

## Chapter 19

### Visions of Grandeur

When Yahshua began His earthly ministry, He was heralded by a charismatic figure we know as John the Baptist, who had been predicted to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. John was the last of the “Old Testament” prophets—that is, men called to announce Yahweh’s program in the days before Yahshua’s death, burial, and resurrection ushered in the “Kingdom of Heaven.” The Antichrist knows that he too will need a forerunner like John if he is to pass for the Messiah.

He’s not a very good match, I’m afraid, but the Antichrist’s herald is this guy: **“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon....”** Notice that this beast comes “up out of the earth” (in contrast to the first beast, the Antichrist, who rises “up out of the sea.”) The use of this common metaphor leads me to believe that he’s a Jew (SF3). In my hypothetical narrative, I’ve already introduced this character as an Israeli religious leader or theologian of some sort, someone who is, like the Antichrist, widely honored and respected. If you’ll recall, I guessed that he would be roundly hailed as a “prophet for the New Age,” or some such nonsense. The comparison to a lamb reminds us of Yahshua’s introduction in Revelation 5. But there the Messiah had seven horns. This beast has two (which I take to mean spiritual influence over both Jews and gentiles—SF6). In other words, this lamb/beast may look sort of like the real thing, but he’s an impostor. The real tip-off, of course, is what he says: he speaks like the dragon—his words are smooth and slick, but if you listen to him, you’ll get burned.

John the Baptist introduced Yahshua to the world, saying simple and profound things like, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” This False Prophet, showing more flair for the theatrical than John could have dreamed of, operates as a combination master of ceremonies, press agent, and house magician for the Antichrist. **“And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men....”** A few years ago, I went to see the illusionist David Copperfield in a live performance. Before my very eyes, I watched him perform stunts that were clearly “impossible,” like making a motorcycle disappear from the stage in a cloud of smoke, only to make it reappear moments later—*with him riding it*—on a small platform set in the middle of the audience. My point is that though my senses told me it was all real, I *knew* he was faking it, though I couldn’t figure out how. Would I commit my soul to a course of action based on the amazing things I’d seen? Of course not. So why are the

inhabitants of the earth buying into the Antichrist's program just because they've seen some "great signs?" Bear in mind that the vast majority of people will never see these signs in person, but only via their televisions. And that only makes it worse. I've seen entire *planets* explode on the silver screen. How's the False Prophet going to top that? Either these are *some signs* he's performing, or the inhabitants of earth have grown terribly gullible. I suspect it's a little of both. Unlike me and my intellectual admiration for the talents of David Copperfield, the Antichrist's audience is emotionally desperate for a savior, and they're willing to suspend reason if it helps them believe what they so frantically *want* to believe.

Twice John tells us that the False Prophet only does his sleight of hand "signs" when the Antichrist is around. This probably adds to the illusion of divine intervention. **"And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."** (Revelation 13:11-15) Why do all these megalomaniac types feel like they have to have big statues of themselves? They all seem to have an edifice complex. Note that this "image" (presumably large, but we aren't told) is built by others upon the demand of the False Prophet. The image is said to be "*to* the beast," that is, in honor of him. But the word for image is *eikon*, meaning a representation of something or someone, which begs the question: who, precisely is the "beast?" The Antichrist and the demon who inhabits him are spoken of interchangeably in these passages, and the dragon, Satan, is the one who empowers them both. An image made in honor of one of them honors them all.

The False Prophet's slickest trick is undoubtedly the animation of what we presume is the Antichrist's statue. John reports that **"he was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast,"** but "breath" here is a loaded word: it's *pneuma*, normally translated "spirit." Strong's offers as its second definition of *pneuma*, "the spirit, i.e., the vital principal by which the body is animated." In other words, this image actually becomes "alive" at some level. And whose *pneuma* is animating this image? I believe it's Satan's own spirit. Notice that the worship of the masses is to be directed toward the *image*, not to the Antichrist. That's all Satan wants—to be worshipped as if He were God. This is turning out to be scarier than it looked at first glance.

What would we think if we saw the Statue of Liberty climb off her pedestal in New York Harbor and stroll down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue? (I've seen that one at the movies, too.) No doubt we'd all be amazed. But what if she then said that everybody in Manhattan had to bow down in worship to her or she'd squash them like bugs? Amazement would quickly become fear: some would bow, and some would run,

but everybody would take her seriously, especially after she began stomping on passers by. Multiply all that by a million, and you've got the basic idea of what's going on here in Revelation 13.

An image—an idol, if you will—is a surrogate for whatever it represents. Those who bow before (i.e., do the bidding of) the image are actually worshipping the man himself and the dragon who empowers him. I know that seems pretty elementary, but Yahweh thought it was important enough to make the prohibition of image worship His second commandment: **“You shall not make for yourselves any carved image”** (Exodus 20:4)—right after the biggie, having no gods but Him alone. The reason I bring this up is that I'm not positive the “image” will take the form of a statue, even though it's spoken of as a singular entity: *an* image, *the* image; and the abomination of desolation, which is an apt description for such an image, is said to be seen **“standing in the holy place.”** (Matthew 24:15) But who knows what kind of hot new technology might be pressed into the devil's service by then? Maybe everybody will be required to carry around a credit-card-sized hologram generator that delivers the Big Guy's daily fireside chat, live and in three dimensions, every afternoon precisely at six o'clock. I just don't know. But those required to worship the image will.

Whatever form the image takes, it will only serve to demonstrate that some things never change. The prophet Habakkuk wrote, **“What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, the molded image, a teacher of lies, that the maker of its mold should trust in it, to make mute idols? Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Awake!’ To silent stone, ‘Arise! It shall teach!’ Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, yet in it there is no breath [Hebrew: *ruach*—spirit] at all. But Yahweh is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”** (Habakkuk 2:18-20) It's interesting that the prophet defines these worthless idols by their lack of breath or spirit, and yet the False Prophet is said to “give breath” to the Antichrist's image. This is clearly an idol designed to fool some of the people all of the time—the jaded yet gullible lost souls of the Great Tribulation. The bottom line for the False Prophet is the same as for any idol maker: “Woe to him....”

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In the three-ring circus of popular eschatology, if the “center ring” is the rapture of the Church, the other two must be the battle of Armageddon and our next subject, the Mark of the Beast. Even the most ignorant seem to have die-hard opinions about these three hot topics. Makes me want to skip it and move on.

But you've stuck with me this far, so I'll give it my best shot. The Mark of the Beast is mentioned eight times in Revelation (and nowhere else in scripture,

which should tell you something about its relative lack of significance to those of us on this side of the rapture). In only one passage is it explained in any detail, and even then, as prophecies go, this one is more cryptic than most: **“He [the False Prophet—the beast from the land] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.”** (Revelation 13:16-18) That’s it. That’s all there is. For centuries, these three little verses have been generating controversy far beyond their importance to the people doing the debating.

And why is that? Why does everyone consider the Mark such a big deal? It’s because of the dire consequences of “receiving” it. John explains in the next chapter: **“Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’”** (Revelation 14:9-11) Yeah. That sounds bad. So before I attempt to explain what the mark actually is, I’d like to clear up the matter of who it’s for and what it does.

First, notice the dichotomy between **“He causes all...to receive a mark”** and **“If anyone...receives his mark.”** This implies that the mark will be compulsory by international law—*everyone* will be required to have the Mark—presumably to ensure that the system works properly. But some, engaging in “civil disobedience,” will refuse to take it, which will make them outlaws, unable to function or participate within society. The Mark alone grants access to the world of commerce, for **“no one may buy or sell”** without it or what it represents. So it’s a bad-news-worse-news story for those living in these dark days: take the Mark and you can collect your pay and buy food for your family, but by doing so you’ll be bringing down the wrath of God on your head. Or refuse the Mark, become an outcast from society, and bring down the wrath of the *Antichrist* on your head. The false prophet, lest we’ve forgotten, has the power of life and death over the world’s populace, and he’s not squeamish about using it: **“He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast.... As many as would not worship the image of the beast [would] be killed.”**

Don’t get me wrong: it won’t be “optional,” any more than refraining from stealing cars or not robbing banks is optional. Refuse the Mark and you’ll be breaking the law—and the penalty is death. The choice, though, is between breaking the law of Man or breaking the law of God. Everyone on earth will

eventually have to decide between openly allying himself with the Antichrist by receiving his Mark or being persecuted for refusing it.

Second, notice that the mark is inextricably linked with the *worship* of the Antichrist: “**If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark....**” This is the key to the whole thing. No one will be in doubt as to what they’re doing when they accept the Mark of the Beast. It will be characterized as an indication of support, cooperation, loyalty, even devotion to the Antichrist and the god he serves. And remember, Lucifer’s role will no longer be a secret at this point. Bowing to the Antichrist will be recognized as being tantamount to bowing to Satan.

If you think about it, the Mark of the Beast firmly links the doctrine of salvation by grace to a pre-tribulation rapture. Those who believe that the Church will go through the Tribulation (taking the “post-tribulation rapture” position) are saddled with a salvation-by-works scenario: if refusing to accept the Mark is what saves believers in the Tribulation from the eternal wrath of Yahweh, then they are being saved by their own works—there is therefore no reason for Yahshua to have shed his blood for their sins. But if refusing the Mark is the criteria for last-generation Christians, what must *earlier* believers—those who die before the Mark is instituted—do to earn their salvation? They are, as they say in theological circles, “screwed.” No similar works are specified for them—only the grace of Yahshua is provided. One way or another, the Post-Toasties (as a friend of mine calls them) have a terrible problem.

Here’s what’s really happening. The trial that is imminent for those who refuse the Mark is precisely that from which Christ promised to spare the Church of the rapture, i.e., that of Philadelphia. Yahshua said to them, “**Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**” (Revelation 3:10) So deciding whether or not to take the Mark of the Beast *is* the trial—a test that’ll be graded on the pass-or-fail system. To those who have accepted Yahshua’s grace after the rapture—to the Church of Repentant Laodicea—He said, “**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.**” (Revelation 3:19) And indeed, for many, the refusal to align themselves with the Antichrist will cost them their lives—the ultimate “chastening.” Putting their lives at risk in the name of Yahweh will surely require both “zeal” and “repentance”—a change of mind. But their sacrifice is not lost on heaven: there they are lauded as those who “**did not love their lives to the death.**” (Revelation 12:11) On the other hand, I have a feeling that, survival instinct aside, they may not be all that concerned about hanging onto their mortal lives by this time—the world will have become a nasty place to live. As a matter of fact, even the Spirit of God states that there will come a time when being dead—presuming you’re in Christ, that is—will actually be

considered a blessing: **“Blessed are the dead who die in Yahweh from now on...that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”** (Revelation 14:13) Notice that their works *follow* them, not save them.

So it’s clear that the Mark of the Beast is something imposed during the Tribulation—and my guess is that it won’t appear until right around the midpoint, the beginning of the *Great* Tribulation, when Satan has been thrown out of heaven and is aware of how little time he has left. There will be a specific point in time when Lucifer will come out of the closet for all the world to see, demanding worship through his minion, the Antichrist. The only believers, then, who will be faced with the “test”—*should I take the Mark or should I head for the hills?*—are those who were saved between the rapture and this satanic unveiling, known as the “abomination of desolation.” They will be required to demonstrate their faith by their works—to choose between expedience and devotion, between death masquerading as life and life disguised as death—by refusing to receive the Mark. This is the crucible of the refining process of which Yahshua warned Laodicea in Revelation 3:18. Though people saved before the rapture may encounter trials, they will never be faced with this particular test.

Not to belabor the point, but this is not something new, some super-test for super-saints. In a very real sense, every Christian has always faced the same kind of choices. James talked about it at length: **“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith....”** I have the feeling that quite a few new Christians will be asking Yahweh for wisdom when it comes down to a choice between doing what the law requires and following their conscience—knowing what nasty consequences promise to follow.

**“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren....”** It’s like James was talking directly to the Tribulation believers. The temptation they’ll face to take the Mark will be tough, there’s no doubt—it’s probably the worst temptation in history. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden had no such appeal: the serpent never said to Adam and Eve, “If you don’t eat the fruit, I’ll kill you.” That’s why Yahweh warned the Tribulation Saints about the consequences ahead of time. This is like the blessings-and-cursings passage of Deuteronomy all over again (only shorter).

Israel blew it and paid the price the first time. Let us pray that the post-rapture believers will not.

James continues the thought: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can [such a] faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 1:2-6, 12-16, 2:14-19) Refusing to take the Mark of the Beast will first and foremost entail the faith to believe that God is as good as His word—that even though it might cost you your mortal life, you are *still* safe in the arms of Yahshua. But after all that, there is still the “sheep and goats” issue: sheltering the emissaries of Christ (definitely the 144,000, and perhaps other believers on the run as well) during the Tribulation will be a terribly risky enterprise, but one that Yahshua equates with meeting *His* needs.

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What, exactly, is the Mark? The word in Greek is *charagma*, which *Strong’s* defines as “a scratch or etching, i.e., a stamp (as a badge of servitude) or sculptured figure (statue), hence: graven, mark.” Our word “character” comes from the same root. Even though the word can mean something graven in three dimensions like a statue, a different word (*eikon*, meaning an image that represents someone, a likeness) is used for the “image” or statue of the beast.

Its description and function give us the strongest clues. As we saw, everyone will be required “to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads.” We may therefore infer that the Mark is a physical sign that identifies its bearer as part of the “system.” You’re either in or out. It will be either visible to the eye or otherwise detectable (perhaps electronically), and because it is applied to a specific part of the body, it will function as an identity badge to authorize or qualify its owner. Note that having a mark *per se* is not necessarily a bad thing—it’s spiritually neutral. We all remember the serial numbers the Nazis tattooed on their death camp victims during World War II, and I’m told that Christians in Egypt today often tattoo a small cross on their right hands—to show that they’re *not* the beast’s.

Before the age of computers, Bible expositors naturally assumed that everyone would have the same Mark, perhaps a simple 666 tattoo, that would tell whoever checked that you were an “official” human being, eligible to receive all

the rights and privileges afforded by your status in the Antichrist's new world order. That theory fit the requirements of scripture well enough, but since the advent of the microchip, it is now possible to envision how the Mark could *in itself* fulfill much more of the prophecy.

In order for the Antichrist to hope to pull this off, the Mark must not only be required, but *desired*. Force is hard to apply on a worldwide scale. For the Mark's implementation to become a practical reality, there will have to be a reason for people to *want* to have it. And there is. Actually, if you're able to mentally remove all of the Satanic baggage, the scenario of the Mark sounds like a dream come true for every law-abiding citizen of planet earth. (Remember: Satan's evil, not stupid.)

The key is John's description of the Mark's function. **"No one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."** How is that possible? A generic "I'm-in-the-club" Mark would be virtually useless in preventing commerce, especially on the black market, which might be expected to thrive in a post-nuclear-war world. As long as there's money—currency—in circulation, paper notes or metal coins that society agrees have specific value, buying and selling will go on, regardless of what the government has to say about it. If you don't believe me, ask your friendly neighborhood drug dealer or prostitute—the money that goes through their hands bears no semblance of official regulation. No one other than the parties involved in the transaction has any idea what's going on. No records are kept, no taxes are paid, no infringements of the law are divulged. If you think about it, cash is often the very thing that makes crime possible.

Now imagine yourself in the post-nuke world. Governments that haven't already fallen are teetering on the brink of collapse. Most of the world, financially, looks like Germany in 1920. Remember the third seal judgment? *A loaf of bread for a full day's pay*. It's not just that food is scarce. It's that inflation is rampant. People no longer trust the currency of their nations like they used to. The value of a dollar (euro, yen, peso, pound, or ruble, etc.) is directly related to the confidence people have in the government issuing the currency. And what is the totalitarian mind's standard answer to that kind of problem? Control, of course—starting with wages and prices. It will be complicated, since the crisis has engulfed the entire globe, but with the power and technology now at the disposal of this centrally administered one-world government, the first order of business will be to reinvent the socioeconomic wheel.

Cash, as we have seen, is practically obsolete even today. And in a world where control is imposed globally from the top down, currency will be the first thing they look at. *Is it even necessary anymore?* The Antichrist will have been pondering this for years, and now, near the half-way point in the Tribulation, he

will implement his plan. It will consist of two parts: electronic money and a comprehensive database that tracks and monitors every living human being. The necessary technology is commonplace already—it has been around for years. The only things lacking have been the will and the authority to put the plan into action. There will be no apparent downside from the point of view of the Antichrist's administration: it will be seen as the ultimate way to exact submission from the earth's unruly population. But it's also a marketing man's dream. The ostensible benefits for the populace will be obvious, tangible, and easily communicated. Putting lipstick on this pig—excuse me: *presenting this plan to the world*—will be a snap.

The electronic money part is easy enough to comprehend. We've been using it for years in the form of credit cards, debit cards, bank checks, internet banking, and ATM machines. Up until now, we've always used currency as well, but seldom for anything approaching a sizeable purchase. Large amounts of cash, in fact, are a red-flag giveaway to law-enforcement officials that some sort of crime is taking place. "Money laundering" often involves converting currency to electronic money, which can be more easily transferred without raising suspicion. So the jump to a "cash-equals-crime" mindset will be simple enough. In the wake of the anarchy that follows the war, crime prevention will become a worldwide priority. The vast majority of survivors, more fearful of bandits than bureaucrats (a big mistake) will welcome a cashless monetary system as the first step in a comprehensive anti-theft program.

But credit or debit cards can be stolen too, and they're only slightly harder to use than stolen cash. The key to minimizing personal financial crime is requiring foolproof I.D. So what is needed, the Antichrist will say, is a comprehensive, worldwide personal identity system. The Americans developed the prototype for it way back in 1935 when we introduced the Social Security number. Now, every U.S. citizen (and a fair number of aliens) have a nine-digit number that—*theoretically*—identifies each of them to the exclusion of anyone else in this country. The system, however, isn't foolproof. Because the number is not actually *part of you*, it's possible to borrow, steal, or duplicate it. Almost no one actually checks. It's possible to pass for a legitimate U.S. citizen merely by using the Social Security number of some other person, alive or dead. Illegal immigrants have been known to use the SS numbers of other taxpayers when applying for jobs in the U.S., paying their FICA taxes into the account of the number's true owner—thereby cheating themselves of future benefits—in order to maintain anonymity. It is said that a clever thief, with little more than your name and Social Security number (not the *card*, mind you, just the number) can steal your identity—and with it your entire financial world.

But what if your public identity were part of you, and it went with you wherever you went? In a way, of course, that's always been the case: Yahweh Himself designed it that way. Your fingerprints, retinal pattern, voice print, and DNA profile are virtually impossible to fake, though they're not terribly practical (yet) as on-the-spot ways of verifying your identity. And they're not terribly computer friendly—they all require huge amounts of memory and expensive equipment to access. All that's really needed is a ten- or eleven-digit number. (Ten digits would allow for 9,999,999,999 separate identities, barely enough to accommodate the present population of earth.) The number would be unique to you, something no one could access without your physical presence (just like a fingerprint or retinal scan).

Perhaps the ideal personal code will be determined to contain three sets of six digits—six-six-six. We'll discuss this familiar prophetic theme at length in a moment; for now, let's just examine how the I.D. system might work. The first six numbers would form a rough physical description of the number's owner. One digit describes your gender—male, female, and (if I know Satan) a designation for surgical monstrosities somewhere in between. One identifies your race—a range of designations designed to promote “diversity,” something dear to Satan's heart. The last four numbers state the year you were born. With this information, your 18-digit code could not easily be stolen and used by someone else. The person or machine checking the number would, for example, be looking for a forty-seven year old Hispanic woman, not the Asian teenager who's trying to buy a car with her number. The last twelve digits in the code would be your own personal I.D. number (broken into two sets of six to make it easier to read and memorize). The computer, of course would know that #254874-568342 is owned by a white female born in 1997—not a person of some other description. So faking the number without access to the hacker-proof database would be virtually impossible.

The easiest, lowest-tech way of applying the I.D. code to your body would be to etch the number in bar-code form into the skin, like a hyper-accurate machine-generated tattoo. Like the laser-readable UPC (Universal Product Code) marks found on every grocery item, a simple scan would tell the system that you are really *you*. The technology to achieve this has been around since the mid-1970s; it's cheap, reliable, and familiar. And the world is gearing up for the next-generation biological model: Houston inventor Thomas W. Heeter holds U.S. Patent 5,878,155, described as a “Method for verifying human identity during electronic sale transactions.” For all practical purposes, it's a barcode I.D. tattoo designed to facilitate Internet commerce.

Other, more sophisticated, ways of applying the Mark are under development as we speak, and we'll discuss them in a moment. But for now, let's pause to

consider the ramifications. In normal use, having the Mark could make your financial life safe and convenient—or at least that’s how the government’s marketing gurus will present it.... *You’re off to work in the morning. Need to put a few gallons of gas or a couple of kilowatts of electricity into your car? Just scan your Mark into the machine—your purchase will automatically be debited from your account. Same thing with that coffee and bagel you habitually pick up. Your paycheck isn’t a check at all any more. Rather, every afternoon at six o’clock a day’s wages are automatically deposited into your account—less taxes of course. Pick up a dozen eggs and a carton of milk on the way home—but don’t “pay” for it; just scan your Mark.*

Your “bank” is no longer a private corporation, one of many from which you can choose based on its services or convenience. It’s now a single world-government monolith that controls all of the planet’s finances. Everything you owe, you owe to *them*; everything you have “saved up” is merely “ones and zeros”—electronic money—in their computers. This state of affairs is the result of a global financial meltdown predicted in scripture, something we’ll cover in a future chapter. *You can check your account balance any time you like—just scan your Mark into the reader that’s built into your cell phone or computer. If you run a little short, don’t worry; we’ll cover you. We’ll just roll the shortfall into your loan.* Virtually every adult has a “loan,” which includes their house, car, everything they owe, all rolled into one lump sum, all with the same low interest rate, all borrowed from the only legal lender on earth—the central government. As long as you don’t get too far out ahead of your income, you’re golden, or at least that’s what they’ll tell you. (Remember the line from old folk song, “Sixteen Tons?” *I owe my soul to the company store.*)

They’ll say, *Crime is a thing of the past.* While a blatant lie, this marketing myth will receive so much air time people will actually begin to believe it. *It is true that certain types of crime no longer “pay.” Dangerous illegal drugs are no longer available because money is no longer anonymous. Muggings and armed robberies no longer take place, because there’s no cash to steal, and fencing stolen goods is next to impossible.* Some crimes are history, though, simply because the government has opted to decriminalize, regulate—and tax—they instead. So prostitution has moved off the streets into legal bordellos. Marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy and other usually non-lethal drugs have been made available through licensed dealers. (The harder stuff is available only with a doctor’s prescription, of course, paid for by the world-state’s universal health plan.) Taking a page from the lottery playbook, such “services” are now actually seen as a good thing because a portion of the proceeds are set aside to fund public education (which is now little more than a vehicle for indoctrinating obedient, politically correct future taxpayers). Child abuse, stalking, and rape are no longer considered crimes if the victims aren’t actually killed in the process—depriving

the state of potential future tax revenues. Many local governments have noted that laws that had been pushed through by moralistic, holier-than-thou do-gooders before the rapture were out of step with the current shades-of-gray pop theology. What had once been viewed as a matter of right or wrong, good or bad, is now seen “more clearly” as merely convenient or inconvenient. This attitude has now been reflected in new laws decriminalizing “victimless” offenses.

Obviously, there will be other uses of the Mark that make for good P.R. as well. Criminals (like serial murderers and Jews) who have been tried and convicted—even if they haven’t yet been caught—can be penalized by having their “account” frozen, or even having all of their ill-gotten gains confiscated. Fugitives can be more easily apprehended by tracking their recent Mark scans as they buy food. In more advanced areas, the Mark can be tied to all sorts of conveniences: it’s the key to your guard-gated community, your home, office, and car. It’s your library card, your passport, your driver’s license, your health insurance I.D. It gets you past the security checks at the airport with a minimum of fuss. It’s keyed to your dental and medical records, your social security status, movie rentals, and your local pizza parlor’s buy-ten-get-one-free deal. Scan your Mark and you can get a free abortion on demand.

I can envision the Mark being marketed as a stepping stone to even greater things. To help it reach its full potential, a plan will be promulgated to use the Mark as the centerpiece of a worldwide database that includes every individual’s fingerprints, DNA profile, and maybe retinal scan and voiceprint. This information will be anticipated as God’s gift to law enforcement, for if a suspect or victim has left behind a fingerprint or drop of blood at the scene of the crime, the authorities will be able to immediately determine who he or she is. This database will have to be built up gradually, of course. They could plan to start with convicted criminals, government and military employees, and newborn babies. As time permits, more and more groups will be included: school children, medical professionals, driver’s license holders, registered voters, and so forth. (Those concerned with the possibility of innocent children being required to receive the Mark—thereby earning the wrath of Yahweh—should be reminded that not only is the essence of the Mark the oath of submission that goes with it—making small children immune—the longest this phase can last is three and a half years, the last half of the Tribulation. Therefore it may be argued that even the first newborn to get the Mark will not have reached the “age of accountability” when Yahshua returns to set things right again. The bottom line: God is never unfair.)

The law-enforcement angle will present another level of anguish for those new believers who want to be good, law-abiding citizens but can’t bring themselves to worship the Antichrist. *After all*, the argument will go, *who but*

*criminals—those who wish to remain anonymous when they perform their nefarious acts—would resist such a system?* It's highly unlikely, but the government might even quote scripture (out of context, of course), reminding the reluctant that only bad **“men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”** (John 3:19) They'll pompously quote: **“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.** (Romans 13:1-4) *If you're not planning on breaking the law, what do you have to be afraid of?* The rule of the Antichrist will serve to demonstrate how true Paul's words were when applied to every previous earthly government—even the worst of them.

Because taking the Mark is required of everyone, no hard-to-meet conditions will be imposed on the applicants. They won't have to have a high-school diploma, own land, be white males over twenty-one, or anything like that. There's a chance that a minimum-age requirement will be set, but it's hard to say. (In America the Social Security number is now a cradle-to-the-grave sort of thing.) But just as driver's license applicants must affirm that they intend to obey the traffic laws of their state, people receiving the Mark will be required to pledge their allegiance to the government, its leader, and its laws (a factor that argues against children being forced to accept it). Perhaps a two-stage program will be implemented—first the physical mark, which could be imposed (or at least numerically assigned) at birth, and second, the oath of allegiance that activates it (including the political, religious, and financial components), required of everyone upon reaching a certain birthday, as young as twelve or as old as eighteen.

It's quite clear in scripture that by accepting the mark they will be aligning themselves with the Antichrist, his prophet, and Satan—the beasts and the dragon—but just how blatant the wording of the oath will be we can only guess. If you'll recall, Freemasons are required to take blood-curdling Satanic vows as they rise through the orders, but they never know what they'll have to say until they're actually repeating the words—when it's a little hard to stop and examine the import of the oath. On the other hand, this last three and a half year period—the Great Tribulation—is the only time Satan will ever get to be openly worshiped. It's all he really wants. Will he settle for hidden meanings and mindless platitudes at this late date? I don't know, but I doubt it. I can state with certainty, however, that followers of Yahshua will *know* not to receive the Mark; they will understand that it requires denial of their Messiah.

So we return to the question: what, precisely, is the Mark of the Beast? Some of the older commentators suggest that it needn't be a literal, physical "mark" at all, since the mark of God's sealing on the foreheads of the 144,000 seems to be figurative (which is not to say non-existent: it's absolutely effective in keeping them from physical harm). In light of contemporary technology and common sense, however, there is no reason whatsoever to suspect that the Mark is anything less than a literal, physical insignia of some sort. Earlier, I mentioned the tattoo hypothesis, in which a laser-readable bar code is permanently inscribed on the skin. Although this would satisfy the scriptural requirements, our technology has progressed so much further already, it's easy to envision something far more sophisticated being utilized.

Let's review the ground rules: **"He [the False Prophet] causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."** (Revelation 13:16-17) We have seen the demonstrable advantages (at least on paper) of a cashless society, and we have established that the key to administering it would be a worldwide personal identification system. The enrollee has to bear only the I.D. number itself—the data it represents is stored separately in a computer database. But rather than a tattoo, which has a marketing downside (*I don't want that ugly thing on my skin*) as well as potential scanability problems (*Will it read as well on dark skin as it does on fair, or on wrinkled "senior skin" as well as on a young person's? And what if the recipient is already covered in tattoos?*) it would make more sense to simply implant a microchip with a small antenna under the skin. An external scanner would emit a radio signal that passes through the skin, energizing the chip, whose number would then be transmitted via the Internet to a secure site. In an interesting confirmation of this concept, note that the KJV's rendering of the phrase is "*in their right hand...in their foreheads.*" Though it sounds funny to our ears, it's actually a more faithful rendition of the Greek.

Science fiction? Not at all. It exists today. In December 2001, a Palm Beach company called Applied Digital Solutions announced the development of its new, miniaturized, implantable RFID (radio frequency identification) chip, trade-named VeriChip. In its original form, it's a tiny cylinder, 11.1mm long and 2.1mm in diameter, though with advances in miniaturization, it could conceivably shrink to a fraction of that size. It is inserted under the skin in a simple outpatient procedure requiring only local anesthesia, a tiny incision, and a small bandage. As the technology advances, such a gadget could probably be implanted subdermally with a simple syringe, like getting a flu shot. At the present, the VeriChip is used to provide vital information about other implanted life-enhancing devices such as pacemakers, heart valves, or medication pumps—without the invasive surgery that would otherwise be necessary. With a 128-character memory, it's a ready

source of data about the patient's name and condition, as well as the medical device's original components, settings, and other essential parameters.

ADS has also introduced a product called Digital Angel, the world's first biosensor linked to GPS technology via Web-based wireless telecommunications. Similar technology is already widely used to keep track of pets and livestock. Today, it is being contemplated for use with high-risk human subjects—Alzheimer's patients who might wander off, corporate executives in South American countries where kidnapping for profit is a growth industry, or practically anybody visiting the Middle East. Uses envisioned for the future include the monitoring of parolees or ex-convicts and children who are the focus of custody battles. Biometric systems are being explored by several nations for immigration control purposes. Soldiers in the field could be individually tracked, giving their headquarters more precise information on their moment-to-moment strike capabilities. The list of possible applications is practically endless.

Taking the "mark" concept one step further, in 2007 Somark Innovations announced a new RFID ink—a chipless system that tattoos a mark or code onto the skin. The ink is metal-free, invisible or colored, biocompatible, chemically inert, and can be read—even through hair—from a distance of four feet away. The mark is applied with a geometric array of micro needles, a reusable applicator, and a one-time-use ink capsule. It can be done in under ten seconds.

In America, resistance to the new technology has put civil libertarians and fundamental Christians on the same side of the issue—a rare occurrence indeed. Their reasons for opposing chip implants or RFID tattoos are polar opposites, of course. In defending the concept of the right to privacy, groups like the ACLU smell Gestapo tactics in anything that could conceivably make the job of law-enforcement agencies more efficient—like tracking known child molesters to make sure they aren't loitering near elementary schools, *'cause, let's be fair, until the guy has actually made off with another kid, he hasn't broken any laws, right?* Meanwhile, my fundamentalist Christian brothers smell the dreaded Mark of the Beast in these technologies and anything remotely similar to them—and conclude that they should be avoided at all costs.

I should therefore reiterate that the subdermal chip or RFID ink technologies themselves—like any technological innovation—are spiritually neutral. They can be used for good or ill, just like the printing press, television, the Internet, or a thousand other things. We Christians have the curious habit of equating the evil we read about in scripture with what we perceive in the world around us—and then trying our best to stamp it out, whether Yahweh wants us to or not. But innovation is not the same thing as evil. Besides, God never told us to force non-believers to behave themselves. His instructions were simple and clear: preach the gospel—tell the world by our words and deeds about the good news of God's

provision for our reconciliation with Him, while at the same time separating ourselves from the sins we see in the society around us.

Though our hearts may be in the right place when we try to prevent ominous prophecies like the Mark of the Beast from occurring, it demonstrates that our minds have slipped out of gear, as when Peter tried to dissuade his beloved Master from going to the cross (you remember, that's when Yahshua called him "Satan"). Yahweh *told us* this would happen. He didn't tell us to try to stop the Mark from coming to pass, to obstruct its development. He merely said, "Don't *receive* it." If His word is true, then these things *will* happen, and through them His will, in the end, will be accomplished. God is perfectly capable of taking care of His own kingdom—a kingdom which, I might add, is supposed to be populated exclusively by people who *choose* to be its citizens. We, on the other hand, need to listen better.

I hasten to point out that if this theory proves correct—that the Antichrist will use personalized microchips to implement his sovereignty over mankind—the chip itself is *not* the Mark of the Beast. The Mark, rather, is the inevitable baggage that goes with it: the "oath of allegiance," whatever form it takes, to the world ruler and the god he serves. It's entirely possible that the Mark will be implemented with different technologies in different regions, depending on varying states of infrastructure development. The universal problem will be that you can't get the *physical* Mark, whether a chip, tattoo, or some unforeseen mechanism, without kissing the devil on the lips. Yahweh knows we're easily fooled. That's why he calls us sheep. He won't hold Tribulation believers accountable to be clever enough to see through a plan that on the surface promises merely to facilitate commerce and stifle crime—but is really a satanic plot to take over the world, a plot known only to a handful of evil and powerful men. No, God never called us to paranoia or even insight, only to faithfulness. The deal will be clear: receive the Mark and align yourself with Lucifer and his lapdog (okay, *lap-beast*), or stand with the true and living God—and be prepared to run for your life.

By the way, don't be too impressed that Satan should come up with such a clever scheme as the Mark of the Beast—requiring submission to himself and the dragon he serves as a precondition for the right to live one's life in "peace." As usual, a search of the scriptures reveals that the Mark is actually something Yahweh implemented first—thousands of years ago, if only in a prophet's vision. For Satan, it's merely one more phony in a long string of pathetic counterfeits. Ezekiel writes, **"Then He [Yahweh] called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, 'Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand.' And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a**

writer's inkhorn at his side." Here's God's six-plus-one pattern again. **"They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.**

**"Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and Yahweh said to him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.'" I believe this one who was to judge mens' hearts and apply the Mark of Yahweh represents Yahshua Himself. "To the others He said in my hearing, 'Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.' So they began with the elders who were before the temple. Then He said to them, 'Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!' And they went out and killed in the city." (Ezekiel 9:1-7)**

Ezekiel's vision (which spans chapters 8 through 11) speaks of the idolatry into which Israel had fallen: gross idol worship (8:10), weeping for Tammuz (8:14), and bowing to the sun (8:16). Those who **"sigh and cry over all the abominations"** are marked **"on the foreheads"** and are thereby put under the protection of God. I get the impression that there aren't too many of them. Is it a literal, visible mark? I have no idea. Ezekiel was having a *vision* when he saw it, and Zeke saw some really weird stuff in visions. (The same thing, of course, is true of John's description in Revelation. All we know for sure is that the Mark is *real*: it has consequences.)

The idolaters that Ezekiel sees are then put to the sword (okay, *ax*) by men coming from the north; the prophecy was fulfilled in the near term by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Note that the marked men are not expected to force the others to follow the true God or adhere to a strict code of outward moral uprightness. Rather, they are characterized by their weeping for the sins of their nation, crying out to Yahweh because of the abominations they see engulfing their people. When's the last time your cheeks got wet because you were in anguish over the sins of your nation?

The Antichrist, mimicking God, intends to **"utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but...not come near anyone on whom is the mark."** And he will indeed have a certain amount of success in persecuting the Tribulation saints, as we shall see. But Satan is not Yahweh, the Antichrist is not Yahshua, and the False Prophet is not even *remotely* the Holy Spirit. Where God's Mark indicates salvation leading to life, Satan's Mark says "dead man walking." In the end, that's all anyone really needs to know about it.

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But Yahweh provided one more bit of information—something designed to help believers living in those dark times verify or confirm that the system to which they’re being told to ascribe is actually the Mark of the Beast, and not some quasi-innocent look-alike or precursor, like the Social Security System. **“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.”** (Revelation 13:18)

For almost two millennia now, everybody and his idiot nephew has taken the 666 ball and run with it. The theories are as numerous “as the stars of the sky and as the sand which is on the seashore.” And some of them, I must admit, are creative to the point of genius. That’s not to say they’re *correct*, but they sure are imaginative. Because the number is said to somehow correlate to a name (though we aren’t told how) the theories invariably revolve around number codes of one sort or another.

The obvious starting point is that neither the Hebrew nor Greek alphabets with which the Bible was composed have “numbers,” *per se*. Instead, letters of the regular alphabet are pressed into service as numbers. The context tells you if you’re dealing with numbers or letters spelling out a word. This is evidently harder than it sounds, especially in Hebrew: there are many places where the Masoretic text and the corresponding Septuagint translation disagree in their rendering of numerals, leading us to the conclusion that there may be more cultural baggage attached to the process of sorting out these numbers than we’d like to think. The Greek for 666, or as the King James words it, “six hundred, threescore and six,” is three characters: *chi-xi-stigma*, χξς). *Chi*’s numerical equivalent is 600; *xi*’s is 60; and *stigma* (ς—an obsolete letter, used only as a number in Koine Greek, not to be confused with *sigma*—σ) represents 6. It’s interesting (but not terribly significant) that the word *stigma* in Greek means a “brand, mark, spot, or colored patch.” Hence in English we describe a “mark of infamy or a token of disgrace” as a stigma. Funk and Wagnalls says that “stigma” was formerly used to denote “a brand made with a branding iron on slaves or criminals.” Coincidence? If you say so.

Another possibility is latent in the fact that in the earliest Greek manuscripts of Revelation, the “*chi-xi-stigma*” mark was scribed with a horizontal line above it, indicating that it is a code or place-holder of some sort. It has been pointed out by scholars fluent in Arabic that viewed *sideways*, this mark bears a remarkable resemblance to the written name of Allah! There’s something to ponder.

Because of this letter-equals-number system, some researchers have made a contact sport out of discerning “hidden meanings” in sets of Hebrew words that

add up to the same numbers (or numbers related in some way, such as the sums of their squares). They call this process “gematria.” Using this or similar formulas in other languages, people with an axe to grind have discovered 666 in a wide variety of names and titles. Not surprisingly, many “identify” the Pope or the Catholic Church as the Antichrist with this method, finding 666 within such Greek titles as *Lateinos* (“Latin-speaking man”), *He Latine Basileia* (“The Latin Kingdom”), or *Italika Ekklesia* (“Italian Church”). Catholic buzzwords in Latin get the same treatment: *Vicarius Filii Dei* (“Substitution for the Son of God”—a title for the Pope), *Dux Cleri* (“Captain of the Clergy”), and *Ludovicus* (Vicar of the Court) all add up to 666 in Roman Numerals. In Hebrew, it’s the same song: *Romiith* (meaning “Roman kingdom”) and *Romiti* (“Roman man”) both come out to 666.

I didn’t figure this out, of course. All of these “solutions” have been around for centuries. And I’m not suggesting they shed any real light on the identity of the Antichrist. They’re only included to demonstrate that with a little ingenuity, you can find 666 in almost anything. A few cases in point: If you start with A=100, B=101, etc., “Hitler” comes out to 666. ’Course, the only conceivable reason for starting to number the English alphabet at 100 is to *make* “Hitler” add up to 666! For that matter, if you use the same formula and multiply the result by two (because he has twice as many legs), it turns out my cat, Moe, is the Antichrist (a theory that’s not altogether unreasonable, if you know my cat). My personal favorite? If you convert their names to Hebrew letter-number equivalents, both William Jefferson Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton add up to 666. (Maybe that would explain the treachery of the Clinton-sponsored anti-Israel Oslo accords of the mid-’90s. *Naaaaah.*)

Is gematria, therefore, worthless? As a means of predicting who the Antichrist will be, most definitely. As a means of verifying his identity once he shows up and starts fulfilling prophecy? Maybe not. Computer-generated ELS (equidistant letter sequence) tables have revealed some significant confirmations hidden in the Hebrew text, and the really remarkable thing about them is their close proximity to each other *and* to plain-text passages that support them. Also to be found are many such things as half a dozen words relating unmistakably to the September 11 disaster in the same place, or the names of quite a few influential Rabbis in close proximity to their dates of birth and death. We need to use the brains God gave us in interpreting these things: they prove *only* that the God who inspired their placement in His Torah exists outside of the bounds of time as we know it, and He’s interested in us knowing that fact. But as a means of divining the future, these things are useless, even dangerous. (I would, however, hasten to point out that the Rabbis’ dates of *death*, not merely their births, were embedded in the text. It’s as if Yahweh is saying, “Don’t follow these men. They are all dead. If you want to live, follow Me. I live forever!”)

So I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find that somehow, the Antichrist's name or title calculates out to 666. I say his title (as opposed to his given name) could qualify as the key to the 666 conundrum because the Greek word used for "name" in passages like **"no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name"** (Revelation 13:17), *onoma*, means, according to Strong's, "name, either literally or figuratively (authority, character); called, (sur-) named." Your *onoma*, then, is simply what you are called. As a case in point, the reigning Yahshua's title is called His "name": **"And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name [onoma] written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."** (Revelation 19:16) I don't know (or care) what the gematria for the Messiah's title is. But the numerical equivalent of the Antichrist's name or title (or both) will likely work out to 666. **"It is the number of a man."**

But this side of the rapture, nobody will know what that name is (and even if we did, there's not a thing we could do to avert the inevitable unpleasantness). The 666 puzzle is not for us; it's for those faced with the all-important decision of whether or not to bow to the beast and accept his Mark. If 666 is a number readily associated with a program or person who otherwise fits the Biblical description, and if you're unlucky enough to be around when it all happens, my advice is this: flee. Run away. Hide. Do *not* accept his Mark. Do not submit to him or his government. Even if they kill you for your stand, you'll still be infinitely ahead of the game.

John's vision recorded in the Revelation is the only place in the Bible where we're given any hard information about 666 or the Mark of the Beast. Sixes played a significant role in several other Biblical dramas, however. David's nemesis, Goliath, and the big statue of Nebuchadnezzar were both closely associated with the number six. And how's this for a coincidence? **"The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold..."** (II Chronicles 9:13, cf. I Kings 10:14-15) All three examples deal with the pride of Man. Feel free to take *that* ball and run with it.

Before we leave the subject, there is one more prophecy concerning the Mark that we need to cover. **"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.' So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image."** (Revelation 16:1-2) If you'll recall, the "Seal" judgments are listed first in the Revelation. I have characterized these as the outer layer of a prophetic onion. The seals are opened by Christ Himself; they cover the entire Tribulation in sweeping terms. The next layer, delegated to angels, provides more detail—it's called the "Trumpet" judgments. The innermost layer of the onion, the "Bowl," or "Vial" judgments, begins with the verses we just reviewed.

Notice that the angel is directly involved with the administration of this curse: he pours the wrath of God down upon the earth. I may be reading too much into this, but a subtle shift seems to be in play here. The angels delivering the Trumpet judgments “announced” what was going to happen: the first four, as we have seen, seem to be describing the effects of nuclear warfare (something man has brought upon himself) or predictable natural disasters. The last three proclaim events that take place in either the demonic or spiritual realm (statements of fact with no clear causal connection to the angels or their Trumpets). The Bowl judgments, on the other hand, could easily be construed to be God’s personal infliction of wrath upon the earth, Yahweh’s direct and well-deserved punishment upon mankind. Significantly, they all appear to be “poured out” during the second half of the Tribulation—starting with these “foul and loathsome sores.” At first glance, the English translation seems to be indicating two different targets, those who “had the Mark,” and those who “worshipped the image of the beast,” but I believe this view is incorrect. There is but one object of wrath here, identified by two separate and parallel criteria. Those who worship the beast’s image are the same people who willingly receive the Mark. They have made their choice.

We need to address the nature of this “**foul and loathsome sore.**” It could, of course, have something to do with the physical “Mark,” an infection, perhaps, that sets in sometime after the microchip (if that theory is correct) is implanted. Personally, I have my doubts. Although it isn’t explicitly stated, the passage implies that *all* of the Mark-holders suffer from this affliction; the odds that this could happen, given the worldwide administration of the Mark and the medical precautions that will surely be brought to bear, are vanishingly remote. With several billion microchips to be manufactured, it would make sense that a number of widely separated facilities would be set up to handle the load. Again, there is little chance that each of these factories could be infected with the same virus or bacteria, or that no one, anywhere, has a natural immunity to it. And then there’s the fact that such a disease could easily spread from the marked populace to the unmarked minority—something that is not indicated in the prophecy.

No, I think what we’re seeing here is just what it looks like: divine wrath. Every single one of the recipients of the Mark has, by definition, willingly allied himself or herself with the Antichrist and Lucifer and at the same time officially and permanently rejected Yahshua and Yahweh. Therefore, God has said, *Alright, if that’s what you want, I won’t be a part of your life anymore. You want a Mark that will identify you as Satan’s? Fine. As my parting gift, I’ll give you a mark that you cannot only see, you can feel and smell, too.* Okay, that was an extrapolation. Far be it from me to add anything to God’s word. But you get the picture.

An intriguing psychological phenomenon might be expected to arise because of the “**foul and loathsome sore.**” It won’t take long for the media and the authorities to latch onto the fact that *only* followers of the Antichrist—the majority of most populations, I would guess—are developing this malady. Therefore, even if the official Mark of the Beast is invisible by design, it will become visible by virtue of the plague that follows it. Disguising your loyalties will no longer be possible. In time, the disgusting abscesses will actually become a badge of political correctness, a chic symbol of patriotic rectitude. Whoever is covered with these stinking pustules will be considered one of the beautiful people. Clear, perfect skin, on the other hand, will come to be regarded as the stigma of a lawless and antisocial rebel, a backward and hysterical religious terrorist—one to be shunned at all costs. Black is white, up is down, right is wrong, ugly-as-sin is lovely-to-look-at, only less subtle than in today’s world. In the end, the lie will be as plain as the sores on your face.

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Somewhere during the Tribulation timeline, an abrupt and fundamental change will take place in the public persona of the Antichrist. He must transform from politician to despot, from military tactician to unchallenged tyrant, from charismatic, popular leader to crazed, all-powerful demigod. Only after this transformation will he attempt to institute the Mark, require the worship of his image, and impose his will over every living creature. All of the indicators seem to point toward a sudden shift just before the mid-point of the seven-year period. The logical “trigger” for this transformation is his attempted assassination. In the previous chapter, we took a look at how the prophecies concerning the apparently mortal wounding of the Beast/Antichrist might transpire. Scripture leaves it unclear whether he is actually killed at this time—then reanimated by a demon living within him—or if it’s all smoke and mirrors, an elaborate ruse to gain the attention and awe of the world. After the attempt is made upon his life, however, everything about the man is different (not that he was such a sweetie before—he purposely precipitated a nuclear war that killed off a quarter of the planet for no better reason than to impress a group of people he doesn’t even like, the Jews). It’s obvious that he is now demon possessed, totally and openly controlled by the dragon, Satan.

One thing the scriptures make abundantly clear is that as a result of his “miraculous resurrection,” all the world will run after the Antichrist. **“And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is**

**able to make war with him?’ And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies....”** (Revelation 13:3-5) Satan will at this time “come out of the closet,” and because of this incident come to be worshipped as himself (or at least as he’d like you to think of him—as Lucifer, the light bearer) rather than in the guise of some man-made false god like Allah or Apollo. It will be his finest hour.

But in a clinical sense, the Antichrist’s “near-death experience” is not unique; the phenomenon has been documented and studied widely in recent years. Many people have “come back” after having been declared dead, speaking in reverent terms of an overwhelming sense of peace, of walking toward a brilliant white light at the end of a long tunnel. *Death is not so bad*, they say. *Dying changed my life*. But the world does not worship people because they have had near-death experiences, nor do we tend to give credence to stories of meeting Jesus or dear departed relatives at the end of the tunnel of light. When it comes to life after death, we don’t know quite what to believe. It’s all considered a little weird.

This time, however, it will be different. This time, the world *wants* to believe. Billions have gathered (in front of their televisions and computer screens, at least) to honor the Antichrist with their praise, submission, and loyal obedience, only to see him get assassinated—and then brought back to life—before their very eyes. They’re positive his resurrection wasn’t any ordinary resuscitation—it was a miracle, a sign: *here at last is the one we’ve been waiting for*. The world is primed for this. The timing is perfect. If this death-resurrection scenario had happened to any other man at any other time, it would have been written off as an amazing but unexplained phenomenon, an interesting but insignificant glitch in the march of human history, a footnote in the Guinness Book of World Records. But here, now, under these circumstances, mankind hears the call of destiny.

Apparently recovered from his little adventure, the Antichrist resumes his place at the podium and addresses the earth. Calmly, passionately, he tells his audience what he’s seen, where he’s been, and what it all means. *You have doubtless heard stories of people dying, only to witness a brilliant luminescence leading them on to the gates of glory. I, too, have seen that glory—I have conversed with the giver of light. He said I must return—return to you—for I had a job to do, a message to bring, a destiny to fulfill. I must lead you into the Promised Land—not a place, but a state of mind. Follow me, my children, as I follow the light giver. He is mighty and terrible—a source of awesome power—and he has given his power to me—to Me! I do not ask for your obedience today—I demand it! Witness the power I now possess....*

Suddenly, the charismatic leader raises his good arm toward the heavens. The polluted sky immediately parts, allowing a brilliant stream of pure sunlight to pour down upon the dais where he stands—and *only* there. The people gathered on the temple mount gasp in amazement; the incredulous reporters describe what

they're seeing to their worldwide audiences, though they're clearly not prepared for this kind of miracle. As the cameras roll, the Antichrist sweeps his outstretched hand before him, and as if in obedience, the darkened edges of his heavenly spotlight begin to roll and boil—angry black clouds, driven by fierce winds. His hand now forms a fist, and as he crashes it down upon the podium, lightning and thunder burst forth from the swirling maelstrom above him. Hail begins to pelt the terrified onlookers. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it ends: the Antichrist sweeps his hand once more across the sky, and the storm ceases. Slowly the sun spot illuminating the dais closes. The whole episode has taken just six minutes.

*The power is mine, he says with finality. Obey me, or experience hell on earth. Worship Me, for I now possess authority over all men. I have not been elected by mere mortals. I have been made your absolute ruler by the giver of light, the one who illumines us all, the almighty Lucifer!*

The throng assembled on the temple mount erupts into hysterical celebration. Around the world, there is no one who has not been deeply affected. Most feel the same stirrings of utopian longing that had flickered briefly when this man had brought the world to the brink of peace a few years before. *Surely this is our Messiah, our savior. Remember all that stuff about the "Second Coming" the Christians used to harp on? This must surely be it—Looks like they were right after all! Besides, we don't have much choice in the matter. We've gotta do what he says. Did you see what he did to the sky?*

But scattered here and there across five continents, small pockets of Yahshua's new believers huddle together and stare at their televisions in shocked disbelief. *This can't be good. Lucifer? That's Satan, isn't it? The devil himself. I have a feeling we're about to face a trial worse than anything the world has ever seen, brothers and sisters, and the world has seen a lot in recent days. Many of us won't survive. But we must try to hang on until Jesus returns. Run away. Hide. Live off the land. Whatever it takes.*

In Israel, there are mixed signals. Many Israelis, even the leaders, have been convinced for some time that the Antichrist is a fraud. Ever since the defeat—the *annihilation*—of Magog, when the Antichrist proved his impotence to deal with the invasion, it has been clear that Mr. Wonderful was no "god on earth." No, it was Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had rescued them from the Muslim hordes, and it's slowly dawning on some of them that it was Yahshua—whose name means "Yahweh is Salvation"—Immanuel, "God with us"—who had been their savior two millennia before, if only they had recognized Him. In a future chapter, we'll explore this national paradigm shift in detail, for the scriptures have a great deal to say about Israel's great awakening.

But at the moment, the Jews are conflicted. The European leader—now undisputed world dictator—has made it clear that he wants to make Jerusalem his capital city. Now that the vast majority of the world’s Jews live in Israel, they’re torn between the guaranteed prosperity that comes with owning the most important piece of land on earth, and the guaranteed eternal death that comes with accepting the Antichrist’s Messianic claims. In the end, millions of Jews will opt to go with their heart, for they now *know* it’s true—they really are Yahweh’s chosen people.

One Israeli watching the televised unveiling of the Antichrist smiles sadly to his wife and jokes, “Moses was right. *We are* a stubborn and stiff-necked people. Two thousand years ago, we told the real Messiah to take a hike. Only now, when this false Messiah shows up offering us the world on a platter, do we figure out that Yahshua of Nazareth was the real deal after all. Do we have our timing down, or *what*? One thing is certain: if we do as this madman says, we will surely taste the wrath of Yahweh. Get up! Grab the children! We must leave, today, right now. The city is no longer safe....”

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Okay, it’s time to get our feet back on the ground. I’ve been spewing out prose like a novelist, but it’s important to remember that the scenario you’ve just read does have a basis in fact—i.e., Biblically revealed prophecy. I’ve brought us to the doorstep of one of the most chilling recurring themes in the entire Bible: the “abomination of desolation.” (I realize that phrase doesn’t mean anything in today’s English; I’ll try to make some sense of the scary-sounding title as we go on).

Paul described the Antichrist as “...**the man of sin...the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.** (II Thessalonians 2:3-4) Although it may not seem to at first glance, this passage actually supports the picture of the Antichrist’s satanic obeisance that we painted in the previous section. The question is: who is he trying to pass off as god? Until the middle of the Tribulation, Satan always had to content himself with being worshipped through surrogates, false gods, idols, and demigods. By elevating himself above all gods who have ever been openly worshipped (including the one true God, Yahweh), the Antichrist is giving Satan, a.k.a. Lucifer, the one thing he has always wanted: center stage. There is no way the Antichrist can pull this off without demonic support, of course—he must give credit where credit is due. Bear in mind that John tells us, “**The dragon** [identified elsewhere as Satan] **gave**

him his power, his throne, and great authority,” and “They worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’” (Revelation 13:2,4) Just as when we Christians worship Yahweh and Yahshua as one God (who dwells within us as the Holy Spirit), people will see the Antichrist and Lucifer as one. You’d think that’d be a bad thing, wouldn’t you? Sadly, it won’t be seen that way. Yahshua predicted even this: “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.” (John 5:43)

I have hypothesized that the Antichrist will demonstrate his satanic powers by manipulating the weather—in a public and undeniable format. That would certainly cause anyone who saw it to wonder, “**Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?**” But where did I get the idea that Satan has power over the weather? Sure, he’s called “**the prince of the power of the air**” (Ephesians 2:2) but that’s a wee bit vague. In the early chapters of the Book of Job, however, we’re given a very clear picture of what Satan can and cannot do. Clearly, he can influence (though not compel) men to perform his will—to suggest a course of action that advances his agenda. And, if Yahweh allows it, he is able to inflict disease upon us: he gave Job a case of boils so bad it made him wish he’d never been born.

But the surprising thing is that Satan also controlled the weather—things insurance adjusters routinely call “acts of God.” They’re *not* acts of God, necessarily. Job was informed that: “**The fire of God** [that’s how the messenger described it] **fell from heaven...**” (Job 1:16) and, “**Suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness...**” (Job 1:19) These were things *Satan* did in order to test Job. They weren’t coincidence; they weren’t random natural occurrences—and they weren’t merely bad luck. They were Lucifer’s handiwork. Remember, the false prophet who pimps for the Antichrist “**even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth.**” (Revelation 13:13) This ability is nothing new. And although we aren’t told as much, I’m convinced that the storm that rose on Galilee that threatened the lives of Yahshua and His disciples (Luke 8:23) was whipped up by Satan as well. The good news, both in Luke and Job, is that God overrules Satan. The devil was given divine *permission* to take away Job’s wealth and family; without it his hands were tied. And Yahshua calmed the devil’s storm with a word and a yawn. His authority over the weather clearly outweighs Satan’s.

Christians should find this truth extremely liberating. Nothing can happen to us—*nothing*—without Yahweh’s knowledge and permission. Satan can’t touch us unless God is allowing it in order to teach us something about Himself. As powerful as the devil is in some ways, we are free to thumb our noses at him—to treat him like the naval lint he is in our Father’s eyes. More importantly, we are

free to ignore his suggestions; he can't make us sin (I'm preaching to the mirror here). It's all a question of relationships. *My daddy can beat up your daddy.*

This is demonstrated by the experience of the seventy disciples, after Yahshua had sent them out to preach the Gospel. **"Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.'"** (Luke 10:17-20) We are given the power to overcome all spiritual obstacles, if only we will exercise that power. But this is only a byproduct of the *real* good news, that of our undying relationship with Yahweh. As a parent of nine adopted children, I know exactly what that is: there comes a day in the adoption process when we "go to court," and the final paperwork is filed. Our new child's "name is written" in the county archives, and that means he or she is legally, permanently ours, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that come with being my son or daughter. Of course, it's an even bigger deal becoming a child of God.

But I digress. We were discussing the self-exaltation of the Antichrist. Paul, if you'll recall, told us that **"He sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."** This and parallel passages, of course, are what led us to believe that T3, the third temple, will be rebuilt on Moriah in the last days. (Yes, there's a temple of God in heaven, but the Antichrist is a man, and not a very nice one at that—he's not likely to show up there.)

So how, exactly, does one "sit as God in the temple?" Did Yahweh ever "sit" in the temple? Yes, in a way. We need to go back to the original specs for the wilderness tabernacle to see God's design for the temple. **"...And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy. You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy."** (Exodus 26:33-34) The Most Holy, otherwise known as the "Holy of Holies," was the inner sanctum of the tabernacle/temple, separated from the Holy Place by a veil, or heavy curtain. The only object within the Most Holy place was the ark of the Testimony (or Covenant), upon which was placed the mercy seat, making the ark, for all practical purposes, look like a golden throne. (If you'll recall, we discussed the function of the ark—and its present location—back in Chapter 13.)

When the Israelites were done building the tabernacle of meeting in the wilderness, Yahweh moved in, so to speak. **"Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle."** (Exodus 40:34-35) The same thing happened at the

dedication of T1, Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. "It came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Yahweh, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised Yahweh, saying: 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever,' that the house, the house of Yahweh, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of God." (II Chronicles 5:13-14)

So God, manifesting Himself as a cloud (the *Shekinah*), filled the tabernacle and the temple with His glory. The "seat" of his power and grace was said to be within the Holy of Holies, for that is where the High Priest, once a year on the Day of Atonement, sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial lamb onto the mercy seat. And as we have seen, it now appears that Yahweh arranged for the blood of *The Sacrificial Lamb*, Yahshua, to be sprinkled upon that very same mercy seat—secreted away in the catacombs beneath Golgotha.

Have you figured it out yet? Have you put two and two together? Yeah, me too, and I can almost guarantee that the Antichrist is "smarter" than you and me put together. He will have heard the stories—how the amateur archaeologist found the ark of the Covenant in a cave beneath the north end of Moriah, but never brought it out. All he has to do (he figures) is follow the clues, find the ark, put it in the Holy of Holies, rebuild the East gate of the temple mount so he can make a grand entrance, and plunk his fanny down on the mercy seat—all on worldwide television, of course. *Where else would a god sit? Of course, it'll have to be cleaned up a little. We can't have the ruler of the world sitting on old dried blood, can we? That thing is covered in solid gold; it should look brand new when we're done—spectacular under the studio spotlights.*

I know it's the middle of the Tribulation, and there will be all sorts of weirdness going on, but do I *really* think Yahweh will let this wannabe Indiana Jones use the mercy seat—and the priceless blood of the Lamb of God—to pull off a cheap publicity stunt? No, I don't. But he doesn't have to. All he has to do is convince the world that he's in possession of the genuine article. No sweat. He will, no doubt, have had film crews documenting his multi-year-long scientific search for Israel's holy relics. He may even find them (right where Ron Wyatt said they'd be). Getting them out, however, will be another matter. After losing half a dozen archeology/film crews to "unexplained circumstances," he'll get the hint. *Paramount Studios didn't use the real thing; why should we? A replica will do nicely.* His people will simply abscond with forty or fifty pounds of Muslim gold earmarked for the Dome of the Rock remodeling project (*they're dead—they're not going to miss it*) and mock up a new ark of the Covenant, complete with mercy seat—in complete secrecy, of course. *Heck, we'll even make the table of showbread and the lampstand while we're at it.* The film crews will show them

being “found,” restored, and brought with great pomp to the new temple. It’ll all be very believable—and it’ll all be as phony as a Hollywood movie.

It’s admittedly an odd idea: the Antichrist sitting in the Holy of Holies—on the mercy seat—pontificating to the world that they must now yield total obedience to their new master. In point of fact, though, it’s designed to snare just one group of people, the Jews. (Atmospheric signs and wonders—and a standing army of millions—will do the trick with everybody else.) Going after the Jews is a dead giveaway that the plot is satanic: Lucifer covets what Yahweh has and is—he wants His power, His glory, His city, and even His people. I’ve said it before, but it bears repeating: if Yahweh hadn’t declared his special love for the Jews, nobody, not even the devil, would give them a second thought today (if only because they would doubtless be extinct as a separate people, like the far more powerful Canaanites, Hittites, and Chaldeans before them). But to the Jews, who know that even *touching* the ark of the Covenant can be fatal, this masquerade will be persuasive—even compelling. Remember, for the last two thousand years, they’ve been looking for the Messiah, but all they know is what’s written in the Old Testament—which the Masorete scribes purposely altered in an attempt to obfuscate the Messiah—who is identified *by name* in the Tanach seventy-seven times! (It’s invariably translated “salvation.”) Therefore, the Jews’ perception of what their Messiah will be like is not necessarily colored by our New Testament knowledge of the historical Yahshua of Nazareth; they’re looking for someone who will rule the world with a scepter of iron. The prophets said far more about the reigning Messiah than they did about the suffering Savior. So as phony as this Antichrist guy looks to us from this side of the rapture, he will seem quite convincing to those living halfway through the Tribulation.

This act of purposely desecrating the temple has a specific title in prophetic scripture, used in both the Old and New Testaments: the “abomination of desolation,” or, as the KJV puts it, the “abomination that maketh desolate.” The NIV is a little clearer, rendering it the “abomination that causes desolation.” The scripture specifies several of these “abominations,” but only one is yet future—the one I have just described.

Since such words have fallen out of favor in our shades-of-gray politically correct world, it would behoove us to look closely at their meanings. “Abomination” is from the Hebrew *shiqqwt*, meaning disgusting, filthy (especially when applied to idolatry), or detestable. The corresponding Greek word is from a root that means “to stink.” *Bdelugma* denotes a detestation of something idolatrous: an abomination. “Desolate” or “desolation” comes from *shamem*, the Hebrew word meaning to stun, devastate, stupefy (make amazed, astonished), to make desolate, lifeless, or destitute; to destroy or lay waste. The Greek equivalent is *erimos*, desolation, from a root that means despoliation, to

come to naught. An “abomination of desolation,” then, is a stinking, filthy, disgusting act of idolatry that causes stunning, astonishing devastation. If you need a clearer picture of this, think of the Islamic attack on the World Trade Center (and don’t kid yourself; that’s all 9/11 was—a shocking, detestable act of wanton destruction done in the name of a false god).

Now that you know how it works, let’s look at the Biblical examples, given to prepare the last generation for what’s coming. **“He [King Manasseh] even set a carved image of Asherah [i.e., Ishtar] that he had made, in the house of which Yahweh had said to David and to Solomon his son, ‘In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever’.... But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom Yahweh had destroyed before the children of Israel. And Yahweh spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, ‘Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations’ (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), therefore thus says Yahweh, God of Israel: ‘Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.’”** (II Kings 21:7, 9-12, cf. II Chronicles 33:7) I don’t know about you, but *my* ears tingle whenever I turn on the evening news. I wonder if that’s just a coincidence.

In 175 B.C., a relative nobody, Antiochus IV, through a series of murders and intrigues, seized the throne of the Seleucid empire, which controlled Israel at the time. Miffed that “his” Jews were not much help in his subsequent war against the Ptolemaic forces of Egypt (does any of this sound familiar?), he persecuted them, murdering thousands. He put an end to the daily temple worship, sacrificing a sow on the altar and erecting a statue of a Greek god in the temple. **“And forces shall be mustered by him [Antiochus IV Epiphanes], and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation. Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.”** (Daniel 11:31-32) These “exploits,” if you know your history, were carried out by the Maccabees—who, if I’m not mistaken, will serve as role models for the heroic Jewish warriors doing battle with the Antichrist in the coming dark days. But as before, there will be some Jews who will **“do wickedly against the covenant”** and whom **“he [this time, the Antichrist] shall corrupt with flattery.”**

The Olivet Discourse warns of a time of impending trouble for the Jewish nation. Within it is one of those maddening prophecies that have both near and far fulfillments in mind. Luke records it like this: **“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are**

nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” (Luke 21:20-24) In the light of events that transpired less than a generation after these words were spoken, it is obvious that the near fulfillment was to be found in the sack of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus in 70 A.D. The war raged for years (it began in 67) before the siege began. There was plenty of time to escape, and thousands of Christians who lived in the city, knowing the prophecy, did precisely that. But non-Christian Jews, neither knowing nor believing the words of the slain Rabbi, holed up in Jerusalem and died—or were enslaved, dispersed to the farthest corners of the empire.

End of story? Not by a long shot. Yahshua apparently kept talking, throwing a different light on things. There was more to this than just Romans. Matthew and Mark both recorded more of the story: **“So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not”** (let the reader understand), **“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter. For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be....”** Although similar in tone, this admonition clearly speaks of something more intense, more sudden, than the siege of Jerusalem. The signal to flee has changed from “when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies” to “when you see the abomination of desolation.” The times he is speaking of now are said to have no parallel in history, past or future. That means worse than Assyria, worse than Babylon, worse even than Hitler’s holocaust, where half of the world’s Jewish population was annihilated.

And was Yahshua talking only about Jews, or the whole race of mankind? Here’s the *really* bad news: Mark goes on to report, **“Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, He is there!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.”** (Mark 13:14-23; cf. Matthew 24:15-26) The most successful “false christ” of all, of course, will be the Antichrist, but there will apparently be many others, all doing things that defy logic and “prove” their divine status. But beyond that, unnatural death during this time will be so common, the human race, over six billion strong as I write these words, will actually become an endangered species. What we’ve seen in our study up to this point (over 1.5 billion souls dead due to the Gog-Magog war) is merely a warm-up act.

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Nowhere in scripture is a nice, clean Tribulation timetable given to us. But it's possible to piece the clues together from hints scattered throughout the prophetic record. It seems that a great deal is happening at our present juncture, at or near the mid-point of the Tribulation. So perhaps it would be helpful to do a quick review of the passages that tell us the timing of these days—if for no other reason than to remind you that I'm not just making this stuff up as I go along.

If you'll recall, the time structure of the Tribulation is laid out plainly in Daniel: **“Seventy weeks [literally sevens, i.e., seven-year periods] are determined for your people and for your holy city.... Sixty-nine of these seventy seven-year units have already passed, coming to a close on the day Yahshua made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, less than a week before his crucifixion. This leaves one “week” left to go, seven years in which to “finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.”** (Daniel 9:24)

This last seven-year span of time starts with a treaty: **“Then he [the Antichrist] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.”** (Daniel 9:27) Here we see that three and a half years into the seven-year covenant, the “willful prince,” i.e., the Antichrist, will stop the Jewish sacrificial service that's been going on in the rebuilt temple (since it can't, by Levitical law, be performed in any other place) and set himself up as god in their stead. This time the treachery of the broken treaty is couched in poetic terms, no less sinister for their eloquence: **“on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate.”** In other words, this man will employ the most detestable sort of idolatry—that of overt Satan worship—as he sets out to destroy mankind. This is the same event of which Paul warned us: **“...the man of sin...the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped...sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.** (II Thessalonians 2:3-4)

Daniel also gives us a recap of the three and a half years following this pivotal episode. **“I was watching; and the same horn [the Antichrist] was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days [Yahshua] came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.... He [again, the Antichrist] shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and**

**half a time.”** (Daniel 7:21-22, 25) A “time” in this context is a prophetic year, 360 days, so he’s saying the saints (Hebrew *qaddish*, holy ones) are going to get pummeled for three and a half years—until the coming of the Messiah. The Jewish believers are in view in this case, but we realize from Revelation 12:17 that the new gentile Christians are in for it as well.

We know that the schematic “prophetic” year of 360 days is being used in these predictions because the first sixty-nine “weeks” were fulfilled precisely, to the very day, using this system:  $69 \times 7 \times 360 = 173,880$  days from the prophetically revealed starting point. (If you don’t know what I’m talking about, go back and re-read Chapter 7.) In the passages we’ve just reviewed, time spans are spoken of in rather generalized terms, in “weeks” (sevens), “times,” and “years.” But there are several passages that pin things down more tightly, to months or even days.

First, let’s look at the clues about timing that *precede* the abomination of desolation. Ezekiel writes of a seven-month period of time when Israel will be mopping up from the devastation of the Gog-Magog war: “**...They will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I [Yahweh] am glorified.**” (Ezekiel 39:11-13) Here we see that for seven months, practically everybody in the country is occupied in cleaning up the country—disposing of the dead bodies, but also presumably gathering up and stashing the left-over war materiel and supplies the Muslims brought in with them. Nobody is seen running for their lives, which leads us to the inescapable conclusion that there is *at least* a seven-month gap—perhaps much longer—between the end of World War III (or the Gog-Magog phase of it within Israel) and the abomination of desolation.

Second, when John in his vision was given a reed and told to measure the temple of God, he was instructed to ignore the outer court because “**they [the gentiles] will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.**” (Revelation 11:2-3) Forty-two months and 1,260 days are the same length of time—half of the Tribulation’s seven 360-day “years”—in other words, three and a half years. We’ll talk about these two witnesses in a future chapter, but for now, consider the length of their prophetic ministry: *exactly* 1,260 days. Note that though they’re exactly the same duration, we aren’t specifically told that the forty-two months and the 1,260 days are coterminous. Indeed, the fact that the two identical time spans are expressed in two different ways might be a clue that they aren’t precisely the *same* 1,260 days.

Third, from what we’ve seen of the progression of events during the Tribulation up to this point, it seems reasonable to assume that the time period specified in this next verse will fall primarily within the second half of the

Tribulation, ending only when the Tribulation itself is all but over: **“Then the woman [Israel] fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”** (Revelation 12:6)

When the Antichrist makes his wannabe-god move, the Jews in Israel who had recognized Yahweh’s miraculous preservation of their nation from the armies of Gog will say, “No way, José,” or something similarly politically incorrect. And as we read in Mark’s rendition of the Olivet discourse, they’ll know it’s time to run for their lives. Note that the time period is precisely the same length as the ministry of the two witnesses, but again, it isn’t specifically stated to be the *same* 1,260 days.

Fourth, there will be a dark period when believers [in context, specifically the believing Jews] will have no power to defend themselves, when Satan will be given free reign on the earth. **“One said to the man clothed in linen [apparently an angel]... ‘How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?’ Then I heard the man clothed in linen...[swear] that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.”** (Daniel 12:6-7) When this time—the time of Jacob’s trouble—is over, “all these things shall be finished,” in other words, the three and a half year period comes at or very near the end of the Tribulation—Yahshua’s final coming brings it to an end.

So far, we have a collection of seemingly quasi-unrelated statistics: seven months to bury the dead; forty-two months for the gentiles to “tread the holy city under foot”; three and a half years for the saints to be “given into the hand” of the Antichrist; 1,260 days for the two witnesses to prophecy; time, times and half a time (three and a half years) when God’s holy people will have no power at all, and 1,260 days for Israel’s fleeing multitudes to be sustained and protected by Yahweh in the wilderness. But it seems reasonable to roughly equate the “woman’s” (i.e. Israel’s) 1,260-day flight into the wilderness, the three and a half years of helplessness, and the forty-two months in which the gentiles “will tread the holy city underfoot.” The reason the gentiles are there and in control is that the Jews—many of them—have fled for their lives.

We have also been told that the Antichrist will bring the temple sacrifices to an end in the “middle” of the seven-year Tribulation (Daniel 9:27). Incredibly, Daniel, at the end of his ministry, gives us even more precise timing for the abomination of desolation. **“Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”** He begins by telling us what we’ve seen elsewhere, that some of the Jews will come to repentance at this time, and some will dig in their heels. **“And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up [note that he has hereby equated the two things], there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days....”** What? Not 1,260 days? Nope, there’s an extra

month here. I believe that that the prophet is saying that the abomination of desolation, the self-declaration in the temple by the Antichrist that he is god and that the world must worship him, will occur precisely one month before the midpoint of the Tribulation, leaving 1,290 days to go until—until what? It just says, “There shall be 1,290 days.” The only logical meaning is *until the end of the Tribulation—until the return of the reigning Messiah*.

Perhaps this means that at the time of the abomination of desolation, a thirty-day deadline is set for the inhabitants of Israel to bow to the image of the beast (pledge allegiance to him) and receive the Mark. It makes sense that the Antichrist would begin imposing his will there, planning to work his way through the rest of the world in successive waves. Doing Europe or America on such a short deadline would seem an impossible task, but Israel—the world headquarters of the beast—is certainly small enough to serve as a “test market.” Besides, truth be known, it’s the only patch of ground Satan cares about, because it’s the only place with which Yahweh has personally identified Himself. The devil is nothing if not predictably covetous. Bottom line: the Jews have a thirty day window, *max*, in which to beat a retreat into the wilderness, where Yahweh has promised (as we saw above in Revelation 12:6) to protect them from the jealous rage of the jilted false Messiah.

But Daniel isn’t done. The angel tells him, **“Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.”** (Daniel 12:10-13) *You shall rest?* Yeah, Daniel probably died from the headache all these dates gave him. 1,335 days? From when? From the same event specified in the preceding verse, i.e., the abomination of desolation. But this puts us past the end of the Tribulation, doesn’t it? Yes, by forty-five days. Apparently, the returning Messiah is giving Himself forty-five days to clean house, as it’s described in Matthew 25, to “separate the sheep from the goats.” The first month and a half of the Millennium will be used to judge those people who are still alive on planet earth. (We’re only talking about timing here; the *subject* is going to have to wait for a future chapter).

Still confused? Good; I’m not the only one. With the information we’ve just reviewed, let’s go back and construct a possible timeline. I’ll have to make to educated guesses for the significant but unspecified milestones, of course; I’ll put the Biblical certainties in italics. The Tribulation is to last for seven years (Daniel 9:27), so  $7 \times 360 = 2,520$  days, total. Here’s the first half.

*Day 1: The seven-year peace “covenant with many” is “confirmed” by the Antichrist.* The U.N. assumes its peace-keeping role.

Day 2: Gog begins secret talks designed to unify the Islamic world against Israel.

Day 30: *The Jews break ground on their new temple site.*

Day 90: *Antichrist sets up personal headquarters in Israel to monitor U.N. peacekeepers, or possibly to serve himself as the “special representative.”*

Day 300: *The third temple is completed on Mount Moriah and the Levitical liturgy is restored. Other shrines are in progress.*

Day 340: *Gog’s forces in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, etc. begin to assemble.*

Day 360: *Egypt and Syria attack Israel in a coordinated surprise military action.*

Day 361: *Antichrist’s forces strike back.*

Day 400: *Antichrist’s forces push Egypt and Syria back to Israel’s borders.*

Day 470: *Antichrist sweeps across the Sinai, enters Egypt.*

Day 500: *Egypt surrenders.*

Day 520: *Gog’s Islamic allies in Northern and Eastern Africa begin gathering their troops.*

Day 590: *Ethiopian, Sudanese, and Libyan armies clash with Antichrist’s forces.*

Day 630: *Antichrist fights the African Islamic armies to a standstill.*

Day 650: *Syria attacks Israel with nerve gas. The missiles are blown off course, making Jordan a wasteland.*

Day 680: *The Antichrist, alarmed at Gog’s armies assembling north of Israel, leaves Africa and prepares to meet them.*

Day 700: *Gog’s forces begin their sweep into Israel through Lebanon and Syria.*

Day 720: *Saudi Arabia, the United States, and others lodge formal protests at the U.N.*

Day 750: *Hampered by U.N. forces, Gog makes flanking maneuver through Jordanian territory.*

Day 780: *Gog’s African allies cross Sinai toward Israel.*

Day 800: *Gog’s forces close in on Jerusalem. The Antichrist is powerless to stop their advance. The Israelis fight valiantly but are close to being overwhelmed.*

Day 810: *Yahweh miraculously destroys Gog’s armies within Israel with fire, brimstone, floods, an earthquake, and fratricide.*

Day 815: *Israelis begin the burial of Gog’s armies.*

Day 820: *Antichrist sends nuclear missiles to Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.*

Day 825: *Antichrist nukes other Muslim nations.*

Day 840: Russia retaliates, sending *nukes to Europe* and America. America and Europe respond in kind.

Day 875: *Cumbre Vieja Volcano erupts, plunges into the sea. Commercial Babylon falls.*

*Day 882: Apophis Meteorite strikes.*

Day 1,025: *Israelis complete burial of Gog's armies, collection of its war materiel.*

Day 1,100: *Last nuclear weapon is detonated.*

*Day 1,230: Abomination of desolation. Mark of the beast is instituted. Jews flee.*

*Day 1,251: The two witnesses begin prophesying. (SF3—I'll explain later.)*

*Day 1,260: The mid-point. Gentiles take over Jerusalem.*

We'll deal with the second half in the coming chapters. You'll find a similar wrap-up list of Great Tribulation events at the end of chapter 24. And in case you're wondering if it's possible to assign calendar dates to these events (rather than mere sequence and time interval observations), it is. But there's a caveat: you have to make a few assumptions that are not specifically spelled out in so many words in scripture, or if they are, are not recognized for the truths they represent by the vast majority of Christians today. A list of these assumptions, and the chronological data that emerge if they're true (as I believe they are) can be found in the Appendix section. Make sure you're sitting down when you read it.

Please remember: the Tribulation is only the end of the beginning. A new day—and a new eternity—follows. I know it looks exceedingly grim at this point. It's going to get worse before it gets better. But for the children of Yahweh, physical death is just a temporary glitch.