

Chapter 23

Days Of Wrath

Now that the Satan-empowered Antichrist has actually achieved what only the most insane of megalomaniacs have even dared to dream—total world domination—we see a shift in Yahweh’s *modus operandi*. Up until now, God has been content to work primarily through the agency of His creation. With the exception of His normal behind-the-scenes provision and the occasional overt miracle, He has opted to let men run things here on earth—to exercise the power of choice He gave us. Occasionally we have chosen wisely; more often, we’ve chosen poorly. But now, with man’s ultimate poor choice a *fait accompli*, and with those who have belatedly chosen to follow Yahweh so powerless to effect change, He takes matters into his own hands.

Don’t get me wrong. The change is not due to desperation on the part of Yahweh. He has always known He would do this, and He told us as much. But from the beginning, man has had the ability to make choices—it’s a natural byproduct of God’s love for us. And Satan’s stranglehold upon the earth, if left unanswered, would create the impression that this ability has been curtailed. It has not, even now.

As if urging Tribulation saints not to abandon hope, John reminds us of God’s glory and power, undimmed by the darkness of these times: **“I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them....”** There are many recorded incidents where angelic messengers appeared as men. Even so, they tended to be so astonishing in their appearance that their first words invariably had to be, “Don’t be afraid.” *This* angel makes no attempt to calm his audience down; he lets his magnificence show through. We can take some educated guesses at the symbolism we see here: his shining countenance, feet of flame, and roaring voice all speak of having come in the power and authority of Yahweh. The cloud and the rainbow are a token of God’s promise not to destroy the earth again with a flood—and a gentle reminder that He alone has the power to do that and more. His stance, with one foot on the sea and one on the land, indicates that he is dealing with—and exercises power over—all of mankind, Jews and gentiles alike.

The seven thunders are a puzzle. It is as if the angel is conversing with the earth itself, and John is given the ability to understand how this once-pristine planet God made for us feels about having been treated so badly. As we are about to see, this period of time will witness conditions that, without Yahweh's intervention, would spell the end of all life on earth. And since seven is the number of completion, I presume that John heard the whole story. Polycarp, among others, thought that the thunders had something to do with judgment, which is a reasonable, if not terribly enlightening deduction. I have also heard it said that the seven thunders represent levels of persecution endured by the Jews (cf. Leviticus 26:18, 21, 23-24, 27-28), that they are seven specific periods of persecution that Israel has endured (or will), or that they are seven Last Days wars (conveniently unspecified in scripture). John thought what he'd heard was significant enough to write down, and he clearly understood what was being said, though he described the sound as "thunders." But because John received instructions from heaven not to record what he heard, we're left to ponder what the thunders actually said. I'll bet it wasn't good.

"The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets..." The seventh trumpet judgment introduces the seven bowl judgments, the most detailed description of God's wrath recorded in Revelation. Because the seventh trumpet signals the finalization of the "mystery of God," we have proof that the trumpet judgments don't precede the bowls chronologically, but are rather a more generalized view of an overlapping period of time. We are about to see things up close and personal. Yahweh has been delaying this inevitable judgment for two thousand years. The time has come for Him to say, "Enough. Let's finish this."

But we have a few things to cover before we get to the most gory and intimate details of the Great Tribulation. Remember the little book the angel held in his hand? It seems to represent the rest of the events that are to happen before Yahshua returns to set things right. Fortunately, it's a short little book—there's very little left of the story of man's rebellion against God. **"Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, 'Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.' So I went to the angel and said to him, 'Give me the little book.' And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.' Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.'" (Revelation 10:1-11)**

Prophecy is like that. I love to study these scriptures because they reveal the glory of Yahweh. They strengthen my faith and renew my hope. This discipline is truly sweet while it's on the tongue. But there is a downside. I cannot blithely ignore the plight of the unsaved multitudes, for I know that the end—their end—is fast approaching. And as thankful as I am for my own salvation, I'm frustrated at the indifference—or antagonism—of the lost world toward the things of God. The same scriptures that reveal the awesome power of God tell me that billions of souls are about to perish without Him. And so, like John, I am in agony.

But I too must plow ahead, speaking **“about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.”** Isaiah, in this partially fulfilled passage, gives us what amounts to a synopsis of the last half of the Tribulation: **“Send the lamb to the ruler of the land, from Sela [literally “rock” or “cliff,” a word often used to denote the rock city of Petra] to the wilderness, to the mount of the daughter of Zion. For it shall be as a wandering bird thrown out of the nest; so shall be the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon [a river that enters the Dead Sea from the Jordanian side].”** As we have seen, Moab (in Jordan) will be virtually annihilated during World War III. It seems that they will appeal in their distress to the Jews. But the Israelis will have troubles of their own. **“Take counsel, execute judgment; make your shadow like the night in the middle of the day. Hide the outcasts; do not betray him who escapes. Let My outcasts dwell with you, O Moab; be a shelter to them from the face of the spoiler....”** We have seen that some of the Jewish refugees fleeing the Antichrist will seek shelter in Jordan. That is confirmed here. This passage has led not a few commentators to conclude that the Jews will seek shelter in Petra (in what is now a desolate wilderness south of the Dead Sea).

The prophet then jumps ahead to the conclusion of the matter. **“For the extortioner is at an end, devastation ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.”** (Isaiah 16:1-5) If you can't stand the suspense, sometimes it's good to peek ahead and see who makes it to the end of the story—and who doesn't. Thanks, Isaiah.

As we have observed, the judgments presented in the Book of Revelation are arranged in three levels of increasing detail and complexity. The most general level, the “seal” judgments, cover the whole seven-year time period. The seals are opened by Yahshua Himself. The first four seals, as we saw a few chapters back, cover the period of time through World War III: the Antichrist appears, looking

like a winner; then in quick succession we see war, famine, economic ruin, disease, and death. I guess looks can be deceiving.

The fifth seal shows us the Tribulation martyrs—those who were slain for their faith. **“When He [Yahshua] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord [Greek *despotes*: owner, possessor, ruler, or master], holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”**

(Revelation 6:9-11) Although the carnage during the first half of the Tribulation will be unbelievably gruesome, it will not to any great degree be caused by religious persecution. (Yes, it will be triggered by Muslim hatred of Jews, but that’s not the same thing. The Jews are a target because of biological bigotry, not beliefs.) The war and its attendant plagues will kill a quarter of the earth’s population—over a billion and a half people. But until the Antichrist gains total control at around the mid-point, there will be relatively few who are **“slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.”** The scene depicted in the fifth seal, then, takes place during the “Great” Tribulation, i.e., the second half. The reason for the mass martyrdom is that the Antichrist is systematically hunting down and killing anyone he can find who refuses to take his oath and his Mark.

A couple of things bear pointing out. First, the martyrs’ cry for vengeance is not exclusively against the Antichrist, but against **“those who dwell on the earth.”** This leads me to the sad but inescapable conclusion that the saints are relatively few and far between. Like Elijah on the run from Ahab and Jezebel, it seems to each believer that he or she is practically alone, that there is no one left whom they can trust. But as Yahweh informed Elijah, there were “yet 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal”—this in a nation of perhaps seven million at the time: in other words, only one Israelite in a thousand followed Yahweh. The Tribulation saints are a similarly small minority, worldwide, but they are not alone, nor are they forgotten.

These martyrs are apparently comprised of both Jewish and gentile believers, for they are asked to wait for **“both...their fellow servants and their brethren.”** Note also that each martyr receives a **“white robe,”** actually a garment of light. This is a sign of imputed righteousness; it indicates that their sins are forgiven, just like the sins of the saints of every age preceding them. Their souls were seen **“under the altar,”** a confirmation that they’re covered by the atoning blood of Yahshua.

I get the feeling that the fifth seal represents a process, not an event—for the temporal judgment—God’s avenging wrath—against the unrepentant inhabitants of earth will have begun long before the final saint is slain. Indeed, the

Antichrist's goons will be murdering them right up until the last few days of the Tribulation. But as we shall see, the Antichrist and his false prophet will elude punishment until the very end. They will not be dealt with until the last of the martyrs is killed, just as the passage hints.

The sixth seal takes us right up to the last week of the Tribulation: **"I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place...."** This isn't just any earthquake. It's a specific whopper quake spoken of several times in scripture punctuating several important events within a few days of the end (notably the return of Yahshua to the Mount of Olives). It is described in even more detail during the seventh bowl judgment, which we'll cover later. For now, notice that it is quite likely the strongest earthquake ever felt, for mountains and islands in distant lands will stagger when it hits. It will be accompanied by other signs, some related, some not. The sun, so recently dimmed by the debris of a thousand nuclear detonations during World War III, will again be darkened by clouds of airborne dust and ash, and the moon will turn blood red. I recently witnessed this very phenomenon during a total eclipse. The moon didn't fully disappear from view when the earth blocked the sun's rays; instead, it turned a ghastly shade of red. Another sign, independent of the earthquake but occurring simultaneously, is apparently a spectacular meteor shower, a devastating multiple direct hit on an already beleaguered planet.

The inhabitants of the earth have proved reticent to respond to the love of God—His sacrifice and provision, offered over a period of six thousand years. How will they react to the one-two punch of the sixth seal? **"And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"** (Revelation 6:12-17) Oh, swell. *Now* they believe there's a God in heaven. What would have been so hard about turning to him before this? Why does Yahweh have to make the ground shake and the sky fall before anybody listens? This is eerily reminiscent of an Old Testament passage describing the fall of Israel's idolatry, which in the end is this same climactic event being described in Revelation: **"The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars. They shall say to the mountains, 'Cover us!' and to the hills, 'Fall on us!'"** (Hosea 10:8) There's nothing like the end of the world to get your attention.

Appearances can be deceiving, of course. This *isn't* the end of the world, and we *aren't* seeing repentance from the followers of the Antichrist. What we've got here is, **"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"** (James 2:19) It's abundantly clear that although God's mercy endures forever, His patience does not. There is a point at which Yahweh says, "Okay, you've made your choice. Live with it. Die for it." Don't complain that it's not fair. It's the only thing that *could* be fair. Yahweh never makes our choices for us. But one of the worst choices we can make is choosing to believe that our choices don't have consequences.

The seventh seal brings the Tribulation to a close. **"When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound."** (Revelation 8:1-6) Remember the fifth seal? The Tribulation saints asked God, "When are You going to avenge our murders?" Here He answers them: "Now." The censer that brought their prayers to the throne of Yahweh metaphorically becomes the weapon of God's retribution. Yahweh in the end will let no injustice go unpunished.

The narrative does not proceed forward from this point, however, but rather digs to a deeper level of knowledge about the days of John's vision. The seventh seal introduces the trumpet judgments, which will in turn reveal the bowl judgments. We have much more to learn about the time of Jacob's trouble. But first, **"there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."** It is recognized, even here in heaven where God's omniscience makes angelic epiphanies hard to come by, that an ominous and significant crossroads has been reached. All of human history has been leading up to this moment: it is the last opportunity for mankind to voluntarily walk in peace with his Creator.

As we saw with the seven seals, the seven trumpet judgments as a group appear to be roughly chronological. (The bowl judgments will follow this pattern as well.) And as before, we have already seen the way the first few of them could be fulfilled during the Battle of Magog. The first trumpet brought hail, fire, and blood, and with it blazing devastation to the flora of a third of the earth's land

surface—in other words, nuclear war on a grand scale. The second trumpet brought the death of one third of the world’s oceans—my guess was that the Atlantic (with its smaller neighbors like the Caribbean and North Seas) is meant. Next, with the third trumpet, we saw what sounds like a first-century description of the effects of a catastrophic asteroid upon the fresh water supplies of the earth.

The fourth trumpet continues the theme of specific war-related plagues, since the same one-third portion of the earth is affected. **“Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night....”** The nuclear blasts and subsequent “natural” disasters have blown millions of tons of debris into the atmosphere. At first, this will naturally block the sunlight primarily in the portion of the planet’s land area that was directly involved. But as time goes on the pollution can be expected to dissipate, blocking less of the light to more of the earth. Either way, the net result will be crop failure, famine, and general grumpiness on the part of those still alive.

And the prevailing mood isn’t calculated to improve when this happens: **“I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!’”** (Revelation 8:12-13) The single Greek word for “midst of heaven,” *mesouranema*, makes it clear that this is not something that happens in “heaven,” (the abode of God) but rather in “mid-sky.” In other words, the survivors of World War III are being told—audibly warned—by an angelic messenger that if they like the way the Tribulation is going so far (war, famine, misery, and death on an unprecedented scale), then they’re going to *love* what’s coming.

This angelic warning signals the arrival of the subtle shift in God’s *modus operandi* that I noted at the beginning of this chapter. Up to this point, one could reasonably point to sinful man as the primary source of the world’s grief. But that’s about to change. **“Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit....”** The “star fallen from heaven” is none other than Satan himself. We have already seen how Satan fights a losing war in heaven against the Archangel Michael. This is the same event. He’s thrown out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-10) and all his “angels” are thrown out with him. So Satan has lost his access to God’s throne room, but he didn’t leave empty handed. Yahweh made sure that he took the “key” to the abyss with him, for it suits His purpose.

We have also seen that the demon who inhabits the Antichrist (as he did Nero) has been confined to this bottomless pit, or abyss. It is clear, then, that the demonic spirit who personally possesses the Antichrist is not Satan, though he *is* so nasty he has to be kept under lock and key most of the time. My guess is that

this bad boy is the first demon Satan lets out of the pit. He has a job to do. Our timeline is therefore established: Satan is cast out of heaven just before the abomination of desolation takes place, 1,230 days into the Tribulation. The demon of Nero is freed at that time, taking up residence in the sorry carcass of the Antichrist. But he won't be the last demon to be loosed on the world. **"And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit...."** It would appear that this abyss is located someplace beneath the physical surface of the earth, as opposed to existing only in the "spiritual realm," whatever that might be. It is seen belching smoke like a volcano when it is opened—one more thing to darken the sky.

"Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads...." The inhabitants of the abyss are described here as locusts (but poisonous, like scorpions—yikes!). They are not actually grasshoppers of the family *Acrididae* (although they may look something like real locusts if they can be seen by men). They're demonic beings who exhibit locust-like tendencies: they're destructive, voracious, and operate in swarms. Fortunately, they have limits placed upon them by God. It's fascinating that demons—though rebels against Yahweh—still know that they must obey Him. These destructive little devils are prohibited from harming *anything* except people who are not under Yahweh's explicit protection—and as spiritual beings, they know who these are. The 144,000 Jewish evangelists and the two witnesses are specifically excluded from their attentions. The big question is, are other Tribulation believers exempted? My guess is that they are, even though they may not necessarily be "sealed" in the sense of being spared a martyr's fate. I have nothing to support that contention, however, other than the character of Yahweh. But remember: this isn't persecution of saints—it's punishment of sinners.

"And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them." (Revelation 9:1-6) Ever hear the expression "a fate worse than death?" This is it. The pain, compared here to a scorpion's sting, will be so intense, people will decide death is better. Suicide will look like a sane and rational option. *After all, there's no heaven and no hell, right? There's only Nothing after you die, and that sounds pretty good right about now.* There's only one problem: suicide no longer works. You take the pills—nothing happens. You pull the trigger—the gun misfires. You jump off the bridge—you break your leg, but you don't die. You *can't*, not for five of the longest months in your life, months of agony,

sleeplessness, and unending pain. But hey! Look on the bright side. You've never been this thin before.

As usual, the Old Testament provides insight on the New (or is it the other way around?). What's it like to be in so much pain that death seems preferable to life, only to discover that death is as elusive as relief? Job knew: **"Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in? For my sighing comes before I eat, and my groanings pour out like water. For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes."** (Job 3:20-26) The locusts from hell will teach man what Job's torment was like. In fact, Job's torment had been inflicted in a similar way, by similar demonic spirits who had been placed under similar limits by Yahweh. But this time Satan's troops are inflicting pain on *Satan's* followers. Those who cling to the odd notion of fairness and loyalty on the part of Lucifer are doomed to disappointment. The wages of sin is death, and in this life, the devil is the paymaster.

John goes on to describe these little buggers in detail. I'm a trained artist, but I confess, no matter how I try, I can't envision what this must have looked like: **"The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months...."** This is a straightforward description of something John actually saw in his vision. Only time will tell if their attributes are visual or metaphorical. I suspect it's the latter—these are demonic beings; they are not known to have physical bodies in any sense we'd recognize. The beasts John described have no counterpart in the known world. But that doesn't mean they're not real.

"And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things." (Revelation 9:7-12) Abaddon and Apollyon both mean "destroyer." Seriously this time, let's look on the bright side. Yahweh is still in control. He has placed limits upon these most foul of demonic beings—limits which they have no power to exceed. They may torment, but not kill; they may not hurt any but a select group, and they may only do it for a limited time. When does this five-month period occur? Considering what must precede it and what must follow, I place it (SF4) early in the second half, from approximately day 1,350 to day 1,500. Just a guess, of course.

One woe down, two woes to go. “Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.” (Revelation 9:13-16) The four *angels*? John used the very same Greek word that’s used throughout the New Testament for the spiritual servants of Yahweh, *aggelos*. It simply means “messenger.” But Yahweh’s “angels” are never spoken of as having to be “bound.” In Revelation 12:9, when Satan’s followers were thrown out of heaven with him, they are referred to there as angels. I believe, therefore, that these too are fallen angels, a.k.a. demons, who have been restrained in an unusual place (i.e., not in the abyss with everybody else nasty enough to need locking up) in anticipation of their unique role.

Strong’s suggests that *aggelos* is probably derived from *ago*, meaning “to lead.” And that’s exactly what we see these four doing. They lead an army of 200,000,000 soldiers on a rampage that ultimately kills “a third of mankind.” This is the second and final time in Revelation when the death of a specific percentage of the earth’s population is prophesied. The first time was under the fourth seal judgment, when one quarter of mankind was slated for destruction by the warfare, famine, and disease directly associated with World War III. Starting from a baseline of a nice round six billion (though earth’s population already exceeds that today), that means the fourth seal judgment will kill off 1,500,000,000 people. The sixth trumpet will see the death of one third of the remaining 4.5 billion—*another* billion and a half souls. These two “events” will kill off half the world’s population between them—over three billion people! (Actually, I expect the earth’s population to reach an even *seven* billion as the Tribulation begins (SF8)—it’s a more Biblically poetic number, even though it never was specifically predicted. *Seven billion souls: the earth is full!* But the math is simpler with six.)

Does this mean that the remaining three billion or so will survive until the end of the Tribulation? Alas, no, it doesn’t. The cumulative fifty percent death toll is due to two well-defined causes, World War III and the horde of the sixth trumpet, which I’d characterize as World War IV. Easily another couple of billion could die from other causes: executions for refusing to take the Mark of the Beast; smaller regional (or neighborhood) wars fought over dwindling food and water supplies; the general anarchy and violent crime that inevitably follows the

collapse of established human government (see Romans 13:1-7); punishments meted out by the central authority for sheltering believing Jews and Tribulation Christians; infections and complications from the **“foul and loathsome sores”** that afflict the recipients of the Mark of the Beast; thirst due to a worldwide drought and an accompanying shortage of drinkable water; disease left untreated because of the breakdown of medical services or the increased virulence of the germs that cause it; **“men’s hearts failing them for fear”** (Luke 21:26)...you get the idea. There will be no shortage of ways to die that aren’t included in the fourth seal or the sixth trumpet judgments.

Another observation: the voice that sent the sixth trumpet’s angel on his way came from the **“four horns of the golden altar which is before God.”** In other words, the blood of Yahshua (if I’m reading this right) is demanding that justice be served to those who have refused to avail themselves of its atoning power. By doing so, these people are saying in effect, *Your sacrifice was pointless—we have no need of forgiveness or salvation. Go away and leave us alone—forever.* Okay, if that’s what you really want. It’s your choice.

And what’s that about preparing the demons for **“the hour and day and month and year?”** Is John saying merely that they are being readied for this precise moment (which is pretty obvious), or is he giving us the timeline? If the latter is intended, my guess would be that the clock starts ticking on day 1,230—at the abomination of desolation. An hour, day, month, and year later would put you at day 1,621—a plausible conjecture at the very least for the timing of this part of the second “woe.” Of course, it doesn’t matter, on this side of the rapture anyway, whether my speculations about the timing of this or anything else are particularly accurate. What matters is that God’s Word is true—these things *will* happen, precisely on Yahweh’s schedule. On the other hand, we’re given these specific time markers and odd phrases like “a time and times and half a time” and “the hour and day and month and year” for a reason. It is incumbent upon us to at least try to figure things out. The details could be a matter of life and death to those trying to make it through these times, and one gets the feeling that the Tribulation saints aren’t going to have the time and resources needed to study this through like we do.

John isn’t done. **“And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow....”** The description of the breastplates is a clue. If you look at this in the old King James, they sound like weapons (“fire,” “jacinth,” and “brimstone”). But I believe the NKJV renders them correctly as colors. None of the words in the Greek are the usual nouns for the things represented, but are all adjectives; in the case of “hyacinth blue,” it definitely describes a color. Other clues we need to factor in are that (1) these people are probably not primary participants in World War III (i.e., Russia, *dar*

al-Islam, Europe, or America)—since they can still field an army of two hundred million men; and (2) they are said to be from the “east” in Revelation 16:12—the sixth bowl judgment. Remember, in scripture, directions are given in reference to Israel, so our modern conception of East and West, separated by the Pacific Ocean, is still in line with ancient Biblical terminology. So whose national colors are red, yellow, and blue? The only Eastern nations populous enough to be remotely in the running are India, Indonesia, Australia, China, and Japan. Of those, only China fits the color profile: its own flag is red and yellow, and its northern vassal, Mongolia, supplies the blue component. Japan, Australia, and Indonesia include white—so I’d say they’re ruled out. For what it’s worth, Vietnam also fits China’s color profile.

While the color thing proves nothing, it’s strong circumstantial evidence that China is the home of this huge Eastern army. It’s noteworthy that as far back as 1965, China boasted of its ability to field a military force two hundred million strong. And they haven’t gotten any less numerous in the intervening years, despite their brutal attempts at “family planning.” In fact, population growth rates may prove to be the key to this conflict. Since 1950, the total fertility rate in China has dropped from 6 births per woman to 2.4. India’s, by comparison, has only been reduced from 6 to 4. These two nations are thus still expected to lead the world’s population growth in the early twenty-first century (though the *rates* of increase are considerably higher in many smaller developing nations). At these rates, India’s population will someday pass China’s—potentially making them a perceived threat. These statistics are a time bomb for China. The average age of their population is rising. It will eventually reach the point where China will fear becoming too old to provide for or defend itself, at which point they could, for the first time in their long history, decide to strike out imperialistically beyond their own borders. Of course, the reason for China’s belligerence could simply be a good old fashioned genocidal land grab designed to cope with ever-decreasing harvests—a direct result of the diminished sunlight since World War III.

As we have seen before, John had no vocabulary with which to deal with twenty-first century weaponry, so he was shown his vision with images he could understand and communicate. **“And the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.”** (Revelation 9:17-19) This passage does not require millions of horses with birth defects. It’s symbolic (I hope) of an army that’s, swift, fierce, and deadly. They’re well armed, using three specific classes of weapons, symbolized by fire, smoke, and brimstone. If I had to guess, I’d say that represents nuclear, conventional, and biochemical warfare, things the Chinese have spent decades developing, but have never used in open warfare.

And the bit with the tails like serpents, with heads on them? That's a tough one. Perhaps the key is in the word "serpent." The Greek *ophis* means snake, but as in English, the word can be used in the sense of a sly, cunning, malicious person. Indeed, this same word is used of Satan himself in Revelation 12:9 and elsewhere. So the passage seems to mean that while the Chinese hordes are fighting a "public" war in one theater with "fire, smoke, and brimstone," they are also fighting a private, sneaky war in the rear—maybe on a different front or fought in a different way (e.g. undermining rival governments from within with political intrigues).

At present, China is a sleeping giant if ever there was one. But all it will take to wake them up is four demons from out of town. Once awake, the purpose of their aggression will be to severely depopulate their neighbors, providing room for China's population to expand—*Lebensraum*, as the Nazis would have called it. If China has any kind of national memory, they will be especially brutal toward Japan—who did precisely the same thing to them a century before. India, Australia, and Southeast Asia—the most populous regions to survive World War III—will also be hit hard. Taiwan is toast. Korea is unified—and promptly swallowed whole. The Philippines are overrun, and this time there's no MacArthur melodramatically promising to return and save the day. Malaysia, Indonesia, and the rest of Southern Asia are goners. The Far-Eastern Muslim populations, those that weren't obliterated as the Middle East perished under the folly of Gog, are wiped out. And as in the oh-so-recent world war in the west, over 1.5 billion lives—one third of the earth's remaining population—will be lost.

"But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." (Revelation 9:20-21)

Genocidal wars will seem so common by this time that the survivors in the West will greet the news of World War IV with yawns and shrugs. *Gee, that's too bad, but what does it have to do with me? I've got problems of my own to deal with.* One gets the feeling from these verses that the general populace doesn't make the connection between the disasters they're experiencing and the displeasure of God. If the bombs aren't falling in their own backyard, then life is good, relatively speaking. In a world without moral absolutes, World War II-style holy indignation against the evil aggressors will be a meaningless concept. But even if the West wanted to get involved (which they won't) there's not enough infrastructure left to mount any kind of sustained military response.

So for everybody east of the Euphrates who wasn't killed in the War of Magog, a new peril has arisen. John saw them, heard their number, and saw their battle flags. The prophet Joel saw them as well: **"A people come, great and strong,**

the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations...." The next time an army even remotely this large marches, a thousand years will have passed—but that's a story for another chapter. (The Battle of Armageddon, which we'll discuss in due time, is in reality merely the final engagement of World War IV.) **"A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. Surely nothing shall escape them...."** If an army two hundred million strong wants what you've got, they're going to take it, and there's not a lot you can do to stop them. Part of the strategy seems to be to consume or destroy whatever crops and infrastructure they find (like Sherman's March to the Sea, only on steroids), leaving no way for their hapless victims to fight back or even survive. They don't want to subjugate people (like the Muslims did): they simply want to kill them.

"Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array...." Joel, like John, sees them as a mighty, state-of-the-art military machine. Leaping over mountaintops sounds like close air support to me; the noise he describes is jet aircraft engines. **"Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color...."** No kidding, Joel. Anybody in their path who has a clue of what's about to happen to them will be scared spitless. **"They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief...."** This is the picture of a modern well-trained, well-equipped army, in superb physical condition, drilled, disciplined, and skilled in the tactics of both open field and urban warfare—completely unlike the Muslim hordes of the Battle of Magog. As usual with huge armies, their very presence brings with it environmental disaster: **"The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness...."**

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this mighty army is that although they are led by demonic forces, and regardless of the fact that they have no relationship at all with Yahweh, they are still performing His will, in His time, for His purposes. They just don't know it. **"Yahweh gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of Yahweh is great and very terrible. Who can endure it?"** (Joel 2:2-11) Joel wrote primarily to warn ninth century B.C. Judah that there was a Babylonian horde in their future if they didn't repent. Nebuchadnezzar's army would function in exactly the same way—as the unwitting hand of God's wrath—albeit on a much smaller scale than this future Far Eastern military machine. So I would be remiss if I didn't include the admonition that accompanied the prophecy: **"Now, therefore,' says Yahweh, 'Turn to**

Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.' So rend your heart, and not your garments. Return to Yahweh your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm." (Joel 2:12-13) The call for repentance was not for Judah alone, but for every one of us, in every age.

There is one more interesting and important question. What's the Antichrist's position on the Eastern holocaust? Two scenarios are possible. He could see China's move as a threat to his own power, perceiving that once their position is unassailable in the Far East, the Chinese will turn their acquisitive attentions toward him. Scripture, however, seems to support the opposite view: China's war of expansion is being done with the Antichrist's blessing, supervision, and support. Like 1930s Italy under Mussolini (behaving like a bully in its own backyard while in reality being little more than the puppet of the far more powerful Third Reich) China will defer to the Antichrist in matters of their own regional interests. Remember: **"Authority was given [to the Antichrist] over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him."** (Revelation 13:7-8) Nobody challenges the big dog (well, nobody but Israel). We'll see this destructive horde again—at the very end of the Tribulation. He whistles. They come. Everybody dies. Film at eleven.

Isn't the Antichrist concerned that the world under his control is dying off faster than butterflies in a blizzard? Apparently not. He works directly under the authority of the dragon, Satan (Revelation 13:2), and *his* agenda is to kill as many humans as he can before they turn in repentance to Yahweh—dooming the object of God's love to an eternity of separation from Him. That's the devil's idea of "winning."

The sixth trumpet, then, takes us into the second great war of the Tribulation, a war that's every bit as devastating (though somewhat more lopsided) as the first one. It will claim the same horrendous number of victims but will be played out in a different theater. World War III starts in Israel and spreads east and north toward Siberia and westward through Europe and Africa to the Americas. World War IV spreads outward from China, consuming the most densely populated nations left on earth. It is a war that by itself would surely seem to qualify as the second "woe" that was pronounced upon the earth after the fourth trumpet. But it's only the beginning.

We are told precisely when the second woe will be finished. Revelation 11:14 states, **"The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly."** What is the context of this telltale verse? It comes at the very end of the discussion about the

two witnesses—after their deaths, even after the things they did *following* their martyrdom. We’ll cover this bizarre material a bit later. For now, I just want to acquaint you with the idea that the second woe is intimately associated with the activities of the two witnesses, and it stops when they do. As we shall see, everything within the bowl judgments until the actual arrival of the Messiah fits perfectly within the description of their “ministry,” which we reviewed in a previous chapter—stopping the rain, turning lakes, rivers, and ground water into blood, and generally striking **“the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.”** (Revelation 11:6)

As these plagues progress, the inhabitants of earth will begin to wonder how it will all end—how long the agony will continue. Although God’s Word clearly teaches that the end will come precisely 1,290 days after the Antichrist declares himself to be God, almost no one will be aware of this. Biblical knowledge, even for most believers, will be rudimentary at best during these dark days. And that’s a pity, for God has provided reason for hope in the structure of the judgments of Revelation. As we have seen, the “seals” are administered by Christ Himself—they recapitulate the entire scope of the Tribulation. The “trumpets” are administered by seven angels. They too span its entire seven-year duration: the first four transpire in the first half, and the last three, the three “woes,” define the second half, known as the “*Great Tribulation*.” These woes are described in detail by the seven bowl judgments.

Notice that both the trumpets and bowls are specifically said to wrap up the Tribulation: **“The angel...swore...that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound [his trumpet], the mystery of God would be finished.”** (Revelation 10:5-7) Compare that to: **“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete....”** The word “last” is the Greek *eschatos*, from which “eschatology,” the study of last things, comes. It doesn’t necessarily mean final in terms of time (though it can), but can also denote “uttermost,” or “farthest.” John is describing the bowl judgments as the seven ultimate plagues. As the hippies would have phrased it, *far out, man*.

So in preparation for the revelation of these seven ultimate bowl judgments, John is shown this scene in heaven: **“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.’”** (Revelation 15:1-4) Again, we see the martyrs of the Tribulation, but this time,

they're not praying, "How long until You take vengeance on them for our murders," as they had under the fifth seal. This time they're praising God for having done precisely that. They now have **"victory over the beast."** It is only a matter of time until **"all nations shall come and worship before [Yahweh]."** We're getting a glimpse forward at the conclusion of the matter; the matter itself will be explained in the following few verses. (I know this jumping back and forth in time is hard for us to get a handle on, but that's because our minds work like video cassettes—one frame after the other, in sequence. God's mind, however, is more like DVD: you know, random access.)

It's interesting that John should bring up Moses here. Is he hinting that Moses is the second of the two witnesses—that my "Enoch" theory is all wet? No, I don't think so. The two witnesses are all about judgment, about proclaiming the wrath of God upon an unrepentant world. Moses sang a different song, one of deliverance. One is the flip side of the other: in the end, you can't have deliverance without judgment. The Israelites would never have been truly free of the bondage of Egypt had not Pharaoh's armies been obliterated—they would have been constantly looking over their shoulders, not pressing forward toward the ultimate goal (or wandering around in the wilderness like sitting ducks). Nor could we have been truly freed from the penalty of sin without the judgment that Yahshua suffered as He took our sins upon himself. Without his sacrifice, we could never have been sure that our sins were forgiven—we would have been constantly looking over our shoulders for signs of God's inevitable wrath.

Thus Exodus 15:1-21 records Moses' song of praise to Yahweh for Israel's deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh. Here are some highlights, still germane to our present discussion: **"Yahweh is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.... Who is like You, O Yahweh, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful [i.e., awesome] in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them."** Note: it's the *earth*, not the Red Sea—this is a prophecy (see Revelation 12:16). **"You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation.... You will bring [the people you have purchased] in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Yahweh, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Yahweh, which Your hands have established. Yahweh shall reign forever and ever."** (Exodus 15:2, 11-13, 17-18) By contrast, Enoch talked about God coming **"to execute judgment on all."** (Jude 15) Different men, different messages.

The story of the seven ultimate plagues begins in heaven. As with the trumpet judgments, the bowls of wrath are administered by angels. **"After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then one of the four living**

creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever..." If you'll recall, the four living creatures are representative of the attributes of Christ: the lion is symbolic of power or authority; the calf (or ox) speaks of service; the third creature presents Yahshua in his humanity; and the fourth, the eagle, is lord of the heavens. I would guess that the "living creature" that John saw here was the first one, the lion. **"The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. 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.'"** (Revelation 15:5-16:1) The angels, then, are taking their instructions (as always) directly from Yahweh. And he is apparently saying, *I'm through talking about this. The time for My wrath has come. I will not entertain any more petitions from men or angels until My will has been accomplished on the earth.*

I probably read that a thousand times before I caught it. If my take on it is correct, it's one of the scariest verses in the Bible: **"No one was able to enter the temple [in heaven]"** where the Shekinah—the glory of God—had manifested itself. For the first time since the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom as Christ took our sins to the cross, access to the throne of grace is curtailed. Does this mean that it's too late to repent when the bowl judgments begin? I honestly don't know, but I fear that it might. It would certainly have given Isaiah good reason for writing, **"Wail, for the day of Yahweh is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man's heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them: they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth. They will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames. Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it."** (Isaiah 13:6-9)

The bowl judgments commence, it seems, as the two witnesses begin their ministry, a 1,260-day period of time described as the second of three "woes." **"So the first [angel] 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 16:2) If my timeline is anywhere near correct, the two witnesses start making trouble for the Antichrist a few weeks after he announces he's God and institutes the Mark of the Beast. It therefore seems an appropriate place to start to whittle away at his pretensions. The Bible never explicitly states that the two witnesses announce these bowl-judgment plagues, you understand, but the coincidences are too delicious to ignore. As I see it playing out, time after time the witnesses react to an affront to God's will or authority by pronouncing the appropriate judgment against it. The angels with the seven bowls then administer the predicted plague. Bowl Number One: man wants a Mark—okay, they'll get marked.

We discussed these sores at length a few chapters back, though the two witnesses' role was not factored in. The timing is significant: my sense is that when this plague is announced, few people will have actually received the Mark—the Antichrist's machine is still gearing up for his worldwide program on day 1,251, when E&E show up and start making themselves odious to the powers that be. Apparently, the first thing out of their mouths is a warning to the world not to take the Mark. The inhabitants of earth are given a clear choice, both spiritually and physically: *If you take the Mark and worship the Antichrist's image, you will not only be worshipping a false god, your foolishness will be displayed to the world through painful, stinking pustules all over your body. You can't say you weren't warned.*

It is entirely consistent with God's merciful character to issue warning after warning, for He doesn't *want* anyone to perish. But He's done that already. If Yahweh is honest (and He *is*), there must be an end to it—the thing He warned about must ultimately come to pass. Thus did He tell us through the prophet Isaiah, **"I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible [Hebrew *ariyts*: terrifying, ruthless, mighty, or awesome]. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir..."** He's talking about the whole world, not just Israel or some other nation. The earth is to be severely depopulated. We have already reviewed two events that will kill off one half of the world's inhabitants between them—and these aren't remotely the only causes of death we can expect during the Tribulation. How many men will die before those remaining are considered "rare?" I don't know, since we aren't told, but this can't be good. It may or may not be significant that the Hebrew word for "annihilate" (*shawshaw*) literally means, "to leave but the sixth part."

As we have seen time after time, the one thing that God really hates is our pride, "the arrogance of the proud...the haughtiness of the terrible." It is what keeps us from having any kind of relationship with Him. As long as we pompously see ourselves as the top of the food chain, the magnificent end product of eons of evolution, we will never thankfully acknowledge that we owe our very existence to a loving Creator. **"Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of Yahweh almighty and in the day of His fierce anger. It shall be as the hunted gazelle, and as a sheep that no man takes up; every man will turn to his own people, and everyone will flee to his own land. Everyone who is found will be thrust through, and everyone who is captured will fall by the sword. Their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes. Their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished."** (Isaiah 13:11-16) Here we are reminded that the wrath of God has been before, and will be again, delivered through the hand of man—all Yahweh has to do is remove His protection. No matter how fierce the anger of God is, no matter how scary his signs (like the earthquakes so frequently associated with His

wrath), Yahweh is never cruel. But the inhumanity of man against man is another story. Man—especially when purposely following the whims of Satan—is a brutal and malicious animal.

Revelation 11:6 informs us that the two witnesses “**have power over waters to turn them to blood.**” The second bowl judgment seems to confirm their instigation of the plague: “**Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.**” (Revelation 16:3) Since the 1970s, environmentalists have been gloomily predicting the death of the oceans. (When it didn’t happen according to their schedule, they switched to bemoaning the imminent demise of the earth’s ozone layer. We’ll have more to say about *that* in a moment.) Here in the second bowl judgment, Greenpeace’s worst nightmare has come to pass.

Our attitudes toward the ecology tend in the long run to reflect our spiritual position. The natural man sees the world around him as a resource—something to use, and use up, for his own advantage. He doesn’t pay much attention to its overall health until—and unless—it starts showing signs of stress: overcrowding, pollution, and the apparent inability to repair itself. The typical environmentalist is actually just a subset of this group (the majority of whom, ironically, he considers his mortal enemy). Not knowing why the earth is here, Who built it, or what Yahweh has planned for it, he assumes that its delicate balance is the work of an endless string of incredible cosmic coincidences—that it just happened by accident to be the perfect environment for the flora and fauna he finds here—including himself. (This, by the way, is ultimately blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.) Hence, if mankind screws it up, the “accident” will never—indeed, *could* never—happen again; the odds are impossible enough already. Bottom line: we need to take care of the ecology of the planet.

Strangely, that puts the typical atheistic environmentalist (granted, not all of them are) in agreement with believers in the true God, though not for the same reasons. Christians see (or *should* see) the world as a beautiful gift from God. As far back as the Garden of Eden, Yahweh gave man the responsibility to care for this planet we live on. Like any loving father giving a wonderful gift to his child, God expects us to look after it. What father wouldn’t be upset when we carelessly leave the shiny new bicycle he’s given us out in the rain, six blocks away, unlocked (or worse, trade it to the neighborhood bully for bite of forbidden fruit). Of course, until the twentieth century it never occurred to anybody that we could actually ruin the earth. But the advent of atomic weapons, a population explosion (the world *doubled* in population between 1957 and 1990), and a string of technological revolutions have brought us to the brink of disaster, ecologically speaking. It will not, however, be the normal progress of man upon this planet

that brings it to its ecological knees. In the end, it will be his stubborn refusal to honor the God who made it—and made us.

Under the judgment of the second trumpet (Revelation 8:8-9), *one third* of the sea “**became blood,**” killing every living thing in it or on it. (I have offered a likely scenario as to how this might come to pass: the Cumbre Vieja volcano in the Canary Islands—a ticking environmental time bomb.) But the ocean doesn’t just lie there like a child’s wading pool. As the earth continues to rotate upon its axis and warmer water rises above cooler, the oceans’ currents gradually circulate their contents throughout the waters of the earth. As David so eloquently put it, “**Then the channels of the sea were seen; the foundations of the world were uncovered.**” (II Samuel 22:16) The total death of the Atlantic must eventually spell the demise of the rest of the world’s oceans as well.

We can only speculate as to the nature of this “blood.” Is it real blood, something you could do a DNA profile on? Or is it a substance that merely looks and acts like the “blood of a dead man,” a thick, dark red liquid, stinking, putrid, and bereft of available oxygen—incapable of supporting marine life? I don’t know. Does it matter? The world is up a creek without a paddle either way.

We are told that the two witnesses “**have power over waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues as often as they desire.**” (Revelation 11:6) Thus we should not be surprised to see the plague of ocean water becoming blood extended to the world’s fresh water supplies: “**Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.**” (Revelation 16:4) As Yogi Berra once said, “This is like *déjà vu* all over again.” The first of the ten plagues upon Egypt in the days of Moses was this very thing, but on a smaller scale. Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “**Thus says Yahweh: “By this you shall know that I am Yahweh. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river.”**”

“**Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, “Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone.”**” And Moses and Aaron did so, just as Yahweh commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

“**Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as Yahweh had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this. So all the Egyptians dug all around the**

river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river. And seven days passed after Yahweh had struck the river.” (Exodus 7:17-25) If you replace Moses and Aaron with Elijah and Enoch, Pharaoh with the Antichrist, and Egypt with the world, the second bowl judgment in Revelation could be an instant replay of the first plague of Egypt in Exodus.

Note first that if the substance wasn't blood, it was similar enough to fool those who saw it. The magicians (actually, illusionists) of Pharaoh's court were with sleight of hand and creative chemistry able to conjure up something that looked just like it—which naturally made Pharaoh think Moses' transformation of water into blood was a cheap parlor trick as well.

Next, notice that the blood was not confined to the river, but water in vessels—water that had already been drawn—became blood as well. The implication for the Revelation plague is that it is something other than the normal hydrologic cycle in action—“blood” being evaporated from the oceans and sent back to earth as bloody rain. For one thing, there *is* no rain, bloody or otherwise. Note that the **“rivers and springs”** are said to be affected. I take this to mean that not only streams, rivers, and lakes, but also ground water—wells—will be bloody. Indeed, if the plague extends like it did in Exodus to **“buckets of wood and pitchers of stone,”** one could expect stored water—in holding tanks, cisterns, bottles, water heaters, etc.—to be affected as well.

The Egyptians were able to dig around the river and find water good enough to drink. This indicates that filtration—through soil, in their case—may be at least partially effective in making the bloody water potable. We notice, too, that people will somehow survive the second bowl judgment, since there are still five more to go. As nasty as the water is, it evidently doesn't cause the death of all mankind. Perhaps Yahweh will put a time limit on the plague, as he apparently did in Egypt: **“seven days passed.”**

The official explanation will no doubt have something to do with “natural causes.” In the angelic realm, truth is easier to come by. **“And I heard the angel of the waters saying: ‘You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.’ And I heard another from the altar saying, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.’”** (Revelation 16:5-7) The “blood of saints *and prophets?*” Yes, prophets—forth-tellers if not foretellers. These dark times will see the culmination of something that began on the Day of Pentecost: **“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”** (Joel 2:28-29) Evil men have always done what they could to silence the prophets of

Yahweh, and these last-days servants of God are no exception. Yet even in their martyrdom, they are congratulated in heaven because they **“overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”** (Revelation 12:11) The really disturbing thing to me is that the plague was apparently inflicted all over the earth in retribution for the shedding of **“the blood of the saints and prophets.”** That means that the whole world—not just a few megalomaniacs in the upper echelons—were guilty of the murder of God’s people.

The fourth bowl judgment comes as something of a surprise. The theoreticians predicting a “nuclear winter” are proved wrong (at least temporarily). World War III has blown millions of tons of debris into the atmosphere, either through the atomic blasts themselves or the resulting fires. In addition, there have been meteor showers and earthquakes on an unprecedented scale, not to mention the appearance of a huge crater somewhere on earth belching smoke and locust-like demons—all contributing to a darkening of the sky. As we saw in our study of the fourth trumpet, the sunlight reaching the earth’s surface was cut by a third (though we aren’t told for how long), causing crop failures and famine. And the scientists who study such things expected to see a corresponding worldwide drop in average temperatures, possibly resulting in a new mini-ice age.

But the nuclear winter fails to materialize, at least for a while. Instead, we see roughly the opposite phenomenon. **“Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.”** (Revelation 16:8-9) The effect of the sun’s rays, in spite of being partially blocked by the pollution in the air, are intensified on the earth. What has happened?

Hold that thought for a moment. I need to explain something. Time after time, you’ll notice, I’ve offered plausible twenty-first-century explanations for what the prophecies of Revelation describe in first-century language. Often they involve connecting the dots between known human behavior (as predicted in context or elsewhere in scripture) and the likely—or possible—result. John sees fire and brimstone; I see nuclear war and the use of biochemical weapons. (That thing with the locusts, though—you’re on your own there.) I may have inadvertently been sending the message that Yahweh is playing no part in all of this except to inform us of what He’s seen in our future. So I want to take this opportunity to reiterate that none of this is accidental or coincidental. Rather, Yahweh is using

the decisions and actions of men to bring about His own will—on His schedule and for His purposes. He will not infringe upon Man’s ability to choose, but He most certainly reserves the right to focus or direct the outcome of those choices. However—and this is important—there doesn’t have to be any natural chain of events for His judgments to be carried out. Miracles are still within His purview—He doesn’t owe us an explanation.

That being said, several perfectly “natural” explanations for what we see in the fourth bowl judgment are possible, and one of them might actually prove to be correct. If you’re like me, you tend to read passages like this from the point of view of those suffering from the plagues. Men are getting “scorched.” What does that mean? The logical place to start looking for an explanation may be in the thing that normally *prevents* us from getting scorched: the ozone layer.

Ozone is an unstable pale bluish gas formed when oxygen is subjected to an electrical discharge (such as in lightning storms). A layer of ozone (O₃) molecules in the stratosphere (10 to 50 kilometers above the earth) serves as a barrier to protect the earth from harmful radiation, especially ultraviolet rays. A five percent depletion of the whole ozone layer at temperate latitudes will cause an average rise of *ten* percent in ultraviolet radiation intensity at ground level. This can result in a variety of problems, such as eye cataracts, skin cancers, and reduced immune function. Humans, of course, aren’t the only things to be affected. UV rays can also kill small fish and plankton near the ocean’s surface, and the harvest volume of some agricultural crops is apparently reduced in inverse proportion to rising UV levels. Soybeans, for example, are especially vulnerable.

Okay; back to our Revelation scenario. Could a nuclear war damage the ozone layer? Maybe. Scientists tell us that a large number of multi-megaton warheads exploded in the atmosphere could conceivably deplete the ozone layer by as much as thirty to forty percent. (The ozone layer is constantly being regenerated, so it could theoretically recover to nearly normal density and thickness within two or three years, given the normal amount of thunderstorm activity.) The trend among the major atomic powers, however, has been to stockpile larger numbers of smaller devices, and these smaller kiloton-range bombs may not be capable of launching the requisite harmful nitrogen oxide materials high enough to damage the ozone layer. (It’s all theoretical, you understand. Nobody’s doing atmospheric nuclear weapons testing these days.)

The real Achilles heel of the ozone layer seems to be chlorine. It is believed that one chlorine atom, through a series of reactions, can lead to the destruction of tens of thousands of ozone molecules. Chlorofluorocarbons, chemically stable compounds that can hold together for years after being discharged into the atmosphere, have been the biggest ozone-layer destroyers in recent decades. Being lighter than air, they rise to the stratosphere, where strong ultraviolet rays

eventually break them down, releasing their chlorine atoms. These in turn strip oxygen atoms from the unstable O₃ molecules, leaving the more stable O₂, an allotrope of oxygen far less efficient in protecting the earth from UV rays. Hence the problem.

So here's the question: does the prophetic record suggest a scenario in which massive amounts of chlorine compounds could be released into the atmosphere? We have to read between the lines of course, but I'd say that the numerous references to "brimstone" suggest a widespread use of chemical weapons. Although brimstone is technically sulfur, it could easily be a metaphor for a whole range of noxious substances brought into play during the last days. And since the First World War, chlorine has been one of the elements most likely to show up in chemical weapons.

That still doesn't prove that the widespread use of chlorine-based chemical weapons could destroy the ozone layer, though. The fact is, it takes industrial chlorofluorocarbons seven years or more to float high enough to do any damage. No one knows if chemical weapons released into the atmosphere can remain intact long enough to reach the stratosphere. For that matter, chlorine gas by itself is heavier than air—it crawls along the ground neutralizing infantry troops with great alacrity, as they found out during WWI.

So it's possible we're on the wrong track with the man-destroying-the-ozone-layer line of inquiry. Let's look again at the passage in question: **"The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat."** We (okay, *I*) have been operating under the assumption that the *effect* was the key: men were scorched. But the verse plainly says the angel poured out his bowl *onto the sun*. Perhaps the sun itself is the source of the increased heat on the earth's surface.

We've all heard of solar flares, the sudden, intense variations in the sun's brightness that can affect our weather patterns and communications. These hour-long events occur when magnetic energy that has built up within the solar atmosphere is suddenly released, like rubber bands pulled too tightly—recoiling with explosive results. Physicists call this effect "magnetic reconnection." When this happens, radiation is emitted across virtually the entire electromagnetic spectrum, from radio waves at the long-wavelength end, through visible light to x-rays and gamma rays at the short end. The amount of energy released is equivalent to millions of hundred-megaton hydrogen bombs exploding at the same time (which, to put it in perspective, is still less than one-tenth of the total energy normally emitted by the sun in any given second).

Scientists have determined that solar flares occur near sunspots, usually along the dividing line between areas of oppositely directed magnetic fields. By constantly measuring magnetic shear in and around sunspots, they have learned

how to predict large solar flares. The biggest of these events are called “X-class” flares. Our atmosphere (including the ozone layer) is ordinarily quite effective in defending the earth’s surface against their effects. (Thank You, Yahweh.) And as far as scientists can tell, there has never been a flare intense enough to cause the kind of heat spoken of in the fourth bowl judgment of Revelation. Not on the sun, anyway.

Distant stars are another matter. “Superflares” have been observed for years emanating from young stars, fast-rotating stars, or twin stars—places where the magnetic fields are presumed to be totally haywire. But in 1999, a team of Yale University researchers announced that they had observed superflares—anywhere from a hundred to ten million times as powerful as ordinary X-class solar flares—coming from nine stars described by astronomer Bradley E. Schaefer as “disturbingly similar to our own sun.” He was quick to point out, of course, that we are in no immediate danger, saying “Our sun does not do this, as far as we can tell.” These superflares are theoretically triggered by interaction between the stars’ magnetic fields and those of nearby gas-giant planets like Saturn or Jupiter—which in the case of our solar system are far too distant from the sun to have the requisite magnetic influence.

Schaefer, however, did speculate on what would happen if such a superflare were to occur here. A powerful one could create “a complete global ozone hole that would last a couple of years.” And we know what that would do, don’t we? Such a superflare, he said, “could turn a cold winter day into a hot summer day.” Does this sound familiar to anybody but me? It’s a perfect description of the effects of the fourth bowl judgment.

It would take a miracle, of course, for the magnetic forces on the sun’s surface to build in just the right way and let go at just the right moment to cause such a phenomenon. I’ve got no problem with that. To my mind, the far greater miracle would be the sort of thing Yahweh did a thousand times over when He created this earth for us to live on: achieving perfect balance. The superflare would have to be strong enough to get men’s attention (an ordinary X-class flare wouldn’t even be noticed after a nuclear war) but weak enough to avoid turning planet Earth into a charcoal briquette. God’s not done with the world yet. People are still going to have to live here after bowl number four. Belief here is a package deal: either Yahweh is the Creator of the whole universe and thus capable of controlling such things, or He isn’t.

The fifth Bowl Game looks a lot like the fourth quarter of a scrimmage played out 2,500 years previously in Egypt. And even with the home field advantage, the Antichrist's team remains scoreless. **"Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds."** (Revelation 16:10-11) This is the fifth time we've seen specific moves from Moses' plague-book used against the Antichrist and his followers. We saw how water was turned into blood—this was the first plague upon Egypt. We've seen boils or sores (the sixth plague), hail (number seven), and locusts (the eighth plague, though those in Revelation were clearly demonic). We're also going to meet some demonic frogs shortly. Considering the unsanitary conditions that will prevail following World War III, I wouldn't be the least bit surprised to find flies and lice tormenting the inhabitants of earth, though these things aren't specifically mentioned in reference to the last days. Darkness was the ninth—and most terrifying—of the Egyptian afflictions. The only thing left after that was the death of their firstborn sons: can you spell "Armageddon?"

Darkness meant something special to the Egyptians of Moses' day—and it ought to mean the same thing to the Antichrist's people. Since the time of Tammuz, Satan has been trying to pass himself off on the human race as "Lucifer, son of the morning," as he's called in Isaiah 14—the "sun god," the source of all life. The Egyptian permutation of this lie was named Ra. Thus when darkness fell over the land of Egypt, it was an unmistakable sign to them that their revered solar deity—the head of their pantheon—had been defeated by the Hebrew God, Yahweh. Fast forward to the twenty-first century. Lucifer is still trying to get us to believe that he's the great illuminator, the light-giver. So God instructs the angel with the fifth bowl to demonstrate what Satan is really all about—darkness and pain.

This black sky doesn't happen over the entire earth, but is specifically said to be within the Antichrist's kingdom and upon his throne. It could be argued that his kingdom is Europe, since that is where he originally rose to power. But as we have seen, the Antichrist will set up his world headquarters in Israel (**"He will plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain"**—Daniel 11:45). So which is it, Europe or Israel? The prophet Joel provides the answer: **"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of Yahweh is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains."** (Joel 2:1-2) The prophet has not only pinpointed the location of the darkness, but identified its cause: thick, heavy clouds—so black that you'd swear the sun was going down. **"And it shall come to pass in that day," says Almighty Yahweh,**

‘That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.’”
(Amos 8:9)

As if to shake a stern finger of correction at those Christians who foresee a post-tribulation rapture, Amos points out that the day of Yahweh is not for them, but for those who have chosen to live in darkness. **“Woe to you who desire the day of Yahweh! For what good is the day of Yahweh to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of Yahweh darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?”** (Amos 5:18-20) This is the real “dark ages.” Safety is an illusion. There will be no place to hide.

Isaiah concurs. **“For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.”** (Isaiah 13:10) Time after time we see God tailoring the nature of His judgment to a specific sin of mankind. Not only does man insist on following a false light, Lucifer, he is totally ungrateful for Yahweh’s provision of our sun, moon, and stars, things He put in place for our benefit, our survival, our very existence. As the creation account puts it, **“Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament [i.e., expanse] of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.”** (Genesis 1:14-18) If our kids were rude and unthankful for the gifts we gave them, we’d no doubt be tempted to return the stuff to the store and get our money back. But if the gift was something really wonderful that we’d lovingly made with our own two hands, we’d feel deeply hurt, betrayed, and unappreciated—and we’d put the gift away, out of sight. Is this any different? I think not. Here Yahweh seems to be saying, *If you people don’t like the good things I’ve given you, I certainly won’t force you to look at them.*

The general level of sunlight will be diminished all over the earth for many months during the Tribulation, as we have seen—the result of nuclear detonations, volcanic activity, you name it. But this plague is different: it’s a localized blackout, a specific and undeniable sign from God (which men will deny anyway). We aren’t told how long it will last, but Yahshua gives us a clue about the timing: **“In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.”** (Mark 13:24) The phenomena to which our Savior is referring here are a perfect fit for the sixth seal judgment, delineated, as we have seen, in Revelation 6:12-17, especially verses 12 and 13, where **“the sun became black as sackcloth of**

hair, and the moon became like blood; and the stars of heaven fell to the earth.” It therefore seems likely that the period of darkness will occur very near the end of the seven years (i.e., *after* most of the Tribulation is past) and won’t persist longer than a few weeks.

It might only last a day, if Zechariah was talking about the same phenomenon. Right after a lengthy discussion of the great final earthquake—something we’ll look at shortly—he says, **“It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to Yahweh—neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light.”** (Zechariah 14:6-7) It seems that the plague of darkness will be followed by an equally strange period of light in the evening, demonstrating once again that nature is subservient to Yahweh, not the other way around.

There’s more to the fifth bowl judgment than just darkness. **“They gnawed their tongues because of the pain....”** We aren’t told if the pain is somehow directly related to the darkness, but there will be no lack of residual causes for physical discomfort: the sores from the Mark of the Beast, the work of the 5-month locust plague of the fifth trumpet, sunburn from the fourth bowl judgment—need I go on?

We need to pause for a moment and consider the phenomenon of pain. Since we usually go out of our way to alleviate and avoid it, we often regard pain as a bad thing. But it’s not. Pain is essential to our long term well being, even to our survival. Early in life we learn to use caution around fire and sharp, pointy things. How? Why? Because of pain. Technically, when a skin cell is injured, it secretes a chemical called *bradykinin*, which irritates nearby nerve endings, causing a sensation our brains interpret as pain. So what happens then? We flinch—we reflexively pull the offended appendage away from the source of pain. But what would happen if we didn’t feel the pain that warns us that something’s wrong, or if we trained ourselves to tune out the pain? We would suffer injury and debilitation far beyond what we actually experience in the normal course of living our lives—much more injury than our bodies were designed to cope with in the normal course of healing. This and a thousand other intricate “feedback loops” built into our physiology are incontrovertible proof that we were *designed*—we didn’t just evolve.

But back to the point: we tend to look at the Tribulation unsaved, note the pain they’re suffering, and say, “How cruel! Why doesn’t Yahweh do something to alleviate their pain?” We’ve missed the whole point when we think like that. The pain—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—is there to warn them that something’s wrong. The pain says, *Take your hand out of the fire! Flee from the danger!* If we’re told that the Tribulation unsaved didn’t react to the pain they felt, if **“they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and**

did not repent of their deeds,” is it Yahweh’s fault? No. The pain was designed to alert them to the danger of following Satan.

While a sad commentary on the times, this is a clue as to Yahweh’s purpose in allowing mankind to suffer: He wants them (and us) to wake up and repent—to flinch away from the source of their pain. He’s tried everything else to get their attention, and nothing’s worked all that well. Plan A was kindness: **“Do you think...that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil.”** (Romans 2:3-9) Plan B, on the other hand, is what we see here in Revelation 16. That isn’t working either. Plan C would have been to force mankind to repent, to take away their freedom of choice. But Yahweh refuses to do that. After all, choice is our defining attribute. It’s essential to the way He made us.

If you’re not terrified yet, it means that you’re either secure in your salvation or you’re asleep. If the latter is the case, I offer the following wake-up call: **“The great day of Yahweh is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of Yahweh is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Yahweh. Their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse [the translators are *so* polite: the word really means excrement—dung]. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of Yahweh’s wrath; but the whole land [the Hebrew *araq* means earth, not land] shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land [*araq*=earth].”** (Zephaniah 1:14-18) Don’t roll over. Don’t hit the spiritual snooze button. You’re running out of time. Wake up!