

Chapter 8

Getting All Caught Up

I feel like I owe you an apology. (I *don't*, you understand. I just *feel* like I do.) Here we are seven chapters deep into a book on Biblical prophecy and I haven't given you ten sentences about the future. But eight is the scriptural number of new beginnings, isn't it? Don't give up.

Just before His crucifixion, Yahshua comforted His disciples by telling them, **"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.** (John 14:2-3) How, precisely, did He intend to do that? Whether or not they understood it at this point, He had told them plainly that He was about to be killed. And you don't normally see this kind of behavior—going, preparing, and coming back—in dead people. Yes, He'd said He would rise again the third day, but what did that mean? He'd often resorted to parables and metaphors to teach some hidden truth. Was this one of those times? If you listen to the questions the disciples asked him, it's clear that they didn't really understand. I know I wouldn't have.

Maybe they thought back a few weeks to the Lazarus incident. Upon hearing that His dear friend was ill, Yahshua had purposely hung back in Perea—on the other side of the Jordan—until Lazarus had been dead for several days. **"Then Martha [his sister] said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'"** (John 11:21-27)

Only then did He go out, stand in front of his friend's tomb, and shout, "Lazarus, come forth!" Good thing Yahshua didn't speak English; if He had, three other guys would have come out first. He had that kind of power over death, and he had just proved it—again. Neither Lazarus, nor the daughter of Jairus, nor the son of the widow of Nain had been able to remain dead in His presence. But it was one thing to bring a corpse back to life; it was something else entirely to come back yourself, under your own steam. Or was it? If you're God in the flesh, what's possible and what's not? The disciples had to have been confused. They were still not sure what Yahshua was talking about.

It wasn't long, however, before they discovered that He wasn't speaking in parables. He'd been talking about real physical death, real burial in a real tomb,

and real resurrection. “Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they [the Galilean women], and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as [the women] were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”’” And they remembered His words.” (Luke 24:1-8)

A bit of explanation is in order here. The Jews of Yahshua’s day, especially the wealthy ones, didn’t bury their dead in the ground or cremate them as we do today. Rather, they would lay the corpse in a cave, anointing it with fragrant spices to mask the stench of death while they waited for the flesh to rot off the bones. Some months later they would go back, remove the bones and place them in an ossuary—a small box made for the purpose. (One such recently discovered ossuary may have held the bones of James, Yahshua’s half-brother.) The tomb itself would have been used over again many times throughout a family’s generations—there were often several recesses or platforms for the bodies carved into the rock. The tomb was accessible through a small passage, perhaps three or four feet high. A stone disk, big enough to cover the opening and eight or ten inches thick, would have been rolled in front of it. The stone had to be heavy enough to keep the tomb secure from marauding animals, but light enough that it could be rolled aside by a couple of strong men if and when the need arose. It was this stone that the women had been concerned about moving that Sunday morning. But when they’d arrived, they found that it had already been rolled away.

The tomb was empty. Since it was a newly built structure, none of Joseph’s kin had ever been laid there; Yahshua had been the first to use it. This was a private garden, and the tomb was the only cave in the vicinity. The women had followed Joseph and Nicodemus the short distance (a few dozen meters) from the crucifixion site, and they had watched the two men place the corpse of Yahshua into the tomb. There was no mistaking the grave. And there was no denying that Yahshua was no longer there.

If the women hadn’t been so badly shaken (mind you, *they* were the ones out talking with angels and crawling into tombs—the men were all cowering in a locked room), they might have said, “I can see that He’s not here, but what do you mean *risen*? You mean like Lazarus? Back from the dead?”

“No,” the angels would have said. “Not exactly. Lazarus is alive, but he’s still mortal; some day his body will die again, as is the way of all men. Yahshua, on

the other hand, is *risen*—He has put on immortality. He hasn't *postponed* death; He has *conquered* it. And because He did, you will too."

What actually transpired is this: "Then they [the two men in shining garments—angels] said to her [Mary Magdalene], 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.' Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.... Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God."' Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. (John 20:13-14, 17-20)

Besides the fairly remarkable fact that Mary was holding a conversation with someone who had been dead for the last three days, we need to notice a few things about the body that Christ now occupied. First, it was a real body, not a vision, spirit, or ghost. She apparently fell at his feet and grasped Him in worshipful reverence until He gently insisted that she not restrain Him from doing what he needed to do. Although we aren't told, my guess (SF3) is that Yahshua "ascended to His Father" that very Sunday morning after meeting with the faithful women, presenting Himself as the "wave offering" before the throne of God (cf. Leviticus 23:11) in fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits. He then returned to show Himself to his disciples. (He seemed to be in a hurry when he encountered Mary. It wouldn't have made sense to hang around for forty days until His "ascension" after telling her in so many words, "Don't hold me back; I need to go now.")

Indeed, later in the same day, Yahshua appeared to the disciples and encouraged them to touch Him, to handle Him, to satisfy themselves that He was real, having "flesh and bones." He still bore the marks of the crucifixion, proof that it was Him and not some look-alike imposter. "Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you.' But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, 'Have you any food here?' So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:36-43) Though He obviously didn't need food to sustain life anymore, He could still assimilate and enjoy the bounty of the earth. Sounds to me like the best of all worlds.

Second, this resurrection body Yahshua now inhabited had what Star Trek fans might call a “cloaking device.” That is, whether or not people who had known Him recognized Him as the risen Christ—or saw Him at all—was apparently a matter of His discretion. Mary, who knew Him well, thought He was the gardener until he spoke her name. Two disciples walking to a nearby village chatted with Him for hours before suddenly realizing that they were in the presence of the risen Messiah: **“Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’**

“Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’

“And He said to them, ‘What things?’

“So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.’

“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (Luke 24:13-27)

Paul would later explain that the whole Hebrew Bible had been speaking of this very thing. All of Scripture led to the resurrection and coming glory of Yahshua the Messiah. He *was* the redeemer; but redemption always carries a price tag. **“Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the gentiles.” (Acts 26:22-23)**

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus found Yahshua’s explanation of the words of the prophets as compelling as Paul would later. **“Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, ‘Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.’ And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them,**

that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.” (Luke 24:28-31)

Not only did Cleopas and his friend not recognize the face and voice they knew so well—the very One whom they had been convinced “was going to redeem Israel”—but when their eyes were finally opened, He vanished into thin air. Though it was getting toward dark, they hoofed it back to Jerusalem as fast as they could, a brisk two-hour walk from Emmaus. By the time they got there, Yahshua had already had a one-on-one conversation with Peter (Luke 24:34, I Corinthians 15:5) who had in turn gone back and told the other ten. Then, as Cleopas and his pal breathlessly told the disciples of their encounter, Yahshua Himself suddenly appeared in the room—though the doors were locked—and showed them all how real He was, as we read above in Luke 24:36-43.

We can conclude from the narrative that Yahshua, in His resurrected body, was not restricted by time or physical barriers. He could be wherever He wanted, whenever He wanted. He could appear or disappear at will, reappearing moments later at some distant location of His choosing. He could assume either the recognizable form of His old physical body or that of someone unknown to those who were familiar with Him in His humanity. It’s possible, of course, that rather than changing forms Himself, he altered the perception of those He encountered until He wished to reveal Himself—a feat no less miraculous. Luke does mention that “their eyes were restrained.” But that wouldn’t explain the capacity for time travel or the ability to pass through locked doors. The evidence about Yahshua’s resurrection body clearly points to an objective reality, not a mass hallucination. At the very least, we can be assured that Yahshua’s new body was nothing like the one He had inhabited in his earthly life.

Interestingly, His “clothing” apparently had the same attributes. He had been stripped naked when they crucified Him, and the grave clothes had been left behind in Joseph’s tomb. Yet no one reported seeing a naked man running around Jerusalem accosting mourners, and He left no clothing behind when He went poof in Emmaus. This leads me to the inescapable conclusion that the Yahshua all these folks saw after the resurrection was whatever and whoever the risen Christ wanted them to see. If He had desired to manifest Himself as a turnip at this point, He could have done that, for His body was no longer restricted by the confines of atomic structure or DNA. It looked real and felt as solid as any human flesh, but it was no longer subservient to the laws of physics. Yahshua’s spiritual body was constrained only by the will of God.

Yahshua did not show himself to everyone. He restricted his appearances to those who had already shown faith in Him. Why? Because to *prove* His resurrection to those who had rejected Him would be tantamount to forcing their acceptance, and if you’ll recall, love must be voluntary—if it’s forced, it becomes

something else. His appearances to His disciples, however, gave them confidence to carry out His instructions: **“God raised up [Yahshua] on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.”** (Acts 10:40-42)

His appearances also gave them assurance that there was life beyond this life. And it logically followed that it didn't much matter what happened to their mortal bodies. There was something better waiting for them, and not just as disembodied spirits playing phantom harps on clouds somewhere. Our new bodies were going to be real, just as Yahshua's was real. In some ways, these bodies will be like those of angels: **“In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.”** (Matthew 22:30, cf. Mark 12:25) Those like me (I can't imagine, or even *remember*, life without my wife) have some hurdles to get over here. Procreation is a thing of the past: spiritual beings can't beget other spiritual beings the way physical beings reproduce themselves. That makes sense, because each of us is a “new creation” in Christ—spiritually, no one makes us without consulting us first, the way our parents “made” our physical bodies. I believe that in the resurrection our personal relationships will be deeper and more meaningful than ever, but alas, scripture doesn't say much about it.

Seeing Yahshua alive, the disciples at last had confirmation of the hope that had been voiced in the earliest scriptures, a hope of resurrection, of a new bodily existence, of eternal life. Job in his anguish had pleaded: **“Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You.”** (Job 14:13-15) Somehow he sensed that physical death wasn't the end, but that he would be changed, renewed, even from the grave. **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me.”** (Job 19:25-27)

Job's hope was of a bodily resurrection from his grave, but David took it one step further: **“I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.”** (Psalm 17:15) Yahweh's favorite human fully expected to awake from death in a body that looked something like his God's—whatever that was. He wouldn't be satisfied until he could walk and talk with his heavenly Father as Adam had before he fell. In our present sinful state, it's sometimes hard to comprehend how we could be made in God's image. But in our new spiritual bodies, I think the likeness will be readily apparent.

Paul put it like this: **“We who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.... For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”** (Romans 8:23, 29-30) Becoming “conformed to the image” of Yahshua is a process that begins when we are born anew as spiritual beings, a process that will not be complete until we are “glorified,” i.e., given our sinless resurrection bodies.

“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this [body] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” (II Corinthians 5:1-8) In other words, giving us a spiritual body—an immortal body—was Yahweh’s plan all along. And the reason for giving us His Spirit was to prove to us that He would someday put His plan into action in our lives.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (II Corinthians 4:16-18)

No wonder the early Christians made such cheerful martyrs. They realized, as few of us do today, that **“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** (II Corinthians 5:17) Yahshua himself had said, **“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”** (John 12:25-26) A new creation for a new location.

Let's pause and check our bearings. We've established that Yahshua of Nazareth was God's promised Messiah, the one of whom the prophets had spoken. We have eyewitness reports saying He was crucified and entombed, that He rose from the dead on the third day after his death, and that he was then seen by a number of His followers, first immediately after his resurrection and then sporadically over the next six weeks. Then, **"[Yahshua] was taken up after He, through the Holy Spirit, had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:2-3)** We have heard the disciples' testimony concerning the unusual properties of the body Yahshua now inhabited. Now we need to ask the hard question: *what does all this have to do with us?* After all, according to Isaiah, the Messiah would be "mighty God, everlasting Father." Does this imply that whatever Yahshua did and however He appeared, it's unique and only applies to Him?

Fortunately, scripture does not leave us in the dark on this point. Paul explained it with the flawless—if somewhat wordy—logic of a transformed Pharisee: **"Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (I Corinthians 15:12-22)**

Or, to put it more simply, **"If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."** (Romans 8:11) The bottom line? **"Jesus Christ our Lord...was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God...by the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:3-4)**

Paul had a point. Yahshua, though the Son of God, had lived the life of a mortal man. He had proved His mortality by dying (duh). But if He had risen from the dead, as over five hundred eyewitnesses enthusiastically affirmed (I Corinthians 15:6), *that* proved that not only was resurrection possible, it was something God was prepared to do.

Possible? On the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted David in making the case that God was *certain* to raise Messiah from the dead, and because of this, we could have hope as well. **"God raised [Him] up, having loosed the pains of death,**

because it was not possible that He should be held by it. For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw Yahweh always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in the grave, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.'" (Acts 2:24-28; cf. Psalm 16:8-11, Acts 13:30-36)

We have further confirmation that we will experience a bodily resurrection—and not merely a spiritual change of address—in this benediction from Paul: **"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.** (I Thessalonians 5:23-24) Spirit, soul, *and* body! He also reminds us, **"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.** (Philippians 3:20-21) John puts it like this: **"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."** (I John 3:2)

Remember the Feast of Firstfruits? God had predicted this very thing. Yahshua was the sacrifice. He was the "grain offering" who ascended to the Father. Just as the sheaf of barley was a precursor of the entire coming harvest, Yahshua was "merely" the first of many mortals who would ascend to the Father. We will follow Him. **"If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. [But even] if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself."** (II Timothy 2:11-13) Our resurrection, like our salvation, is not dependent on our works but upon the character of Yahweh.

"God...has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (I Peter 1:3-5) Yes, we look like ordinary sinful people as we walk through our lives trapped in these mortal bodies. But our glorious new existence is already future history, a *fait accompli*, ready to be revealed. Ready or not, world: our salvation will soon become apparent.

"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—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, to each seed its own body.... So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a

natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” (I Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-44)

Allow me to interrupt scripture with scripture here. In another letter, Paul wrote, **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”** (Galatians 6:7-8) Even though our resurrection is all Yahweh’s doing, we aren’t passive pawns, here. We aren’t predestined to corruption or eternal life. We’re active participants in sowing the seeds of our own futures.

Back in Corinthians, Paul was about to explain how our bodies, built for life on earth, cannot at the same time be suitable for life in the spiritual realm. **“And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man [Adam] was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man [Yahshua] is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.** (I Corinthians 15:45-50)

How does this work? Yahshua’s life-changing words to Nicodemus in John 3, **“You must be born again [that is, from above],”** come to mind. But logistically, how do we obtain our “spiritual bodies?” How do we follow Christ in this last great adventure? Surely not in the same spectacular fashion in which Yahshua left this earth. Millions have died “in Christ” since His resurrection, but we don’t stand on hilltops and wave goodbye to them as they ascend bodily toward heaven. Rather, our souls and spirits immediately enter the presence of their Savior. As Christ said to the repentant thief on the cross, **“Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”** (Luke 23:43) Or as Paul reminds those indwelt by the Holy Spirit, when we are absent from our mortal bodies, we are present with Yahshua. (see II Corinthians 5:5-8). When we die, however, though our eternal spirits still live, our bodies are left behind, emptied of life. They’re “sown in corruption,” a nice way of saying they rot, stink, and deteriorate. So far, this doesn’t sound a whole lot like Christ’s bodily resurrection. But just as His corpse spent time in a tomb before He rose in His new, incorruptible body, so those who “sleep” in Yahshua must spend some time in the same state, separated (thank God) from their mortal bodies. Thanks to Him, this condition is no more permanent with us than it was for Yahshua.

Again, it is Paul who explains it: **“I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who**

sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (I Thessalonians 4:13-16) I probably read this a thousand times before I saw it: God will bring “those who sleep in Jesus” (i.e., their conscious souls and eternal spirits) back with Him when He returns, and *then* “the dead in Christ” will rise. *He’s talking about the same people!* This can mean only one thing: the souls and spirits of the godly dead will be reunited with their bodies as Yahshua was with His—not their corrupt, mortal, decayed bodies, you understand, but new, transformed, “spiritual” bodies, just like the one Yahshua walked around in after His resurrection.

Of course, Paul wasn’t speaking to dead people. His audience, based on his previous teaching, knew that Yahshua could return for them at any time. He was talking to “we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord.” Logic dictates that if the Church doesn’t die out completely—which is pretty hard to imagine if the gates of hell can’t prevail against it—there will still be a community of believers living upon the earth when Yahshua returns, no matter how long He waits. Paul just got through telling them that God was going to take care of resurrecting the godly dead before he dealt with those still living. But what then? In the same breath he says, **“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”** (I Thessalonians 4:17-18)

What? All of us? Yep. This is one of those bombshell passages that defines our whole perception of future events. An entire generation of believers will not taste physical death. Instead, they (or is it *we?*) will be instantaneously “caught up” into the air. This event will apparently happen immediately after the dead in Christ are raised, for we all have the same timetable and the same mission: to “meet the Lord in the air.” Indeed, it is said we will be caught up “together.” In other words, there will be no discernable time gap. This same event was spoken of in the Old Testament: **“He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: ‘Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.’ Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge.”** (Psalm 50:4-6) The “covenant by sacrifice” is our trust in the death of God’s Messiah to atone for our sins—whether before or after the fact. These saints will be gathered both from “the heavens” (those who have already died) and “the earth” (those who still live).

Note that we will meet the Lord “in the clouds,” or “in the air.” Peter Pan notwithstanding, this is not normal behavior for human beings. But Yahshua has already demonstrated that it’s perfectly natural for one who has assumed his or

her “spiritual body.” This is precisely what He did, standing in the presence of His disciples on the Mount of Olives, forty days after His resurrection: **“While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”** (Acts 1:9-11)

The Greek word for “caught up” used in Thessalonians is *harpazo*. It means “to catch away, snatch up, pluck, pull, or take as if by force.” The Latin equivalent is *rapiemur*, from which we derive the commonly used term for this event, “rapture.” Interestingly, the word Luke used for “taken up” in the Acts passage just quoted is not *harpazo* but *analambano*, “to receive up or take in.” Whereas Christ’s ascension into the clouds was a rather leisurely affair—with dozens of guys standing around with their hands in their pockets staring up into the sky, straining to catch a last glimpse of Yahshua—the rapture will apparently be a sudden, now-you-see-me-now-you-don’t sort of thing. The kind of disappearing act that Yahshua performed in Emmaus will be the order of the day.

Some light might be shed on the subject if we look at a few of the other scriptural instances for *harpazo*. Philip, in a unique demonstration of the Spirit’s power, was “raptured” without actually being raptured. That is, he disappeared from view just as Yahshua did in Emmaus, and showed up miles away, but he was still in his mortal body! **“Now when they [Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch whom he was baptizing] came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught [harpazo] Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus.** (Acts 8:39-40)

The same word is used by John to describe the people’s intention to “take Yahshua by force” and make Him king. Paul was “taken by force”—*harpazo* again—from an angry mob by the Roman guard in Jerusalem. It is used twice in the passage describing Paul’s “near-death experience” when he was “caught up” into heaven. There is nothing casual or passive about the word.

The fascinating instance, however, is in Revelation, where in John’s vision, the intense spiritual warfare surrounding the advent of Yahshua is in view. **“And the dragon [Satan] stood before the woman [Israel] who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child [Yahshua] who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.”** (Revelation 12:4-5) So in a sense, Yahshua *has* experienced the rapture, just as the Church will. A cursory reading might lead to the conclusion that the Child was “raptured” in order to keep Him safe from the dragon’s clutches, but that’s not the case. Yahshua was tested in every way possible and remained untouched,

defeating death itself in the end. Satan would certainly have “devoured” Him if he could have. But he had no real power over God’s Anointed.

Nor does he have any power over the Bride of Christ. When Yahshua told the church at Philadelphia, **“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth,”** (Revelation 3:10) He was talking about the rapture. They would be kept out of “the hour of trial,” not in order to keep them safe, but because they had *already* persevered in the name and power of Christ. There was no need for testing, no reason for wrath.

The rapture, then, is a one-time event, still future. When it comes to pass, every believer from the Church age, whether dead or living, will suddenly receive his or her “spiritual” body, in which we will depart this earth to meet Yahshua in the air. The rapture, in fact, is the very event that defines the end of the Church age. The Ekklesia is characterized by one thing above all others: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But Paul writes of a time when the Spirit will no longer be here: **“He who now restrains [lawlessness] will do so until He is taken out of the way....”** (II Thessalonians 2:7) He is surely referring to the Holy Spirit because there is no one else who can truthfully be said to be “restraining” the “mystery of lawlessness.” Some commentators assert that the restrainer is the Church, but aside from the fact that we are just as often part of the problem as we are part of the solution, we on our best days are impotent to restrain evil without the Spirit’s power (though the Spirit often accomplishes His work in and through individual believers). So in this context it’s a moot point whether Paul is talking about the Spirit or the Church.

The Holy Spirit cannot be “taken out of the way” as long as the Church is here on earth, for He (or is it “*She*?” In Hebrew, *Ruach Qodesh* is a feminine noun) dwells within us. Yahshua explained to His disciples, **“I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”** (John 14:16-17) The indwelling of the Spirit was still future when Yahshua spoke these words, but it all became “present tense” on the Day of Pentecost, seven weeks later. So for the time being, we’re a package deal. No Spirit, no Church.

It’s not that the Spirit’s influence will be non-existent after the rapture. But He (or She) may not dwell within believers as is the case today. The Spirit’s *modus operandi* may be more like it was in Old Testament times, when the *Ruach Qodesh* temporarily fell upon certain individuals (Saul or Ezekiel, for example) or worked directly in the natural sphere (Genesis 1:2). But the final Church (Laodicea) will appear during this time, and it will be separate from Israel in God’s program for the last seven years. So who knows?

The rapture will apparently occur instantaneously, for Yahshua said, **“As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”** (Matthew 24:27) He mentioned both daytime and nighttime activities in His description of the event, which makes perfect sense if Christians all over the world are to be resurrected at the same moment: **“I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed; the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together; the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field; the one will be taken and the other left.”** And they answered and said to Him, **“Where, Lord?”** So He said to them, **“Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”** (Luke 17:34-37, cf. Matthew 24:40-41)

That last phrase has always puzzled me (and don’t look so pious—you’ve never understood it either). So I did a little word study on it. The three key words are “body,” “eagles,” and “gathered.” The Greek word for body is *soma*, meaning “the body (as a sound whole), used in a very wide application, literally or figuratively—body, bodily, slave.” (*Strong’s*) *Thayer* explains that it can mean the body of a man or animal, dead or alive; a star or heavenly body; a group of people, such as a family or organization such as the Church; or the thing that casts the shadow, as opposed to the shadow itself. *Soma* is related to *sozo*: to save or keep safe, to rescue from danger or destruction.

“Eagle” is the Greek *aetos*, which is derived from *aer*, meaning air or breeze. And “gathered” is from *sunago*, “to lead together, that is, collect or convene, specifically to entertain (hospitably):—accompany, assemble (selves together), bestow, come together, gather (selves together, up, together), lead into, or take in.” (*Strong’s*)

I don’t know what Aramaic words Yahshua used, but their Greek equivalents are turning out to be intriguing, to say the least. He had told them, **“One will be taken and the other left.”** And they answered with a question: **“Where, Lord?”** His reply was a play on words answering *both* questions, that is, “Where will they be taken?” and “Where will they be left?” The first answer could be rendered, “Where my followers—the body of Christ, those who are safe—are found, that is where My Spirit will have gathered them together.” The second answer would be, “Where the corpses of those left behind are found, that is where the carrion birds will come together to feast upon them.” Or words to that effect.

If He had told me, **“One will be taken and the other left,”** I wouldn’t have asked Him, “Where?” I would have asked Him, “How?” Paul answered my question when he wrote, **“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be**

brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (I Corinthians 15:51-54)

There it is again, the definition of the rapture (although Paul didn’t use the word *harpazo* this time). All those in Christ will receive new, incorruptible, “spiritual” bodies. Some will be “sleeping” at the time and some will still be alive in our mortal bodies. The event will happen instantaneously, “in the twinkling of an eye.” And just that quickly, Yahshua’s personal victory over death will become our inheritance.

But wait a minute. What was that about a trumpet?

Back in chapter three we explored the first four of seven “Feasts of Yahweh,” annual celebrations the Israelites were commanded to observe. We saw that each of them not only had a historical basis in the life of Israel, but a future, prophetic aspect as well. The next one in order is the Feast of Trumpets, erroneously called *Rosh Hashanah*, meaning “head of the year.” This day has been observed—wrongly—as New Year’s day on the Jewish civil calendar since the Babylonian captivity, a bad habit the Jews picked up from their pagan captors. (Yahweh put the new year in the spring.) The date of this miqra (or holy convocation) is the first of Tishri, in the seventh and final month of the annual round of Levitical festivals. It falls in our September or October.

“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh.’” (Leviticus 23:23-25, cf. Numbers 29:1-6) There wasn’t much to this feast, comparatively speaking. It was a special Sabbath (as usual, proclaiming that “you can’t work for it”) marked by the blowing of the *shofar*—a ram’s-horn “trumpet” symbolic of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (whereas cow’s horns were reminiscent of Aaron’s golden calf debacle).

Arnold Fruchtenbaum of Ariel Ministries points out that the Jewish theology surrounding The Feast of Trumpets saw three reasons for blowing the *shofar*. First, it was a call to remembrance and repentance, for the day was the first of the ten “days of awe” that culminated in *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement. Second, it was to remind Israel of their covenant relationship with Yahweh. And third, tradition held that this was the day in which Satan came before God to accuse Israel (although my guess is that he does it all year round). So the Jews blow the *shofar* to confuse the devil. *It’s not working, guys.*

Likewise, the ram's horn in Jewish lore symbolized three significant concepts: the regathering of Israel (Isaiah 27:12-13), the resurrection of the dead, and the opening of three heavenly books. The Book of the Righteous revealed the identities of the totally good people, who would live for at least one more year; the Book of the Wicked (a.k.a. the Book of the Dead) had the names of those who were rotten to the core, and thus would not live to see another year; and (you can almost smell this one coming) the Book of the In-Between—recording, as you might guess, those “in between,” neither all good nor all bad. Everybody assumes they're in this last book, of course, and should consequently make an effort to reflect and repent during the ten days between the Feast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*—the Day of Blowing) and Yom Kippur.

The *shofar* is blown one hundred times during the Feast of Trumpets, using four distinct types of sounds. The *tekiah* is a long, continuous blast signifying joy and contentment. Three shorter blasts is called the *shevarim*, and breaking that into three sets of triplets, or nine staccato notes, is known as the *truah*. These three blasts are repeated throughout the festival, but at the very end comes the *tekiah gedolah*, or “great blast”—the last trumpet. Sound familiar? **“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”**

Yes, the Feast of Trumpets is prophetic of the rapture of the Church. Does this mean that the rapture *must* happen on The Feast of Trumpets—in September or October? The return of Yahshua for His Church has been considered imminent ever since the Day of Pentecost. But that doesn't negate the fact that *every single one* of the Feasts of Yahweh that have already come to pass has been fulfilled *on the very day* of its Levitical directive. That's more than a little significant, if you ask me. Though trying to guess the date of the rapture is a fool's errand, I must admit that during the last decade or so, I've occasionally caught myself glancing up at the clouds on autumn mornings and grinning. I can't help it.

But doesn't saying the rapture will fall on *Yom Teruah* fly in the face of Yahshua's statement that **“of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only”**? (Matthew 24:36) No, not even on the face of it. Yahshua is very precise about what He tells us. We *still* don't know the day or the hour, because we don't know the year. But there's another factor buried in the cultural baggage surrounding the statement—something that gets lost in the translation. Remember what I reported about the *shofar* being blown to confuse the devil? The Feast of Trumpets is also known as *Yom Hakeseh*—“the Day of the Hiding,” or simply the “Hidden Day.” It was to be, according to Jewish tradition, symbolically “hidden” from Satan—so the accuser couldn't be effective in accusing anybody. I know it sounds as stupid as it is naive, but it introduced an idiom into Jewish speech that was reflected in Yahshua's enigmatic statement.

Following this tradition, Jewish believers never actually stated when the Feast would come, although everybody knew it fell on the first day of Tishri. They merely remarked, tongue in cheek, “Of that day and hour no one knows, only the Father.” Unfortunately, Satan’s not that dumb. But the fact remains, the only day of the year that was described this way—as being hidden—was the Feast of Trumpets, *Yom Teruah*, *Yom Hakeseh*. Yahshua was indicating by His use of the idiom that He would “gather His elect” on the Feast of Trumpets in some unspecified future year.

Thus it’s no coincidence that the Rabbis connected the Feast of Trumpets with the resurrection of the dead. Equally intriguing is their association of the day with the Jews’ regathering into the promised land. At the risk of getting ahead of our story, consider what will happen when the Church is raptured, leaving not a soul on earth, Jew or Gentile, who believes that Yahshua is the Messiah. Even now, those who acknowledge no accountability to God invariably look for something or someone other than themselves to blame for their troubles, and as often as not the Jews become these people’s targets. If history is any indicator of future events, Gentiles will systematically persecute the world’s Jews in the days following the rapture of their only allies, and this will drive them to the one place left on earth where they are accepted and welcomed, if not quite safe—Israel. But we’ll have to save the details concerning that theory for later.

Strictly speaking, Yahshua wasn’t raptured. His resurrection and subsequent ascension paved the way for us, however, demonstrating His power over death and proving that He alone was the unmaking of Adam’s curse. But none of the New Testament writers except Paul explains the mechanism of *harpazo*, this catching up of believers into the presence of God. This has led some misguided theologians to question the reality of the rapture, presumably on the premise that only “in the mouth of two or three witnesses” is the truth established. *Paul was entitled to his opinion, but....*

You want more witnesses? Fair enough. There are two Old Testament characters who learned all about the rapture the hard way. No traditions, no scholarly tomes for these guys. They lived it. The first was Enoch, the great grandfather of Noah. **“Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”** (Genesis 5:21-25)

“And he *was not?*” That’s pretty thin, you might be saying. Fortunately, we have scripture to interpret scripture in this case: **“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”** (Hebrews 11:5-6)

The Greek word for “taken away” is not our old friend *harpazo*. It is *metaitemi*, which *Strong’s* defines as “to transfer, that is (literally) transport, (by implication) exchange, (reflexively) change sides—to carry over, change, remove, translate, or turn.” Interesting, isn’t it? I like the KJV’s rendering here: “Enoch was translated.” *Thayer’s Greek Definitions* sheds even more light on the subject. The word means, “to transpose (two things, one...in place of the other); to transfer; to change...” In other words, Enoch’s corruptible body was transposed, transferred, *changed* into something incorruptible, a body capable of being in God’s presence. If I may wax metaphorical, his mortal body had been written in a primitive language—one limited in vocabulary and clumsy in grammar, little more than grunts and wheezes—and it was translated into *koine* Greek—expressive, robust, and precisely eloquent (and, if I may stretch my metaphor to the breaking point, a language that could live forever only because it had already died).

Of course, I’ve been ignoring the most important thing: God took Enoch home because the man pleased Him. Makes sense. Why would anyone, especially One as smart as Yahweh, want to have people around who didn’t like Him or refused to believe He even existed? Enoch was chosen because he had faith in Yahweh and “diligently sought Him.” God doesn’t change, my friends. Who do you think He’ll take next time?

The other Old Testament example of a rapture experience happened in the plain view of a reliable witness who recorded it for posterity. Apparently, what was about to happen to Elijah was no secret, either to himself or any of the other prophets of Israel, of whom there were many at this time (848 B.C.). Elijah’s servant and fellow-prophet, Elisha, determined to be there when it happened. **“It came to pass, when Yahweh was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Then Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Stay here, please, for Yahweh has sent me on to Bethel.’ But Elisha said, ‘As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!’ So they went down to Bethel. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, ‘Do you know that Yahweh will take away your master from over you today?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I know; keep silent!’**

Then off to Jericho. Same thing happened. **“So the two of them went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water;**

and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?' Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.' So he said, 'You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.' Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Note that although Elijah's rapture was expected, it was still surprisingly sudden.

"And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!' So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, 'Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?' And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over.

"Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.' And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. Then they said to him, 'Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of Yahweh has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.' And he said, 'You shall not send anyone.' But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, 'Send them!' Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days but did not find him. And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, 'Did I not say to you, "Do not go"?"' (II Kings 2:1-18)

If Elisha hadn't been so determined, it's possible that all we'd be able to say with certainty about his master is, "Elijah was not, for God took him." As it is, we've got a detailed eyewitness account—one that's every bit as incomprehensible as the one about Enoch if you're not prepared to accept the power of God: "A chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Elijah didn't just disappear from sight, nor did he die and leave a body behind. He rode a whirlwind into heaven. I can't think of anyone in the Bible who made a more spectacular exit, although Korah and his merry men (Numbers 16:31-33) came close.

We can draw several parallels between Elijah's departure and the rapture of the final generation of Christians. The chariot of fire served two functions. It separated Elijah, who was supposed to go, from Elisha, who was not. And it confirmed that the prophet was being taken on purpose by the hand of God, rather than merely being the unluckiest man in Israel that day. We too will be separated from those around us; the Holy Spirit who dwells within us has already accomplished this. God told us to "Be holy, for I am holy." *Holy* means separated,

set apart for His purposes. And what about flaming horses? I don't expect too many "chariot-of-fire" experiences on the day of the rapture, but if the driver of that red Mustang tooling down the interstate on the big day happens to be a Christian....

Also, as in the coming rapture, Elijah left no corpse behind. Fifty students from the local prophets' seminary searched for his body for three days and found nothing. We need to be realistic here. If one man's departure almost three thousand years ago caused that kind of interest, the sudden disappearance of millions of people from the face of the earth will not go unnoticed. But the event will be met with, shall we say, mixed reviews.

Throughout much of the world, small pockets of Christians, two here, three there, a whole family at home, a few friends out sharing a pizza, will go missing. The following scenarios describe the kinds of things I imagine the rapture will leave in its wake. I have no knowledge of how many will be taken and how many will be left; therefore my "statistics" here are strictly guesses for the purpose of illustration, given so that you can appreciate what it might be like to be left behind. The time of day in any given location is strictly my conjecture. What does seem certain, however, is that the rapture will occur in "real time" at the same moment all over the globe, sometime during the twenty-four hour duration of the Feast of Trumpets, Jerusalem time.

An Australian surfer, catching some late afternoon waves with a friend after work, sees his mate's board float into shore without him. The first thing that goes through his mind is, *shark!* But there's no body, no blood. He hears yelling down the beach. Others are missing too.

A husband in India sharing a meal with his family looks up from his food to find his wife and young son gone; his frantic search reveals that sixteen others in his village, including that missionary doctor and his family, are gone as well. No Hindus are missing, but (unfortunately, he reflects) none of the village's Muslims are either—only the Christians. *I warned her about talking to those people.*

Life in Mecca goes on as usual. No one is missing. Nothing is out of place. The *hajj* pilgrims visiting the Ka'aba catch the news in their hotel rooms on CNN or the local *al-Jazeera* affiliate and scratch their heads. Then somebody fires a Kalashnikov into the air and yells *Allahu Akbar!* A great victory is declared. *The hated infidels, those despicable, lying, Jew-loving unbelievers are gone! Some of 'em, anyway.* It will dawn on them slowly, if at all: Neither Allah nor his Apostle

Muhammad (peace be unto him) ever did a miracle of any kind before. Why did he wait fourteen centuries and then do *this*?

Jerusalem dawns bright and clear. But it is soon discovered that 342 tourists, mostly from America and Canada, staying at five of the city's best hotels, have simply disappeared during the night. The *Shin Bet* swings into action, fearing the Palestinian Muslims, perhaps Hamas or al-Qaeda, have gone and done something rash. The IDF is put on full alert, but the reports trickle in: it's not just tourists. Hundreds of Israelis have failed to show up for work. Interviews with their employers all tell the same story: these are good, responsible workers, not prone to wildcat strikes, even though many of them have occasionally expressed odd Messianic theories. The black hats show up in droves at the Wailing Wall and immediately scour the nearby library for the proper prayer to recite (since you can't petition He-Whose-Name-Must-Not-Be-Spoken—*ha-Shem*, or “the Name,” for short—if a Rabbi hasn't pre-approved your words). But there's nothing in all of Judaism to cover this. They finally select something about heroic warriors missing in battle, form minyans, face the wall, and begin bobbing their heads.

The Vatican is all abuzz. Scattered reports are coming in from all over Europe. Thousands of Catholics and even more Protestants are gone. No one knows how. Sometime before dawn they simply disappeared. Among the lost are hundreds of priests, dozens of bishops, and even two cardinals. Scores of Europe's Protestant pastors are nowhere to be found. The clergy who are left talk in low whispers about those who were taken, their colleagues and friends. Invariably these were the more “radical” of their number, daring to challenge the Church on issues like the inerrancy of the papacy or the efficacy of the ecumenical movement—foolishly hindering their own careers in the process. Somebody mentions the rapture theory; he's laughed out of the room. A shaken Pope prepares a statement stressing hope and unity as hundreds of thousands of worried Romans crowd into Saint Peter's Square.

The Western hemisphere is hardest hit—especially the U.S. and Canada. The American Vice President and three members of the cabinet are missing. A third of the House of Representatives and twenty percent of the Senate seats are vacant. Thirteen state governors are gone. Local administrations find that so many people in positions of responsibility are absent, the day-to-day functions of local government—from trash pickup to emergency services to education—quickly begin to grind to a halt.

Business is devastated. The heart of the American workforce, not those who have clawed their way to the boardroom, but those who faithfully serve in the mailroom, the factory floor, in kitchen and cubicle, are absent in the millions. Few companies are left whole. Many of the best companies—those still being run by

founders who built their firms' strength through hard work and an attitude of service—are found leaderless.

The damage is not spread evenly over the country. Some cities are left more or less intact—San Francisco and New York, percentage-wise, are relatively untouched. But rural America is in shambles. Whole communities in the South and Midwest are like ghost towns, with half their populations AWOL. America's backbone is broken.

Because the “event” happened in the daytime here, there is far more “collateral damage” than elsewhere. Thousands of traffic accidents occur simultaneously as cars and trucks being driven by Christians are suddenly left unmanned. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that emergency personnel—police, firefighters, EMTs, and hospital ER staffs—have seen their own ranks “thinned.” Commercial aircraft manned by all-Christian flight crews stay aloft, but only because their auto-pilots keep them on course; landing—hours later—will prove to be their passengers' downfall. Life in the air traffic control towers becomes even more chaotic than usual, and not only because they're suddenly short-handed. Slowly, the infrastructure begins to break down because Christians are no longer there to do their jobs. Power grids fail, water and sewer systems malfunction, and half-staffed hospitals can't keep up with the carnage. Airports shut down. An instant gasoline shortage develops because the refineries aren't fully manned and fuel trucks can't get to their destinations. The supermarkets run out of food.

The media, of course, doesn't miss a beat. They're on top of the biggest story since 9/11 with every resource they've got—which is almost as much as what they had before the “Event.” Sure, there are a few low-level grunts missing—graphic artists, sound techs, and makeup people—but the on-camera network stars are all ready to go. They quickly line up “experts” to hypothesize about what's happened: law enforcement types, psychologists and parapsychologists, scientists, military leaders, politicians, and, of course, clergy.

The cops will only comment on what they're doing to contain and rectify the situation—meaning cleaning up the mess, not finding the missing millions. They're making lists, checking them twice, and trying to get hotlines set up for anyone with questions, or better, with answers. Likewise, the politicians offer condolences and hopeful promises of speedy resolution, assuring the public that the FBI, CIA, NSA, the Secret Service and the whole Department of Homeland Security are on this thing like a duck on a June bug. Meanwhile, the Attorney General's office is exploring the Constitutional ramifications of a special election. After all, the “Event” has shifted the balance of power in both the House and Senate solidly toward the liberal side of the aisle. Something must be done.

ACLU lawyers begin preparing class action lawsuits blaming government agencies for being woefully unprepared for anything like this.

TV psychologists and psychiatrists do their level best to make the remaining audience feel good about what's happened, whatever it is. They offer tips for dealing with stress and grief, confidently advising that the sooner the nation gets beyond this, the sooner we can begin to build a better world. Nobody overtly speaks ill of the dead (or departed), but there is a subtle, underlying tone of—what is it? Relief? A newfound sense of liberation? Buried between the words in interview after interview is the unarticulated thought that those who are missing are the same ones who caused all the divisiveness in our world—they were the ones who wouldn't compromise, wouldn't accommodate, wouldn't make the first effort to get along with the peaceful religions of the world, wouldn't admit the obvious fact that there are many paths to god. *The fundamentalist whackos are gone. We have a chance to start over, new and fresh. Are we not better off without them?*

CBS does a human interest piece on the black humor that invariably arises in times like this, especially in America. Within hours of the event, the sick jokes start circulating on the Internet. *What do you call it when a hundred million Christians disappear into thin air? A good start.... Have you heard of the new Christian diet? No, how much weight can you loose? All of it!...*

For the first time in their lives, the parapsychologists find themselves getting respect, and not only because Halloween is just around the corner. Their theories actually sound sort of plausible in the wake of this horrible, wonderful event. Here at last is proof: we are not alone in the universe. One of two things has happened, they announce. Either the aliens have come and selectively abducted all the intolerant troublemakers from the earth, or, more likely, the missing were actually aliens living among us, and they've gone back to their home planet. That buzzing some heard—it sounded like a horn, a trumpet of some sort, didn't it?—that must have been the signal to return to the mother ship.

Although he really hates it, the military spokesman finds himself agreeing with the parapsychologist. It has to be aliens, because nobody on earth has the technology to do what's been done. *We're the best there is, and we can't do it. As much as al-Queda would like to claim credit for this, they have demonstrated that the apex of their achievement is simply blowing things up. And though they get lucky from time to time, they've never been very good at it. It can't be the Chinese, either, because they've lost a fair number of people themselves. The Russians? Same story. So yessir! It has to be an alien strike force, and we need to ready ourselves to repulse any further aggression. The earth has a new enemy, an enemy from outside our world, and we all need to come together to fight it! World unity is what is needed now more than ever. Thank god for the United Nations.*

The scientific expert delivers a technical treatise on how making people disappear might be possible—something about string theory and warping the space-time continuum. It's not *real*, of course, just a concept some guys at Cambridge are fiddling with. It all happens in the sixth or seventh dimension anyway. Not terribly practical. On the other hand, you could make people disappear today using the CIA's satellite-based laser weapons. *We're not talking about "teleporting" them, you understand, but evaporating—disintegrating them.* The audience feels strangely unsatisfied with his explanations. After half a century of believing "the scientist is god," they're now leaning toward the guy who thinks we've got little green men living among us. He makes for a more convincing sound bite.

The network bigwigs figure that when things happen that offer no facile explanation, you've got to look at the religious angle. So the media lines up experts from every faith they can find. They want to get a Graham or Falwell type, but they can't locate one. However, they get a Catholic archbishop, the minister of a huge Protestant church in New York (*a veteran of the prime-time news/talk shows—she'll be perfect for this*), a Muslim imam, a Jewish rabbi, a Hindu scholar, and they even hook up with the Dali-lama via satellite. They all say pretty much the same thing: we've seen the hand of god here, as far as we can tell; it's a sign, an omen; god is trying to tell us we must achieve unity through tolerance for all religious beliefs; we must pray for understanding and enlightenment.

After a diligent search, Fox News finds a defrocked television evangelist who'd once had a huge following but had been caught with a prostitute and was subsequently convicted of altering the ministry's books. They sober him up long enough to tape an hour-long interview with a junior reporter, an attractive brunette. She is shocked to learn that he does not agree with the other esteemed men and women of the cloth, except for one thing. It's a sign, all right, and the sign reads: "Going Out of Business." He starts out lucidly enough, explaining to her how he knew all about the Bible in his head, but never really took it to heart. He relates how he became a famous TV preacher, how he'd gotten everything he'd ever wanted—and how he'd lost it all.

After a short prison term, he had wound up selling real estate in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in his words, "running from God, and from myself." But his head-knowledge had never left him. He relates how, on the day of the "event" it all came back to him: "**Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.... Death is swallowed up in victory.**" The ex-evangelist looks the young reporter in the eye and says, "At that moment, I knew it was all true—the reality of God, the sacrifice He

made for my sin, His victory over death—the whole thing. I fell on my knees and asked Jesus for His forgiveness. And y’know something? He forgave me, He saved me, right there in the parking lot. I know He did.”

The anchor isn’t interested. She tries to steer him back to the point.

The evangelist’s look turns cold. “You don’t know what took all those people away, do you? I do. It’s called the rapture of the Church. Jesus came back and took his people home—*all* of ’em.” The evangelist looks down, as if to gather his thoughts. When he raises his head, tears are flowing down his cheeks. “When you folks phoned me, I was drunk, dead drunk. When it hit me that I’d missed the rapture, I went home and crawled inside a bottle of Scotch. Wanna know why? ’Cause it’s over. Earth is toast. We’re all...”

“Surely you’re overreacting,” the reporter interrupts. “I mean, it’s a terrible tragedy that so many people have died, but...”

“They didn’t *die*! Don’t you get it? God took his people out—*alive*—because He’s about to judge the earth!” So much for lucid and rational. The ex- and future evangelist launches into a forty-minute rant, explaining what he knows about the rapture, the coming Tribulation, the Antichrist, World War III, the Abomination of Desolation, the Battle of Armageddon, Judgment Day, and the second coming of Christ. The reporter nods knowingly and tries to ask intelligent questions. But she knows the interview is a lost cause. The guy is clearly a couple of sopranos short of a choir. She takes the tape back to the network. They never run it.

Okay, back to reality.

If you recall, one of the Bible’s ways of prophesying an event yet future is to present a “type” or a dress rehearsal foreshadowing it. Thus Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah was a dress rehearsal of Yahweh’s sacrifice of *His* son, Yahshua, two thousand years later. It should not be surprising, then, to find that there are types of the rapture in the Old Testament, or that Yahshua told parables illustrating this concept in the Gospels.

If you know anything about the old Bible stories, your mind has probably already flipped back to the flood of Noah—a picture of divine judgment out of which only a few people are saved by the hand of Yahweh. The story goes like this: **“Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Yahweh was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So Yahweh said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing**

and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of Yahweh... Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God....

"The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth... But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.' "So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood....And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive." (Genesis 6:5-13, 18, 7:7, 21-23)

Yahshua talked about the days of Noah being a sign of His return. **"As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."** (Matthew 24:37) So this has to be a picture of the rapture, right? No, sorry. Close, but no cigar.

Look at the details. Yes, there's definitely judgment here. And Yahweh has devised a way for Noah and his family to survive His wrath, along with the animals that were under his protection. But when the flood was over, Noah returned to the devastated earth and began to rebuild. His sons and their wives repopulated the earth. This indeed is a perfect picture of something yet to come, but it isn't the rapture. It's God's protection of Israel and a belatedly redeemed gentile remnant through the coming period of wrath known as the Tribulation, or the "time of Jacob's trouble." It is this comparatively small group that will rebuild and repopulate the world after the "coming of the Son of Man."

As I said, though, the Noah-rapture theory was close. The antediluvian type of the rapture, however, was not Noah but his great grandfather Enoch, who as we have seen was "translated" 669 years before Noah entered the ark. I have no idea if that time period is indicative of anything yet future. We were given enough genealogical data to figure it out, so who knows? The thing to notice is that the two events are related, and the rapture type *precedes* the Tribulation type. That last point is important. Some have taught that the rapture will come at the end of the Tribulation, because they have erroneously equated Noah's little adventure with the rapture instead of the "sealing" of the remnant. I'll discuss some of these timing issues later on. Forgive me for jumping the gun a little.

There's another Old Covenant character whose story can teach us some valuable lessons about the rapture. Abraham had a nephew named Lot. Like his uncle, he worshipped Yahweh, but he also had a head for business on his

shoulders. Not content to sit around herding goats until God blessed him, Lot settled in the big city—Sodom—where opportunities abounded and a man of ambition could get rich. He quickly found out that it was a moral cesspool, a violent, evil city, and a terrible place to raise a family, but a man had to earn a living, didn't he? So he climbed the social ladder, became one of the city fathers, and joined the local country club. Unfortunately, he was still living there when Yahweh—after decades of giving the Sodomites chance after chance to repent—decided that Judgment Day was in order.

Yahweh told Abraham what He was about to do, and Abe pleaded his nephew's case for him. God told him—and this is important—that He would not destroy the city if there were righteous people living there. That didn't mean He would turn a blind eye forever toward Sodom's sin, for Yahweh is a just God. But He wouldn't destroy the righteous along with the wicked, either. There was only one alternative: remove—*rapture*—the righteous people out of the city before judgment fell.

“When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, ‘Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.’ And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, Yahweh being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he [the angel] said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.” Then Lot said to them, ‘Please, no, my lords! Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.’ And he said to him, ‘See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there.’ Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar [Hebrew: from tsaar—to be small, to be brought low, i.e. ignoble].

“The sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar. Then Yahweh rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from Yahweh out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Yahweh. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt.” (Genesis 19:15-29)

A few things bear mentioning here. First, Lot goofed up God's intended picture. He was told to escape to the mountains—metaphorically a place of majesty and power, the shelter only Yahweh can provide. God's throne is sometimes described as “the mountain of Yahweh.” But Lot had spent too much time in the city. He was now a confirmed “indoorsman,” afraid of his own shadow, so the disgusted angel let the terrified refugee scamper to a little hole-in-the-wall burg a few miles to the east. Apparently the fire and brimstone hit a little too close for comfort, however: the very next verse (19:30) says that Lot *did* go and live in a cave in the mountains.

Second, the angel said, “**I cannot do anything until you arrive.**” Not *will* not, but *cannot*. Lot was under Yahweh's protection: judgment would not fall until he was safe. In fact, Zoar was apparently slated for destruction along with the big cities near it, but the angel spared it for Lot's sake.

Third, Lot's children were spared because of his relationship with Yahweh (and not because they were such angels themselves—read the rest of Genesis 19). We need to address the emotionally charged issue of children in the rapture. Many commentators insist that all children “under the age of accountability” will be taken. They may be right, but there's no scriptural basis for saying this. We are given no clear word on the issue, and precious few hints. Yahshua obviously had a special concern for them, for he said, “**Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.**” (Mark 10:14-15) One could argue that Yahshua was thereby guaranteeing a place in his kingdom for children who die very young, or those who are still “young and innocent” on rapture day. Still, the case for universal child rapture is pretty thin.

Perhaps we can draw some enlightenment from Paul's observation: “**I was alive once without [or, apart from] the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.**” (Romans 7:9-11) Our infants possess the same sin nature we all inherited from Adam. But the implication could be drawn from this passage that those who have never actually committed a willful sin themselves—the kind of hand-in-the-cookie-jar experience that they knew was wrong when they did it—will be accounted as “alive” at the rapture. On the other hand, not having willfully sinned is not at all the same thing as having a relationship with Yahweh.

I'm going to go out on a theological limb here, but it appears to be solid enough. Children who are not mature enough to make their own spiritual choices may be raptured or left behind on the basis of their *parents'* faith (SF4). They may be “saved” through the faith of either their mother or father—or left behind to face the last days with their unbelieving parents. Remember, there were children

in Sodom who suffered the same fate as their evil parents, though Lot's less-than-perfect daughters were rescued with him. Paul writes, **"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy."** (I Corinthians 7:14) This, of course, puts a huge responsibility on the shoulders of parents (it's there anyway), for their kids' eternal fate is linked to their parents' in the rapture.

This is not quite as unfair as it may sound for those kids left behind, however. A few years will probably pass between the rapture and the Tribulation, and the Tribulation itself will last seven years, so a four-year-old child of non-Christian parents at the time of the rapture could easily be (I'm guessing) thirteen or fourteen by the time Yahshua returns in His glory—plenty of time to figure it out and make his own choice. In other words, such a child has the same opportunity to make right or wrong decisions as anyone else on earth, before or after the rapture. I have a feeling that kids will "grow up fast" during this time. The trick will be staying alive long enough to make the right choices.

Fourth, though the timeline in Lot's escape from Sodom was abbreviated—taking only a few hours, the coming of judgment once the rapture is accomplished is just as certain. Yahshua warned us, **"In the days of Lot they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."** (Luke 17:28-33) The Sodomites thought it was just another day, but Lot's departure signaled the coming of a rain of fire upon them. In the same way, the rapture will begin a chain of events that will culminate in the total annihilation of wickedness in this world. Yahshua is not saying that the rapture will happen on the same day that "the Son of Man is revealed." He has given us enough chronological details elsewhere for us to know otherwise. He's merely saying that when He *is* revealed, it will be too late to avoid certain destruction. It's going to get messy. You don't want to be here when it happens.

And what about Lot's wife? She never understood that the world had nothing that could help her in the end. She appeared to be following Lot to a place of safety, but in her heart she longed for the good life of the city. Turning around, she made her choice not to trust Yahweh—she chose to put her faith in the world instead. But as strange as it sounds, whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life following Yahweh will preserve it.

I've given Lot a hard time for his apparent weaknesses, but in truth, we've all lived in Sodom at one time or another. We *do* have to earn a living, we *do* have to

feed our families. We don't have to buy into the system quite to the extent Lot did, but perhaps it was pressure from his social-climbing wife that got him so deep into Sodomite society. Peter sheds some light on Lot's true feelings: **"[Yahweh turned] the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)."** (II Peter 2:6-8) We who must live in Sodom—or San Francisco—need to be honest with ourselves: are we "oppressed" and "tormented" by what we see around us? Or would we have to be dragged kicking and screaming to meet Yahshua in the air?

Yahshua once told a parable that plainly outlined the conditions before, during, and after the rapture. The setting of the story is a wedding. The custom in those days was for the bridegroom to arrive at an undisclosed hour at his bride's home, where she would be waiting expectantly with her bridesmaids. (They were smarter back then than we are now. The groom's arrival was supposed to be a "surprise." That way, there was no way he could show up late.) Then the couple, carrying palm and myrtle branches, would be led in festive procession to the bridegroom's house. The bridesmaids, of which ten was the usual number, carried olive-oil lamps atop staves as the little parade made its way through the streets. Grain or money was thrown about, musicians played, and those who met the procession along the way considered it a joyful religious duty to join in the festivities, which typically lasted for a whole week.

That's the background. Here's the parable. **"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.** (Matthew 25:1-13)

The bridegroom, in case you haven't figured this out, is Yahshua. For the sake of the parable, the virgins—the bridesmaids—are the Church. (In actuality, the Church is the bride of Christ, but you can't make every metaphor work on every level.) The virgins are divided into two groups, those who are prepared—who have the “oil” of the Holy Spirit—and those who are not so prepared. If you'll recall, the churches listed in Revelation 2 and 3 included two that were characteristic of the last days: Philadelphia and Laodicea. The first represents the wise virgins; the second, the foolish ones.

As we speak, we are waiting for the groom to arrive, but He's been a long time coming—almost two thousand years now. It's been so long, in fact, most of us have dozed off. But sleeping or not, the bridesmaids of Philadelphia are prepared, and those of Laodicea aren't. When the Bridegroom comes (at the rapture of His Ekklesia), only the first group, those who have the Holy Spirit living within them, will be admitted to the party.

The lessons are stunning. All of the bridesmaids knew the groom was coming. None of them knew when. All of them wanted to go to the party, and all of them were invited. None of them stayed wide awake, watching for His coming. They all had the same opportunity, that is, they all had oil lamps with them. The *only* difference between them was that the wise had oil—the Holy Spirit abiding within them—and the foolish didn't. Now, here's the interesting part. All five of the foolish virgins went out and bought oil, and that meant they could still have a relationship with the Groom after the wedding feast. But the only time they could get this oil was while the party was going on. And they couldn't come into the party halfway through, because the doors were shut. They had to wait outside for the whole week.

This is all a picture of the rapture and the Tribulation that follows. But what does it mean to “buy oil” after the party's started? The oil, as I said, is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. Buying oil is thus a picture of receiving God's Spirit, of accepting His grace, for without it, there can be no relationship with the “Groom,” Yahshua—they are One. The Laodiceans were told: **“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich.”** (Revelation 3:18) Those who take this counsel are characterized in the parable as the “foolish virgins” who waited to buy their oil until it was too late to be admitted to the party—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Their faith will be tested, refined in the coming crucible of trial known as the Tribulation. They will not escape this trial—in other words, they will not be raptured like the wise virgins—but rather, they will go through the fire—seven years of hell on earth. Many will be martyred, though some will manage to stay alive until the end. Turning to Yahweh during the Tribulation, of course, is better than never doing it, but it's better yet to avoid the trial altogether.

The true Church of Laodicea is wholly comprised of those who accept the grace of Yahshua after the rapture. I should note that this group is not necessarily a hundred percent coterminous with “religious” people today who nevertheless reject Christ. Some of those people will *never* repent. Remember, Laodicea is part of the Church, part of the Body of Christ. Before it’s over, they will *all* be saved. However, I’m getting ahead of the story again.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins wasn’t the only time Yahshua instructed His disciples about the rapture and its aftermath. But they didn’t get it, not right then. Still, you can’t blame them for not understanding what He’d said until after His resurrection. This stuff is too wonderful for mortal comprehension: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.... The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.** (John 5:25, 28-29) There *is* life after death, for both the righteous and the wicked. But alas, I’m going to have to save my discussion of that whole topic for a later chapter.

“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40) What did Yahshua teach His disciples to pray? **“Our Father, may Your will be done.”** I think it’s a safe bet that it will be, in the end. **“[That Day] will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”** (Luke 21:35-36) I guess Yahshua doesn’t believe in a post-tribulation rapture. This verse doesn’t make any sense if the Tribulation comes before the rapture on God’s timetable. There’s no point in praying **“that you may be counted worthy to escape”** if the escape God has planned—the rapture—won’t happen until after “all these things” are past, as post-trib rapture theorists contend.

Yahshua explained, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.... Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.** (John 6:47-49, 51, 53-54) As metaphors go, that one has caused more confusion than most. But it’s quite simple, really. We are to assimilate Yahshua our Messiah as the Israelites assimilated the manna in the wilderness. That “bread” kept their mortal bodies alive for forty years; the “Living Bread,” Yahshua’s Spirit, the Word of God living within us, will keep our spiritual bodies alive forever.

As the last days approach, even the most hardened skeptics can sense that there's something going on. Major secular news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* have devoted cover articles to the phenomenon of "Apocalypse Fever," even taking the radical step of interviewing popular Christian spokesmen like Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey. Christians have no monopoly on insight, of course, but we do have a monopoly on peace. That's why John 14:27-29 records what Yahshua reminded His disciples on the very night He was betrayed: **"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe."**

And speaking of peace, let me leave you with this parting shot from Isaiah, a stunning Old Covenant confirmation of the rapture and its purpose: **"The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart. Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness."** (Isaiah 57:1-2) Amplified to reveal its full meaning, these verses would read: "The one who is just (*tsadiq*), lawful, righteous, and vindicated before God perishes (*abad*), dies, is put to death and exterminated, and nobody places (*sum*) this fact upon his heart (*leb*), mind, understanding or knowledge. Men of mercy (*cheched*), goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and unfailing devotion are taken away (*'asaph*), gathered, brought together, assembled, withdrawn, or, in military terms, assembled as a rear guard, while no one considers (*biyn*), understands, discerns or perceives that these righteous people (*tsadiq*) are being taken away (*'asaph*), gathered or withdrawn from evil (*raah*), wickedness, adversity, misfortune, affliction, calamity, disaster, distress, and trouble. [That, in case you missed it, is a picture of the rapture, first of those who have perished and then of those who still live.] He shall enter into (*bow*), come to, attain, be brought or introduced to peace (*shalowm*), safety, prosperity, and contentment; they shall rest (*nuach*), repose, and be quiet on their beds, each one walking (*halak*), going, following, or behaving in his uprightness (*nakoah*), straightness, or rightness." That's the best news of all: after we're "raptured," we'll no longer sin—we'll walk in righteousness forever.