sons and revealed his glory to them; he made his covenants with them and gave them God's Law; they have the true worship; they have received God's promises; they are descended from Hebrew ancestors; and Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race . . ."⁶⁵

He went on to describe their relationship with the Church as he had received it from God:

"Some of the branches of the cultivated olive-tree have been broken off, and a branch of a wild olive-tree has been joined to it. You Gentiles are like that olive-tree, and now you share the strong spiritual life of the Jews. So then, you must not despise those who were broken off like branches. How can you be proud? You are just a branch, you don't support the roots—the roots support you."⁶⁶

With the initiation of the *Church of the Messiah* by Jesus and the Apostle Paul, blessings of the kingdom of God were transferred to a new theocracy, which would be different and more glorious than David's theocratic nation was to Saul's democratic failure. It would be Daniel's prophesied *"The sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey Him."*

This universal aspect of the *"Church of the Messiah"* is what is emphasised in the Apostle John's *Apocalypse* with both its rewards and judgements involving the *"True Church"* in the *"Seven Churches"*, and *"Remnant Israel"* purged in a series of unfolding judgements

⁶⁴ Matthew 21:43, 24:1, 28:13, 27:19

⁶⁵ Romans 9:4-5

⁶⁶ Romans 11:17-18

involving. (i) *The Messiah and the Church*; (chapters 1-3); (ii) *The Messiah and the World* (chapters 4-11); (iii) *The Messiah and Satan* (chapters 12-21); and (iv) *The Messiah and Eternity* (chapter 22).

The first four chapters of the *Apocalypse* are like the beginning of any book, with a "Contents" page and an "Introduction" before the actual events unfolded in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter 1 there is the central figure of God described in similar fashion as Daniel prophetically describes him in his vision of the last days of the world. In chapters 2-5 the "Church of the Messiah" is seen in heaven and then is not mentioned again in the *Apocalypse* until chapter 21.

In chapters 2 and 3 the "Church of the Messiah" is exclusively composed of "overcoming saints" as listed in the Seven Churches inheriting a seven-fold promised inheritance with the Messiah: (i) "to eat of the tree of life"; (ii) "not to be hurt of the second death"; (iii) "to eat of the hidden manna . . . given a white stone . . . a new name"; (iv) "given power over the nations" . . . "rule over them" . . . morning star . . . " (v) "white raiment . . . name not removed from the book of life . . . confess name . . ."; (vi) "a pillar in the temple . . . name of city of God and God's name . . . own name . . . "; (vii) "sit on Messiah's throne . . . companion and sup with him . . ."

Throughout the *Apocalypse* the Apostle John is said to be "in the Spirit" on four separate occasions: (i) in chapter 1 he is said to be in the Spirit "on the isle of Patmos", to learn about the destiny of the "overcoming" Church of the Messiah (vv 9,10); (ii) in chapter 4 he is "caught up to heaven" by the Spirit, to witness the Throne of God and Tribunal of Judgement (vv 1,2); (iii) in chapter 17 he is "carried away into the wilderness" by the Spirit, to witness the deliverance of the kingdom of God believers (v 3); and in (iv) chapter 21 he is "carried away to a great and high mountain" by the Spirit to witness the marriage ceremony of the Church of the Messiah and the conquering Ruler/Messiah (v10).

In the *Apocalypse* as in *Daniel*⁶⁷ God is seen as about to judge the world in seven judgements: (i) judgement on the Church; (ii) judgement on Remnant Israel believers; (iii) judgement on Jewish unbelievers; (iv) judgement on Gentile unbelievers; (v) judgement

⁶⁷ Daniel 7:9ff

on Babylon; (vi) judgement on angels, and (vii) judgement on Satan. What these judgements are is described in horrific detail of escalating catastrophic divine punishments during a period of seven years, ending with the unimaginable slaughter of the final battle of Armageddon.

All of the foregoing is anticipated in the *Apocalypse* chapter 4 where God, as the prophetic "*Ancient of Days*", takes his seat on the throne in the heavens. In chapters 4 and 5 the word "throne" is mentioned 15 times in the 25 verses, in six segments—throne set, round about throne, out of throne, before throne, midst of throne, sat on throne—with the Messiah as "*Lamb of God*", together with all those, angelic and human, who will exercise authority with him in the ultimate purged and redeemed "*new heavens and new earth*".

Of all the unfolding historical mysteries of God, the *two mystery judgments* of the last days of the world—the "*Seven Churches*", and "*Babylon the Great*"—are the most difficult to understand. That is because, with the earlier mysteries in previous chapters of this book, we are looking backwards at them historically with knowledge of the existing contemporary circumstances; while the judgments of the last days of the *Apocalypse* are ahead and still to take place. This historical span is stated explicitly by God himself in his opening words to John: "*Write what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later*"—in other words, John's commission in the *Apocalypse* would include the unfolding purpose of God from the beginning to the end of time.

The Church "Overcomers"

The 90-year-old John was in exile on the Mediterranean island of Patmos when he received the *First Vision*. The "*Seven Churches*" mentioned in the *Vision* were not especially distinctive at the time, except in that they were geographically close to each other (and all within the north-west corner of what is now modern Turkey), and were probably churches that John had previously visited. The two most important features of the *Vision* mystery were (i) the presence of Jesus the Messiah as "*Lamb/Ruler*", and (ii) the "*overcoming believers*" reigning with him:

*“On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: ‘ Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea . . .”*⁶⁸

The opening verse of John’s *Apocalypse* declares the purpose of God in giving the revelations to John:

“The revelation of Jesus the Messiah, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw . . .”

The word “soon” used here is unfortunate, because a more accurate meaning is “suddenly”, in the sense of something happening “swiftly” within a short period once begun, or “things which in their entirety must happen with speed”. It is the same thought expressed by Jesus some sixty years previously when he spoke of the same events “coming quickly”, or “coming swiftly”. What God was saying to John was, that at a point in time, the unfolding *Apocalypse* he was about to receive from God regarding Jesus the Messiah *would take place swiftly in sequence once begun*.

For the purpose of this particular Vision, Seven Churches were chosen by God, not because they were different from all other churches elsewhere but because they were in their seven-fold variety representative comprehensively of *what perfect churches should be despite adverse circumstances*. John probably had been to these churches, had seen the evidences of the recorded things practiced, just as he had seen the things practiced in churches in Jerusalem and other regions, and there was nothing unique about them—except their being selected by God for His apocalyptic purposes. Therefore, because they were representative of all churches at that time the prophetic significance of the Vision involving them meant that they were also representative for all time to come. Everything that was said to each church was, like all prophecies, for real and immediate application by all individuals and all churches *at that time*, but also the *near and distant future* to “the end of time”. This was in order that all churches everywhere reading the *Apocalypse* might conform to the one high standard of divine perfection, such as had been outlined previously by Paul in his several *Epistles*.

⁶⁸ Revelation 1:4

Those believers who exercised the spiritual responsibilities in the post-resurrection Church of the Messiah, listed in Paul's *Epistles*, are given the special designation of "overcomers" by God in the revelation of the mystery of the Seven Churches in Asia. They were distinguished from others in local churches elsewhere by a variety of internal and external characteristics which differentiated the nature of their "born-again inheritance" from the "lesser rewards" of those with lesser aspirations and performances. This is evident by the repetition of the word and necessity of "repentance" for lowering the standard of "perfection" set by God, where the word "repent" is directed to the practices of six of the seven listed churches.

Paul wrote seven *Epistles* to the churches, followed by the seven *Epistles* to individuals; the whole corpus making a comprehensive statement of the God-ordained universal ministry of "perfection" for the Church of the Messiah committed to him by God. This ideal of perfection for the Church is reflected in the Hebrew perfect number "seven" used for the *Epistles*. In chapters 2 and 3 of the *Apocalypse* the Church is defined as exclusively composed of "overcoming saints" listed in the Seven Churches inheriting a seven-fold promised identification with the Messiah: (i) "to eat of the tree of life"; (ii) "not to be hurt of the second death"; (iii) "to eat of the hidden manna . . . given a white stone . . . a new name"; (iv) "given power over the nations" . . . "rule over them" . . . morning star . . .": (v) "white raiment . . . name not removed from the book of life . . . confess name . . ."; (vi) "a pillar in the temple . . . name of city of God and God's name . . . own name . . ."; (vii) "sit on Messiah's throne . . . companion and sup with him . . ."

These seven different attributes have defined the different attainments they have inherited in their commitment to pursue the path of perfectability to be like their Lord and Master as defined by the Apostle Peter:

"Keep alert and set your hope completely on the reward which will be given you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Be obedient to God, and do not allow your lives to be shaped by those desires you had when you were still ignorant. Instead be holy in all that you do, just as God who called you is holy. The scripture says: 'Be holy as I am holy'".⁶⁹

⁶⁹ 1 Peter 1:14-16

Peter then goes on to specify what the divine virtues are by which sinful creatures can be holy as God is holy:

“God’s divine power has provided us with everything we need to live a truly spiritual life through our knowledge of the one who called us to share in his own glory and goodness. In this way he has given to us the very great and precious gifts he promised so that by means of these you may escape from the corruption in the world and instead share in the divine nature. Add to your faith, goodness; to your goodness, knowledge; to knowledge self-control; to self-control, endurance; to endurance, godliness, to godliness, brotherly kindness; to brotherly kindness, love.”

All of these seven virtues are within the capabilities of any individual desiring to “*be holy as God is holy*” with the help of the Spirit of God. It is this aspiration and accomplishment that makes the individual an “*overcomer*”, different in degree of commitment, and promised a commensurate share in the divine nature and holiness like God. The *Apocalypse* is a “*book of sevens*”: there are seven Visions, with the seven-fold ascription of glory to God and to the Lamb, the seven Spirits of God, the seven candlesticks, seven stars, seven lamps of fire, seven seals, seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb, seven angels with seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven heads of the Beast and seven crowns upon those heads, seven plagues, seven vials, seven mountains and seven regencies. There are over fifty “*sevens*” in the *Apocalypse*—and seven in the Hebrew Scriptures is the number of completion, of perfection.

The *Seven Letters to the Seven Churches* all have certain emphases in common, although their respective messages are different. These are also seven-fold: (i) there is the distinctive symbol of authority introducing each message; (ii) there is the expressed personal knowledge of affairs, and the commendation of the Lord; (iii) there is the distinctive charge against each; (iv) there is the command to repent; (v) there is the threat of judgment and punishment; (vi) there is encouragement of respective aspirations; (vii) there is the promise of inheritance to the overcomers.⁷⁰ Within that seven-fold framework, if all the charges of the Lord God are met, repented, and overcome, the confessed believer—*and only that committed believer*—will be fit to reign with the Messiah in the Second Coming

⁷⁰ Revelation 4:10

post-Armageddon administration described in John's later *Visions*. As Daniel said, in his prophecy regarding those same times:

*"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".*⁷¹ (my emphasis)

There are those who interpret the "*Seven Churches*" Vision of the *Apocalypse* as seven historical dispensations of inevitable declension to follow the "*almost ideal*" *Ephesus* in the first century, and ending with the "*mediocre*" *Laodicea* in "*the last days*". It is evident that there is a progressive decline in moral character and practice from the first church, *Ephesus*, to the last church, *Laodicea*, and there are lessons to be learned from this; but historical and geographical conclusions can be ruled out because of the divinely-emphasised nature of their selection.

For example, *Ephesus* was not the "*first*" church, by any definition other than divine priority; Jerusalem and Antioch churches had greater claim to be first. *Ephesus* was popularly known at the time as "*the first city in Asia*"; but other great cities like Rome or Alexandria in Egypt, also claimed that primary distinction. Antioch in Syria was the "*first*" Gentile church after Jerusalem, and it was from there that Paul and Barnabas and others carried the gospel to the Gentile world. Therefore, it could be said that Antioch had a greater historical and geographical claim to "*Christian*" pre-eminence than *Ephesus*, especially since it was in Antioch that the term "*Christian*" was first used. *Ephesus*, although the most architecturally magnificent of the cities of Asia, and the most religiously popular, was not the most important city; Pergamos was more politically important, being the old capital of the ancient Mesopotamian kings as well as the Roman titular capital. But, because *Ephesus* had the great harbour on the coast, and dominated the central highway from Syria to Rome making it the commercial centre for the region, it had gained greater prominence

The Church In Ephesus

It was this combination of geographical accessibility, material

⁷¹ Daniel 7:26-27

success and popular religion of Diana, or Artemis, worship, which provided its importance as the first “*example*” of the “Christian-professing churches” in John’s *Apocalypse* revelation. In this set of circumstances the Ephesian church was commended by God for its rejection of overt evil, its spiritual perception, its patience under persecution, and its unique emphasis on love; or, rather, its early emphasis on love which the angel in the Ephesian church now charged them with diminishing and even forsaking. The specific charges were clear, and only two points need to be emphasized here: the first was the threat to remove the symbolic “*lampstand of witness*” from its place; and the second is that they “*hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans*”. The importance of the threat to remove the “*lampstand of witness*” from Ephesus was that it is the only time it is made to any of the Seven Churches—yet their only real fault was that the believers there had “*forsaken their first love*”. There were demonstrably greater derelictions of obedience in the other churches, yet this threat of lampstand witness removal is not made against them. In “*hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans*” this was the attempt to introduce a privileged elite of clerics distinct from laity being advocated by one named Nicholas.

We should be quite clear about this: *it is possible to have the Lampstand of priestly witness and function divinely removed from a local church for the loss of first love alone*. It does not say for apostasy, or heresy, or incest, or other sins; but for losing their first love while retaining spiritual activities of patience, high moral standards and discernment. Unless the Ephesian church repented of its wrong emphasis, and restored love to its first place, they were not worthy to be a church in the estimate of the Messiah, and he would remove their spiritual authority from them. Unless love is recognized as being the foundation of all spiritual witness in all the churches of the world, the basis of all the practice of the commandments of God; and, unless there is a recognized striving towards perfection of witness, then all else is useless and worthless in the sight of God—“*wood, hay and stubble fit only for the fire*”, as Paul said.

The Church In Smyrna

Smyrna was fallen into ruins when Alexander the Great recreated the city, as he did Ephesus. It grew rapidly when the Romans expanded it as a rival of the great maritime power of Rhodes. Cicero said that Smyrna was *"the city of our most faithful and ancient allies"*; and because of this it was agreed that the new Temple to Tiberius should be built there. The city was acclaimed for the beauty of its situation and buildings, the grandeur of its streets, and its many trees. Appolonius of Tyana, the great orator, said of Smyrna,

"Though it is the most beautiful of all cities under the sun, and makes the sea its own, and holds the fountains of Zephyrus, yet it is a greater charm to wear a crown of men than a crown of porticoes and pictures and gold beyond the standard of mankind".

So Smyrna was proud of its reputation as *"the crown of Asia"*. This becomes significant in the light of the words of Jesus to the church in Smyrna that, in return for their obedience and faithfulness, he would give them *"the crown of life"*—the symbol of rule with the Messiah because of the suffering to death like him. The message to the Church of the Messiah in Smyrna came from *"the First and the Last, who died and came to life again"*. The church had grown out of temptation in the midst of material wealth; and persecution, especially from Jews who followed the Alexandrian Judaism of mixed occult and numerology derived from Egyptian and Babylonian sources, and practiced by the Jewish philosopher Philo and his followers. Hence, *"the synagogue of Satan"*, which differs from *"Satan's throne"* in Pergamos. The message to them was that the persecutions were to increase even more, but only for a limited period. To those *"overcomers"* who were *"faithful unto death"* during this restricted period of intense persecution, there was promised *"the crown of life"* from the One who *"came to life again from the dead"*, and they would not be *"hurt at all by the second death"*—that is, would not be consigned to the punishment of hell-fire. To be an *"overcomer"* in Smyrna meant being faithful unto death; not necessarily being a martyr, but to strive and *"endure to the end"* under extreme persecution.

There are two words used for *"crown"*: one, *stephanos*, is the crown

awarded to the victorious athlete; and the second, *diadema*, is the crown worn by kings: both involve striving for victory in contest. There are *five crowns* mentioned in the Scriptures as being available for “*overcomers*” who strive to excel for a prize: (i) a *crown of life*, for martyrs, given personally by the risen Messiah (*Revelation 2 v 10*); (ii) a *crown of righteousness*, for a holy and righteous life by those who have longed for his appearing (*II Timothy 4 v 8*); (iii) a *crown of rejoicing*, as an award for disciplined attainment (*I Corinthians 9 v 25*); (iv) a *crown of gold*, as a symbol of royal approval (*Revelation 4 v 4*); and (v) a *crown of glory*, for those who shepherd, or care for, the congregations of the churches of the Messiah (*I Peter 5 v 4*). These are the crowns that the “*Overcoming Church’s twenty-four elders*” cast before the throne of God in heaven in worship and adoration of “*Him who sits on the throne*”⁷²

The Church In Pergamum

Pergamum was the centre and repository of all contemporary Mesopotamian religions, gods and occultism, exported through Babylon to all other nations. It was as famous for its literature and science as Ephesus was for its religion, and Smyrna for its commerce. Its library was said to contain over two hundred thousand volumes and manuscripts. Its official name, *pergamina chartae*, was derived from the curing of sheepskins for manuscripts and parchments. Its patron deity was Aesculapius, the god of healing, and was worshipped in the form of a serpent. Pergamum was formed by the Romans into the official capital of Asia, and it was from Pergamos that the Roman Caesars took the religious title of “*Pontifex Maximus*” — used by later Popes.

Thus, Pergamum was symbolic of Satan’s earthly seat of power — the “*prince of the power of this world*” — demanding worship as well as obedience, so it was described as where “*Satan’s throne*” is located, as distinct from Smyrna, where “*Satan’s synagogue*” for demonic religious practice was found. In the midst of this gross pagan worship, comprising both ecclesiastical and imperial powers, the message from “*him who has the sharp, double-edged sword in his mouth*”, commends the church in Pergamum for remaining true to his name.

⁷² Revelation 4:10

However, they had two faults: they held *"the doctrine of Balaam"*, which was an opportunist combination of divination and materialism, leading the people of God astray with false conceptions of God; and they also held the pernicious *"doctrine of the Nicolaitans"* — a priestly elite associated with licentiousness and hedonism. What in Ephesus was *"deeds of the Nicolaitans"*, in Pergamum had developed into the *"doctrine of the Nicolaitans"* by priestly authority.

The divine counter to this state of affairs was to be personally evident: *"... fight against them with the sword of my mouth"*. This is a reference to the Scriptures which had been described:

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account".⁷³

The Scriptural *"overcomer"* in Pergamum is promised two things: hidden manna to eat; and a white stone, with a new name written on it. The *"hidden manna"* is an obvious reference to the *"secret"* heavenly food which was miraculously provided by God to sustain the people of Israel in the wilderness; and also refers symbolically to Jesus the Messiah, who said he was *"the Living Bread sent down from heaven"*. He will be the strength and life of the heavenly *"hidden manna"* for His overcoming companions with the hidden wisdom from God to rule with the Messiah.

The meaning of *"the white stone"* is obscure, unless it refers to the white stone of the *"Urim and Thummim"* in the ephod of Israel's high priests. The ephod pouch held a white stone and a black stone, signifying the positive and negative aspects of the will of God, when direction from God was being sought. The *"white stone"* for the overcomers in Pergamum, therefore, would be the revelation of the will of God, and the *"new and unknown name on the stone"* would be the individual's unique personal relationship with God.

The Church in Thyatira

Thyatira was a military colony, much different from the other three cities; its titular deity, *Apollo Tyrinnios*, was represented on a

⁷³ Hebrews 4:12

horse with a battle-axe on his shoulder. Thyatira's distinctive condemnation among the Seven Churches was to be persuaded by "*the Jezebel factor*". When Jezebel was a tyrannical pagan queen in Israel, wife of the weak Jewish but Baal-worshipping King Ahab who caused Israel to sin more than any other leader, she seduced the Israeli nation into idolatry until, the Scriptures record, "*every man did that which was right in his own eyes*". The combination of demon worship, sexual malpractices and cultic idolatry comprised "*the Jezebel factor*"—an unholy alliance with pagans—and these false forms of worship, replicated as misinterpretations and malpractices of the Scriptures, are abhorrent to "*the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze*". The modern equivalent of these debased practices is in the secular ethics now permeating the churches where homosexuality is condoned, gay marriage is practiced, worship of clergy and liturgy is tolerated, and secularism is creeping Satanism. God warned them:

"I have given her time to repent of her sins, but she does not want to turn aside from her immorality. So I will throw her on to a bed where she and those who committed adultery with her will suffer terribly . . . I will also kill all her followers, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who knows all thoughts and wishes. I will repay each one according to what he or she has done."

God accepted no specious excuses for Thyatira, although he acknowledged "*your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first*".

None of these admirable qualities were sufficient to exonerate the believers in the church in Thyatira from blame when they were still mixed with the other Jezebel-like practices. Only those "*overcomers*" who deliberately separated themselves from the devious complexity of the Satanic deceits of representing spirits as "*angels of light*" were to know the spiritual benefits promised.

To the "*overcomers*" in Thyatira, who rejected revisionist feminist domination and satanic subversions, the Lord God said he will "*give power over the nations . . . and I will also give him the morning star*". It was said of the Messiah that he is himself "*the Bright and Morning Star*". The rising of the morning star announces the end of the long

dark night and the beginning of the dawn of a new day. Note that it does not say the "overcomers" will only *see* the morning star, but will *receive* it: that is, the "overcomers" will participate in the restoration of the Son of God's glory in association with their Lord, and subsequent millennial reign of peace and plenty ushered in by "*the Day of the Lord*" at the end of the old world.

The Church in Sardis

Sardis was one of the great cities of primitive history, the capital of a powerful empire, Lydia. Herodotus, Homer and Strabo all wrote about Sardis. The legendary wealthy Croesus was the last king of Lydia. For centuries Sardis was the great, the rich, the impregnable; the focus of all ambitious conquerors from both East and West. Coins exist which are inscribed "*Sardis, the first Metropolis of Asia, Lydia and Hellenism*". It was at Sardis that Xerxes assembled his army of "*Ten Thousand Immortals*" to march against Greece in history's great Battle of Thermopylae. Sardis was built on the sheer, perpendicular slopes of the Hermes Valley, with only a single approach from the south, and so was considered to be impregnable. Yet each of its several conquerors discovered a way to breach its vaunted physical defences—and so each time it was taken by surprise.

Sardis was also "*the city of death*". Ephesus had everything good, but had a diminishing love. Smyrna was rich in goods, yet was poor in commitment. Pergamum had a few faithful believers in the midst of rampant demonism. Thyatira had good works, but also women-dominated believers. Sardis was socially alive, but spiritually dead. So Sardis historically represented an arrogant self-confidence and a catastrophic self-destruction.

When the Lord God addressed Sardis he presented himself as "*he who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars*"—symbolizing the divine majesty, insight and power that Sardis could only pathetically imitate. The Lord God warned the church in Sardis, that they suffered from the same fault as the city history: they thought they were living impregnable and thus favoured by God, not knowing they were vulnerable and that their fate was already sealed. So God told the "overcomers" to be watchful and prepared, not to be

complacent in their own works. What chiefly afflicted Sardis, however, was not the religious authoritarianism and hedonism of the Nicolaitans, nor the gender-confused activities of Thyatira, but dead ritualism, sterile orthodoxy. Because certain attitudes and actions had been satisfactory in the past, they thought, they must be good enough for the future—until sudden disaster struck. God's charges against them were:

"I know that you have the reputation of being alive, even though you are dead! So, wake up, and strengthen what you still have before it dies completely . . . Those who win the victory will walk with me, clothed in white, and I will not remove their names from the book of life."

The next return of the Lord to this earth will be in similar sudden fashion, he warns the representative church in Sardis—silent, unexpected and devastating. Only those "overcomers" not compromised in their beliefs and witness will be fit to walk with him in the resurrection's white garments—which elsewhere are described symbolically as "righteous acts". It is also the garment that was worn in the triumphal processions of the Romans when they celebrated victories. The writer Juvenal described the Imperial Victor's triumph in the words:

*"Add now the Imperial Eagle, raised on high,
With golden beak, the work of majesty,
Trumpets before, and on the left and right,
A cavalcade of nobles, all in white".*

The spiritual "overcomers" in Sardis—and in Sardis-like circumstances of other times—were promised to be clothed similarly in God's "Day of Triumph"; and their names would not be removed from the *Book of Life*, but would be personally vouchsafed by the Lord Messiah himself before his Father and the observing angels.

The Church in Philadelphia

The city of Philadelphia derived its name from Attalus, in the second century B.C., whose loyalty and devotion to his brother, Eumenes, won him the cognomen "*Philadelphus*". The city was only about thirty miles from Sardis, and it was a cause of some

astonishment that people continued to live there because of the many earthquakes which had devastated it at times.

Philadelphia was basically a Greek church with a Jewish community in it. Both groups had to understand the significance of the divine message addressed to them. A small church, with a small and faithful witness, they were to be encouraged by the evident sign of the presence of Jesus the Messiah among them.

"I know that you have a little power; you have followed my teaching and have been faithful to me. I have opened a door in front of you which no one can close. As for those who belong to Satan, those liars who claim that they are Jews but are not, I will make them and bow down at your feet. They will all know that I love you."

The spiritualized Alexandrian occultic heresy would be exposed for the deceit that it was. The *"synagogue of Satan"* comprised those rabbinical Judaizers who put their *Traditions* above the words and commands of God of Moses (*"which say they are Jews but are not"*). The *"overcomers"* with Messiah-like qualities will inherit the blessings foretold by the prophets; but those with only Judaistic beliefs will inherit the same judgement as the pagan Gentiles.

Philadelphia had only a small (*"a little strength"*) but active (*"kept my word"*) church—yet it was to them that the Lord God revealed himself as *"the one who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no man can shut, and what he shuts no man can open"*. These words are part of a prophecy of Isaiah, who went on to say *"he will become a glorious throne to his Father's house"*.

To those Philadelphian *"overcomers"* who have remained obedient to the faith, even when under severe persecution, the Lord Messiah promises that he will sustain them in the predicted tribulation about to come upon the whole world as a test for all its inhabitants regarding their relationship with the Creator. To those who endure to the end there is the promised crown, reigning with the Messiah in the new heavens and new earth. The *"overcomers"* will be made *"pillars in the Temple of God"*, they will have God's Name written on them, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the Lord's own new name. The pillars of the Temple were not only for support, but were

also imprinted memorials to the respected and reputable the nearer one approached the central Sanctuary.

The “*overcomers*” are those having an intimate fellowship with the Messiah, those who are closest to this administrative centre in the future *New Jerusalem*, where they will be associates in rule with the Lord God, whose “*own new Name*” written on them clearly distinguishes them as his associates in their divinely-bestowed authority. The “*non-overcomers*” will be outside the favoured elite and without such rewards - endless regret for opportunities spurned in life. They will have received whatever rewards they merited from their meagre exercise of faith on earth, where they were content to be saved from hell, but not sufficiently enthused to strive for Messiah-like perfection in their churches and for the inheritance and glories of heaven.

The Church In Laodicea

Laodicea, with nearby Hierapolis, was known as “*the Gate of Phrygia*” because of their strategic location in the Meander Valley, and for the spectacular calcinated waters of the famous hot springs falling in great cliffs and cascades of brilliant white terraces and sky-reflecting blue pools. Before the Romans arrived, Laodicea was only a small, nondescript place; but the Romans brought their impressive network of roads, with administrative and banking systems, making it into an important junction city. Laodicea had become rich through the profits derived from these financial services, and from the exports of a widely popular black wool found only in the Laodicean and Colossian regions.

Laodicea was also the original home of the Phrygian native god, *Men Karou*, and there were famous temples to both *Men* and *Aescalupius*, the god of healing. The medicines in great demand were an ointment for the ears made from the spice nard, and one for the eyes made from Phrygian stone pounded into a powder. These were exported all over the world, and had made Laodicea famous.

The cosmopolitan character of Laodicea, derived from its financial and export systems used by many races, made it a city of compromises at every level. Jews compromised with Gentiles,

Romans compromised with Greeks, Phrygians compromised with Lydians, and so on, for mutual materialist gains.

This spirit of compromise infected the church in Laodicea so that they were *"neither cold nor hot"* in their witness—neither too Christian, nor too pagan; neither too committed nor too complacent. The anger of the Lord God—awesomely described as *"the Amen, the Faithful and True witness, the Ruler of God's creation"*—is directed against their lukewarm attitude, and he warns them to come to him for true spiritual wealth and true healing for sins. He also made it clear that such mercy and grace depends on their being willing to hear and to respond in repentance.

"I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me."

To those *"overcomers"* in the cynical Laodicean circumstances the Messiah said he will share his Throne, in the same manner as he himself overcame in his earthly circumstances and shares his Father's Throne as Son of Man. The Thyatira *"overcomers"* had been promised *"power over nations"*, but the Laodicean *"overcomers"* are promised *"royal rule"*—to *"sit on my Throne"*. The former might be compared with Joseph, who, it is said, had authority over everything in Egypt under Pharaoh, *except the throne*, which belonged to Pharaoh alone; but the latter, like David, who *shared his royal rule* with his son, Solomon. So our Lord promises to share his royal rule with those who, like himself, suffer, are uncompromising, and eventually conquer in the cause of God.

Summary of the Lessons of the Seven Churches

As noted earlier in this chapter, these Seven Churches are not to be taken as a prophetic calendar of events put into specific and progressive time segments. They are only historical in a general backward and a forward *circumstantial* sense, and not in a sequential *dispensational* sense. Their general backward significance might be seen allegorically as: the *"tree of life"* refers backward to the Garden of Eden; the *"second death"* to the first Adam Fall; the *"hidden manna"* to Israel's desert wanderings; the *"white stone"* to the High Priest's ephod; the *"rod of iron"* to Moses' defeat of Amalek; the *"white*

garments“ to the Tabernacle and Temple ceremonies; the “*sitting on the throne*“ to the reigns of David and Solomon.

The general forward significance is that any, or all, of the prophetic items concerning the Seven Churches will be as true of any sequential period of history to come as they are true at present of churches in places other than those specifically mentioned—which, factually, are now all Turkish ruins. They are unique in the Seven Churches of the first century AD only because they were placed in a unique set of geopolitical circumstances—many, or most, of which disappeared with time, but the spiritual significance of which will remain constant for all time.

Another important factor to keep in mind is *that there is increasing deterioration in the nature of the spiritual witness from Ephesus to Laodicea*. The virgin purity of the first century Church of the Messiah—such as was projected in Paul’s lifetime vision and goal—was already disappearing under the attacks of Satan-inspired religious Judaisers and political Romans when John visited the Seven Churches later, following Paul’s death. So one application of the “*Lessons of the Seven Churches*” is that, in the “*Last Days*”, the relative purity of the First Church Ephesus will eventually reach the deplorable conditions of the Seventh Church Laodicea—unless immediate action is taken to “*repent*” and “*overcome*”. Currently, this is evident in the spiritual deterioration of the churches in the West despite the spiritual acceleration of the churches in other continents.

Another interpretation is that, historically, the deteriorating conditions in one church will spread to others as those with self-centred interests and ambitions extend their influence. The “*Nicolaitans*” and “*Balaamites*” and “*Jezebels*”, the “*synagogue of Satan*” and “*seat of Satan*”, will all attempt to organize and dominate regions as well as churches, as happened from the second to the fifth centuries AD, until they become like “*Papal Rome*” and eventually become the integrated “*Universal Ecumenical Church*”. The divinely provided ceremonies of Moses, and the later Temple ceremonies of David, were corrupted by the Babylon-exile Scribes and the Rabbis into the unauthorised *Traditions* of Judaism denounced by Jesus, so it was not difficult to do the same with the teachings of the Messiah

into the institutional "*churchoids*" (resembling churches) of Orthodox, Roman, and Reformed witness—and their current ambitions to form a Universal Religion that will include Islam. In summary, the visible "*True Church of the Messiah*" in any village, town, city and nation is a body of believers meeting in households and streets with no organisational connection, like the 100 million "*underground churches*" in China at the present time.

All of the universal denominational integration, prophetically speaking, will take place while the organisational Church is still in the world, as the first three chapters of the *Apocalypse* makes clear. The fourth chapter opens with the words "*After these things*", and the "*Overcoming Church of the Messiah*" is shown in heaven. This event will terminate the history of the *Overcoming Church of the Messiah* on earth until after the devastations of the last days of the world when the *Overcoming Church as the True Bride of the Messiah* will return to earth to reign with him for a thousand years of peace and prosperity.

Obviously, the implication of all this is that I anticipate being one of the "overcomers", but as my death, naturally speaking, is likely to be soon and before the rapture, I will take my place with all those who "*await his (Jesus) appearing*". My anticipation when I die is that I will be like the "*poor man*", the repentant dying thief, and the Apostle Paul—in the heaven region of Hades, or Paradise.

What Will Heaven Be Like?

“On this mountain the Lord will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines . . . He will swallow up death forever and wipe the tears from all eyes. He will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.”

Isaiah 26:6-8 New International Version

Overcoming Church in Heaven

When the time comes for God to remove the *Overcoming Church* from the earth, it will happen suddenly—“*in the twinkling of an eye*”, as Paul says—caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This event will terminate the history of the *Church of the Messiah* on earth and will take place in the manner described by Paul:

“According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede

those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever.”⁷⁴

The removal of the *Church of the Messiah Overcomers*—not institutional church members or denominational churchoid attendees—takes place in the *Apocalypse* between the end of Chapter 3 and the beginning of Chapter 4. From then on the Church is not seen on earth during the period of *Apocalyptic* judgments. In the first three chapters of the *Apocalypse* the word “church” occurs about twenty times, but it is never mentioned again until the end of the *Apocalypse* and beginning of eternity in chapter 22.

From chapter 4 on the *Overcoming Church of the Messiah* is with the Messiah in heaven as he takes over authority and judgment from his Father, and they share impending inheritance of rule in heaven and on earth won through their overcoming efforts. The dramatic Rapture of the Overcomers will start the divine clock for the count-down events of the last days of the world. From the Rapture onwards the Overcoming Church is not seen on earth during the period of *Apocalyptic* judgments which follows. From chapter 4 the Overcoming Church of the Messiah is with their Lord in heaven as he takes over authority and judgment of the last days of the world. This removal of the Overcoming Church, however, ushers in the new history of the believing *Remnant Jews*, as God begins to fulfil His promise to bring them back to the Promised Land. The startling disappearance of the Christian Overcomers from earth will cause a world-wide convulsion of interest, because the bodies of the Overcomers will not be left in beds, houses, or streets, as so often ludicrously portrayed. They will just disappear as mysteriously as the post-resurrection body of Enoch, Elijah and Jesus disappeared, leaving the grave-clothes of Jesus in the tomb; or like the cloak of the prophet Elijah, both their bodies just metamorphosing into another state or dimension, possibly similar to, or the same as, the body of Adam before he sinned. At that time Adam could walk and talk with God in the Garden of Eden, with God-given rule over earthly creation.

⁷⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

The dramatic removal of the *“Overcoming Church”* to heaven, with their permeating spiritual influence in the world, opens the door to Satan’s final attempts to destroy the remaining remnants of *“the kingdom of God”* of non-overcoming or lukewarm believers, both Jews and Gentiles, in seven years of increasingly devastating *“Tribulations”*. These *“seven years”* are derived from the prophecy of Daniel regarding *“seventy weeks of years”* of God’s unfolding plan for the world. The *“seventy weeks of years”* were interpreted to mean 490 years by Hebrew calculations, from the time of Daniel/Nebuchadnezzar to the *“last days”* of the world and divided into three segments: (i) the first 483 years (69x7) ended with the entrance into Jerusalem of the acclaimed Messiah and the subsequent events there; (ii) the second interim period of *“the times of the Gentile nations”* and *“Church age”*; and (iii) the final week (7 years) divided into two segments of 3 and 1/2 years of *“the last days”* of Tribulations and Final Judgements. With the removal of the *Overcoming Church of the Messiah* to heaven, Daniel’s *“last week of years”* begins, and God turns once more to the destiny of *Remnant Israel* and the kingdom of God on earth.

The present-day Israel is not the prophetic realisation of the Scriptures: it is a non-Biblical, non-spiritual return to Israel of European political *“Zionists”*, with selective nationalist and socialist policies derived from a mixture of East European Marxism and Western capitalism, with only a gloss of Biblical association to justify their claims to Israel’s historic *“Promised Land”*. In their modern constitution there is no mention of observing God’s commandments other than claims to the *“Promised Land”* based on God’s promises to Abraham. Even ultra-Orthodox Jews currently living in Israel do not accept the legitimacy of the present Israeli government—or any national government—*“until Messiah returns”*. God’s promises concerning *“Remnant Israel’s return”* include the provision that they will be *“true believers”* in the commands of God through Moses and Jesus.

“They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived . . . 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 .My dwelling-place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them.”⁷⁵

The secular Zionism of modern Israel bears little relation to the Israel of Moses; it is a bowdlerized combination of BC fifth century Judaism and European socialism, with no Biblical claims to the inherited “*Promised Land*” of Moses. That Israel agreed to a concordat to share the land of Canaan with the descendants of Esau, now modern-day Arabs and Palestinians, and both Jews and Arabs shared the benefits of the Islamic empire for a thousand years.

Modern Zionist Israel is not the *Remnant Israel* of the Scriptures, and has no part in any prophetic blessings. In the Scriptures they are classified “*unbelievers*”, because of their commitment to Babylonian Judaism, sharing the same classification and destiny as non-practising Christians. Jesus gave a blistering condemnation of these rabbis summed up in the opening words of his diatribe:

“Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are attempting to do so.”⁷⁶

A clear distinction is made between those who believe in God as Creator and those who do not believe. Those who believe in the God of Moses’ *Pentateuch*, the *Psalms*, the *Prophets* and Jesus as the Son of God—whether classified as Jews or Muslims or nominal Christians—in God’s sight are “*believers*” and therefore *subjects of the kingdom of God*. This is not to say they are they same as Christians *in the family of God*, who have been “*born again*” into this special relationship in the Church of God. The Apostle Paul stated clearly:

“God will reward each person according to what he has done. To those who by their persistence seek glory, honour and immortality; to them God will give eternal life.”⁷⁷

The removal of the *Overcoming Church of the Messiah* from the world ends “*the Church age*” but not “*the kingdom of God*” in the world, which will comprise nominal Christians, Jewish Messianic converts, and Islamic practitioners—all genuine “*persistent seekers of glory, honour and immortality*”. The shock of the departure of the

⁷⁵ Ezekiel 37:24-28

⁷⁶ Matthew 23:13

⁷⁷ Romans 2:7

Overcoming believers will serve as a stimulus to the previously lukewarm believers in all three segments of nominal Christians, secular Jews and militant Muslims, who will continue to represent the “*kingdom of God*” on earth despite the persecutions of the Tribulations.

Thrones in Heaven

In the beginning of the *Apocalypse* John records the commands of God to him as: “*Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which take place after this*”. Consequently, having commented on “*what you have seen*” among the Seven Churches on earth, and then the things “*which are*” currently being practiced by them, he now turns to reveal the things to happen “*after these things*”.

The Apostle John was immediately transported in an ecstatic state through an entry in the heavens to a different scene from the one previously experienced. Before him was a Throne and on the Throne was a Person, but the Person had no “*form*”; earlier Scriptures had made it clear that “*no man can look on God and live*”. Even Moses, the “*friend of God*”, had to cover his face when God was speaking to him. John was conscious only of the Presence on the Throne—the glory and majesty blazing like the jewels jasper and carnelian and, around the Throne, a rainbow with the green predominating and encircling it.

From the Throne there emanated flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. Under the Throne there was a transparent expanse, like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. Around the Throne there were twenty-four smaller thrones and on these were seated Twenty-Four Elders, all dressed in white robes, with crowns of gold on their heads. They were not angels, but human beings because they were able to sing about being “*taken from every tribe, and tongue and people*”. They were “*elders*” because of their experience under trial; and they were “*twenty-four*” because they comprised twelve Apostles, and twelve Overcomers, representatives of both Israel and the Church, officiating as “*kings and priests*” in glory, reigning as promised with their Lord

Before that Throne Seven Lamps were blazing which John assumed were symbols of the Seven Spirits of God. Moving between the twenty-four smaller thrones and the central Throne there were four Living Creatures, also described by the prophet Ezekiel in his vision of heaven: the first had the appearance of a lion; the second like an ox, the third had a face like a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each had six wings, and the wings were covered with eyes, above and beneath. These Four Living Creatures were the highest ranking seraphim and cherubim in the angelic hierarchy administering the purposes of God in the world. They were singing an anthem: *“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”*

The Twenty-Four Elders left their thrones to fall down in worship before the Presence on the Throne, laying down their crowns while they sang: *“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”*

In his *Paradise Lost* the poet John Milton described it:

*“Forth rushed with whirlwind sound
The chariot of paternal Deity,
Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel undrawn,
Itself instinct with Spirit, but conveyed
By four cherubic shapes; four faces each
Had wondrous; as with stars their bodies all,
And wings were set with eyes, with eyes the wheels
Over their heads the crystal firmament,
Whereon a sapphire throne.”⁷⁸*

The first thing that impressed John was the similarity between his vision of the *“Ancient of Days”* on the Throne and that of Daniel, although there were more details than Daniel’s. This would seem to indicate that the scene was permanent, and have direct associations with all that subsequently transpires in the *Apocalyptic* divine judgements on the world.

The Vision continued to unfold with one of the most sublime scenes in all Scripture. The Presence on the Throne is seen to be holding a book, or roll, in the right hand, written on the inside and

⁷⁸ Book vi

cover, and fastened with seven seals. The book, it appears, contains material regarding "*The redemption of the purchased possession*" of Israel and the Church, not just the positive glorious rewards for the people of God, but also the negative calamitous judgements on all those who rejected God's provisions of mercy and salvation listed in both *Old* and *New Testaments*.

A mighty angel appears to announce with a loud voice and the call resounds throughout heaven, "*Who is worthy to open this book?*" No-one came forward, not even to look at it. John knew that if no-one came forward the world was faced with hopeless damnation. But, even as he wept in despair, one of the Elders said to him: "*Do not weep; behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, is able to open the book and break its seven seals.*"

Then there appeared in the midst of the thrones the similitude of a slain Lamb in striking contrast to the acclaimed Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the two aspects of the divine revelation of God throughout Biblical history—redemption by sacrifice of the innocent Lamb of God on behalf of the world's sinners, and the triumphant Messianic King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The similitude of the Lamb which John saw had "*seven horns, and seven eyes*", which he is given to understand "*are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth*"—and which he knew from the prophet Isaiah were "*the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of might, the spirit of knowledge, the spirit of the fear of the Lord, and the spirit of perception in the fear of the Lord*". The "*seven horns and seven eyes*" he understood to be the metaphoric symbolising epitome of imperial, intellectual and spiritual power, available to all individuals who sought "*the fear of the Lord*", represented in King David of Israel, but fully demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ as Son of Man and Son of God.

Without hesitation the Messianic Lamb/Lion came forward to the Throne of God and took the book from the right hand of the Presence of God. Metaphorically, this was the "*Second Adam*" standing sinless and unashamed in the presence of God to take the full inheritance lost by the disobedience of the "*first Adam*". When he took the book the Four Living Creatures, with the Twenty-Four Elders fell down

before the Lamb and broke into a song of worship and praise.

Each one of the Elders is described as *“having in their hands a harp, and a golden bowl full of incense”*, which John is given to understand symbolized *“the prayers of saints”*, the summation of all the prayers of all the saints of all the ages: *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*, treasured in golden bowls with the sweet savour of appreciative incense. To the songs of the Elders there is added the swelling thunders of a choir of millions of angels.

John understood that all that he was seeing were symbolic representations of ranks and powers of divinity and angels to serve as a background of all that was still to come *“after these things”*.

Seven Seals of Judgement

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and darkness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old, nor ever will be in ages to come . . .”

Joel 2:1-2 New International Version

Last Days of the World

If the Rapture of the Overcoming Church was Act One, Scene One, of the saints in heaven, then what followed was Scene Two of the opening calamitous events of *“the last days of the earth”*. The *“Sealed Book”* taken from the hands of the Presence on the Throne is opened by the regal Lamb and this opening of the *First Seal* reveals the divine programme of the last days of the world. The *Seven Seals* of the fateful book launches a series of *Seven Judgements* preceded by *Seven Trumpets* over a period of *seven years* culminating in *“the end of the world as we know it”*. The events of that time were

prophesied by Daniel from the Angel Gabriel:

“Know therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem to the Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks . . . And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and have nothing; The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be like a flood, and to the end of the war desolations are determined . . .”

“He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and on a wing of the temple he shall cause an abomination to be set up that causes desolation until the end that is decreed for him.”⁷⁹ (my emphasis)

That specific figure of seven years to “*the end of the age*” had been prophetically announced as the final segment of Daniel’s “*seventy weeks*”, or periods of duration forecasting the fate of the world from his own time until the end of time. But the fate of the Gentile world is secondary in Daniel’s prophecy to that of the Jewish people. Daniel was a privileged prisoner in Babylon at the time of his prophecy, a favourite Counsellor to King Nebuchadnezzar, with a primary concern for his fellow-exiled people, the remaining two Israeli Dispersed tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The revelation from God, therefore, primarily concerned the immediate and future destiny of the Israeli people in the light of God’s promises to Abraham regarding the Promised Land and their place in the world. They had no country, no Temple, no future, as exiles in Babylon, God’s disastrous punishment on the two segments of Israel, Judah and Ephraim, for their continuous disobedience. It was at that point that God revealed to Daniel the destiny of the remaining Jews in periods of time. The full significance of Daniel’s prophecy is not the specific nature of the fate of empires involved, or the coming of the prophesied Messiah, but the future return of a repentant *Remnant Israel* to the Promised Land with their Messiah as God’s patience with the Gentile world ends.

The “*decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem*” as the beginning of his prophecy was provided King Artaxerxes of the following Medo/Persian empire in the twentieth year of his reign in 455BC.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Daniel 9:23-27

⁸⁰ Nehemiah chapter 2

From that time the first of four segments of Jewish history began.

The first seven weeks, or 49 years, were occupied in the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem in the "troublous times", recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Three score and two weeks, or 434 years from the time of the rebuilt city to the entry of Jesus entering Jerusalem and acclaimed as the Messiah, was 49 plus 434, or 483 years.

One week, or seven years, still future, "the Anointed One, the Ruler, cut off . . ." —until the return of the Dispersed Remnant Israel returns to the Promised Land⁸¹

The clock of divine judgement from that time was given, varying descriptively but not factually, as two periods of *"forty and two months"*, *"a time, times and half a time"*, *"a thousand two hundred and threescore days"*, or *"three-and-half years for each period"*.

Throughout this final prophetic period of seven years defining the *"last days of the world"*, the *Seven Judgments* would increase in severity, each one announced by the opening of a *Seal* of the *Book* and the sound of a *Trumpet*, until the final catastrophic Armageddon. The Apostle John, like every Jew and including the Apostle Paul, was aware of the sixty-nine years of divine history and the final prophetic week of seven years, but no-one until John's *Apocalyptic Visions* had known the details. So John waited with a combination of fascination and trepidation to see what would follow the breaking of the *First Seal*.

He was presented with the emergence of *Four Horsemen* and he was immediately reminded of the mysterious words of the prophet Zechariah:

"During the night I had a vision, and there before me was a man riding a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses.

"I asked, 'What are these, my lord?'"

"The angel who was talking with me answered, 'I will show you what they are.'"

"Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, 'They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth.'"

"And they reported to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the

⁷⁹ Isaiah 18

*myrtle trees, 'We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.'"*⁸²

John waited with interest to see what these *Four Horsemen* of his vision represented more than four hundred years after the prophet's revelation.

First Horseman

Then one of the Four Cherubim from beside the Throne declared in a loud voice, "*Come!*", and immediately there appeared an armed rider on a *White Horse*, and he was given a crown and power to accomplish all that he had to do on earth.

Biblical literalists, in their acceptance of real horses with real riders having real crowns and real bows and swords, are derided for their childish beliefs in mythical figures. It is certainly a difficult position to defend, if not impossible, but my own interpretation is that these are all metaphorical substitutes provided as divine aids to our limited understanding of the supernatural world. For example, when I was in Tibet, on one occasion I was battling with supernatural opposition as I tried to come to grips with the mysterious world of the supernatural unfolding before my eyes, when I had a clear sense of an angel with a sword appearing on my behalf in answer to my desperate appeal to God for help.

Afterwards I wrote the following:

*"The air was still;
Yet charged with power,
As forces elemental
Engaged in conflict for the will.
Can it be that in so small a space
There are sufficient powers to alter destiny?
And who is this with but a flaming sword
To challenge all the hordes of hell;
Who forward steps with eager feet
His dark antagonists to meet,
In battle to excel?
They clash! And space is filled
With noise, as creatures spiritual*

⁸² Zechariah 1:8-11

*Grapple in eternal war:
Noise as of many thunders,
And shrieking winds, and tossing tempests,
Of splitting earthquakes, and hissing lava;
Roll upon roll of sound
Of overwhelming horror.
Suddenly -
The air once more is still,
With the quiet stillness of early dawn,
Pulsing with life.
The representatives of doom are gone,
And nothing remains in all the firmament
But clear blue sky without a cloud.
The smiling messenger of God has sheathed
His erstwhile flaming sword,
Victor in the strife.
With one last look all space he scanned,
Then, with a gesture of his hand,
He cleft the air.
Ere I could know I was alone
I found myself before a throne
In silent prayer."*

The experience of swarming demons was real; the angel was real; the sword was real, the panic was real, the deliverance was real — as it is today when I recall it. I had nothing physical, or “literal”, to show for it, but I did have an expanded understanding of how the “evil” supernatural operated which led to a greater understanding of how the “good” supernatural is described in the Scriptures. It was to be the first of many similar experiences over the next few years while I was studying the world of the supernatural in my understanding of the unfolding revelation of the purposes of God in history.

To return to the “armed” White Horse rider with “crown” and “power” to accomplish a divine purpose: the rider is armed with a bow, an instrument of war, and his white horse is indicative of spiritual warfare, so it might be legitimate to infer that his task is to

provide divine support to all those nominal believers on earth who have been left behind in the rapture of the *Overcoming Church*, and who provide a witness and challenge in contrast to the mocking unbelief of others. Hitherto, individuals, religions and nations had been hiding their allegiance to Satan rather than God by a series of complex philosophies and secular theories devised to exclude God from their private lives and professional activities. The divine symbols of *White Horse*, bow and crown of the *First Horseman*, all symbols of royal power and purity, seem to indicate the divine provision of a “*second chance*” separation from the multiplying disbelief on earth following the departure of the *Overcoming Church*.

Second Horseman

At the opening of the *Second Seal*, as with the *First*, one of the Four Cherubim announced “*Come!*” and a *Second Horseman* appears, this one on a fiery *Red Horse* and with a large sword. The rider “*was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other*”. The colour of the horse, like blood, is indicative of vengeance and slaughter, now as then an acceleration of what is already being demonstrated in the rising use of weapons, increasing disorder and terror in national societies across the world, disregard of civil as well as moral laws, cynical political manoeuvring, endemic corruption and starvation. This is a world in which there is no internal harmony in nations, no amity among nations, and no trust between nations. This is what Jesus foretold while on earth as “*the beginning of sorrows*” which precedes the succeeding “*Tribulation*”, then the final “*Great Tribulation*” and culminating in the “*Day of God’s Wrath*”, Armageddon.⁸³

Third Horseman

The breaking of the *Third Seal* brings another horse, a “*black horse and he that sat on him having a pair of balances in his hand*”. Then John heard a voice from among the Four Cherubim declaring sonorously: “*A measure of wheat for a day’s wage, and three measures of barley for a day’s wage*”. As a fisherman John knew the difficulties of living day

⁸³ Matthew chapters 23 and 24

by day on what could be caught, so he knew that this fearsome black rider with the scales was going forth to disturb the economies of the world. When wheat is scarce people have to resort to barley—the food of animals. In normal times a Roman *denarius* would buy twenty-four measures of barley, and the voice of the cherubim had warned that it would purchase only three measures—the wage of a slave. The unseen Cherubim announced commandingly “*Do not damage the oil and wine*”. Olive trees and vines, once begun, will grow and produce yearly without much attention—but not wheat and barley, evidence that God will still provide opportunities for repentance amid signs of growing judgement.

Fourth Horseman

When the *Fourth Seal* was broken another horse and horseman appears, more terrible than the others, a *pale, corpse-like horse*. The rider is called “*Death*” and his attendant, “*Hades*”, or Hell. The voice from the Four Cherubim declares that “*power was given them over a fourth part of the earth to kill with sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts of the earth*” The catastrophic consequences follow the previous pattern of all forms of affliction, proceeding from the lesser to the greater. A condition of bloody war and civil strife is followed by multiplying disease and famine, the dead becoming too numerous to bury, wild animals ravaging cities seeking food because their own habitats have been destroyed, and “*Death*” and “*Hell*” are no longer subjects of supercilious intellectualism as successive calamities become inconceivable catastrophes. Yet only a “*fourth part of the world*” is affected, just “*the beginning of sorrows*” foretold by Jesus.

Fifth Seal

The breaking of the *Fifth Seal* was different from those preceding it: there is no voice from the Cherubim, and there are no horses or horsemen. Instead there is a dramatic digression to describe a company of martyrs who, despite the horrendous persecution for their belief in God following on the departure of the Overcoming Church from the world, and suffering the same as their unbelieving neighbours through the unfolding and increasing divine

judgements, have held on to their faith. When the Lamb/Lion Messiah opens the *Fifth Seal* it is recorded that John saw,

“ . . . beneath the altar the souls of those that had been slain on behalf of the word of God for their unflinching testimony. Then they shouted loudly, ‘Almighty and True God, how long will it be until you judge the people on earth and punish them for killing us?’ Each of them was given a white robe and told to wait a little while longer until their fellow-servants and brothers who would also be slain were completed.”

Although they were given a “white robe” like the Overcoming Church representatives, they were told to wait a little longer “beneath the altar” until other martyrs joined them to enjoy the heavenly rewards for their earthly witness. Here we enter a sphere that only those who are spiritual with a knowledge of *Old Testament* religious procedures can comprehend—and that with great difficulty!—how to make those who believe in the duality of *homo sapiens* being only “body and mind” understand those who believe we are the trinity of “body, mind and spirit”—who believe that God exists as a Judge and is “a rewarder of those who diligently seek him”.

To return to the “altar in heaven”: first, this was not the first mention of an “altar in heaven”. When God called Moses up into Mount Sinai alone to give him His Covenant with Israel, the religious and moral Law that would identify Israel “God’s People”, He showed Moses “the true tabernacle in heaven which God pitched, and not man,” every item of which was communicated to Moses by God.⁸⁴ This was also true of David who was given full instructions regarding the building of the Temple, communicated directly from God: “Then David gave to Solomon the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the Lord and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasures of the temple of God . . .”⁸⁵

To the believers in the reality of the words from God, like Moses and David, the spirit is as real as the mind, with only a “curtain” between the two which can be crossed both God-ward and man-ward. It is the means by which we come to know and understand God as the prophet Jeremiah made clear when he said: “The is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but

⁸⁴ Hebrews 9:1-5, 21-24

⁸⁵ 1 Chronicles 28:11-19

let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord . . ."⁸⁶ So the goal of "knowing and understanding God" is open to every one who believes and acts on it.

The significance of this is that in the after-death experience of believers, such as the martyrs described by John, an existence of an "altar in heaven" is as real as the temple in heaven or a heavenly city of Jerusalem. "Where are these buildings located?" may well be asked. I have to answer, "I don't know". In all that is known of the stellar universe, and the other universes beyond the ones already identified, there might be a physical "heavenly location", but I doubt it. A physical altar, temple, or city, in space is difficult to imagine let alone believe. They are metaphors of the real that are difficult for us to understand with our present limited knowledge of the spiritual world. Also, the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the heavenly city and temple is apparently 1200 miles square and high, which is demonstrably a physical impossibility, but a likely spiritual metaphor.

Once one accepts the spiritual metamorphosis of the after-death bodies of Moses, Elijah and Jesus the possibility of a spiritual metamorphosis of structures becomes possible, if not easy. It means that when God created Adam he had the capacity to walk and talk in the presence of God in a pristine Garden of Eden, with powers to name the animals and expand Eden into a microcosm for the rest of the world.

This capacity to "understand and know God" was the vision also given to Moses for the people of Israel "to enlighten the world" from a God-blessed Promised Land. It was the vision of David when he created Israel as a viable God-directed State. They all gave form to what was initially a spiritual experience. They did not just believe in God as a "religious entity", but as a realistic dynamic Being providing power to create a physical kingdom of God on earth, from a spiritual blueprint of "a city not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." What Moses and David did not do, Jesus Christ successfully accomplished when he not only opened a door to heaven for Gentiles but also the realisation of building a New Jerusalem on earth. The New Temple, New Jerusalem, and Kingdom

⁸⁶ Jeremiah 9:23

of Heaven, already currently exist in spiritual forms, and this is what was being revealed to the Apostle John in his apocalyptic visions. What John was seeing and hearing is what has been prepared by God for the years following "*the end of the world as we know it*".

This is what the post-rapture martyrs under the altar found difficult to comprehend: "*Lord, why do you not judge and avenge our blood from those that dwell on the earth?*" They had died for their faith in God yet their murderers were unpunished and they had not experienced the full joys of heaven. Like John the Baptist in prison they did not know that judgement of the world had already started with the presence of Jesus on earth, and would soon be consummated by his death and resurrection far beyond their expectations.

Sixth Seal

As the divine judgements on the world escalated with the opening of the Seals the opening of the Sixth Seal produced cataclysmic events far beyond what had gone before. There is a great earthquake which rocks the world, the sun becomes black and the moon red, shooting or meteor stars bombard the earth, the sky dissolves, mountains flatten, and islands disappear under raging oceans.

These phenomena could be both literal and metaphorical; that is, in addition to real storms, eclipses, planet disturbances and earthquakes, they could also be interpreted symbolically as political convulsions, increasing Godlessness, social revolutions and world-wide desperation and panic. All of this had been foretold by Jesus while on earth: "*Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven . . .*" The prophet Isaiah said: "*Go into the rocks, hide in the ground from the wrath of the Lord . . . men will flee to the rocks and caves when he rises to shake the earth . . .*" And the prophet Joel declared, "*the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near . . . the sun and the moon will be darkened and the stars no longer shine . . . the earth and the sky will tremble . . .*"

Despite the world-wide belief that "*the day of the Lord*" had arrived this is still only the *Sixth Seal*, with other *Apocalyptic*

judgements to follow. Throughout the *Apocalypse* the Apostle John is said to be "*in the Spirit*" on four separate occasions and locations: (i) in chapter 1 he is said to be "*on the isle of Patmos*", to learn about the destiny of the *Overcoming Church of the Messiah* (v 9,10); (ii) in chapter 4 he is "*caught up to heaven*", to witness the Throne of God and Tribunal of Judgement (v 1,2); (iii) in chapter 17 he is "*carried away into the wilderness*", to witness the deliverance of the kingdom of God believers (v 3); and in (iv) chapter 21 he is "*carried away to a great and high mountain*" to witness the marriage ceremony of the *Church of the Messiah Bride* and the conquering *Ruler/Messiah* (v10).

The *Sixth Seal*, and its devastating consequences, are still only "*the beginning of sorrows*" foretold by Jesus, and only the first three-and-a-half years of Daniel's prophetic seven years of the last days. Now the final Tribulations begin which will end with "*the day of God's wrath*".

-12-

The Seventh Seal and the First Trumpet

*“An unheard-of disaster is coming. The end has come!
The end has come! It has raised itself against you. It has
come! Doom has come upon you — you who dwell in the
land. The time has come, the day is near; there is panic, not
joy upon the mountains. I am about to pour out my wrath
on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you
according to your conduct and repay you for all your
detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity or spare
you; I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and
the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that
it is I the Lord who strikes the blow.”*

Ezekiel 7:5-9 New International Version

First Parenthesis

There is an extended hiatus between the Sixth and *Seventh Seal*, a sort of parenthesis, in which two major events take place: the “sealing” of the believing *Remnant Israel*; and the removal to heaven of a great multitude of non-Israel believers out of the

imminent "*Great Tribulation*". Although the whole world is in a state of panic, fear and confusion, and the whole of nature is in a state of turmoil, there is called a lull in the storm of divine judgements for a short time.

John is given a Vision of Four Angels standing at the four corners of the earth to monitor the divine parenthesis while a Fifth Angel carries a divine seal to stamp God's name on the foreheads, like a phylactery, of the selected *Remnant Israel*, twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes, a total of 144,000. Who are those favoured ones who are sealed from judgement? There is great controversy in Christian circles about the literal or metaphorical significance of this number but, without listing these, my own understanding is that they are practising Judaisers, the firstfruits of the new return to God from among the world's unbelieving Jews, a particular class singled out because of spiritual qualifications based on the *Law* of Moses and teachings of Jesus, not practised by other Judaism communities, and distinctly different from the Overcoming Church already in heaven.

The second group in the divine parenthesis distinct from *Remnant Israel* is described as "*a great multitude that no one could number out of all nations . . . clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands*". The Overcoming Church believers have thrones and crowns; this "*great multitude*" has palm branches. The Overcoming Church is in heaven before the '*hour of trial*'; the palm-bearers are "*come out of that trial*"; the Overcoming Church rules, but this "*great multitude*" is ruled over. The "*great multitude*" of believers was once sinners and sufferers on the earth, members of its tribes and peoples; cleansed and sanctified by the blood of Jesus. They ascribe their salvation to God and to the Lamb. They are by nature and descent of the stock of Adam, and by grace of God the community of redeemed believers. Their place in heaven is assured, as those "*saved by fire*", citizens in the kingdom of God but not rulers in the *Overcoming Church of the Messiah*.

First Trumpet and Judgement

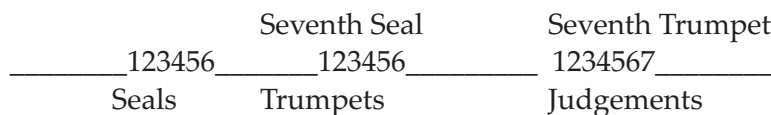
The opening of the *Seventh Seal* coincides with the sounding of the *First* of the *Seven Trumpets*, and this procedure coincides

throughout the subsequent *Apocalypse*; that is, the *Seventh Trumpet* coincides with the launching of the *First Judgement*, with each succeeding in intensifying of divine wrath. As the *First Vision* of the *Seven Churches* ended with the appearing of the Lord for his Overcoming Church, so this *Second Vision* of the *Seventh Seal* ushers in the start of the second half of the seven years of Daniel’s vision of “the end times . . . the Great Tribulation”.

When the *First Seal* is broken a “voice like thunder” is heard, and the same is true of the breaking of the other *Three Seals*. With the breaking of the *Fifth Seal* there is a “great cry” from beneath the altar; and when the *Sixth Seal* is broken a “terrifying convulsion” shakes the earth

But with the breaking of the *Seventh Seal* not a sound is heard “for the space of half-an-hour” in anticipation of the final consummation of the great *Apocalypse* of God, the beginning of the second three-and-a-half years of Daniel’s vision. It is also the silence described by the Psalmist in Psalm 76: “From the heaven You pronounced judgement, and the land feared and was quiet . . . when you, O God, rose up to judge, to save all the afflicted of the land . . .”

The sequence of *Visions* given to the Apostle John—*Church, Seals, Trumpets, Judgements*—are a mosaic of concurrent and not sequential events; sometimes they include the same overlapping event, occasionally elaborating on them, and sometimes adding new developments to them. On a time-line they would appear:



So the silence of the *Seventh Seal* ushers in the calm before the final storm, the time when God calls a halt to all debates, all distractions, all defiance, and draws every eye and thought in tense expectation of upcoming divine retributions. God’s grace and patience are at an end; He is about to intervene in power and wrath against all those who have so contemptuously dismissed him from their lives. After this awesome stillness the actions from the Throne are announced.

Seven Angels holding Seven Trumpets step forth, while another imposing Angel steps over to the altar with a golden censer of incense. According to ancient Jewish tradition the *Seven Angels* are named as “Uriel, who presides over terror and clamour; Raphael, who presides over the spirits of human creatures; Ragael, who is in charge of punishments on the world; Michael, who presides over nations, and human virtue; Sarakiel, who presides over the lives of all transgressors; Gabriel; who presides over paradise and the cherubim.”

The imposing Angel holding the golden censer offers up incense to God, which is said to be “*the prayers of saints*” — to those who pray, with those who pray, and for those who pray — all those saints still on earth passing through the Tribulations as a purging process. But why the offering of the incense prayers here when the Trumpets are just about to sound doom judgements? Because “*in wrath God remembers mercy*”. Before God wreaks vengeance on Satan and all his demonic followers, in heaven as well as on earth, He responds to the prayers of the remaining saints on earth. Their prayers have always been “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” and now the time has come for God to answer their prayers.

At once the divine *finis coronal opus* is launched on the world: “*The Special Angel took the censer and filled it out of the fire on the altar and cast it into the earth*”. Immediately the heavens erupt with rolling peals of thunder, electrifying cloud-splitting lightning, mind-paralysing rumblings and colossal earthquakes. The angelic fire which activated the prayers of believers unleashes the lurid hell of the unbelievers who had mocked its very existence. And this was only the beginning of the final phase of God’s wrath.

The *Seven Angels* holding the *Seven Trumpets* now prepare to sound their blasts of *Apocalyptic* doom. As the *First Trumpet* peals forth “*there followed hail and fire mingled with blood and it was cast into the earth; and a third of the earth was burned*”. The divine record in the impersonal voice of the Apostle John does not convey the stupendous phenomena of hurricanes and tongues of fire mingled with blood falling from heaven while a third of the world is consumed with raging fires. There had been no cataclysm like it since Moses called down such literal phenomena from heaven on

Egypt—and that was only one nation, not a third of the world. There is no description of the related consequences of catastrophic economic disaster through the ecological catastrophe, much more sudden and violent than any climate change from global warming.

Second Trumpet and Judgement

The second *Trumpet Angel* sounded and “*something like a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, a third of the creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*”

It can only be assumed that this is a great spouting, seething, and thundering meteoric mass, accompanied with voluminous flames, plunging into the ocean and—again like Moses in Egypt—the water becomes blood, not “*like blood*” but real blood. Before this is mocked by some cynical atheist it should be recalled that the waters of the Nile were turned into blood by Moses lifting up his staff and smiting them sufficiently for Pharaoh and every Egyptian to believe it and to permit the Israeli people to leave Egypt. The “*sea*” area of the flaming holocaust is presumably the Mediterranean which is the region most mentioned in the *Apocalypse*. The oceanic eruption destroys all living creatures in the sea and, as a related consequence, the food supplies of the region.

Third Trumpet and Judgement

While the world is trying to adjust to the series of supernaturally catastrophic events the *Third Angel* blows the *Trumpet* and “*there fell out of heaven a great star flaming like a torch, and it fell upon a third of the rivers and springs of waters; The name of the star is called ‘Wormwood’, and a third of the waters is turned into wormwood, and many died*”. Another name for wormwood is *absinthe*, a bitter, intoxicating and poisonous herb which on occasions can produce convulsions, paralysis and death. A lethal consequence of this meteoric catastrophe is the embittering of waters that had not been affected by the previous judgement of blood.

It is difficult for us to imagine such catastrophic judgements, but a miniscule example might be the combination of the tsunami floods

in Burma and the mountain-convulsing earthquake in China—and these are minor in comparison with the sequence and enormity of the divine judgements being poured out on a disbelieving world.

Fourth Trumpet and Judgement

The rapid widening and intensity of the catastrophic disasters befalling the world is multiplied with the sounding of the *Fourth Trumpet*. The divine focus shifts from the earth to the heavens where a third of the sun is smitten, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars. At a stroke the sidereal calculations and projections of astronomers—and astrologers!—is destroyed, not to mention the disastrous disruption to the seasons and sources of light and heat to the world. The prophet Isaiah had declared:

*“The Day of the Lord is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins . . .”*⁸⁷

Now that the “*day of the Lord*” is imminent, those who mock the Lord with their theories, who imagine they are the measure of all things in creation with their secular science, will find themselves in bewildered confusion as what they believe and boast is disintegrating in front of them—and there is still worse to come!

Fifth Trumpet

There is a second mysterious parenthesis between the *Fourth* and final *Three Trumpets* which I find difficult to understand:

“I beheld, and heard one eagle, flying in mid-heaven, saying with a great voice ‘Woe, woe, woe, to the dwellers on earth, by reason of the remaining blasts of the Trumpet of the three angels who are yet to sound.”

The King James’ *Authorised Version* renders the word as “*angel*”, not “*eagle*”, but apparently the major versions all agree that it should be “*eagle*” despite the confusion of a “*talking eagle*”. But there is no doubt about the message the “*flying eagles*” conveys: namely, that there are three “*woes*”, or judgements, pending that will exceed anything that had preceded them. With these *Three Trumpet/Woes* the

⁸⁷ Isaiah 13:9-11

doors of hell as well as heaven are opened and the demonic hordes are unleashed on the world.

The metaphorical "*flying eagles*", leading angels as eagles are the kings of birds, whose territory is said to be "*mid-heaven*", proclaim the doom of the pseudo-religious inhabitants of the earth whose specious claims to "*moral values*" has corrupted their witness and incurred the wrath of God. These "*pseudo-believers*" are targets of the first "*Woe*" of judgement, the other two "*Woes*" being directed against the unbelieving Jews

The *Fifth Angel* sounds the *Fifth Trumpet* and a star out of heaven falls to the earth, a sign of the judgement on Satan, isolating him from his previous access to the divine tribunal in heaven, described by Job. However, his restricted authority on earth and in hell remains, so he is able to "*open the Abyss*" and release its hordes of demons on the world. They have powers to disable like locusts, just as they had afflicted the man in the tombs cured by Jesus; and powers to destroy with the scorpion-like madness of the boy who cast himself into the fire until cured by Jesus. These unleashed demons now have powers to afflict the whole world, but their demonic powers are restricted to delivering agonising physical and mental tortures for only five months, making the victims wishing for death but unable to find it.

Sixth Trumpet of Judgement

When the *Sixth Angel* sounds the *Sixth Trumpet* the voice from the altar before the Throne commands the Angel to loose the *Four Angels* who "*are bound at the great River (Euphrates)*", who have been made ready for this "*hour, day, month and year*", to kill a third of mankind. These *Four Angels* are not the same as the earlier *Four Angels*, whose function is to *restrain* the forces of evil. These *Four Angels* from hell *release* the powers of evil, direct executors of the impending catastrophic judgments on the world, of whom it had been written by the Apostle Peter, "*God sent them to hell to be held in gloomy prison until the judgement of the great day*"⁸⁸ God in mercy, and the presence of the Overcoming Church on earth, had restrained them from their malicious destruction of all humankind; but now, with the

⁸⁸ 2 Peter 2:4

Overcoming Church in heaven, they are given freedom to work their evil purposes because of the world's continuing rejection of God.

It is said that they are located or unleashed "*beyond the great River Euphrates*", the site of the former Garden of Eden and its Satanic intervention, the region of all God-defying empires—Babylon, Medo/Persia, Greece—enemies of Israel and Israel's divine destiny. Some authorities suggest this "*beyond the River Euphrates*" means to be "*from the East*", and certainly China would have no difficulty in providing an army of the size stated. The Four Angels from hell then unleash all the world's innumerable forces of evil latent in human-kind—spiritism, idolatry, murder and sexual perversions—destroying a third of the human race in just over three months.

Second Parenthesis before the Last Judgements

"I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, 'Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshippers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1, 260 days, clothed in sackcloth'."

Revelation 11 vv 1-3: *New International Version*

Mysterious Two Witnesses

As the world reels before the implacable series of divine catastrophes unleashed on an unbelieving majority of its population there is an intermission where the Apostle John sees *"a mighty angel descending out of heaven, clothed with a cloud, a rainbow around his head, his face like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire"* This *"mighty angel"* is another manifestation of Jesus himself, further emphasised as in his hand is a *"little scroll"*, and this little scroll was to be *"eaten"*, opposed to the earlier scroll of *Seals* which

had to be “opened”. The “*intermission*” is a sign that the period of the “*Seals*” is drawing to a close, and the next, final, *Seal* of three-and-a-half years of *Judgements* is about to begin.

The *Mighty Angel* representation of the Lord Jesus places one foot on the land and the other on the sea, lifts his right hand to heaven and declares that there would be no more delay, that the mystery of God—the sum of all God’s past revelations—is about to be completed. John heard the voice from heaven telling him to take the scroll out of the hand of the *Mighty Angel* and eat it. When John did so, he found it was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly, a reflection of his subjective feelings regarding the escalating scenes of judgement he was observing.

But John was immediately transferred from being a “*seer*”, an “*observer*”, of events in heaven, to one of active participation as a “*prophet*”, and he is “*to rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it.*” A prophet is not only one who “*foretells*” events in the future, but who also “*forth-tells*” events in the present; in both categories he is a witness for God. This is a particularly Jewish command in its relating to the “*temple, the altar, and those who worship in it*”; and this Jewish-ness is emphasised with the stated exclusion of the “*Court of the Gentiles*” from the measuring.

(As a personal digression, this has a fascinating relationship to the present, when there is a minor faction of Jews in Israel who are reported to have assembled all the parts of the Temple to build it again on its ancient site; but that site is currently occupied by an Islamic mosque. The sensitivity of the Muslims was demonstrated a few years ago when some Jews attempted to claim the site as their own and there was a major riot.)

With this measuring of the Temple precincts Jesus as the *Mighty Angel* is giving his authority to his fellow-Jews to recover the site for the nation of Israel, a *casus belli* if ever there was one; and it is a potential looming threat of a major war involving not only Jews and Muslims but their political as well as religious supporters across the world.

In this potentially explosive situation it is said John is “*given a measuring rod and told to . . . exclude the outer court of the temple because*

it has been given to the Gentiles". Could this be because it is currently being occupied presently by the Muslims, who are Gentiles in Biblical terms—as are all nations who are not Jews by birth? The "*Palestine Question*" is the most explosive geopolitical issue facing the world at this present time; with the United States of America, the European Union, and the United Nations Organisation seeking to find a *modus vivendi* with the powerful Arab States surrounding Israel to avoid its Armageddon potential.

To return to the *Mighty Angel's* prophecy:

"The Gentiles will trample on the holy city for forty two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth" (my emphasis)

Who are these "*two witnesses*", introduced so suddenly and unexpectedly? Metaphorically, fire issues out of their mouths and kills those who would injure them; that is, they have the power of life and death by what they say. There is no rain during the time they prophesy, they have power over water to turn it into blood, and to smite the earth with plagues. The only possible answer is that they are Enoch and Elijah, the only two people who never "*died*" in the accepted sense; Enoch was "*translated*", and Elijah was carried to heaven in a "*chariot of fire*" whirlwind. Elijah undeniably was a Jew, but Enoch was a Gentile; or, rather, Enoch lived before there were distinctions between "*Jews and Gentiles*". Enoch lived and prophesied before Abraham and the Promise from God, and before Moses and the *Law of God*, dividing Israel from other nations. Enoch is a representative "*Gentile*", as Elijah was a representative "*Jew*".

So the *Two Witnesses* have supportive evidence for their titles as "*witnesses*" to being alive, and Elijah has evidence from Jesus himself who stated "*Elijah shall truly first come and restore all things*" Saint Augustine of Hippo in his *City of God* has stated categorically:

It is a familiar theme in the conversation and heart of the faithful that, in the last days before the judgement, the Jews shall believe in the true Christ by means of the great and admirable prophet Elias . . ."

The *Two Witnesses* "*are immortal until their work is done*", and it will take the first appearance of Satan himself on earth to confront and

kill them. Their bodies will be exposed in the streets of the Gentile occupied city of Jerusalem for three-and-a-half days while people from all nations and languages rejoice in their deaths. But after the three-and-a-half days of death their bodies are revived and terror strikes those who have been mocking their deaths, especially when a voice is heard from heaven, saying, "*Come up here*".

While people are still gazing heavenwards there is a great earthquake and a large area of the city of Jerusalem is destroyed, and seven thousand people lose their lives. As a consequence many believe and give glory to God.

The Last Trumpet and Seven Vials of Wrath

"In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the southern border of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one 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." (my emphasis)

Isaiah 27:12-13: *New International Version*

The Last Trumpet Sounds

The *Seventh Angel*, who has been waiting patiently for three-and-a-half years while the other events run their course, now sounds the fateful *Seventh Trumpet* to usher in the great climacteric of "*the last days of the world*". It is not just one blast because there are other later occasions when the Angel is called on to sound the *Trumpet* to announce the events.

The unfolding *Apocalypse* from the Throne of God requires an extended *denouement*, given in a later recapitulation which involves the details of *Seven Vials of Wrath*, the *Great White Throne Judgement* of the world's unbelievers, and the establishment of a *New Heavens and*

New Earth. But here the earlier continuity of events is brought to a temporary conclusion, leaving the details of the unfolding final three-and-a-half years of the world to be completed in the recapitulation. Briefly, the first three-and-a-half years invoke God's judgements on the Gentile world for their unbelief; while the second three-and-a-half years primarily invoke God's judgements on Israel, and a final joint judgement.

Previously we noted it was announced by a cloud-robed Angel that "*in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall sound, the mystery of God is to be fulfilled*". How many "*days*", and "*when*" they would be fulfilled is open-ended. When the *Seventh Trumpet* of the Angel is sounded there is a great acclamation in heaven, saying, "*The kingdom of the world has become our Lord's and his Christ's; and he shall reign to the ages of the ages*".

Following this great acclamation the *Twenty Four Elders* of the *Overcoming Church* fall to their faces and give glory to God for all that He has accomplished in unveiling "*the mystery of God*". They are joined with a variety of voices from heaven and earth praising God and calling on Him to complete the divine triumph. God responds by revealing "*the temple of God in heaven*" together with "*the ark of the covenant*", accompanied by "*lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquakes and great hail*", just as He had revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai. The promise of eternal life in the heavenly "*temple*" and "*ark*" is revealed together with the judgements still to fall on those who rejected them throughout history.

The Woman Clothed with the Sun

As if to confirm this "*A great sign was seen in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; being with child she cries out to be delivered*". This vision to John emphasises that it is to be viewed not as a "*wonder*" to be awed, but as a "*sign*" to be observed—a representation of something else. Like all of John's Visions in the *Apocalypse* there are many diverse opinions of what the "*great sign of the woman*" means in the critical context of the unfolding of the final judgements, but any feasible interpretation must keep in mind the time and manner of all

surrounding events, especially the primary place of Israel in God's plans.

I believe, therefore, that the woman represents the "*Church of God*" which includes all God-believers from the beginning of time until this point, from Enoch to Abraham; from Moses to the *Prophets*, from Babylonian Judaism to Christians after Christ to the upcoming Armageddon. These were all believers in one form or another as subjects in the "*kingdom of God*", until after the resurrection of Christ (the "*man-child*" born of the woman) when all who are "*born again*" become children in the "*family of God*". The woman is "*clothed with the sun, and at her feet is the moon; and on her head is a crown*", all symbols of the divine royalty of the overarching "*Church of God*" believers throughout history. From God's perspective Israel is the true heir, Jacob rather than Esau; Judah rather than Reuben; David rather than Saul; the olive tree of which the Church is the Branch

The Red Dragon

But, at this critical point, there is another "*sign*" in the heavens, "*a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his head seven diadems*". There is no mystery about this *Dragon* because it is clearly stated it is "*the old serpent that is called the Devil and Satan, who seduces the whole world.*" Like the *Woman* with the man-child Satan is seen in both heaven and earth; the *Woman* is clothed in glory in heaven, yet in birth-travail on the earth. The *Dragon* is in heaven, drawing a third of the stars, or rebellious angels, and they are cast down to the earth, committed to destroying both *Woman and Child*, both Israel and the Church.

Satan is not literally a *Dragon* any more than the Church is a *Woman*. As has been noted, the sun-clad *Woman* denotes the historical Church in its entirety as a spiritual entity, and the *Dragon* denotes the Devil in his entirety as a demonic entity. This is not a mythical clash of equal Titans for global territory, but a wrathful God calling angels and humans to account for both betrayal of their destinies and destruction of His Creation. The *Dragon* "*dragging a third of the stars of heaven behind him*", is a sign that his demonic legions are less powerful,, and their reluctant "*dragging*" is a sign

that their evil powers are distinctly limited, less than those of the *Woman* who has twelve stars in her crown; The “*man-child*” the *Woman* brings forth is an offspring of the *Woman* and, as she is representative of the believers of all ages past, so the “*man-child*” is representative of the *Messiah*, the lodestar of all believers and ruler-in-waiting of the world. With the *Dragon* ready to devour the man-child at birth the latter is removed “*to God and the throne*”. The scene on earth shifts immediately to the mid-heaven where a war to the death takes place between the *Dragon* and his demons, and the Archangel Michael and his angels, in which the *Dragon* is routed. Then a great voice is heard declaring,

“Now is come salvation, and the power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before God day and night, has been cast down . . .”

But the angelic song also carried a warning that the *Dragon* “*had great wrath*” because he knew “*he had only a short time*”.

Beast out of the Sea: The Antichrist

The scene shifts to the shores of the Great Sea, possibly the Mediterranean, where the *Dragon* is seen standing on the sea-shore and a “*wild Beast*” emerges, with “*seven heads and ten horns, on his horns ten crowns and on his heads blasphemous names*”. The *Dragon* gives to the *Beast* “*his power and throne and great authority*” —in other words, he is the “*Antichrist*”, usurping that of Christ.

The subsequent activities of the *Beast* over the remaining time on earth indicate that these “*seven heads, ten horns, ten crowns, blasphemous names*” are symbolic, metaphorical representations of the major governments of the world, while the *Beast* personally embodies their political sovereignties in their final phases. The *Beast* is a single administration embodied in one distinctive individual—like Hitler and National Socialism, or Stalin and the Soviet Union—supported by ten different governments who accept his overall authority. Ultimately, as will be seen later, it is Babylon-revived with Satan as ruler.

The time is one of extreme unrest worldwide due to the earlier catastrophic interventions, out of which arises a “*Beast-like*” imperial power comprising ten rulers in a joint confederacy of evil

from the Mediterranean region. He will not be tolerant of any religion, but will be openly antagonistic against all religions, not by eliminating them but by integrating them in his own self-worship. Authority is given to him by Satan to rule over every “*tribe and people, and tongue and nation*”. It could be someone like Osama bin Laden of an extreme Islam, but more charismatic and ruthless.

Beast out of the Earth: Judas Revived?

Then John saw another “*Beast coming out of the earth, with two horns like a lamb, and speaking like the Dragon*”. He has all the powers of the *First Beast*, but his task as a “*False Prophet*” is to cause all who dwell on the earth to worship the *First Beast*. With his magical powers he is a religious leader, while the *First Beast* is the political ruler. Some influential commentators maintain that he is “*Judas revived . . . the son of perdition*” of the *Old Testament* prophecies, of whom it said when he died that “*he went to his own place*” as if reserved for a future purpose.

Be that as it may, the second *Beast*, “*False Prophet*”, is possessed of superhuman powers used in support of the *First Beast*, making an image of the *First Beast* and causing the image to speak, then ordering all who do not worship the image to be killed. As a further measure of worship of the *First Beast* he commands all who worship the *First Beast* to have a distinctive “*brand*” of the mysterious number “666” on their right hands or foreheads as a public sign of their loyalty. In the Hebrew alphabet the characters also have numerical significance, known as *gematria*, and these in turn have spiritual meaning, with the number “6” being “*the number of man*”, and “666” meaning “*the Abyss*”. “666”, is also a Greek symbol of evil made up of two characters which stand for the name of Christ, with the third a figure of a crooked serpent between them. Whatever the correct interpretation—and there are many!—this mystical insignia of the *Beast* is to be prominently displayed on everybody on earth, rich as well as poor, in submission and commitment to the *First Beast*.

The Response from Heaven

This parenthesis of *Satan's* activities on earth is brought to a

sudden close with the Apostle John given a contrasting vision of what is happening in heaven. Instead of the *Beast* there is a *Lamb*; instead of the blaspheming earthlings with their demonic “666” symbol on their foreheads, there is a company of rejoicing believers with the name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads; instead of the doom and gloom on earth, there is singing and music from 144,000 of the redeemed *Remnant Israel*. They stand with the *Lamb* on Mount Zion, in the heavenly New Jerusalem, made famous on earth by King David, and their new song is the fulfilment of the inspirational psalms of David.

But this *Lamb* in heaven is no longer the apparently helpless and silent creature on the way to slaughter as represented on earth, but is clothed in divine power and wisdom. He is about to claim his own inheritance as all the prophets from the beginning of time have foretold to a sceptical world. Here he is surrounded by the *Overcoming Church*, plus the *Universal Church* from the beginning of time, and now the 144,000 of the redeemed *Remnant Israel* believers. These are those who set themselves to strive all their lives for the divine ideal—“*they are blameless*”—purchased by God, handpicked, responsive, bought for a price paid by Christ, from among the uniform mass of unbelievers.

Three Angel Messengers

Following on the revelation of the elect *Remnant Jews* the Apostle John is shown a series of three scenes, introduced by a series of angels “*flying in mid-air*” with distinct messages. The *First Angel* proclaims “*the everlasting gospel*”, a universal gospel of the kingdom of God reduced to its simplest requirement to all those who live on the earth:

“Fear God, and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water”.

That was the original gospel of Jesus Christ reduced to its least requirement, the further evidence of a merciful God prepared to be forgiving even in the most extreme circumstances. It is a loving God offering a stark choice between acknowledging him as the true God

and eternal salvation, or following the Devil to eternal damnation.

The *Second Angel* follows with a dramatic denouement: "*Fallen! Fallen is Babylon that great city, because she made all nations drink the maddening wine of her fornications*". Babylon, historically, was the preferred magnificent capital of all the three great ancient empires, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece, its breath-taking architecture, walls and gardens making it at one time one of the seven wonders of the world. It is also the one city in the Bible that figures almost antithetically equal with Jerusalem.

In the genealogy of Jesus his history is listed in three segments of fourteen: from Abraham (Babylon) to David (Jerusalem); from David to the Babylonian captivity; and from the Babylonian captivity to the Christ crucifixion (Jerusalem).⁸⁹From the time of King David in Jerusalem there is a series of almost thirty divinely-sent prophets the centrality of whose prophecies is the sin, arrogance and fall of Babylon in the final days of the world, when Satan and the Christ will engage in a monumental battle for dominance, resulting in the total destruction of "*Babylon the Great*" and all it represents historically and Biblically.

Here in the message of the *Second Angel* it is only the announcement of the forthcoming demise of Babylon in a holocaust of destruction as the world comes to an end. Like the modern Jerusalem, which is historically distant from the prophetic record as the crux of divine and human history (although it is central to the current geopolitical situation), Babylon, or modern Iran/Iraq, is also historically distant from the prophetic record (although Iraq's former President Saddam poured billions of dollars into re-constructing ancient Babylon as a potential capital for Islam).

From the records of the past prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, Babylon is "*Satan's Seat*" and the crux of his ambitions to rule the world. With the assistance of the two "*Beasts*" it appears as if Satan's intention is to do this from the Mesopotamian region, and eventually from Babylon.

Third Angel

The message of the *Third Angel* is more general but even more

⁸⁹ Matthew 1:17

ominous. Crying with a *“great voice”* the Angel announces that *“whosoever is found worshipping the Beast and his image, or has the Beast’s mark on his forehead or on his hand, he shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God and be tormented throughout eternity”*.

In support of the *Third Angel* there is a voice from heaven to provide support and comfort to those who remain faithful to God throughout the reign of the Antichrist. Like the days of the first century Christians in the Roman Coliseum providing entertainment in martyrdom extravaganzas, they are assured from heaven, *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth . . . they shall rest from their labours and their works follow them.”*

The Harvest and Vintage

The scene shifts once again and John sees a white cloud, and on the cloud one is seated who looks like *“the Son of Man”*, with a crown of gold on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. An angel comes out of the temple calling out to the One on the cloud, *“Take your sickle and reap, for the time of reaping has come.”* Then the One on the cloud casts his sickle on the earth and reaps, fulfilling the prophetic parable of Jesus:

“He that sows the good seed is the son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are the angels.”⁹⁰

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, also carrying a sickle, joined by one from the altar who has *“power over the (altar) fire”* His goal is to *“gather the ripe grapes of the wine of the earth”* Although the words are seductive their meaning is sinister in that *“the ripe grapes of the earth”* are those who are ripe for divine judgement. They are mown down by the angelic sickle and cast into the great wine-press of the wrath of God. It is the looming shadow of the coming Armageddon, the gathering of armies, the counsels of the world’s mighty leaders, under the iron rule of the Beast and his sinister adjutant, the False Prophet, and their goal is the destruction of *“the holy city”* Jerusalem.

⁹⁰ Matthew 13:38-39

Seven Angels and Seven Plagues

From the midst of the host of heaven John sees *Seven Angels* with the *Seven Last Plagues* emerging from the heavenly temple, dressed in shining linen with golden sashes. One of the four cherubim near the throne of God steps forward and gives to the *Seven Angels* seven golden bowls “filled with the wrath of God”. Then a loud voice proclaims, “Go and pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.”

Six thousand years of God’s anger against the human race that had either ignored or mocked him is now unleashed on the world. The *First Angel* pours its contents on all those who carry “the mark of the beast” and they become plagued with painful ulcers. The *Second Angel* pours his plague on the sea and it becomes putrescent blood killing all sea life. The *Third Angel* pours his plague on the rivers and springs of waters and they, too, become blood, as a token of judgement on those who had shed the blood of believers. The *Fourth Angel* pours his plague on the sun and its intensity increases and scorches those who curse God. The *Fifth Angel* pours his plague on the *Beast* and the earth becomes black as night. The *Sixth Angel* pours his plague over the River Euphrates and opens the way for the mighty army coming from the Orient to attack Jerusalem from the Valley of Megiddo, or Armageddon, and all the city represents of defiance against the *Beast* and his policies. There is a short lull, then the *Seventh Angel* pours his plague into the air, a loud voice from heaven declares “It is finished”, and a series of mighty earthquakes shattered the cities of the world, including Jerusalem.

This is the time prophesied by Isaiah when he said:

“The Lord is angry with all nations; his anger against all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. Their slain will be rejected, their bodies will set up a stench, and the mountains will be soaked with their blood. All the stars of heaven will be dissolved, and the sky rolled up like a scroll. The starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shrivelled figs from the fig tree . . . It is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion . . .”

The universal eruption on such an unprecedented scale will level mountains, rend the earth, and cause islands to disappear into the sea. This is the Son of God acting as men and women mockingly

challenged him as Messiah to act, when he had come to earth to save them. When he comes to claim his rightful inheritance those who mock will reel in awe and fear as the world around them is consumed with a raging destruction.

Babylon: Myth, Metaphor, or Memorial

"I will rise up against Babylon', declares the Lord God Almighty. 'I will cut off from Babylon her name and survivors, her offspring and descendants' declares the Lord. I will turn her into a place for owls and into swampland: I will sweep her with the broom of destruction', declares the Lord Almighty."

Isaiah 14:22-23 New International Version

Historical Parenthesis

The Babylon of myth and history from the beginning of time had set itself to be the centre of rebellion against God. The sequence of events according to the Scriptures is stated as follows. The *"whole earth was of one language and a common speech"* for some time after the Flood. But it was not long until there was discontent with the *"righteous"* circumstances introduced by Noah, and a desire to alter these into self-generated philosophies in regions beyond Mesopotamia. So there began a great migration of *"tribes and*

families", in which the sons of Noah and their descendants moved into their respective world-wide territories and practices

The first recorded imperial dictator was known as Nimrod, whose father, Cush, was a key figure in the great apostasy from God. Cush, the son of Ham, the son of Noah, later became known as *Hermes* in Egypt, *Mercury* in Greece and Rome, and *Nebo* in Babylon, in the idolatrous worship of the sun as God. It was Cush who founded the city of Babel, later to be known as Babylon, and who provided its early rebellious anti-God philosophy. His son, Nimrod, or Ninus, was the consolidator of the city-state of Babel, and the political expansion into the world's first empire from Mesopotamia. Their declared ambition in building Babel, and expanding the Babylonian hegemony, was *self-identity* ("let us make a name for ourselves"); *self-gratification* ("lest we be scattered over the face of the earth"); and *self-transcendence* ("let us build a city, and a tower to reach to the heavens")

Between them they created the world's first literature in the Sumerian cuneiform script which would dominate the region of Asia for the next two thousand years. They were skilled in all forms of metal-work from jewellery to war weapons to chariots. Their architects and engineers were creators and builders of the great cities of antiquity. The proliferation of gods and idolatrous practices gave birth to a variety of priesthoods; which, with the emergence of hero-kings and ruler-divinities, and an emphasis on temple-building, consolidated the priesthoods into a powerful institution of state.

The religious systems, including the influence of the zodiac and the occult, generated by the Babylonians and the Chaldeans, were given the name of "*Mysteries*", and became incorporated into Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek and Phoenician practices in Asia, and then spread throughout the world in distinctive multifarious forms. The priesthoods gave them the name of "*Mysteries*" because of the imposed seal of secrecy, and the sanction of the administered oath required to be accepted into the respective religious communities. By a combination of science, magic and occult practices the initiated participants experienced phenomena of "*lights, radiant fire, strange*

and amazing objects, terrible apparitions...and, finally, the appearance of the great god Osiris, Tammuz, Nimrod or Adonis, to soothe feelings and engage affections . . ."⁹¹

The ancient system of the "Mysteries" was wholly designed to glorify a dead individual, initially Nimrod, then Semiramis, "Queen of Heaven", then their "son", Tammuz, who was claimed to have the power of resurrection from the dead. From this "infernal trinity" sprang the whole pantheon of gods and mythic heroes to be worshipped instead of the one true God. Cush became known to pagan antiquity under the character of *Bel*, "the Confounder", or "Chaos", the god of confusion, son of Janus (of whom Ovid said he was "the god of all gods"), from whom all lesser gods were supposed to have had their origin

At this point, however, God intervened once again, saying:

*"If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel - because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth ."*⁹² (my emphases)

Some fifteen hundred years later the aristocratic prophet, Daniel, became the chief adviser to the Babylonian world emperor of the time, Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel pointed out to Nebuchadnezzar that, in the dream sequence just given to them both, and subsequent interpretation by Daniel, there was no mention of the forgettable kings of Babylon who preceded Nebuchadnezzar; and also, of those equally forgettable Babylonians who were likely to succeed him, until the time of the Medo-Persian conquest, followed by Greece, both of whose memorable leaders ruled from Babylon—and that even then God had emphasised the diminishing relevance, "After you, another kingdom will arise inferior to yours."

In other words, Nebuchadnezzar was the only *personal* world ruler recognized by God; the others were *kingdoms*, civilizations, not *persons*, and they were successively "inferior". That was because God had foretold through the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah particularly,

⁹¹ *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop. Published by A&C Black, London.

⁹² Genesis 11: 6-9

as he had to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, that *another similarly powerful world ruler like Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would arise “in the last days” to confront God’s Messiah-Prince.*⁹³ All other nations and forms of government would decay and disappear due to their intrinsic weaknesses until the Biblically historic Anti-Messiah, or Antichrist, appeared in person in a future Babylon.

Although there are four mentions of the word “*mystery*” in John’s *Apocalypse*⁹⁴ they are related to only two phenomena - *the mystery of the “Seven Churches”, and the mystery of “Babylon the Great”*. These could also be classified respectively as “*the mystery of godliness*” and “*the mystery of lawlessness*” recorded by the Apostle Paul. Intriguingly, the two mysteries are presented by God to the Apostle John in his *Apocalypse* as two figurative women—one a sun-clad *Heavenly Mother* and the other a lurid *Mother of Harlots*.

Significantly John is carried away “*into the wilderness*” to see the vision of this woman

“. . . sitting on a scarlet beast covered with blasphemous names, with seven heads and ten horns. She is dressed in purple and scarlet, glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls, with a golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. On her forehead there is inscribed.

*‘MYSTERY
BABYLON THE GREAT
MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH’.*

“One of the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication . . . ”

Both women in the vision are magnificently dressed. Both women are mothers; one “*gave birth to a son who is to rule all nations*”, and the other “*the mother of harlots and the abomination of the earth*”. Both are extremely influential in the Biblical history of the world. One is a pure woman, the other is a prostitute. One comes out of the heavenly city of God, Jerusalem; the other comes out of notorious city of Satan,

⁹³ Isaiah 2:2, Jeremiah 23:20, 30:24

⁹⁴ Revelation 1:20, 17:5,7

Babylon. One is representative of the Universal Church believers from the beginning to the end of time; the other is representative of the false conglomeration of unbelievers who have sold themselves to Satan in false religious representations until the end of time.

The definition of a prostitute is a woman who offers herself indiscriminately in exchange for money or influence. So the "mystery" of this Babylon the Great was that as "*the mother of prostitutes*" she had given birth to a practice of religions which prostituted the revealed purposes of God for self-centred gain. There are only three divinely "*revealed*" religions among the world-wide proliferating variety of ecclesiastical denominations, in the sense that they exclusively claim to "*bond*" individuals with the Creator. That is the true meaning of the word "*religion*", *religio*; it is the bringing together the two sides of a wound, or torn garment. Buddhism has no God; and Hinduism has a proliferation of gods. Only Judaism, Christianity and Islam claim to provide that personal relationship, but in God's sight they have prostituted themselves for institutional gain by introducing rabbis, pastors and popes between individuals and God. As the world reaches its end, God's fury with their whoring betrayal is directed at this pluralistic Babylonian monstrosity, the Biblically classified "*Mother of Prostitutes*".

In the sixth century BC, rabbinical Judaism's isolation of Jehovah and replacement of Moses' *Pentateuch* by the Babylonian-influenced *Torah* and *Traditions*, and subsequent rabbinical rejection and crucifixion of Jesus as Messiah, introduced a new first century AD persecution of Christians by Jews as well as Romans. When institutional *Christendom* of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, together with its sister institutional religion, *Judaism*, lost their Jehovah-centred integrity by the seventh century AD, the "Prophet" Mohammed, Abraham-descended Arabian offspring religion from Ishmael and Esau, launched a unifying crusade: a new God-centred *Islam* under the name of "*Allah*", an alternative name for God derived from the Jewish *El Elohe*. But, in time, Islam too became corrupted by its professional religionists into a militant institution which was rebellious to God's commands. The "*Mystery Babylon: Mother of Harlots*" of the last days of the world, therefore,

in God's view is ALL the Biblically-claiming but rebellious Jehovah—excluding institutional religions—*Judaism, Christendom and Islam*

Israel and Arabs

From the Biblical standpoint there is one continuous significant element in the secular history of the nations as the old world draws to a close: the future of the perennially conflicting two Biblical "*great nations*" of divine promise, the descendants of Abraham's second-born Israel through Sarah; and his first-born Ishmael through his Egyptian maid. The central focus of that divinely foretold historic conflict of descendants is Mesopotamia, or the Middle East, and the epicentre is the "*Jerusalem/Babylon axis*", some elements of which have been described earlier. *In the last days of the old world the kingdom of God is centred in Jerusalem; the kingdom of Satan in Babylon.*

God has made clear it is His purpose that the descendants of Abraham—not just the Children of Israel—should be His chosen vehicle of divine enlightenment; and, when the Israelis failed, the descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. Time after time in the *Old Testament* God used the Amalekites, the Ammonites, the Midianites, the Moabites, as instruments of His purposes when Israel was disobedient or rebellious. Later Christians, sharing Abraham's faith, would be His alternative instrument to create "*the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven*". It is an awesome, well-nigh incredible relationship, purpose, destiny and vision. It spans four thousand years of pulsating, turbulent events involving both lines of Abraham's physical descendants—the tribes of Israel and Ishmael—and his spiritual progeny, the Christian Church.

This remarkable relationship can be seen in the Jewish struggles to be "*the light to enlighten all nations*" of their divine destiny until their rebellion and Dispersion by Assyria, Babylon and Rome; in the two thousand years of the Christian's attempts to do likewise; and in the fourteen hundred years of the Arabs' fanatical devotion to the tenets of Islam. It is what lies behind the Jewish return to their "*Promised Land*" as the claimed "*God's chosen people*" in the twentieth century. It is what fuels the passions of the Islamic Arab nations in

their claims to Canaan/Palestine, Jerusalem, and the current, implacable, world-threatening conflagration in the Middle East.

In the time since Abraham, the Jews forgot, or have casuistically ignored, God's promise to Abraham's elder step-son, Ishmael, that "*I will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation*".⁹⁵ The "*Twelve Tribes of Ishmael*", according to God's promise, would also be a "*great nation*" as well as "*the Twelve Tribes of Israel*". And so "*the Arab nation*" came into being alongside the Jews in the region of Canaan/Israel, and became natural tribal enemies long before they chose the Islamic teachings of their Prophet Mohammed which would increase the mutual enmities.

Israel/Ishmael Conflict

As the twenty-first century opens the threat to world peace is not the religious and political ambitions of the *Western Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox* or *post-Luther Reformed Churchoids* of the past two thousand years, but the resurgent threat of the third, *Islamic Churchoid*. (The dictionary definition of "*churchoid*" is "*resembling a church*" and has been applied to the various religious institutional and denominational organisations differing from the original Church definition of a "*spiritual organism*" of Jesus and the Apostle Paul.)

Historically, the above religious organisations departed from the *Law of Moses*: negatively, the *Remnant Jewish* exiles returning from Babylon to Judah brought with them the rabbinical Judaism denounced by Jesus; and positively, in his rejection of Judaism Jesus initiated his *Church of the Messiah*; the Arabian descendants of Esau through Mohammed brought into the world the militant and murderous *Islam* because of his accusatory "*disobedience*" of both Judaism and Christianity. Between these three revelatory off-shoots of Abraham they created what the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century termed the hydra-headed "*monstrous mental delusion*" of the three historically counterfeit Churchoids.

The militant Islam of the "*dark ages*" died away with the dissolution of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires and was no

⁹⁵Genesis 21:13-18

⁹⁴Revelation 1:20, 17:5,7

longer a threat of any kind, religious or political, at the start of the twentieth century. So, what makes religious/political Islam a threat in 2008? At the beginning of the twentieth century Winston Churchill wrote about Islam in his book *The River War*:

"No stronger retrograde force exists in the world. Far from being moribund Mohammedanism is a militant and proselytizing faith. It has already spread throughout Central Africa, raising fearless warriors at every step, and were it not that Christianity is sheltered in the strong arms of science . . . the civilization of modern Europe might fall, as fell the civilization of ancient Rome."

Some thirty years later Hilaire Belloc wrote in *The Great Heresies*:

"Will not perhaps the temporal power of Islam return and with it the menace of an armed Muhammedan world which will shake the dominion of Europeans—still nominally Christian—and reappear again as the prime enemy of our civilization? . . . Since we have here a very great religion, physically paralyzed, but morally intensely alive, we are in the presence of an unstable equilibrium".

During the thousand years following Mohammed's death the Islamic religion spread from Arabia westwards to the Atlantic, and eastwards to the Pacific, in over thirty countries, in response to a failed Judaism and a failing Christendom. The unique emphasis in Islam of integrating the mundane with the spiritual, the observance of practice over correctness of doctrine, meant that the decisions of commitment were not made in terms of religious doctrine and political theory, Church and State, but between unquestioningly obeying God's (Allah's) way and rejecting every other way as wrong.

In fact, the classical Islamic languages had no equivalent expression for "*religion*" and "*politics*", so there were no internal national "*frameworks*" such as Church and State, with their religious and political variables, to create tensions or rivalries within the parent *Churchoid*. In Islamic military and imperial expansion all political and religious allegiance was summed up and enforced in the phrase, "*Convert to Islam, or Die*".

The worldwide expansion of Islam peaked between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries due to a combination of the devastating catastrophe of the "*Black Death*" plague in both East and

West nations, together with the limitations of the five thousand year-old collapsing agrarian system in the face of new sources of wealth, new sea-faring technology, new political and economic systems emerging in Europe and the Americas. The clash of agrarian, economic, political and religious systems produced unprecedented and increasing tensions on the Islamic Empire as the rural, tribal and Koran-based systems were not equipped to deal with the titanic economic and political convulsions taking place in the West.

There were attempts within the Islamic nations to imitate the commercial West while still observing the teachings of *Islam*, but these were mostly superficial military and sea-faring adventures by ambitious *caliphs* and *sultans*, which lacked an adequate economic and political infrastructure to counter the rapidly expanding international commerce of the West. This Islamic decline accelerated until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when, as we will see later, oil was discovered in predominantly Moslem States in the Middle East and created new opportunities for *Islam*.

At the end of the nineteenth century ancient Israel—later called Judea and Palestine—was a barren, inhospitable country, much of it desert, inhabited mostly by Arab peasants ruled by the Ottoman Turks, who were also Islamic, and had only about 24,000 resident Jews. But the twentieth century was to radically transform not only Palestine and the “*Jewish Question*” but also the whole Mesopotamian “*Fertile Crescent*” region, and bring it once again into central geopolitical importance.

The “*Industrial Revolution*” in the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought the Middle Eastern region into significant commercial and political focus with the creation of the Suez Canal, and the modernization of methods of transport—ocean-going liners, automobiles and airplanes. Oil became the “*black gold*”, and there was a frenzy of exploration. The greatest concentration of the coveted liquid was found in Mesopotamia—in Iran, in 1908; in Iraq, in 1927; in Bahrein, in 1932; in Saudi Arabia, in 1938.

At the same time, the emerging conflict between “*Zionist*” Jewish religious and political groups in Europe culminated in the

demand for their own State of Israel, backed by leading world powers for their own financial and political interests, and was intensified and made infinitely more complex because of their international essential needs of oil supplies from the Islam dominated region.

At the end of World War II the politicized “Zionist” Jews of Europe—a mostly secular combination of Western Europe capitalists and Eastern Europe socialists - launched terrorist raids against the reluctant British occupiers of Palestine; and, after Britain withdrew its mandate, the United Nations Organization agreed to the partition of Palestine into an Arab State and Jewish State. This was acceptable to neither, and the seeds of the future Biblical Armageddon were sown because of irreconcilable institutional religious and political interests. The Jews had the Promised Land and no oil; the Arabs had enormous supplies of oil and territory, but no Jerusalem and Palestine. In 1959, the oil-producing nations formed the “*Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)*” and, following a meeting in Baghdad, accepted a proposal by Iraq to use their newly acquired powers of refusing oil to intimidate the world.

In 1945 the Arabs formed the “*Arab League*”, and oil was included in the constitutional terms of reference. With the post-war rise to power of President Nasser of Egypt, oil was moved to a central place in Arab policy - even although Egypt had none of its own. In his book, *The Philosophy of a Revolution*, published in 1954, Nasser described oil as one of the three components of Arab power: “*Petroleum is the vital nerve of civilization, without which all its means cannot possibly exist.*”

But it was against the newly occupied “*Zionist Israel*” that the Arabs directed their newly found, oil-based, economic coercion. In 1948 they imposed what was described as “*a boycott*”, but was really blatant blackmail, against any company in the world trading with Israel or making any investment in the country; if they did, then they were banned from doing any business with any Arab State—no oil deals, no investments, no exports, no imports, no construction contracts, nothing was excluded. It was a crippling economic blow

at Israel, as well as a serious limitation on many major multinational corporations, unless they were large enough or important enough—such as arms manufacturers, or the rapidly expanding telecommunication firms - for them to disregard the Arab blackmail. The blackmailing move was not successful at the time, but the pattern was clear—oil-producing Arabs were in a position to blackmail the world's great nations unless they agreed to Arab terms. That threat still exists, as can be seen in the current, 2008, extortionate rising of the price of oil from £10 a barrel to £130 and going higher, and only disagreements among the Arabs themselves have blunted the edge of this formidable intimidatory weapon.

The humiliating defeat of the Arabs in the 1969 *Six Days' War*, and the increasing power and prominence of Israel in the Middle East region and the world, was a constant goad to the seventeen Islamic nations surrounding Israel. Their defeat, too, had exposed them to manipulation by the international superpowers for their own ends, and increased the Arab dependence on one or other of them—yet another humiliation. Their own obvious national weaknesses, despite the unifying religion of Islam, combined with the blatant greed and corruption in their various societies, also embarrassed them before the world.

These factors contributed towards the growth of Islamic militancy in the 1980s. If the Arab armies were inadequate, and their politics a myth, then at least, they thought, they could take pride in the theology and culture of their Islamic heritage—and the formidable military arsenals their great oil wealth helped them to purchase. When Ayatollah Komeini emerged from his exile in France in 1979 to overthrow the Shah of Iran and declare an Islamic Republic he was greeted with hysterical fervour not only by Iranians but by the whole Arab world—especially when he defied the powerful United States of America as "*the Great Satan*".

In neighbouring Iraq another revolution was also taking place, with Saddam Hussein ruthlessly consolidating his own Ba'ath Party power—a combination of Nazism and Stalinism—and with declared ambitions not only to be ruler of a powerful new Iraq but also a leader of all the Arab peoples. In a speech delivered in 1979, after he

had consolidated his grip on dictatorial power, he said:

“The glory of Arabs stems from the glory of Iraq. Throughout history, whenever Iraq became mighty and flourished, so did the Arab Nation. This is why we are striving to make Iraq mighty, formidable, and developed, and why we shall spare nothing to improve welfare and to brighten the glory of Iraqis.”

For eight years both Muslim Iraq and Iran countries fought a war for supremacy of their different political/religious ideologies in the Middle East, both their huge armies supplied by the most modern military equipment from the West and the Soviet Union, with Iraq finally defeating Iran. The United States was the major supplier to the Middle East countries, selling them \$30.7 billion worth of weapons from 1987 to 1990. The Middle East was then reckoned to be the largest arms market in the Third World, accounting for more than half of all arms purchases in the previous decade.

Militant Islam Reborn

Islam had its first sectarian division within twenty years of Mohammed’s death, the effects of which are still evident in Arab rivalries in the twenty-first century. It was basically political but had its roots in religion; that is, two followers of Mohammed contended for succession to the leadership, and when one of them agreed to submit his claims to arbitration a number of his followers promptly broke away in turn, saying that he should have appealed to the “*Book of God*”.

This was the origin of the most important sectarian divisions in Islam—*Sunni*, *Shia* and *Khawarij*—over different views of leadership and militancy. The *Sunnis*, meaning “*Path*” or “*Traditions*”—by far the largest—believed that the Caliphate was an elective office and must be held by a member of the *Qurayah* tribe; the *Shi’ites*, meaning “*Shiah*” or “*the party of Ali*”, regarded the descendants of Ali as the only rightful Caliphs, which was an Allah-bestowed office and not subject to human appointment. The third sect, the *Khawarij*—the smallest—believed that the Caliphate was open to believers fitted for the office. In the twentieth century, when the Middle East was being divided among contending Western powers, Saudi Arabia had

been given what turned out to be the most productive and wealthiest oil region, despite the royal family being aligned with the extremist *Wahabhi* sect of Islam. Complicating all this, according to an early tradition Mohammed had said that Islam would eventually be divided into 73 sects, of which 72 would perish and only one remain.

After the discovery of oil, the two most important developments of the twentieth century in the Middle East were the emergence of the two fanatically ambitious leaders, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran, and Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The former launched a militant Islamic fundamentalism, and the latter launched the dream of a new Babylonian world empire. Between them, unconsciously, they prepared the world for the Biblical Armageddon. The problem for the fanatically fundamentalist Islamists of Iran in the turbulent Middle East was that while they were passionate advocates of Islam they were not Arabs. But Saddam Hussein was not only an Arab, he was a man consumed with a vast ambition to restore the glory and power of the ancient Babylonian Empire. After oil was discovered in Iraq in the early part of the twentieth century, with the oil revenues and rise to power of Saddam Hussein, by 1990 Iraq was reckoned militarily, and with the world's fifth largest oil supply, to be the fifth most powerful nation in the world. The internal religious problem of both nations, complicating their opposing political ambitions, was the rival claims of dominating sects within Islam and even within their own countries. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini, a leading *Shi'ite*, after his victorious expulsion of the Shah, announced an Islamic campaign to purify Islam, to make Iran an Islamic State governed by Islamic *Law and Traditions*; then launched a religious crusade against the world of infidels and the "*Great Satan, America*".

About the same time, a new type of Arab had emerged, young Islamic extremists inspired by the successful Iranian revolution, who no longer respected or feared the quarreling old oligarchic sheikhs whom they saw as betrayers of their religion, cultures and countries. With money available from both renegade Arab and Soviet sources they formed groups whose main goal was to drive the Jews out of Palestine by whatever means were necessary. They conducted armed

raids against Israel in a rising crescendo of terror. In response, the Israeli government stepped up their reprisals, which still continue. Seeking justification and support for their claims and actions the extreme groups of Arabs—led overtly or covertly by Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Libya financed an increasing number of terrorist activities in the West. This threat has grown in seriousness as the oil-financed military capability of the Arab nations expands exponentially.

With the twentieth century combination of oil and its vast profits, plus religious extremism, together with *Zionist* political militancy and subsequent Jewish immigration to Israel/Palestine, there has emerged a new aggressive Arab on the world scene. While Jewish nationalistic *Zionism* unwittingly contributed towards forging a cohesive Arab identity, a paradoxical spin-off from the oil wealth drove an envious and avaricious wedge between the have and have-not Arab nations. A small country like Kuwait had oil reserves of 90 billion barrels, while a large country like Egypt had none; also, some of Kuwait's huge reserves were actually under Iraqi territory, and Kuwait had access to the sea and Iraq did not. Iraq had the greatest oil resources after Saudi Arabia, but the vast reserves lay under the deserts shared with Kuwait. Saudi Arabia had the largest immediate deposits of oil, but was ruled despotically by the extremist royal family of the *Wahabhi* sect of Islam. At the beginning of the new millennium, while the Western superpowers were dependent to a great extent on Middle Eastern oil, the two great Asian nations of China and India, with their resurgent and booming economies were posing a monumental threat in their rapidly expanding demands for oil and political influence to fuel their confident ambitions.

Currently, while the world's leading powers fight off the hovering specter of financial collapse, and frantically engage in a deadly competition of out-selling and out-buying each other in oil sales and armaments purchases, the Middle East Muslim nations are leading buyers of all military weaponry, and the great powers of West and East are supplying the Arab nations with everything—including—surreptitiously!—nuclear expertise. The US Foreign Relations

Committee has compiled a list of corporations from 25 countries that sold Iraq materials and equipment or technology for nuclear, biological, and poison gas weapons.

Meanwhile, during his ruling tenure, Saddam Hussein had used a huge proportion of the oil revenues of Iraq to rebuild ancient Babylon. With typical flamboyance he began the rebuilding during the time of war with Iran—in order, he said, to inspire the Iraqi people. By the time of his invasion of Kuwait he had rebuilt a large part of Nebuchadnezzar's fabled city of golden brick. In two-and-a-half years his builders baked and set more than sixty million bricks to reconstruct the start of the architectural glory that was ancient Babylon, some of which was destroyed and much of the remainder damaged during the anti-Saddam war in Iraq.

William Blake, writing of Milton's shortcomings in his *Paradise Lost*, said, "*The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's Party without knowing it*". When the three great revealed religions of Judaism, Christendom and Islam, discuss ecumenicism they are "*the Devil's Party without knowing it*".

Currently, despite a socially-fractured British society unable to resolve its internal problems Christianity's leading Anglican Churchoid is convulsed and unable to resolve their fundamental problems of women priests and homosexuality; the Islamic Churchoid is split between fundamentalism and modernism; and Israel's Zionist leaders prepare to launch a different holocaust of nuclear strikes against Iran. Meanwhile the three Churchoids, like the United Nations and Tony Blair, spend fruitless months and years discussing peace and brotherhood while "*fettered*" to discuss the spiritual issues which are the real solutions to a doomed world.

With the collapse of atheistic Marxism, what is emerging on the world scene is the rise of a greater threat than politicized Roman Catholicism or pseudo-religious Marxism, a "*Devil's Party*": a religious ecumenicism of a bland form of Islam, Israel's pseudo-Biblical ambitions for a restored "*Promised Land*"; and the late Pope's ambitions for an authoritarian Roman Churchoid in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America; all under the

umbrella of a vaguely defined democratic ideal. This has taken a new twist in the twenty-first century with the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launching his "*Faith Foundation*" to bring all the religions of the world together under one umbrella. The new Pope Benedict, the European Union and the United States are eagerly bringing a "*religious coalition of the willing*" linking Islam with Christendom and Judaism.

A "Third Revolution"

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, said that there are two kinds of revolution: the really passionate revolution, which tears everything down; and the other, bloodless, kind, which leaves everything standing but "*cunningly emptied of significance*". But the post-Marxist, 20th century prophet, Alexandr Solzhenytsin, has added another, third, kind of revolution: "*. . . a moral revolution . . . because of a change to inward development . . .*" He went on to quote Dostoevski in his *Diary Of A Writer*: "*. . . when, with the passage of time, a nation's spiritual strength is sapped, that nation falls, together with all its civil statutes and ideals.*"

Christopher Dawson, in his book, *The Gods of Revolution*, writing on the subject of the English, French and American Revolutions, has a chapter entitled, "*The Birth of Democracy*", in which he says:

" . . . this (European Enlightenment) movement was not originally a democratic one and it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that the democratic ideal was clearly formulated".

Then, going on to speak of Jean Jacques Rousseau as the real force behind the French revolution, and not the usually accepted Voltaire or Diderot, he declares:

"It was he who first fired men's minds with the ideal of democracy not as a mere system of government but as a new way of life, a vision of social justice and fraternity which is nothing else than the kingdom of God on earth. It is true that Rousseau himself was not a revolutionary in the ordinary sense. The revolution that he preached was not a political or economic one but a spiritual one . . ." (my emphases)

The historic institutional Christian Church at that time, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, was in no spiritual state to deal with

the turbulent variety of social and political issues being raised, and it was left to the Jacobin Society, led by the notorious Robespierre, to emerge as the “*spiritual*” voice of France following on the Revolution. In time Robespierre would become the embodiment of despotism and terrorism which destroyed the ideals of the French Revolution, but at first he—and not Miraneau, Marat or Danton—regarded the Revolution as essentially a moral and religious reformation. At the launching of the radical religious movement “*The Worship of the Supreme Being*” in Paris, on June 8, 1794, it was said that Robespierre “*officiated as a kind of priest.*”

Meanwhile, the existing institutional Christian churches were increasingly in disarray, and “*popular religion*” discredited, so the rapidly developing “*Secular Democracy*” of the Western nations became less and less interested in spiritual values and possible solutions, and simply used the religious representatives as impotent tokens at ceremonial occasions. As modern political Democracy was being born, historical Christianity was entering terminal irrelevancy.

Writing of this period in his book, *Evolution and Revolution*, W.F.Wertheim said:

“Evidently, in order to attract broad masses, a revolution needed elements of popular cultism that had been hitherto associated with religion. In later revolutions there were similar experiences. One could quote in this connection the Lenin cult in the Mausoleum on the Red Square in Moscow, or certain facets of the Mao cult in China . . .

“Evidently, the kind of fervour associated with religious movements, seeks expression in familiar forms even though the prevalent revolutionary ideology is a-religious or anti-religious, as for example, the branding of religion by classical Marxists, as ‘opiate of the people’. Each revolutionary movement, though rational in its means and immediate political aims, represents, at the same time, the dream of a fully renewed social order, and this dream may find its expression in quasi-religious forms . . .” (my emphasis)

Actually, Marx did not say that religion *per se* was the “*opiate of the masses*” but “*religious systems*”—an important distinction. As a China-watching journalist based in Hong Kong I reported the new page of history being written in China, and I wondered if an

authoritarian godless regime such as Marxism in China in the twentieth century would provide a similar critical flashpoint of confrontation and purging which stimulated and perfected the vision of the first century Christians when faced with a violently antagonistic Roman Empire; or those of the 19th century when faced with the combined tyrannies of monarchic State and ecclesiastic Churchoid? There was nothing comparable in scale or potential in any other country in the world. Mao Zedong's millions of Marxist followers believed and practiced daily, with commitment and passion, "*The Thoughts of Chairman Mao*" on a scale rarely attained except by a very few dedicated Christians to their Scriptures.

It was this historical revolutionary process which fascinated in its appalling social costs which are still being paid, and in its horrifying yet stimulating challenges which are still being overcome by the Christians in China. They reeled under the onslaught against their faith; they were imprisoned; they were tortured; they were socially ostracized; they were disenfranchised; they were discriminated against in employment and education and official benefits; they were put to prison and to death. All the things that happened to their Master on earth, and which he said all true followers would also experience.

A handful of these disenfranchised Chinese Christians continued to believe, and they emerged spiritually triumphant after fifty years with more committed members in the Chinese *Church of the Messiah* than the pathetically programmed members of the Chinese Communist Party of Mao Zedong. There are now not only an estimated hundred million disenfranchised but dynamic Christians inside China, there are a million of them committed to furthering their spiritual beliefs across China, and there are one hundred thousand of them dedicated to evangelising ninety percent of the non-Christian world as they preach their way from Paris and Peking "*Back to Jerusalem.*"

While the Western world is becoming progressively more secular and even atheistic the rest of the world is becoming more dynamically Christian. The American scholar, Philip Jenkins, has recorded in his recently published book, *The Next Christendom: The*

Coming of Global Christianity, has stated that the Christian prophets of doom are ignorant of the explosive growth of Christianity outside Western Europe:

“In 1990, for instance, there were approximately ten million Christians in Africa; by 2000 there were 300 million; by 2025 conservative estimates are that the number will rise to 633 million. Those same estimates put the number of Christians in Latin America in 2025 at 640 million, and in Asia at 460 million . . . By the middle of this century there will be three billion Christians in the world—one and a half times the number of Muslims.” (my emphasis)

Solzhenitsyn said that there is a third type of revolution, in addition to the two mentioned by Kierkegaard, a spiritual revolution—the turning from the material-oriented to the spiritual-directed, from deliberate self-will to conscious God-will—which has been described by him, in *From Under The Rubble*, as “a moral change . . . to inward development” and continued:

*“This turn toward inward development, the triumph of inwardness over outwardness, if it ever happens, will be a great turning point in the history of mankind, comparable to the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. There will be a complete change not only in the direction of our interests and activities but in the very nature of human beings (a change from spiritual dispersal to spiritual concentration), and a greater change still in the character of human societies. If in some places this is destined to be a revolutionary process, these revolutions will not be like the earlier ones—physical, bloody and never beneficial—but will be moral revolutions, requiring both courage and sacrifice, though not cruelty—a new phenomenon in human history, of which little is yet known and which as yet no one has prophetically described in clear and precise forms . . .”*⁹⁶ (my emphasis)

Islamic Expansion

What is of intense interest to Christian evangelical Bible scholars, which was said to contribute to the right-wing conservative vote in the US 2004 Presidential election, and is the basis of President George W Bush’s personal commitment to support for the Zionist government. This, despite former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s

⁹⁶ Oxford University Press (2002)

expressed commitment for a more pro-Islam policy in the increasing polarisation of confrontation between the Zionist aspirations for Israel, and the neighbouring Islamic nations seeking Jerusalem as “*their*” capital.

This was the region and issue defined by the Prophet Daniel’s prophecies—the Mediterranean coastal nations, and the world’s geopolitical heart-land with Babylon as its centre. Nineteen Moslem nations stretch from the Atlantic to Iran; and at least seven more are in the former Soviet Union from there to the China Sea. As Marxism fades, and the Soviet Union has been divided among several Moslem-dominated states, fundamentalist Islam is said to be planning to take over—especially in nuclear and oil-rich Central Asia—with a view to ultimate world domination.

This is no wild utopian myth as was evident from the serious convictions of Winston Churchill and Hilaire Belloc mentioned earlier. Also, more recently, one Islamic historian, Bat Ye’or, has written of Europe becoming a possible “*Eurabia*”:

“Europe has evolved from a Judean-Christian civilization with important post-Enlightenment secular elements to (become) a secular Muslim transitional society with its Judeo-Christian mores rapidly disappearing”.

In the mid-twentieth century there were only a handful of mosques throughout Europe, but it is now reckoned that every leading country has around a thousand mosques, France and Germany have around five or six thousand, and in Britain alone there are a thousand mosques and over three hundred Muslim organisations of one kind or another. In British mosques some clerics openly discuss “*bringing the West to its knees*” through infiltration of its social structures. Abdullah Faisal, an imam in North London, was jailed for nine years in 2003 for racial incitement and soliciting murder by quoting such declarations from the *Koran* as:

“When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them and lie in ambush everywhere for them” (Surah 9.4)

After the July, 2005, bombings in London a *YouGov* poll found six percent of British Muslims considered the attacks were justified; that

is an estimated 100,000 Muslims. One in four of all British Muslims expressed some measure of understanding for what drove the bombers to commit the acts. Nearly one in five (18 per cent) said they had no primary loyalty to Britain, giving as their reason that “*western society is decadent and immoral*”.

In an article in the *The Spectator*⁹⁷, Dr Patrick Sookdheo, the director of the *Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity*, stated:

“The Muslim community (in Britain) now inhabits principally the urban centres of England as well as some part of Scotland and Wales. It forms a spine running down the centre of England from Bradford to London, with the ribs extending east and west. It is said that within 10 to 15 years most British cities in these areas will have Muslim-majority populations, and will be under local Islamic political control, with the Muslim community living under Sharia . . . For some time now the British government has been quoting a figure of 1.6 million for the Muslim population. Muslims themselves claim around 3 million, and this is likely to be far nearer to the truth. The growth of the Muslim community comes from their high birth rate, primary immigration, and asylum seekers both official and unofficial . . .”

In the United States recently, the political journal *Commentary*, carried a prominent article entitled “*The Islamization of Europe*”⁹⁴ written by a prominent British political analyst, David Pryce Jones, in which he summarized;

“In the meantime, a battle of a different but no less decisive kind has been taking place within Europe, where some twenty million Muslims have settled. Thanks on one hand to their high birth-rate, and on the other hand to the sub-replacement birth-rate that has become the norm among other Europeans, the demographic facts alone suggest a continent ripe for a determined effort to advance the Islamist agenda . . .

“Those in Europe who have striven in ways great and small to extend special privileges to Muslims, while subtly deprecating their own national identity and culture, have indeed opened the way to Islamist separation and Islamist agitation. They have thereby hastened the very clash of civilizations that they (or some of them) foolishly claim they are avoiding. If Bassam Tibi is correct in stating ‘either Islam gets Europeanized or Europe gets Islamicized’ powerful forces are at work to foreclose the question”.

⁹⁷ 30 July 2005

⁹⁸ December 2004

There is alarm also in Russia where it is estimated that the Muslim population is increasing rapidly, now 23 million in a total population of 144 million. In addition to the 3 to 4 million immigrants from former Soviet states, such as Azeris and Kazakhs, there are reported increasing numbers of intelligent but disillusioned Russian youth who are converting to Islam. In 1991 Russia had around 500 mosques, but a recent figure is given as 5,000 mosques, helped by funds from the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the conflict with an emerging militant Islam in al-Qaeda has been accelerated by the belligerent statement by Osama bin Laden's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, declaring in a world-wide media broadcast:

"O nations of the crusade alliance, we proposed that you at least stop your aggression against the Muslims. The lion of Islam, mujahid Sheikh Osama bin Laden, may God preserve him, offered you a truce until you leave the land of Islam. Has Sheikh Osama bin Laden not informed you that you will not dream of security until we live it in reality in Palestine and before all infidel armies leave the land of (the prophet) Muhammad, may peace be upon him. You, however, shed rivers of blood in our land so we exploded volcanoes of anger in your land".

With all the centralising of pro-Islam and pro-Israel conflict in regional and international politics one of the most intriguing of Biblical prophecies is the Prophet Daniel's revelations of the "last days of the world" concentrated in a Babylon-Jerusalem axis. The central country and character of Daniel's prophesied "last days" are Babylon/Iraq and its Nebuchadnezzar-like dictatorial world ruler confronting an implacable Israel.

Sodom and Gomorrah were completely annihilated but that was never the case with Babylon. It continued to exist under Alexander and afterwards the Syrian kings. Peter preached there and wrote his first *Epistle* from Babylon. There was a Christian church there in the third century AD, and a city of 10,000 people until fairly recently. At no time was there ever destruction described by Isaiah:

"See, the day of the Lord is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger — to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it . . . Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be

*overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations . . .*⁹⁹

It raises the intriguing question for conservative evangelicals in the West's *Churchoids*: Are these signs of the polarisation of the Biblically prophesied "*end times*" of the world, with the nations of the world gathering in confrontation in the Mesopotamian/Mediterranean region over the issue of Israel/Palestine under the politically trumpeted banner of "*Freedom and Democracy*"? And will Israel's enemies be Islam and its supporters led by a nemesis like the late Saddam Hussein or the current Osama bin Laden—or someone just like them?

⁹⁹ Isaiah 13:9-19

PART THREE
ETERNITY
The End of Satan

Babylon: “Satan’s Seat”

*“How you have fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low
the nations. You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God: I will sit
enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost height of
the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the
clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’. But you are
brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.”*

Isaiah 14:12-15 New International Version

It is said of the woman “*Babylon, Mother of Harlots*” mentioned earlier; “*The inhabitants of the earth were made drunk from the wine of her fornication*”; and she was “*drunk from the blood of the saints, and from the martyrs or witnesses of Jesus*”. This is not just judgement of Caesar’s slaughtering of early Christians, or later Roman Catholic persecutions of non-Catholics, or even the Islamic slaughtering of non-converting unbelievers, for Judaism had existed before these

with its persecutions of non-adherents such as the crucifixion of Jesus. Now the time of accountability had come from the Throne of God in the image of *Mystery Babylon the Great*.

The greater mystery at this stage of judgement on the world is the non-appearance of Satan in all of the devastations taking place. His evil master-minions had appeared in the persons of the *Beast* and the *False Prophet*, and figuratively in the *Red Dragon* seeking to kill the “*man-child*” offspring of the *Sun-Clad Woman*. Even in John’s present vision he is represented as the steed on which is riding the *Woman Mystery Babylon the Great*, “*a Scarlet Beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns*”. The popular interpretation of this is that the seven heads are seven mountains, or Rome, and the ten heads are great ruling powers associated with Rome. But, just as “*Babylon, Mother of Harlots*” is all corrupted revealed religion from the beginning of time, so “*Babylon the City*” with seven heads were former seven imperial powers, Babylon, Medo/Persia, Greece, Assyria, Egypt and Rome and the un-named one of the end-time, so they also represent the anti-God Middle Eastern dominant *political powers* ruled by the *Beast* and *False Prophet*. They are “*Babylon the Great City*” which “*rends to pieces and eats the flesh of . . . Babylon Mother of Harlots*” to assert Satan’s attempts to rule what is left of the destroyed world.

This is the end of *Mystery Babylon*, the repository of every religious and political institution and nation that comes between the individual and God. But there is still the “*Red Dragon*”, both emperor and pope of the world. Just when the *Red Dragon* is gloating over his destruction of all enemies or rivals a *Mighty Angel*, Jesus personified and illuminated with great authority and splendour, appears and announces:

“Fallen, fallen, Babylon the Great . . . because of her wanton drunkenness all the nations have fallen, and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth became rich because of her excessive adulteries . . .”

Then another voice sounds from heaven calling on all God’s people still on earth to come out of the doomed city Babylon, “*Satan’s Seat*”, who boasted that she was “*a queen and not a widow*,

who will never mourn. She was swept out of existence by the last *Vial of Judgement*, an unprecedented earthquake affecting all the nations of the world, with mourning, famine, fire and death, finally disappearing into an eternity of torturous perdition

Rider on a White Horse

With a tormented world riven with mind-numbing devastation and ruin from the seven *Judgements*, the skies roll back and a rider on a white horse appears, crowned with diadems. Like a medieval armoured rider, he is clad in white linen with blood-red cloak, eyes like blazing fire and carrying a banner reading, "*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*". He is not only Judge and General, he is the King, the Messiah always sought by Israel. Behind him as far as the eye can see ride rank upon rank of innumerable Overcoming saints also riding white horses and clad in white robes.

He emerges from heaven as the promised Messiah to cleanse and claim his purged inheritance, into a world devastated by Satanic deceits, disloyalties, disasters and deaths. The accumulated defiance of Satan has mobilised the nations of the world to unite against Israel and their representative armies are gathered in the Valley of Megiddo. It seems a ludicrous demonstration of earthly power against a small but stubborn Remnant Israel that will not bow to the Antichrist.

But Zionist Israel, composed of secular Jews who returned to rule Israel in the name of God's Promised Land, but who had no God in their constitution or lives, have entered into a concordat with the nations of the world to root out these "*religious subversives*" in the cause of "*world peace*".

Suddenly the sky darkens into night-like blackness and the earth rocks with a monstrous earthquake which splits the Mount of Olives into two, leaving an immense gap between the city of Jerusalem and the international army gathered in the region of Armageddon. As lightning flashes in the skies above the panicked Satanic force, the *Rider on the White Horse* appears, with his mighty heavenly army. At the same time there are screams in the Antichrist army as they are struck by a mysterious plague which rots their bodies where they

stand. The panic increases when a voice from heaven is heard calling on all the predatory birds to come and feast on the rotting bodies, a voracious savaging of the flesh in an earthly hellish feast of all the mighty leaders and their destroyed followers.

As the thunder fades and the lightning disappears the heavens flare with a great light and an angel appears to announce the binding of Satan: With contemptuous ease the angel declares that Satan will be bound and confined to the *Abyss* for the next thousand years while the Messiah rules on earth. It is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy:

"In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above, and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and punished after many days. The moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously"

The purpose of Satan's incarceration in the *Abyss* at this point is so that the Millennium of peace and plenty can proceed gloriously without his interference. The *Abyss* is a different place from that of the "Lake of Fire which burns with brimstone" where the Beast and the False Prophet are consigned; these two places are different from *Hades*, noted earlier, and *Tartarus*. These four places, with *Abaddon* and *Gehenna* are gradations of punishment for unbelievers and demons, not necessarily physical places but spiritual states. This is a reversal of the "Imagine" of the John Lennon song:

*"Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try;
No hell below us,
Above us only sky".*

Personally, I have concluded that there is no place among the planets called heaven, that heaven is a spiritual state determined by what I do, or everyone does, here on earth for Christ. This is metaphorically valued, as the Apostle Paul described "gold, silver, or precious stones . . . wood, hay and stubble"; or, as Jesus said in his

"parable of the talents", the one who makes the most of the talent he has been donated is the one who profits the most in the hereafter. Or, in his *"parable of the ten virgins"*, the five virgins who prepare themselves for the arrival of the bridegroom are welcomed by him into the wedding feast; but the five virgins who neglect to get oil for their lamps are shut out of the ceremony.

Just as believers are given graduated inheritances and rewards for their commitment of belief on earth, so unbelievers are given similarly graduated punishments for their disobedience. For the unbeliever who neglects to accept the offer of eternal life in his or her lifetime, their punishment of *"hell"* will be commensurate with their neglect of God on earth, like the rich man. His hell was not a place in the universe, or in the bowels of the earth, but in his memory of how he had neglected to accept the offer of eternal life while he was *"alive"*. His hell was the knowledge he had of remorse for neglected opportunities behind him on earth, and an eternity ahead of him to regret his wrong choices. Obviously, his hell is proportionately less painful than that of Jack the Ripper, or of Adolph Hitler. As each individual has lived on earth so will that individual be allotted with eternal compensations of heavenly rewards or earthly punishments.

Anyone who experiences the fire of regret or the worm of remorse in a normal lifetime, will have some slight conception of what an eternity of unpardonable regret or remorse might be. The place of final judgement, the true hell, is *"the lake burning with fire and brimstone"*. In the Hebrew Scriptures it is called *Tophet*, or in Greek, *Gehenna*. Both *Tophet* and *Gehenna* were descriptive names given to the geographical Valley of Hinnom, to the north of Jerusalem, because it was the place where human sacrifices had been offered by fire to the god Molech, and a repository for all manner of contaminated filth, but they serve as proportional analogies for sins that are unacceptable to God.

The record is brief and dismissive, for the *Beast* and *False Prophet* are cast alive *"into a lake of fire burning with brimstone"*. As for Satan, John's vision says that *"an angel came out of heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand"*. Obviously this angel is Jesus,

because he is the only one who had the keys of death and hell following his conquest of Satan in rising from the dead. He casts the bound Satan into the bottomless pit for a thousand years, the fearsome state which even the demons fear, for they pled with Jesus when he cast them out of the demon-possessed man *"that he would not command them to go into the Abyss"* but rather into the nearby herd of pigs.

At one stroke, with Satan bound in the *Abyss*, the world is cleansed of its false values, its empty rhetoric, its cynical conceits, its unblushing lies, and it awaits the divine conqueror. This millennial rule will be a world as God intended for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but they forfeited through disobedience by listening to the temptation of Satan. A world described by the prophet Isaiah:

"In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of the gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see . . . On this mountain the Lord Almighty will provide a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wines—the best of meats and the finest of wines . . . He will swallow up death forever. The Lord will wipe away the tears from all eyes . . ."

The Marriage Supper

While the literal hell-fire of judgement is tearing the Satan-ruled world apart the Lion/Lamb of Judah, Jesus as Lord of Lords, is descending from heaven to a shattered Jerusalem, where only the rebuilt Temple has survived, accompanied by the uncountable millions of his Overcoming saints to take control of the world so devastated by Satan's final rebellion. The divine judgements on the world are completed, the armies of the Antichrist are destroyed. Not since the time of Adam at the unsullied beginning of Creation has God been sovereign over his creatures like now. Not since the time of David has God been sovereign over a nation-state. It is *"Great David's greater son"* who is now ready to finish what David began. With the defeat of the Anti-Christ there begins the redemption and regeneration of the world. David, in his final prophetic psalm exulted regarding this time:

*"Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness."*

*He will judge your people in righteousness . . .
He will rule from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth . . .
All nations will be blessed through him,
And they will call him blessed . . ."*

But first there is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb prior to the Wedding of Jesus and his Church of the Messiah. With the religious impostor *Mother of Harlots* defeated the way is now open for the Messiah to celebrate with his true Bride, so long subjected to persecution, misrepresentation and contempt. It is metaphorically designated "*the Marriage Supper of the Lamb*" because Jesus purchased her with his death on her behalf. The *Old Testament* "*Church*", Israel, is regularly described as being betrothed to God as one destined for union with Him in due time. It is the same in the *New Testament* when Jesus describes the Church as "*my Church*"; and the Apostle Paul confirms the "*Church*" as a pure virgin being made ready for her heavenly Bridegroom.¹⁰⁰

Now that all Satanic opposition has been defeated, and elements of faithful witness of believers in both *Old* and *New Testament* dispensations have been either raptured or passed through the purging of the Tribulations, the time has come to celebrate the imminent wedding of the Bride with her heavenly Bridegroom in a "*Marriage Supper*". The songs of triumph have been sung in heaven and the heavenly Bridegroom is now ready to wed his earthly Bride. Both royal Bridegroom and Bride are described lyrically by the Psalmist when he says:

"You are the most excellent of men, your lips are full of grace, therefore God has blessed you forever . . . You love righteousness and hate wickedness therefore your God has anointed you with the oil of joy above your companions . . . Kings daughters are among your honourable women, and at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honour him for he is your Lord . . ."

The Apostle John did not see the Marriage, nor were any details revealed to him; he only heard that the time had come and that the

¹⁰⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:2

Bride had made herself ready. The angel voice announces to John: *“Blessed are they who have been invited to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb . . . These are the true words of God.”*

Yet there are some believers who are not there at the Marriage Supper. Jesus gave the words of warning in his parable of the ten virgins, five of whom went into the marriage feast because they were prepared, but the other five—also virgins, but who were not *“ready”*—found *“the doors were shut”*. They were not shut out of heaven, but they were shut out of the intimate joys of the marriage supper with the Bridegroom and Bride.

Meanwhile, in heaven a great multitude breaks into singing a *“Hallelujah Chorus”*;

*“Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for true and just are his judgements.
He has condemned the great prostitute
Who corrupted the earth by her adulteries . . .”*

Then the twenty-four Overcoming Church representatives, and the four Living Creatures, fall on their faces before the Throne and worship God, singing:

*“Amen! Hallelujah!
Praise our God all you his servants,
You who fear him, both small and great.”*

Finally, they are joined by the masses of all the saints in heaven singing:

*“Hallelujah!
Our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lord has come
And his bride has made herself ready . . .”*

But before this wedding celebration there is the matter of Armageddon and the fate of Satan to be settled. The *Beast* and *False Prophet* have been defeated, and the religious and political Babylon

destroyed, but the *Red Dragon* is still awaiting his final fate.

The Millennium

The Promised Messiah reigns! The Lord of Glory has returned as he said! There is an interregnum of a thousand years between the incarceration of Satan in the *Abyss* and eternity beyond. In reality "*millennium*" is simply a useful descriptive term because time does not exist outside earthly existence. The term and time "*millennium*" is divinely used to provide a period in which God-believers of all ages and dispensations are fitted to use their acquired spiritual powers, from "*ruling with Christ*" at the top to "*servants of the kingdom*" at the bottom.

It begins with "*the resurrection of the blessed and holy*", the resurrection of all those believers who have not taken part in the earlier rapture but have been faithful during the time of all the tribulations leading to Armageddon. As the Apostle Paul described: "*As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, but everyone: Christ, the first fruits, then, when he comes, those who belong to him in his own order.*"¹⁰¹

Earlier, under the *Sixth Seal*, there were those—"*a great multitude*"—who "*came out of the great tribulation*", those who answer to the five virgins who had no oil in their lamps when the bridegroom came, and who were "*shut out*" of the wedding celebrations. There were others, like the 144,000, who were taken out of the tribulations, "*redeemed from the earth*" and "*from among men*" as a special reward for their faithfulness.

This great gathering of the saints of all ages, together with the earlier raptured Overcoming Church, signals the start of the millennium, as everyone either "*inherits*" reigning with Christ because they suffered with and for him in their totally committed lives; or receive their "*rewards*", according to the measure of their limited lifetime commitment. This ruling of the nations the Lord shares with his chosen "*companions*", those who were his faithful disciples while on earth:

"You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and

¹⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 15: 22-23

drink with me at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

This is also the time for the *Overcoming Church* to rule with their Lord as he promised:

"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with a rod of iron; he will dash them to pieces like pottery—just as I received authority from my Father."

This is also the time spoken of by the Apostle Paul when he said to the Corinthian believers:

"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!"

During this immortal administration, government by lie, duplicity, expediency and oppression of the poor, is swept away; and new, just, righteous laws based on love and truth with firm discipline are introduced. New policies regarding the animate and inanimate creation will be initiated, releasing enormous energies and wealth on an unprecedented scale, such as during the divinely approved reigns of David and Solomon. With the minds of men and women freed from the limitations and pressures of Satanic influence there will be an upsurge and expansion of unimaginable creativity and innovation. The divine revolution includes the capacity of never dying, of having glorified, corporeal bodies like the Lord's post-resurrection body, with heavenly qualities capable of sublime joys.

The world, which has been devastated with divine judgements—earthquakes, fires, bloody rivers and streams, crops poisoned, mountains laid flat—will have to be recreated as it was in the beginning of creation, environment and ecology balanced, ruling officials replaced, unbelievers pacified and won over to the everlasting gospel and recognition of Jesus as Lord. The world's population will have been reduced catastrophically because of judgements, removals, and plagues, and will have to be taught new laws, new values, new principles.

The widely believed conception of the millennium among

professing Christians—if they have any belief at all!—is of a vague idea of peace on earth and goodwill to men when there will be a wide acceptance of the Christian gospel, while Christians will walk on golden streets in white robes, holding hands with their formerly dead family members, singing and playing on harps, and casting un-won crowns before the throne of God in heaven.

What is shown is that while the millennium *will not be* the eternal "*new earth*" future in which there will be no more sin, death, curse, nor tears; it *will be* the blissful stage before that eternal state. The thousand years will terminate but the interim joys of the new creation, and the heavenly order, will remain. Jesus as Lord of Creation and King of Kings, and his chosen saint-rulers, will not cease to reign

Satan Released

The end of the millennial period is not a cessation of the earthly blessings enjoyed but the release of Satan from the *Abyss* as a final test and cleansing of the human and angelic species. At the close of the millennium God allows Satan to emerge from the *Abyss*. Why? The reason is hidden in the mind of God. It is an insoluble mystery why God should release Satan after a thousand years of peace and prosperity. No divine reason is given, but a reasonable speculation might be that, because he was once the mightiest angel in the angelic pantheon, almost perfect in beauty and wisdom, God is giving him one last opportunity after a thousand years in the *Abyss* to acknowledge the mercy of God. Or perhaps it is to demonstrate to the millennial nations that even after being divinely provided with peace and joy men and women could still not be trusted with their much-vaunted freedom.

Whatever God's intention, with the release of Satan men and women flock to his banner again in rejection of a sinless life with God. From the distant parts of the earth—the Bible lists "*Gog and Magog*", which both Bible and Koran commentators claim is the Caucasus region—Satan recruits an army of rebels to attempt once again to destroy the Holy Land and all it represents of the purposes of God. From three-quarters of the earth—the king of the north, the

king of the south, and a great army from the East, but interestingly no mention of the West—a huge army is mobilised outside Jerusalem ostensibly to settle the “*Israel Question*” once for all by eliminating the defiant core of *Remnant Israel* from the Holy City. The prophet Joel describes it:

*“The great day of the Lord is near – near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness . . .”*¹⁰²

Inside the city the Temple has been rebuilt, the Twelve Apostles have been anointed to rule together with the Overcoming Church, the faithful 144,000 have been initiated into the administration, and the new conditions of divine rule and order are in place on earth. The prophet Isaiah had said of this time:

*“Listen, you nations, and pay attention, you people! . . . The Lord is angry with all nations, his wrath against all their armies. He will utterly destroy them with a great slaughter. Their slain will be piled high and their dead will rot. The mountains will be soaked with their blood, and all the stars of heaven will disappear . . . For this is the Lord’s day of vengeance, his year of retribution for Zion . . .”*¹⁰³

It looks as if history is repeating itself, with Jerusalem being the island of peace and perfection of the world instead of the Garden of Eden, only this time the Serpent was an escaped prisoner from the Abyss, and Jesus, is in control of the world.

The brutally atheistic rule of Satan and his hellish companions has left the world in a state of utter confusion and economic ruin. So Jesus, as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, with his companion “*rulers*”, the Remnant Israel and Overcoming Church, also using their “*rods of iron*”, set about rebuilding creation in the original image of God.

“When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all the nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left”

¹⁰² Zephaniah 1: 14-16

¹⁰³ Isaiah 34: 1-8

The End and the Beginning

“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the Lord and Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’

“He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks . . . Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.

“Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig-tree, and no-one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.”

Micah 4 vv 1-5: New International Version

The Great White Throne

The millennium, and the history of the old world, ends with the defeat of Satan and his impending judgement, together with all those who have followed him since the beginning of creation. But the millennial blessings do not end with the release of Satan and impending judgements of the unbelievers. Jesus does not cease to reign over the nations of the world. Men and women do not cease to live their lives of disobedience and dissolution.

There are innumerable professing Christians whose lives are taken up with paying off a twenty-five year mortgage, “*saving up for a rainy day*”, paying up life annuity insurance, seeking a three-bedroom house in an up-market neighbourhood, near a superior school for their two or three children, two cars, and three television sets. Their “*Christian*” life has consisted of attending a church for an hour on Sunday mornings, listening to thirty minutes of mildly uplifting moralising from an ecclesiastically approved preacher, while thinking about what’s for lunch and the afternoon’s activities.

In heaven the scene of final judgement is being prepared with thrones being set and occupied with those who had been given authority to judge due to their close walk with God in the past. The heavens are rolled back like the raising of a theatre curtain, the limitations of earth are also rolled back, and a *Great White Throne* is revealed with the Presence of God arrayed in awesome splendour and judgement. Massed before the Throne are the dead unbelievers of all time, and all classes, waiting to hear their fate from the Judge of all Creation. The final resurrections of the believing saints have taken place, and now that of the unbelieving sinners to face what they have evaded throughout their lifetimes—accountability to their Creator.

The heavenly books of judgement are opened; the “*Book of God’s Remembrance*”, and the “*Book of Life*”. The former contains every instance of disobedience, defiance, and disinterest on the part of unbelievers since time began; and the latter contains every instance of pretence, hypocrisy, and secret pride. There is not a thought, an act, a wrong, a word, but is both evaluated in the sight

and presence of God, and final judgement passed.

“The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name is not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire.”¹⁰⁴

Their life activities might be claimed as sinless as a monk’s in the monastery, or the nun’s in a nunnery, but if there is any unclean thought without the cleansing process of regenerated lives through faith in Christ Jesus the judgement is condemnation and *“they shall be tormented day and night to the ages of the ages”*.

The Bride and the Bridegroom

At last the sinful world is purged and Creation has been delivered from its creature-inspired taint to be as pristine as God ever intended to be before Satan’s intervention. Now the animal creation can live in amity with the human creation, and both can live in concord with the stellar universe and angelic hosts. The Apostle John sees *“a new heaven and new earth; for the first heaven and first earth are gone, and there is no more division of seas”*.

A myth has been allowed to grow since the Middle Ages that the world will be utterly destroyed, and a vague *“eternalism”* of streets of gold, harps and endless singing take its place. There is not a single verse in the Bible to justify this concept. Those passages which speak of the earth and heavens passing away do not mean extermination or cessation of existence; not even Peter’s words *“the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire”*, which means dissolution to give place in transition from one state to another. Daniel prophesied that it would be an everlasting kingdom which will stand forever, and Paul said that Abraham and his righteous seed will inherit the earth forever. As the millennial righteous now live forever so does the earth they inherit.

Then John saw, *“. . . the city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the Throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is*

¹⁰⁴ Revelation 20: 12-15

*with humankind, and he will live with them, they will be his people and God himself will be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes; there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’.*¹⁰⁵(my emphasis)

The literal city of Babylon was portrayed as a Woman, a religious *Mother of Harlots* condemned to everlasting shame and destruction; the new literal Jerusalem is also likened to a Woman, but of eternal blessings, without anything impure, shameful or deceitful. The *City/Bride* is of pure gold, and without any institutional or ecclesiastical temple *“for the Lord God and the Lamb is its temple.”*

This is the fulfilment of what is known as the Lord’s Prayer: *“Thy kingdom come . . . Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” . . .* This is the fulfilment of Abraham’s expectation when *“he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God . . .”* This is the fulfilment of the Lord’s words in the Jerusalem temple in his lifetime: *“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again”.* This is the fulfilment of the Apostle Paul’s vision of *“the new Jerusalem that is above is free . . . Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.”* This is the fulfilment of God’s promise to Israel that she would be *“his wife”*, and to the Gentiles that they would be *“his inheritance”*.

An angel announces the city as *“the Bride, the Lamb’s wife”*, not because of the physical materials it describes, but because of the spiritual believers who inhabit it. They are the living embodiment of God’s love and workmanship, created from the dust of the earth to a transfigured inheritance of glory and beauty as a fit Bride for his Son, the *“Sacrificial Lamb”* of both *Old* and *New Testament* history, who wooed and won the Bride by his own sacrificial blood.

The *“New Jerusalem”* is said by Ezekiel metaphorically to be 1,500 miles long, wide and high, that is, it is perfectly equipped to rule in both earth and heaven. It is filled with the unobstructed light, glory and splendour of God as He has revealed himself from the beginning of Creation, and which was the means of the Apostle Paul’s dramatic conversion. This is the *“Paradise”* to which Paul was taken and which was beyond his powers to describe. This is the Paradise of every Overcoming believer married eternally to Jesus as Lord. This is the place which Jesus went to prepare for his

¹⁰⁵ Revelation 21:1-4

followers, and which he described as *"in my Father's house there are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . ."*

And it Jesus himself who signs off on the truth of the visions of the *Apocalypse*:

"Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give everyone according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last . . . If any one shall take away from the words of this book, if any man shall add to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in the book."

To the one who believes in the life and words of Jesus, and who lives in the anticipation of all that has been revealed in the *Apocalypse*, there is promise of a life eternally with him. There are 30,101 verses in the *New Testament* and one out of every twenty-five is concerned with the second coming of the Lord Jesus. From beginning to end of the *Apocalypse*, despite the unveiling of the catastrophic events leading to the end of the old world, the focus is either on or related to the imminent appearance and validation of Jesus as Lord of Lords.

It is to them the words of Scripture are directed: *"Men and women are destined to die once, and after death face judgement . . . and unto those who earnestly look for him shall he appear the second time . . ."* To those who have given up every earthly ambition in the expectation of his second coming his promise is, *"Behold, I come quickly"*. My response, and the response of every believer who loves him and awaits the consummation of the *Apocalypse*, is *"Even so come, Lord Jesus"*.

EPILOGUE

God's Fools

*"Let me stand with the conquered
Who assayed a greater thing
Than sane men can imagine
Or pious hearts believe. Some love of Death
Seized all their being and hurl'd them against the World;
And mocking all intelligence they fell.*

*Such full abandonment possessed their spirit
That they contemned all prizes ever Man won
All works accomplisht, lives by men achieved.
And vied with the Creator to make Death
Impossibly the glory of all the glories.*

*Were they in love with Failure from the first
Because there is no new thing in Success
For praise to the high gods? Nor reckoned once
If there be flaws in failure, or if tears
Should o'er their broken bodies be expended.*

*The Holy Master of men found naught in prowess,
And so was lowly - and little to rejoice in
Among the reputable, so He poured
On reprobates His molten gold of friendship
And wooed the Crucifixion heaven adores.*

*Oh, what tame worship could such a Rebel brook!
Claims He not some defiance for his meed
Of things held fixt and legal and secured,
Passionate avowals that none else dare approve,
And hearts that cannot deign to be victorious?"¹⁰⁵*

W.H.Hamilton