

Chapter 25

Judgment Day

First-century Jews, even those intimately familiar with the prophecies about their Messiah, were caught flat-footed when things turned out like they did. The scriptures clearly painted two different pictures, one of a suffering savior and the other of a reigning King. But nobody, it seems—not even Satan—realized that the Messiah’s advent would be split into two phases with two separate objectives until the risen Yahshua instructed His disciples on the finer points of prophecy. The promise of His return, however, galvanized the apostles into a Spirit-filled army who changed the face of the world.

Within weeks of the resurrection, Peter was plainly telling people what had happened and what to expect next: **“Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has...fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”** (Acts 3:18-21) Ever since then, we have been longing for these “times of refreshing,” the “times of restoration of all things.” As the Tribulation whimpers to a merciful end, those times have finally come.

The psalmist eloquently captures the spirit of the moment. **“Oh, sing to Yahweh a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. Yahweh has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations....”** Interesting: His “righteousness,” not just His power. Apparently, the collective conscience of mankind isn’t completely dead. Man will know intuitively that the victory of Yahshua over the Antichrist and the Dragon represents not just the conquest of the weaker by the stronger, but the triumph of good over evil. This epiphany, however, may not be equally welcome news to everyone.

“He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel.” It’s been two thousand years since they turned their back on Him, but Yahweh keeps His promises. **“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout joyfully to Yahweh, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to Yahweh with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn. Shout joyfully before Yahweh, the King.”** The victory of Yahshua is not a localized event. His triumph has freed the entire world from the bondage of Satan’s control, and the Psalmist calls upon the earth to celebrate. **“Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be**

joyful together before Yahweh....” Not only will the redeemed of mankind shout in celebration, the very environment will rejoice. It’s been through a lot lately, what with nuclear and bio-chemical war, hail, fire, brimstone, the death of the oceans, a three-and-a-half-year drought, and the biggest earthquake ever. The earth is more than ready for the “times of restoration.”

“For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity.” (Psalm 98) There’s the punch line. Yes, it’s Judgment Day. We have trivialized and misapplied the term for centuries, but there really is such a time in God’s plan, and it’s approaching like a freight train. Those who are living under the umbrella of Yahweh’s righteousness have nothing to worry about, for He will make His judgments based upon that—*His* righteousness. And those who have been relying on their good works to make points with God on some grand cosmic scale will be gratified (at least at first) to find that He is perfectly willing to judge them on that basis. In the end, no one will be able to complain that God hasn’t been fair.

The writer of Hebrews put it bluntly: **“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”** He then defines this willful sin: **“Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says Yahweh. And again, ‘Yahweh will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”**

(Hebrews 10:26-31) The thing is, if you want mercy you’ve got to ask for it—otherwise, all you’ll get is justice.

In a passage roughly parallel to Psalm 98, David again pictures a time when Messiah’s physical presence will radically transform the nature of life on earth. **“Sing to Yahweh, all the earth; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For Yahweh is great and greatly to be praised; He is also to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but Yahweh made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and gladness are in His place....”**

By this point in our timeline, the survivors of the Tribulation will have figured this out. David prescribes the proper response: **“Give to Yahweh, O families of the peoples, give to Yahweh glory and strength. Give to Yahweh the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness!...”**

The earth itself, which has been through so much in recent days, will breathe a sigh of relief when Christ’s reign is established. **“Tremble before Him, all the earth.”** As we have seen, it did precisely this when Yahshua’s big toe touched the Mount

of Olives. But now, **“The world also is firmly established; it shall not be moved.”** This seems to support my hypothesis that the coming Millennium will not suffer from the same sort of tectonic exuberance that marked the years leading up to it. **“Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; and let them say among the nations, ‘Yahweh reigns....’”** If we take this sentence at face value, it seems to be saying that the very heavens and earth will be praising God. But maybe it only means that the communications revolution we’ve enjoyed in the last few decades will be developed even further and used to broadcast the glory of Yahshua—Live, from Jerusalem! Either way, it can’t be bad.

“Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field rejoice, and all that is in it. Then the trees of the woods shall rejoice before Yahweh, for He is coming to judge the earth.” (I Chronicles 16:23-33) As in Psalm 98, all of the rejoicing on earth is capped with the news that Yahweh is coming in judgment. We usually think of judgment as being a bad thing (probably because we’re all guilty). But twice now we’ve seen it characterized as the crowning moment of the return of the Messiah in glory—the best thing that’s happened to this planet since creation. Yahweh’s coming judgment is, in fact, the reason that all of creation is seen rejoicing. After all, it would be really depressing to learn that in the end, the God who made heaven and earth didn’t care enough about its inhabitants to come and separate His enemies out from among His friends. And that’s the essence of judgment: separation—of the good from the bad, of the valuable from the worthless, or of the living from the dead.

In the end, the nature of judgment will depend on your relationship with the Judge. **“The hand of Yahweh shall be known to His servants, and His indignation to His enemies. For behold, Yahweh will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword Yahweh will judge all flesh; and the slain of Yahweh shall be many.”** (Isaiah 66:14-16) God’s servants (their works, anyway) will be judged through fire, and His enemies will experience the sword.

Yahshua, during his first-century advent, did lots of teaching about this coming judgment. You’d think we’d have paid closer attention, since our eternal destiny depends on what he said. Much of this information was conveyed in the form of parables. For example, **“There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.”** The landowner is Yahweh. He has “leased” His earth to us. **“Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the**

vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.” These servants are the prophets and apostles, who were sent to convey God’s instructions. **“And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son....’”** You’d think so, wouldn’t you, especially since the prophets told them He was coming. The son, of course, is Yahshua. This “sonship” metaphor is a teaching device; the lesson is that Yahshua came with all of the authority of God—thus rejection of the human “Son” was tantamount to rejection of Yahweh Himself. There is no difference between Yahweh and Yahshua as far as Their authority is concerned.

“But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.” This is such a stupid thing to do, there is only one possible explanation. The vinedressers (that’s us, if you’ll recall) held the Landowner in total contempt. They mistook His patience for weakness. They actually thought they could get away with this. They had no idea Whom they were dealing with. So Yahshua asked His disciples to draw the obvious conclusion: **“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”** They said to Him, **‘He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.’** Jesus said to them, **‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was Yahweh’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?** Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” (Matthew 21:33-44; cf. Luke 20:9-18)

I have always seen the obvious application of the parable, that the kingdom would be taken away from Israel (in the temporal sense) and put instead into the hands of the Church for safekeeping—not the ecclesiastical religious organization that calls itself the “Church,” but the called-out assembly of believers who truly “bear the fruits” of the kingdom of God. That much is history, and indeed, it’s the very thing that leads the Replacement Theology proponents to think that God is finished with Israel. But there’s more to it. Notice when the transfer of the vineyard takes place: it’s when the Owner Himself *comes back*. Note too from whom the kingdom of God would be taken when the Owner returned: from “you.” The disciples were sons of Israel, to be sure, but they also represented the Called-Out Assembly. I believe that Christians have often misread this passage. It is not a get-out-of-jail-free card; it’s a warning. The Church, sadly, has historically been almost as unfaithful in the stewardship of the Kingdom of God as Israel was. But when the Messiah returns, the kingdom will be put into the hands of those—whether Jew or gentile—prepared to deliver its “fruit” to the Landowner. This

fruit, as Paul explains in Galatians, is love and the things that grow out of it: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The “stone” that the builders—the Jews—rejected is the Messiah, Who has now taken his place as the centerpiece, the key building block, of the Kingdom of Heaven. The passage, though poetic, is quite clear: Yahshua is the standard by which mankind will be judged. We are either covered with His righteousness or condemned by it.

The same message is taught another way in a second parable: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, [the king, of course, is Yahweh; the son is Yahshua] and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them....”** The servants, again, are the prophets, and the intended guests are Israel.

The King, for His part, saw very little practical difference between those who ignored His servants and those who took a more proactive stance, going so far as to murder them. **“But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”** That happened, quite literally, in 70 A.D. **“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good.”** This is a picture of the calling out of Yahshua’s assembly. All of us, good and bad alike, are welcome as long as we’re covered by the righteousness of Christ—the “wedding garment” in this story. **“And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”** (Matthew 22:2-14) Here again we see that just because Israel has un-invited itself, and the Church has been invited to the party in its place, our salvation is based on something other than merely wanting it. When the “King comes to see the guests,” it won’t matter if we’re Jews or gentiles; it won’t matter if we’ve tried to be good boys and girls all our lives or if we’ve fallen into all kinds of sin along the way. It will only matter that we’re covered with Yahshua’s righteousness. We can try to fake it—sit in a pew, sing hymns, and drop money in the offering plate—but the King is only interested in whether we’ve shown

enough respect to put on the garment of righteousness He's provided for us. Everybody has been invited—there's no reason to crash the party.

As if speaking directly to those who would be tempted to try to sneak into the kingdom through the back door, (and especially, during the Tribulation, to do it by receiving the Mark of the Beast) Yahshua said, **“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”** (Mark 8:34-38) The underlying premise here is that Yahshua *will* return in glory. It seems to me that if we really grasped that concept, we might live our lives a bit differently.

Conversely, if Yahshua was just a man who had a great spiritual impact on his times but wasn't God in the flesh—in other words, if He wasn't expected to physically return to rule the earth—then we could afford to be less circumspect in following His instructions. It would be sort of like driving through a little town that only has one traffic cop—and you happen to know he's out with the flu. How much attention would you pay to the speed limit? You'd be apt to consider it more a guideline than a law, wouldn't you?

This same counterintuitive logic—death to our egos resulting in life through the crucified Christ—is reflected in another illustration: **“He [Yahshua] told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them, ‘When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted...”** He is not only giving us lessons for life here; He is also teaching us something about the judgment to come. Our status in the present world will have absolutely nothing to do with our relative position in the kingdom of God. Rather Yahshua will honor the one who humbles himself before Yahweh in service to his fellow man, the one who uses whatever gifts God has given him in aiding his neighbor rather than exalting himself. Riches, talent, beauty, and power are merely tools we are given so we can honor God and serve our brothers—they do not in themselves make us better people. On the contrary, from him who is given much, much will be required.

Yahshua's lesson wasn't quite done. **“Then He also said to him who invited Him, ‘When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives,**

nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:7-14) Yahshua is still talking to “gifted” people. They are not to use their gifts to enhance their own status among men, he says, but are to employ their gifts in service to those in need—loving their neighbors as themselves, as it were—which will in turn bless God Himself. It’s an issue of faith: if we truly believe that, as Yahshua said, there will be a **“resurrection of the just,”** a coming divine review of the things we did in this life, then we’ll have no problem “laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven.” (Matthew 6:20) But if we, deep down, think this whole “God thing” is a scam, we’ll consider helping the helpless a colossal waste of our time and money—and we’ll resent it.

This is the tipping point, the paradigm fulcrum: is Yahshua God, or is He not? We must decide what and whom we will follow—and whom we will deny—to cut the black wire or the white wire on this ticking bomb. But be clear on one thing. What we choose has absolutely no effect upon the truth of the matter. The truth simply is.

It behooves us, therefore, to examine what the Record says about Yahshua’s glory, past and future. Where did we get the idea that He is the coming King? What did he claim? Where is the evidence? Why should we believe that He’s the One?

To begin with, His coming was foretold by God’s prophets. **“The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of Yahweh. Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”** (Luke 3:2-6; cf. Isaiah 40:3-5) Interesting. Much of Isaiah’s prophecy wouldn’t be literally fulfilled until the final few days of the Tribulation, and yet here it is, being applied to Yahshua’s *first-century* advent. And notice that when John preached repentance, he was “preparing the way of Yahweh,” but the One who showed up was a man, Yahshua. Only time and events would tell if Isaiah and John had been right.

As Yahshua began His public ministry, He **“was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit**

descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11; cf. Luke 3:21-22) An auspicious beginning: signs from heaven and the audible voice of God are as good a start as you could ask for.

About the same time, “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!’ Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree,” do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’” (John 1:45-51) Nathanael was right—and wrong. For a self-styled skeptic, he seems awfully trusting—even gullible—declaring Yahshua to be the Messiah on the flimsiest of evidence. Yahshua (no doubt shaking His head and smiling) gently informs him that there will be far greater evidence forthcoming. He never asks us to take a blindfolded leap of faith—only a small step into the light, a choice based on fact and unassailable logic. The evidence of His deity is abundant and undeniable, if only we’ll look for it—and look *at* it. Yahshua ends His conversation by telling Nathanael to look for signs of that very thing. He’s saying, *Yes, I’m God in the flesh, and I’ll prove it!* His miracles and resurrection did prove it, and His final coming will do so again.

Funny thing, though. The same guy who had introduced Nathanael to Yahshua—knowing that He was God’s Anointed One—later demonstrated that He didn’t really understand what that meant. (And I, for one, am willing to cut Philip some slack here. If I had been in his sandals, I probably would have comprehended far less.) Yahshua was saying, “‘If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me [i.e., exercise faith], or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves [in other words, look at the evidence]. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the

Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.” (John 14:7-14)

Speaking on behalf of 21st century Americans, I kind of wish God hadn't chosen to use the father-son metaphor to explain the relationship between Yahweh and Yahshua. But that's only because in our dysfunctional society, we've lost track of what that means. (Remember what I said about the Bible's cultural baggage sometimes getting lost in transit?) To us, a father and his son are two different people, with different lives, different goals, and different destinies, who happen to be related. But in that age (ideally) a grown son was the extension of his father's persona—his representative, his legacy, acting as his surrogate and exercising his authority. In a very real sense, they were one. This explains the propensity of privileged Romans to “adopt” grown men they trusted as their “sons.” The ties of a father and son were far more significant than mere genetic serendipity. Thus when Yahshua is described as the “Son of God,” it doesn't mean that He came one generation later, or that half of his DNA came from Yahweh. It means, rather, that He is the Man who stands in the place of God's Spirit in our corporate human experience, exercising all of the authority of Yahweh Himself—indeed, manifesting the only form of deity that we frail mortals could possibly hope to relate to. Do I comprehend it? Not really. I'm still only one step ahead of Philip, and that's only because I have the whole of scripture to pore over.

Anyway, the passage shows us once again that Yahshua, though fully human, equated Himself with Yahweh on some level. We tend to take this in stride, but we shouldn't. His mindset is unique in the annals of “religious leaders.” Sure, kings of the earth from Nimrod to Nero sometimes declared themselves to be “gods.” This is different. Nimrod and Nero wanted to be worshiped by men, so they carved out niches for themselves in the Pantheons of their day. Yahshua, on the other hand, spoke of Himself as being the human incarnation of the One True God, the Creator, and nobody else *ever* did that. No sane person, anyway. But Yahshua, who certainly looked and acted perfectly sane otherwise, did this time after time. **“The elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, tell us.’ But He said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.’ Then they all said, ‘Are You, then, the Son of God?’ So He said to them, ‘You rightly say that I am [clearly an affirmative statement in the original idiom; we would say, “You said it!”].”** (Luke 22:66-69) In saying this, Yahshua was proving He was either divine or demented.

Similar examples are ubiquitous. Yahshua said, **“For this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both**

glorified it and will glorify it again.' Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus answered and said, 'This voice did not come because of Me [i.e., to impart information to Yahshua], but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.'" (John 12:27-32) He was either Master or megalomaniac.

"James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying... 'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.' But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.'" (Mark 10:35-40) Yahshua didn't dispute the fact that He would reign in glory. That was a baseline assumption by this time, both for the brothers and their Master. But although James and John clearly thought that it would come about in their lifetimes, Yahshua didn't bother straightening out their misconception on that point, except to confirm that both of them would live in His service and die there. As it turned out, James and John were the first and last of the apostles to do so.

The same two guys, along with their buddy Peter, later got a crash course in the true nature of the Man they'd been following for three years: "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.... While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid." (Matthew 17:1-2, 5-6) Mortal man can't normally stand in the presence of Almighty God and live to tell the tale. As Yahweh said, to Moses, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20) That's why Yahweh became a Man and lived among us for a brief moment in time. How else could we possibly come to know Him, to walk with Him, to have a relationship with Him? Our feeble brains (at least mine) can't fathom how the Man Yahshua and the Spirit Yahweh could manifest the same Entity, but Paul assures us that they are: "Keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power." (I Timothy 6:14-16) Bottom line—Yahshua either proved His deity on the Mount of Transfiguration or proved Himself to be the greatest con artist of all time.

Yahshua implied that the following Davidic psalm was about Himself. **“Yahweh said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ Yahweh shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Yahweh is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries.”** (Psalm 110:1-2, 5-6; cf. Mark 12:35-37) Either He was the worst sort of liar, since He was asking men to follow Him—or He *will* someday personally reign in Zion and “judge among the nations.” There’s no middle ground here. The “merely-a-great-moral-teacher” myth won’t fly. He’s saying that His reign will extend beyond Israel’s borders to the whole world. But since when does the leader of one nation exercise the power of life and death over the heads of other countries? The Antichrist tried it; the result was chaos. Only when God rules in person will the term “King of kings and Lord of lords” have any real meaning. I submit to you that Yahshua is either King of kings or crazy as a bedbug.

After telling His disciples as plainly as He could that He was going to be crucified, Yahshua comforted them with talk of their heavenly destiny and the coming of the Holy Spirit of God to live within them. He said, **“I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”** (John 14:18) If He were not claiming to be God in the flesh (equating Himself with the Holy Spirit), how do you suppose He planned to follow through on that promise? He’s not leaving the great-teacher-but-less-than-God theorists much wiggle room here.

And who talks to God like this? **“I [Yahshua] have glorified You [Yahweh] on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.... Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”** (John 17:4-5, 24) Of all the temerity! If you weren’t convinced that Yahshua was God, you’d want to slap him silly (which is exactly what the Jewish religious leaders did).

Okay, how about this angle? On the night before He was to be crucified, **“He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.’”** (Matthew 26:27-29; cf. Luke 22:15-17) Dead guys don’t ordinarily come back from the grave to share a drink with their friends—unless, of course, they’re God. But what are the odds of that? Yahshua is either Lord or lunatic.

A few days before this, Yahshua had been over on the Mount of Olives teaching a few of His disciples about the end of the beginning. He told them,

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man [the title He invariably applied to Himself] will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matthew 24:29-31; cf. Mark 13:26-27) Yahshua is predicting that He will do things that no mere man could possibly do—unless He is also God. Either His is the name above all names, or He’s nuts.

Oh, and by the way, notice where the “elect” will be gathered from: not from earth, as the post-tribulation rapture position requires, but rather from the four winds, from heaven. The redeemed are *already* in heaven when they’re called to join Yahshua, as we saw in the previous chapter, to witness the “Battle” of Armageddon. Paul put it this way: **“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”** (Colossians 3:4) When He shows up, we’ll show up.

As much as today’s Christians are accustomed to viewing Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who condemned Yahshua, as a cringing weasel, the prototypical bureaucratic scumbag, the fact is that he was a savvy and experienced politician as well as a respected religious leader. If you met him today, you’d probably want to make him a deacon—or elect him to Congress. He knew his Bible, did not rattle easily, nor was he prone to hysterics. But as he questioned Yahshua at His trial, Caiaphas clearly wasn’t prepared for this matter-of-fact admission concerning His identity: **“Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, ‘I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!’”** (Matthew 26:63-65; cf. Mark 14:61-64) Why did he tear his clothes in mourning and start screaming about blasphemy? Because Yahshua had just claimed to be God. In the idiom of the day, it was crystal clear.

We often forget that the high priest’s reaction was precisely the right and proper response to such a statement—if indeed the speaker was *not* God. However, if Yahshua’s words were (as revisionist historians today illogically insist) something less than a confession of His own deity, then Caiaphas would have reacted differently, perhaps pressing for clarification. Instead, he just lost it: he knew *exactly* what Yahshua was saying. *Blasphemy!* Of course, it probably didn’t occur to him that it would not be blasphemy if the Man before him actually *was* **“the Christ, the son of God.”** Once again, Yahshua’s own words force us to conclude that He was either God Himself walking among us as a Man, or mad as

a March Hare. When He told Caiaphas that he would see **“the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power,”** he was saying, *You’re judging me today, but the day is coming when I will sit upon God’s throne and judge you,* and Caiaphas knew it.

As long as we’re looking at Yahshua’s “trial,” let’s hear what He had to say to the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate, who, unlike the Jewish high priest, couldn’t be expected to understand much of Hebrew theology or prophetic expectations. **“Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’”** (John 18:33-37; cf. Mark 15:2, Matthew 27:11, Luke 23:3)

Pilate was no dummy. He was merely trying to ascertain whether or not Yahshua represented a political threat against his masters in Rome. He couldn’t very well allow wannabe “kings” to gallivant around the countryside gathering followers now, could he? The Jews had couched their accusation in terms of “royalty” because Pilate would at least have to pay attention to that. They knew if they told him that their prisoner had claimed to be “the anointed one,” or the “son of God,” he would just laugh at them. Yahshua told him the simple truth: *Yes, I’m a king, but my kingdom is no threat to you or to Rome—it’s not even of this world.* Pontius took one look at the young rabbi, now haggard and stinking (having spent the wee hours in Caiaphas’ private dungeon) and decided that this man standing before him was no king. How wrong you can be. Yahshua had told him, “I am no *threat.*” He had freely admitted to being a king—to being *the King.*

Funny thing, though. Although Yahshua had not come to reign during His first-century advent, He did qualify (as a descendant of David) to be the King of the Jews. It was He of whom Yahweh had promised Solomon so many years before, **“As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, and do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man as ruler in Israel.’”** (II Chronicles 7:17-18) Genetically, his mother was in the line of David through his son Nathan. Lawfully Yahshua was a claimant to the throne through his legal, adoptive father Joseph, a descendant of David through Solomon—whose line was disqualified through Jeconiah. Yahshua alone met all the problematical genealogical requirements of the promised King of the Jews—the Messiah.

In summary then, Yahshua of Nazareth left us with only two choices when He was crucified in 33 A.D. Either He was a certifiable lunatic, a lying and deceitful megalomaniac whose envy of God caused him to lure countless believers (like me) to their eternal doom through a futile belief in Him—or He really *was* Yahweh, who had taken upon Himself a human body in order to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins to reconcile a sinful human race to a holy God—and to Whom as a result belongs the prerogative of judgment. As far as I'm concerned, option #1 was rendered moot when He rose from the tomb on the third day. Lunatics (even brilliant ones) can't do what Yahshua did before hundreds of witnesses to prove their claims. If you don't agree with me on this, feel free to wait around and see what happens as human history grinds to a halt at the end of the Tribulation.

“The Lord Jesus, on the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” (I Corinthians 11:23-26) *Till He comes.* That’s the heart of our faith, isn’t it? The proof of the pudding. When Yahshua comes back, He will have fulfilled thousands of prophecies and promises, some stated outright, some only implied, that link His return to His very deity.

We (some of us) sometimes get so familiar with the word patterns in scripture, the stunning truths of what’s written there go right over our heads. Note, for instance, what’s laid between the opening lines of “the Lord’s prayer,” Yahshua’s model or example for our communication with Yahweh: **“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** (Luke 11:2) Yes, we take it for granted that God’s will is done in Heaven. And sure, we’d like to see some improvement in the conditions here on earth. But that’s not exactly what He said we’re to pray for. A kingdom requires a King. When we pray along these lines, we’re praying for nothing less than Yahshua’s return in glory, ruling the earth according to His own standards of holiness. What’s more, we’re praying this because *He told us to!* As we’ve observed, if you want to see your prayers answered, pray for something God wants.

Yahweh not only wants it, He has purposed from the very beginning to bring it to pass. As Jeremiah wrote, **“Behold, the days are coming,’ says Yahweh, ‘That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness. A King shall reign and prosper, and execute**

judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely. Now this is His name by which He will be called: YAHWEH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (Jeremiah 23:5-6) If you’ll recall, Jeremiah prophesied at a time when Babylon was breathing down the neck of a sinful and rebellious Judah. Israel, the northern kingdom, had already been toast for over a century. The last “righteous” king in David’s lineage had come and gone. Even today only the first sentence of the prophecy has been fulfilled, so now, at least, we know that the “Branch” is Yahshua. But He has never yet literally “reigned” or “prospered” or “executed judgment and righteousness in the earth.” And no reigning king has *ever* been called “Yahweh our Righteousness.” For an unbelieving world, the prophecy is just as outlandish today as it was when Jeremiah wrote it (which is not to say it won’t be fulfilled).

The same reign was foreseen by Daniel: **“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”** (Daniel 7:13-14) Some very specific requirements are listed here; it’s a description no one has ever literally embodied in all its details—yet. (1) This king is a man, a representative of (and for) the human race. (2) He will arrive “with the clouds,” (and I don’t believe a grand entrance in a helicopter would count as a fulfillment). (3) Though a man, He will stand in the presence of Yahweh—something we have seen is impossible to survive unless the man is sinless. (4) He will rule over the entire earth. And (5) that reign will never end. That’s a tall order, I’d say. The Antichrist, who will have come closer than any man in history to filling these shoes, only accomplished #1 and #4 (and achieving #4 required selling his soul to Satan and murdering billions of people, which would presumably disqualify him for #3). As usual, the devil’s counterfeit is pretty easy to spot if you know what the real thing looks like.

John saw it all unfolding before him, both the counterfeit and the Real Thing. Our timeline, anchored in Revelation, has brought us to the very end of the Great Tribulation. The last “battle” has been won without a fight: the only “weapon” deployed was the “sword that proceeded out of the mouth” of the returning King—the voice of God. As if waving the checkered flag over Yahshua, the Winner of the human race, John tells us, **“Then a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!’ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’”** (Revelation 19:5-6) The Final Coming of the Messiah is a *fait accompli* at this point. All of creation joins in a shout of celebration.

This is surely one of the most significant moments of all time. Its importance ranks right up there with Yahshua's death, burial, and resurrection, the birth of the Church, the rapture, and the final salvation of Israel—each of which were commemorated in perpetuity with a “Feast of Yahweh” outlined in the Law of Moses. We have discussed each of the six prior feasts in turn. Four are past, fulfilled on the very days of their mandated annual celebrations. Two are yet future to us as I write these words, but past in our prophetic timeline. There is but one to go, the Feast of Tabernacles.

This is how Yahweh described it to Moses: **“Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month [Tishri] shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to Yahweh. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it....”** Thus the Feast of Tabernacles—alternately known as Sukkot, the Feast of Booths (Nehemiah 8:14-18), and the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16)—fell just five days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, in late September or October. Once again, we're tempted to wipe our sweating brow and stammer, *Cutting it a little close aren't We, Father? I mean, You've left only five days between the national epiphany in which Israel finally recognizes and accepts its Messiah and the day He's scheduled to take over the government of the planet. And between those two days, there's the little matter of Armageddon to take care of.* I believe that Yahshua would answer by reminding us that since He no longer has to worry about compromising anybody's ability to choose (because by this time they've already made up their minds), five days is plenty of time. He could have finished up His program in five *minutes*.

“Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of Yahweh for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God.’ So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of Yahweh.” (Leviticus 23:34-36, 39-44) Sukkot is a seven-day feast, beginning with a day of Sabbath rest, and followed by another. As we saw with the Day of Atonement, the Sabbath rest is a reminder that we can't work for our salvation—it is a gift from Yahweh; it must be accepted, not earned.

But on the first day of the feast, designated a special Sabbath day, the people were to take branches, palm fronds, and boughs, and build booths in which to camp out and party throughout the week. Four distinct types of trees are specified: (1) “Beautiful” is from the Hebrew verb *hadar*, meaning “to honor, to make glorious. Not surprisingly, it is used of the return of Yahweh (in the persona of Yahshua) to the earth as He takes care of business a couple of days before the Feast of Tabernacles: **“Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength?— ‘I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”** (Isaiah 63:1) So the first “tree” is King Yahshua, returning in glory. (2) “Palm trees” are the Hebrew noun *tamar*, the water-loving date palms that congregate in oasis settings. **“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of Yahweh shall flourish in the courts of our God.”** (Psalm 92:12-13) The second tree, then, is the righteous who will populate the Kingdom—we who will be “planted in the house of Yahweh.” (3) “Leafy” trees. The adjective *abot* means dense with foliage. The related verb *abat* means “to weave together, to conspire, to wrap up, to intertwine something.” Who are these who conspire together, intertwined into one in the context of the Millennium? Israel and the ekklesia—woven together, like the warp and woof of one magnificent tapestry, created by and for the glory of Yahweh. (4) “Willows of the brook” are the Hebrew noun *ereb*, meaning a willow or poplar tree. A virtually identical noun, however, denotes “a mixture, a mixed company, interwoven. The primary meaning is a grouping of people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It was used of the heterogeneous band associated with the nation of Israel as it departed from Egypt. . .” (Baker & Carpenter) Together, then, the four trees listed in Leviticus 23:40 signify the populace of the Millennial Kingdom of our Messiah, beginning with the glorious King, Yahshua himself, and including the righteous who will flourish in His courts: those of Israel and every other nation who have “conspired” together to love and honor Yahweh in truth and trust.

All this must have driven the rabbis nuts: building these tabernacles is “work,” isn’t it? No, not in God’s eyes. It is preparation for worship, which is in itself an act of worship, and that’s not the same thing at all. Remember Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus? Martha was busy “doing the work of God,” while her sister preferred to sit at the feet of Yahshua in humble adoration. Was Martha wrong? There is clearly a proper time for work, as Yahweh demonstrated in His “six days” of creation. But Mary was commended for having chosen to avail herself of the benefits of Yahshua’s personal presence while she had the chance. He knew, even if she did not, that He wouldn’t always be available for intimate moments like this—not in the flesh, anyway. The work would wait.

As with the other feasts of Yahweh, Sukkot is a metaphor, a picture of something significant in God’s plan. The key to the imagery is the tabernacle, the

booth, the *pup tent*, if you will. Yahweh is telling us that He intends to “camp out” with us. He’s going to physically sojourn for a while in a place that’s not His primary domicile, just like these pilgrims in Jerusalem living in their little palm-frond huts for a week. This is obviously a picture of the King, Yahshua, condescending to leave the comforts of heaven once again so He can rule upon the earth, just as He promised He would. The seven days of the feast speak, I believe, of the complete thousand-year period (*the* “Millennium”) in which He will personally reign upon the earth—the last of the seven millennia in Yahweh’s grand plan for mankind, echoing the seven days of creation.

For what it’s worth, there could well have been another realization of the Feast of Tabernacles in the life of Yahshua, a partial fulfillment or dress rehearsal that connected the festival to His first advent as the return of the King does to His second. I’m speaking, of course, of the birth of the Christ Child, the *real* Christmas. We can be virtually certain that December 25 is *not* the correct day. That date was all-too-obviously chosen by Constantine’s Roman church to coincide with the existing pagan winter solstice festival, the Saturnalia. At its heart, the whole point of a late-December holiday was to commemorate the “miraculous” birth of Tammuz, Semiramis’ bastard son who became the prototype for the sun god in all its forms. Scripture gives us few clues as to the time of year in which Yahshua was actually born. But when we’re told, “**There were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night,**” (Luke 2:8) it’s fairly certain that the dead of winter is being ruled out—it’s too cold in Judea to “live out in the fields” in December unless you absolutely have to, and these shepherds didn’t—they were the honored custodians of the sheep destined for the temple sacrifices. So although we aren’t specifically told, I submit to you that the Feast of Tabernacles in September or October is a perfect fit for Christ’s nativity, from the standpoint of both the scriptural record and the mind of God. It marked the day when God came to camp out among men. There is a plethora of historical evidence to demonstrate that Yahshua was born on the Feast of Tabernacles in 2 BC. Refer to my Appendix on Chronology, entitled “No One Knows...” for the details.

Moses isn’t done instructing us. “**You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh chooses, because Yahweh your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.**” (Deuteronomy 16:13-15) Here we see why the festival was sometimes called the Feast of Ingathering. Occurring as it did in the fall, it was designed to be associated with the harvest, a factor that makes it indicative of a larger truth. We have seen scores of scriptures

pointing to the eventual “ingathering” of all of Israel to the Land of Promise (and we haven’t seen ’em all yet). This feast celebrates the fact that under Christ’s reign, the ingathering will at last be fully accomplished. But the Jews aren’t the only people involved: the strangers (i.e. gentiles), the widows and orphans, those without any possessions or inheritance in the Land except for Yahweh Himself (pictured here as the Levites)—in short, everybody who’s left—will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. They’ll celebrate—*or else*.

It may seem like I’ve extrapolated there a bit. Actually, I’ve only peeked ahead at another prophetic text: **“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Yahweh of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which Yahweh strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”** (Zechariah 14:16-19) Moses told us that the Feast would be celebrated **“forever in your generations,”** which extends throughout the entire Millennium. Now we see that attending the Feast in Jerusalem every year will be a requirement not just for Israel, but for all the nations who went to war against her and the Messiah during the Tribulation—which, unless I’m mistaken, means virtually all of them. That’s going to make for one crowded city for a week every fall. It could be, however, that “keeping the feast” will be required only in the broader sense—the recognition and worship of the King, Yahshua. Perhaps only national representatives will be required to attend the Feast, since the passage refers to “families,” and mentions “Egypt” as an example of one. At any rate, the bottom line is abundantly clear: anything less than total reverence for Yahshua will not be tolerated.

The penalty for this hypothetical lack of respect is spelled out: **“They shall have no rain.”** Egypt is singled out as an example. It isn’t specifically predicted that Egypt will rebel—only that if they do, the punishment will be the plague of drought. You’d think that after living through three and a half years of drought under the two witnesses, folks entering the Millennium would do *anything* to avoid any more of that. Besides, Isaiah, as we have seen, foresees a bright future for Egypt, one in which Yahweh says, **“Blessed is Egypt My people.”** (Isaiah 19:25) On the other hand, a Millennium is a long time. Egypt might comply, only to rebel later.

Three times a year, Levitical Law required every Israelite male to go and worship in “the place which Yahweh chooses.” (Jerusalem, the permanent location, though chosen by Yahweh in Abraham’s time, wasn’t specified as “the

place” until later, since the Israelites didn’t occupy the city until the time of David.) These three events were (1) in the spring at the Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread, (2) seven weeks later at Pentecost, and (3) in autumn at the Feast of Tabernacles. This is the only feast out of the seven that becomes a statute for the gentiles as well as the Jews when the Messiah assumes the throne of Earth. As with the first coming of Emmanuel—“God with us”—the final coming represents a period of time when God will personally live among men, this time to rule over a perfect worldwide kingdom of kingdoms—comprised of Israel and the gentile nations alike—for a thousand years. Not surprisingly, the Bible has a great deal to say about this “Millennium,” though we’ll have to save much of it for later. Right now, we’re focused on job number one: judgment, purification, cleansing. God won’t move into a filthy house, and the old tenant left the place a mess. I don’t think Satan’s going to get his security deposit back.

For those who manage to stay alive on earth until the Feast of Tabernacles, I imagine the sigh of relief will sound like the air being let out of a thousand tires. After seven long years of carnage (minus a few months of false hope at the very beginning) the world will be universally glad to have seen the last of the Antichrist—even those who bought into his lies will be relieved that he’s gone. But because the Bible will have been suppressed for a decade or more, few on earth will know what’s coming—or will know who this new Leader really is. Many will be quite unaware that the “regime change” happening in Israel is anything more than politics as usual. Their attitude, at least in the beginning, will be “Meet the new boss, same as the old boss,” just as in the Who’s old rock anthem. They’ll pray that “we won’t get fooled again,” as if their opinion had anything to do with it. It will dawn on them slowly (but surely) that this new Leader reigns not because He’s won a battle, or even a popularity contest, but because He’s God in the flesh.

Yet there will be other Tribulation survivors who have some idea, however imperfect, of the nature of this new kingdom. It was for them as much as for Church-age Christians that Peter wrote, **“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.... Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”** (I Peter 4:7, 12-13) Those who died in Christ or were taken in the rapture will already have been rejoicing for quite some time, but those living through the Tribulation will have precious little to rejoice about until “His glory is revealed,” at the Day of Atonement. Peter’s encouragement

continues: **“The genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, [will] be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”** (I Peter 1:7) In every age, God has considered our faith a precious thing—a sincere expression of our desire to know Him and reciprocate His love. How much more so in the coming unpleasantness, when it will be tested to the breaking point?

The writer of Hebrews concurs, quoting the prophet Habakkuk. **“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ‘For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”** (Hebrews 10:36-39; cf. Habakkuk 2:3-4) These words are valuable encouragement to us on this side of the rapture, but they’ll be doubly so to any believers who read them during the Tribulation.

To the new believers of the Last Days, “endurance” will mean more than merely hanging in there, keeping a low profile and avoiding the Antichrist’s goon squads. It’s not a matter of how well they can hide, but of having the courage to “do the will of God.” And what, precisely, is that, in the context of the Tribulation? Yahshua addressed that very thing during the Olivet Discourse. **“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats....”** Note first that Yahshua is confirming His claim of deity here, as well as the concept of a future advent (presumably leaving Peter, James, John, and Andrew wondering about what would happen in the short term). Everyone left alive on the earth will be placed into one group or the other. Notice that the “sheep” are said to be “His,” but the “goats” are not—they belong to no one at all, or worse, to Satan himself.

“And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me....’” What? No doctrinal stance, no theological position, no creed? Nope. During the dark times leading up to this, precise Biblical truth will be hard to come by. The scriptures will be considered by those in power to be dangerous and inflammatory writings and will be suppressed—probably (SF4) declared illegal. But the 144,000 Jewish witnesses and the angelic evangelists will be delivering their simple message: *the Messiah is coming—trust Him*. Faith in those days will be basic and binary—on or off, yes or no, take it or leave it. And the evidence of that faith will

be just as simple: supplying the needs of the King—His food, drink, shelter, clothing, medical aid, and encouragement.

Huh? Meeting the *King's* needs? Those showing their faith in this way have no idea they're doing any such thing. They're merely doing what they know to be right, *because* it's right, regardless of the possible negative repercussions. Yahshua explains: "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me....'" The salient question, then, is who are "these My brethren?"

Hold that thought for a moment while we look at the converse situation—the "goats." "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)

Again, who are these surrogates for the King? They probably aren't the Tribulation believers in general, because that group are identified as the "sheep" who took care of them. Nor are they the Tribulation martyrs, for the "brethren" are pictured as being alive but in need. I believe they are (at the very least) the 144,000 witnesses—those whose bold words made them prime targets for the Antichrist's wrath. Yes, they were sealed—they couldn't be killed by the powers of Satan—but that doesn't mean they had an easy time of it. They still needed food, drink, clothing, and shelter. Some were no doubt captured, beaten, and thrown into prison, where only the care of courageous believers kept them from despair and, if it were possible, death. In the broader sense, the brethren might be Israelites in general, for as Daniel and John remind us, Israel will go through three and a half years of exile in the wilderness, a time when they have no power at all. Since it is Yahshua who calls them "My brethren," every Jew potentially fits the description.

At any rate, all of the survivors in the whole earth will be called before the reigning Messiah. He Himself promised, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." (Matthew 16:27) And these Tribulation survivors? "They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." (I Peter 4:5; cf. II Timothy 4:1) We'll

get to the judgment of the dead later. This is the judgment of the living, who will be divided into two groups. The saved are told, **“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”** They will go **“into eternal life.”** Mind you, these are still mortal human beings, still living under the curse of Adam, just as we are today. They are not given incorruptible bodies like those being enjoyed by the raptured and resurrected saints at this point. Rather, they are the select group who will inhabit the earth as the Millennium begins. It is they who will rebuild and repopulate the planet under the guiding hand of King Yahshua.

How many will there be? We aren’t specifically told, but my guess (SF8) is that the sheep and goats together will comprise only a small percentage of the original seven billion inhabitants of earth—perhaps a billion souls in total. (As we’ve seen, half of the earth’s population will die from two well-defined causes, roughly designated World Wars III and IV. And many potential causes of widespread premature death that don’t fall into either of these categories are enumerated in the prophetic record.) I would be thrilled to see half of the survivors designated “sheep,” but knowing the heart of man, I fear the final total will be somewhat less. My wild guess? About three hundred million souls (SF8) will enter the Millennium—of which about four million are Israelites (one third of their population at the beginning of the Tribulation; see Zechariah 13:8-9). This is, ironically enough, approximately the same population the earth supported when Yahshua walked the earth during the first century.

So much for the saved. The damned, on the other hand, **“depart...into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,”** into **“everlasting punishment.”** This doesn’t sound too encouraging for the unbelievers who were lucky enough or skillful enough to ride out the storm, avoiding the battles and staying under the radar. In the end, it’s what they do with the Messiah that counts—some things never change. As we saw (between the lines) in the Olivet Discourse passage above, there will be those who thought their religion would be sufficient to save them. But it’s not enough. For that matter, It’s not even relevant, and it might even be counterproductive. As James asked, **“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can [such] 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 warm 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.”** (James 2:14-17) What James was thinking, but didn’t exactly say, was that faith without evidence isn’t really faith.

But I digress. We were talking about the fate of those who, for whatever reason, refused to care for the Messiah’s “brethren” during the Tribulation. We’ll look at the whole heaven-hell scenario later. For now, suffice it to say that the

goats don't get to stay on earth with the sheep and live in Yahshua's kingdom—even as second-class citizens. In the end, all their survival skills didn't do them any good at all. They are summarily killed and sent to a place so nasty that God never intended for human souls to inhabit it. But it's the only place available to them, since they've said ever so eloquently with their actions that not only don't they want to live in a universe with Yahshua, they've proactively aligned themselves with Satan. So to hell with them: it's the only place God doesn't go. Yahweh wouldn't dream of abridging their right to choose their own destinies.

As usual, none of this is exclusive to the New Testament. The Jewish scriptures have been saying pretty much the same thing all along. Consider Psalm 37: **“For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace....”** If you thought Yahshua was being overly optimistic (or just plain sappy) in the Sermon on the Mount when He said that the meek would inherit the earth, you were wrong. Though it obviously hasn't happened yet, Yahshua, like David here, was speaking prophetically. It's future history. Survival of the fittest—usually taken to mean the strongest, most aggressive, and most self-serving—is a myth. The meek—those who joyfully place themselves under the sovereignty of Yahshua—will indeed “inherit the earth.” They'll be the only ones left standing on it when the smoke clears.

David continues: **“The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. Yahweh laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn the sword and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct. Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken....”** Yahweh sees the plotting and oppression of wicked men as an affront to His own holy character. We humans are the crowning achievement of His creation—we're the whole point, unless I miss my guess. Thus to “plot against the just” and “slay those who are of upright conduct” is to spray paint ugly, hateful graffiti on God's favorite wall.

As you may have noticed, Yahweh's arithmetic doesn't deliver the same sums as fallen man's. **“A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but Yahweh upholds the righteous. Yahweh knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of Yahweh, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.”** (Psalm 37:10-20; cf. James 4:14) Here are the sheep and goats again, the upright and the wicked. Whatever advantage the goats thought they'd gained by turning their backs on the needs of God's people is up in smoke.

As if he hadn't yet made his point, David rambles on. **"For Yahweh loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.... Wait on Yahweh, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more."** (Psalm 37:28-29, 34-36) What a fascinating, terrifying day it will be when Yahshua separates the sheep from the goats. This isn't like a battle, where two sides face each other and take their chances. It's more like the metaphor Yahshua used: everybody on earth will stand before the Shepherd like livestock in His pasture, hearing either "You're one of My beloved sheep—rejoice and inherit the kingdom," or "You're an evil goat—perish in the lake of fire I prepared for Satan." There will be protests and excuses, of course, but **"Yahweh loves justice,"** and He doesn't make mistakes.

This won't be a nation-by-nation thing, either; you won't be designated a sheep because you're an American, or a goat because you're French (for example). God is dealing with individuals from every nation. Speaking to the sheep, God says, **"When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it."** They will be eyewitnesses to the fairness of Yahshua's justice, humbled and thankful to be recognized and rewarded for merely doing what they considered "the right thing," and at the same time chagrined to see that the goats' behavior has led them to such a horrible end. I'm not saying that the sheep will be saved by their works, only that their works will be the only evidence of their faith allowed in this court. In many cases, as we saw above, the "defendants" themselves won't even know whether they're innocent or guilty, for they're unfamiliar with the law of the land—they've been operating on conscience alone. Two people will stand side by side. One will be taken, the other left—sort of like the rapture in reverse.

For their part, the goats won't have a leg to stand on. God's warning has been around for three thousand years: **"He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of Yahweh."** (Psalm 101:7-8) We must not confuse Yahweh's patience with weakness, lack of resolve, or senility.

Isaiah explained why Messiah's judgments are unassailable. **"His delight is in the fear [i.e., reverence] of Yahweh, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His**

mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.” (Isaiah 11:3-5) That’s right. No slick lawyers, no questionable testimony, no malleable jury to cajole and convince. Yahshua judges “with righteousness.” He can’t be fooled by Johnny Cochran; His hands aren’t tied by arbitrary rules of evidence or inadequate laws. And there is no higher court to which one can appeal. Yahshua simply knows the truth and acts upon it.

There shouldn’t be any question at this late date, but some are no doubt still pondering: *Yes, but can He make His judgments stick?* If He can’t, who can? Remember, this is the One of whom it was recorded, **“Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, ‘Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?’”** (Matthew 8:26-27) It was a rhetorical question, of course. It was obvious to Yahshua’s disciples at this point that He was God incarnate. He alone has the right, the authority, the wisdom, and the power to judge the earth.

The patriarch Job was once challenged with the awesome nature of the Almighty: **“Have you [Job] an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together. Bind their faces in hidden darkness.”** (Job 40:9-13) Job, of course, could only humble himself in the face of such a description and fall on the mercy of Yahweh. The Antichrist took up the challenge, discovering that all he could really do was intimidate or kill people—a poor substitute for “arraying yourself with glory.” Yahshua, on the other hand, looks at the world and says, *Yes, I’m about to do this very thing.* Acting like God is a whole lot easier if you actually *are* God.

I believe Job would rise up in agreement with the sons of Korah and say, **“Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, with Your glory and Your majesty. And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; and Your right hand shall teach You awesome things. [The NIV renders that: Let Your right hand display awesome deeds.] Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King’s enemies; the peoples fall under You....”** *Humility?* How did that get into the list? You don’t normally find that sort of word in the same thought with “majesty,” “mighty,” and “awesome.” But the King personified humility when he set aside His divine glory to become a man. That would go a long way toward explaining why God seems to have less patience with human pride than just about anything. Yahshua alone has the right to rule.

Moreover, His kingdom is eternal. It’s not over yet. It will *never* be over. **“Your throne, God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.**

You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” (Psalm 45:3-7) It no doubt seemed strange to the psalmist to be singing to God about the fact that *His* God has anointed Him. But when Yahweh took on the form of a man in the person of Yahshua, that’s exactly what happened. This divine anointing, of course, is what made Yahshua the Messiah; it’s what the word means—*anointed*. The scepter He holds, the symbol of his reign, is righteousness, the Hebrew *tsedeq*, meaning justice, rightness, fairness, being proper according to an ethical, moral standard—i.e., the will of Yahweh. Indeed, according to this passage, the *reason* Yahshua is anointed is *because* He judges in righteousness, not the other way around. It’s another big nail in the coffin of the “Jesus-wasn’t-quite-God” hypothesis.

Like it or not, the kings of the earth bear a greater responsibility than the common man, for Yahshua has given them the power to spread good or evil—to promote the worship of the One True God or to elevate themselves over Him in their own eyes (see Acts 12:20-25). Thus politicians who seek high office because they crave power are the most foolish of men. Presidents and potentates who pervert the truth in order to gain political advantage will be held accountable in the Day of Judgment: **“God is in [Zion’s] palaces; He is known as her refuge. For behold, the kings assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, they hastened away. Fear took hold of them there, and pain, as of a woman in birth pangs, as when You break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of Yahweh of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it forever. Selah.”** (Psalm 48:3-8) Sadly, there is no indication that Yahshua will find much faithfulness in high places when He judges the world’s rulers. Rather, the kings are described as being amazed, troubled, full of fear, and in pain. The psalmist likens their plight to merchant ships caught in a perfect storm. There is no escape.

A dress rehearsal of these days is seen in the Exodus. Those who refused to believe the promise of Yahweh were prohibited from entering the Land, though because Moses pleaded with God to forgive them, He allowed the Israelites to live out their lives in the wilderness—rather than killing them outright for their rebellion. Only two men from that generation, Joshua and Caleb, would cross the Jordan. **“Yahweh said [to Moses]: ‘I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.’”** (Numbers 14:20-24) Joshua the son of Nun, in his leadership role, represents Yahshua. (Even the name is the same: “Yahweh Saves,” son of “the Perpetual.”) Caleb is

the picture of the believing remnant—those who came out of the world, lived through the Tribulation, and trusted Yahweh to keep His promises. (In a fascinating twist, it turns out that Caleb was actually a gentile, a Kenizzite—a descendant of Esau. He was one of the “mixed multitude” who saw Yahweh’s hand of deliverance against the Egyptians, wisely opting to ally himself with the Hebrews. His clan was absorbed into the tribe of Judah, where his character brought him to a position of prominence.) Judgment fell upon everyone else in the Israelite camp. But these two were faithful, and because of what they represent, **“All the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh.”**

Moses protégé wasn’t the only “Joshua” in the Old Testament whom God tapped to exemplify the coming Messiah. The prophet Zechariah wrote, **“The word of Yahweh came to me, saying: Receive the gift from the captives...who have come from Babylon—and go the same day and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.”** (Zechariah 6:1-11) There’s more going on here than just the history of it. The offices of priest and king were to be symbolically united in the person of Joshua—clearly a messianic type of the future Yahshua since the priests and the king were normally supposed to be from different families, separate tribes. Another significant factor: Jehozadak, the name of Joshua’s father, means “Yahweh is righteous.” And where did the raw materials for the crown (prophetic of the honor borne by the priest/king) come from? From the returning exiles—representative of the believing remnant coming out of captivity in the world, entering into the kingdom of God.

Zechariah saw the same cast of characters in this vision: the “angel of Yahweh,” probably a theophany, is heard saying, **“Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign....”** These “companions,” I believe, are the same ex-exiles who were to provide the gold and silver for the priest/king’s crown. They are indeed “a wondrous sign,” for by their very presence they prove the mercy and faithfulness of Yahweh. Let’s face it: the odds against their survival and repatriation, whether historically or prophetically, were anorexically slim. **“For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH [i.e., the Branch of David, Yahshua]. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”** (Zechariah 3:8-9) The “stone” is reminiscent of the stone in Daniel’s vision (2:34, 44-45) identified as **“a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.”** The “seven eyes” speak of Messiah’s perfect knowledge—He sees everything—and the inscription is a promise of swift judgment. As we saw a few chapters back, the timeline revealed in Daniel 12:12 suggests that Yahshua will take the first 45 days of the Millennium to cleanse the earth, to separate the sheep from the goats. Here we see that the job will be done in Israel in a single day. My guess is that it will be the *first* day.

Why cleanse Israel first? Because they are the only nation Yahweh is concerned with *as a nation*. Under their Messiah, Israel will be the world's only superpower during the Millennium. A psalm by the sons of Korah celebrates the times: **"Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! For Yahweh Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth. He will subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet. He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves. Selah...."** Considering the fact that the Jews have historically been far more concerned with their immediate survival than with pipedreams of national preeminence, this is an exceedingly odd thing to say—or it would be, had not Yahweh ordained it. It is *so* strange, in fact, that the Israelites would never have thought to choose or seek this destiny for themselves. Therefore, Yahweh must choose it for them. *Selah*, by the way, is a musical notation: it means "pause," stop and reflect upon what's just been sung.

"God has gone up with a shout, Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet...." This reference seems to point to either the ascension of Christ, to the rapture, or to the final victory over Satan's armies. Either way, it once again identifies Yahshua as Yahweh. **"Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding...."** Technically, "praise" isn't telling Yahweh how good He is or bowing down before Him. The Hebrew word for praise, *halal*, means to shine, flash, or radiate light. All of our subsequent thankfulness, admiration, and extolling of His virtues emanate from the light that Yahweh has placed within us, without which we *can't* "praise" Him. God isn't looking for mindless Islamic-style submission; rather He deeply desires for us to recognize and radiate the palpable truth of His glory and His love. He wants us to *understand*. **"God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted. (Psalm 47)** As much as we believers like the tone of Psalms like this, the fact is that God does *not* "reign over the nations" today in any literal way. But that is all about to change.

Another short psalm picks up the oft-repeated theme. **"Praise Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp...."** We sometimes read these psalms and yawn, *Yeah, yeah, God's really good, blah, blah, blah*. Admittedly, there's an awful lot of this kind of thing, and it all starts to sound the same after reading fifty or sixty of them. But please note that when the psalmist starts talking about "subduing the peoples" under the feet of the saints, or "executing vengeance on the nations," he's revealing prophecy: future things we must take on faith if at all, for Yahweh has not literally done any of this yet, and this is not figurative language. God must either pay off on His promises or be called a liar. When we praise Him for what He has done, we're demonstrating our

gratitude. When we praise Him for what He's *going* to do, we're demonstrating our faith.

"For Yahweh takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds [literally: resting place]. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. Praise Yahweh." (Psalm 149) What's that? The judgments of God will be carried out by His *saints*? Everything we've seen up to this point indicates that Yahshua will judge the nations all by Himself, without our help. Now we see the saints "executing His vengeance." Who are these people, anyway? The word in Hebrew is *chasid*. It means: the godly, the ones faithful to Yahweh and set apart for His purposes. In other words, this is not a class of super believers with whom God is especially impressed (as the Roman Catholic usage of the term would imply) but rather includes *all* who have a trusting relationship with Yahweh—all of the "saved people," all who have God's Spirit dwelling within them. And the Psalmist specifically speaks of a subset of the saints—those within Israel. These are the ones who will "execute God's vengeance on the nations" and "bind their kings with chains." Is God confused? Does this mean the "saints" are supposed to be bombing abortion clinics, knocking off drug dealers, and assassinating politicians who don't toe God's line? No. What we have here is a case of "different time, different place, different job." But before I explain, let's visit one more psalm.

"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to Yahweh, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is Yahweh's, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of Yahweh to the next generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this." (Psalm 22:27-31) That last sentence is the key. You see, the generation that enters the Millennium won't be its last generation—far from it. Although every person who enters the Thousand-Year Kingdom will be a believer, redeemed and sanctified by the blood of Yahshua, they'll still be mortal human beings. They will marry and bear children—lots of them, unless I miss my guess. Just like us in the present world, these children will still possess the sinful nature they inherited from Adam; they will require salvation, as their parents did. And just like us, some will gladly receive God's gift of life, and some will rebel against it.

To put this in perspective, allow me to hypothesize a bit about future populations. My guess was that about 300 million souls—the "sheep"—will enter the Millennium. I would also guess that by the end of this thousand-year period of

peace, prosperity, and perfect environment (something I'll discuss more fully in the coming chapters) the earth's population could easily climb back to the seven billion mark. I have no scriptural evidence for this, but it's a reasonable number considering the conditions, not to mention being a poetic echo of God's grand plan. Anyway, that leaves something over six and a half billion souls who will be born during the Millennium—and every one of them will be faced with the same choice we all have to make: love Yahweh or reject Him.

Those who choose to rebel will be summarily judged, but this time Yahshua will not personally do the job in every case, as He did during the Tribulation and its aftermath. Rather, He will delegate the job to His saints. We have already seen how the raptured and resurrected Church-age saints will “reign with Christ” (a concept that still boggles my mind). Yahshua specifically told His disciples that they would judge their nation, Israel: **“You are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** (Luke 22:28-30) And Paul, in chastising the litigious Corinthians, revealed that the saints would judge far more than that: **“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? (I Corinthians 6:1-3)**

Moreover, we've seen how the Old Testament saints are closely associated with the Church-age believers in positions of responsibility, demonstrated by the twenty-four heavenly thrones of Revelation 4:4. Now let us return to Revelation for more information. **“I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.... This is the first resurrection.”** (Revelation 20:4-5) Two groups are in view here. The thrones are apparently the same symbol that John saw back in chapter 4—occupied by the Church-age saints and those who preceded them. It is said that **“judgment was committed to them.”** But then we see a second group, described as the Tribulation martyrs. Actually, I believe (SF3) this group includes anyone who came to follow Yahshua after the rapture but died before the end of the Tribulation—of whom the martyrs are the representative group.

The “first resurrection” includes saints who were redeemed and subsequently lost their lives *after* the rapture. But then we see them reigning with Yahshua on the earth during His thousand-year Kingdom. That implies that there must be a second rapture-like event just for them at the end of the Tribulation, for they can't

function as described if they're disembodied souls. They must have received their immortal, resurrection bodies, just like the saints raptured prior to the Tribulation. This could be either an event or an ongoing process, but John is said to have seen their *souls* (Greek: *psyche*—the inner self, heart, mind, life, breath, soul, or person as a living being), so I can't be dogmatic. *Psyche* is used of the natural, physical life, the whole man, the place of feeling, or true life in contrast to mere physical existence. The word is so broad, it's hard to say with certainty the state of the martyred "souls" he saw.

There will surely be multiplied millions of them, for we read, **"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'... These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."** (Revelation 7:9-10, 14-17) This is describing the same group, the redeemed Tribulation martyrs and victims. First, they are said to "reign with Christ for a thousand years," and then we read that they'll "serve Him day and night in His temple." A contradiction? Not really. Reigning and service are supposed to be the same thing, no matter what our politicians think. More to the point, *this* scene takes place in heaven—before Yahshua's glorious return. The Revelation 20 passage takes place on earth, afterward.

What's the bottom line? Yahshua will be the absolute, unquestioned authority on the earth for a thousand years, and those who have trusted in Him for their salvation (whether looking forward to or back upon His earthly life) will help administer His Kingdom. More specifically, the immortals who accompanied Yahshua back to earth from heaven on the Day of Atonement will "reign with Him," and "judge the world." The Tribulation Martyrs, now immortals as well, will "serve Yahshua day and night in His temple." And apparently, the mortals of the redeemed nation of Israel will physically carry out the judgments of King Yahshua and His immortal saints in the Millennial earth, as we saw in Psalm 149.

"[Yahshua] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:8-11)

The Greek word for “bow” is *kampto*, which the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines as: “The gesture of full inner submission in worship to the one before whom we bow the knee. Thus in Revelation 14:11 [quoted above] bowing the knee is linked with confession within the context of a judgment scene, and in Philippians 2:10 it again accompanies confession with reference to the worship of the exalted *Kyrios* [“Lord”] Jesus by the cosmos”—that is, the whole world. Note that it’s not merely a physical act, but rather a heart attitude, since both angels and demons are included in the roster of those who will “bow,” and they are *spiritual* beings—they’re not equipped with knees.

This picture of “bowing in submission” before the risen Messiah is seen in sharp contrast to the normal attitude of familial relationship Yahweh wants with us: walking upright with Him, being conversant, respectful, open and honest—a Father and child relationship. He *hates* the obsequious obeisance of formal and mindless religious ritual. Therefore, it is a safe assumption that when **“at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow... and every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,”** God is dealing primarily with those who chose not to revere Him, those who don’t have a familial bond with Him. In the end, it won’t matter whether you *want* to worship Yahshua or not—you *will*.

If you’re keeping score, you will have noticed that some segments of mankind have been “judged” at this point in time, and some have not. In the negative sense, we have been concentrating on those who were still alive but unsaved at the end of the Tribulation—the “goats.” That leaves the great bulk of unredeemed humanity dead and gone, but not forgotten. Yahshua will deal with them later: **“The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.”** (Revelation 20:5) We’ll discuss the judgment of these souls when our timeline catches up with us.

And what about the saved? They (we) are commonly called the “redeemed” for a very good reason. Our judgment was borne by Yahshua as He died to pay the penalty for our sins. The gift of our reconciliation with God was paid for with His blood—all we have to do is accept it. Therefore, we aren’t facing a future judgment day.

Or are we? What are we to do with passages like this? **“Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: ‘As I live, says Yahweh, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”** (Romans 14:10-12; cf. Isaiah 45:23) Paul was writing to

Christians. Is he saying that we'll face judgment after all? Not exactly. His explanation to the Corinthians helps clear things up: **"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."** (II Corinthians 5:10) He's talking about the assessment of our works, the "things done in the body." Notice that the good and bad deeds alike will be examined. Our souls are not in jeopardy, but let's face it—some of the things we did were worthless, counter-productive, totally unworthy of the One who died to save us. Should such useless rubbish follow us into heaven? I think not.

On our own the best we can bring to God is garbage, for we ourselves are fallen, sinful creatures. **"We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."** (Isaiah 64:6) As bad as that sounds, it's an overly gentle translation: it really means "all our (*tsadaqah*) honest, just, meritorious, or righteous deeds are (*'edah*) witnesses of our (*begeh*) treachery, faithlessness, and deceit." Ouch. On the other hand, Yahshua said, **"Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."** (Mark 9:41) This seeming dichotomy is an illusion. Good works done with pure motives are an acceptable sacrifice of praise—and are even worthy of reward. But good works done solely to earn brownie points with God (or worse, to be seen by men so they'll think we're good) are of no value whatsoever. As John put it, **"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment."** (I John 4:17)

So Paul speaks of a judgment seat of Christ—a *bema*, in Greek, the same word that would have been used for judging Olympic athletic contests. In that context, it speaks not of the worth of the athlete himself, but rather of the race he's run. It's a place for rewards. "Bad" races aren't punishable offences. They're simply ignored; they're irrelevant. "Good" races, however, are rewarded with crowns of victory—recognition of a job well done. And so it is with the judgment seat of Christ. The apostle explains: **"Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown."** (I Corinthians 9:25) The laurel wreath (or gold medal) an athlete works so hard to earn won't endure, but our rewards for having run a good "human" race will last forever.

Paul also uses another metaphor: a house on fire. **"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."** (I Corinthians 3:11-15) The foundation will remain no

matter what happens. And the occupant will not die in the blaze. But the house itself—the works he’s done—will stand or fall depending on what materials he’s used in its construction. Its value will be determined by what’s left after the fire. Even if there’s nothing left but the foundation, no punishment will devolve upon the occupant. But who wouldn’t prefer to see his house survive the fire?

The “fire,” of course, is Yahweh’s holy standard, as exemplified in the perfect life of Yahshua. It’s not just what He did or didn’t do, either, but *why*. In the end, everything Yahshua did was done out of love for us. All of this makes it a fool’s errand for us to attempt to force people to behave themselves—to set standards of moral conduct for others. It brings them no closer to heaven, and it distracts us from the job God gave us to do—loving one another. That’s why Paul said, **“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.”** (I Corinthians 4:5) Only God is qualified to judge the value of our works. Solomon, who had gold, silver, and precious stones in abundance—dwarfed only by his pile of wood, hay, and stubble—wrote, **“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear (revere) God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) That’s the kicker, isn’t it? It’s not just the things we do in the light of day. Our works include “every secret thing,” whatever we do when nobody is around to watch us (except God).

That’s not to say that *only* what we do in secret will be rewarded. Paul admonished those blessed with the world’s goods to use them in God’s service, not to be seen by the world as a philanthropist, but simply to meet needs. Though a rich man’s giving wouldn’t save him, it would tend to demonstrate that he didn’t worship his wealth: **“Let [the rich] do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”** (I Timothy 6:18-19)

As a matter of fact, Yahshua told a parable teaching us that we won’t be judged on our gifts (wealth, intelligence, ability, good looks) because, after all, they’re *gifts*—we did nothing to earn them. What He holds us accountable for is the diligent use of those gifts. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey....”** Note that the Master knew his own servants’ abilities. They weren’t all equally gifted. Nor was He expecting miracles from them, only faithful service. **“Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.**

So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord....'" The second servant performed just as well in proportion to his resources, and he received the same commendation.

"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matthew 25:14-21, 24-30) This "outer darkness," contrary to popular thinking, is not hell. The "wicked and lazy servant" was not fired, sold to another master, or executed. He remained in his Master's employ. Still, his experience was not a pleasant one. What happened to him? "Darkness" (Greek: *skotos*) is derived from a word meaning obscurity. The lazy servant had blown his opportunity to serve his Master in a position of responsibility. So he would no longer get to sit behind a big desk and take his boss's clients out to lunch. Now he would have to work on the company pig farm in Crete. Or something like that. The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is indicative of his remorse. The lessons for us are obvious: we would be wise to use our gifts in Yahshua's service, and foolish not to.

A similar parable is told in Luke 19:11-27. I won't recount it here in full, but I'd like to point out some revealing points of divergence. Luke begins by explaining, "Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately." Yahshua knew that it would not; He was preparing them for what would turn out to be a two thousand year gap. So he added a new wrinkle in this telling of the story. The part of the Master in this retelling was a nobleman who "went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.... But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'" He wrapped up the parable by dealing with these citizens: 'Bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.' " (Luke 19:11-12, 14, 27) This version of the parable differentiates the rebellious "citizens" from the "servants," even the wicked, lazy one. It's one thing to live in South Heaven, away from the glorious center of the action—you know, where the streets are only *fourteen-carat* gold. It's something else entirely to be consigned to hell.

The concept of receiving rewards in the afterlife (and the possibility of losing them) was taught over and over again by Yahshua to His disciples, and they passed the lessons on to us, as in this snippet from Matthew: **“The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”** (Matthew 16:27) John later admonished, **“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.”** (II John v8)

Peter understood it as well, writing, **“When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away,”** and **“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”** (I Peter 5:4, 6) Now there’s a concept to boggle the mind: God exalting man. It only happens to men who don’t exalt themselves. But the very best reward, to my mind, was mentioned in the introduction to his second letter, when he spoke of **“the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”** (II Peter 1:4) Yeah, that’s what I want—to be a partaker of Yahshua’s very nature, to be released from this mortal, sin-corrupted body to live with Him and in Him—forever.

Although we aren’t told, we may logically deduce that the judgment seat of Christ will take place during the Tribulation—in heaven—before the Messiah returns to earth on the Day of Atonement. Those whose works were assessed at the judgment seat are apparently the same saints who accompany Yahshua when He returns (see Revelation 19:14). And they’re the same souls who will reign with Yahshua on earth during the Millennium, for their positions of responsibility will correlate to the value of their works. Those who were faithful will be put in charge of great things; those who were “wicked and lazy” will get to supervise the proverbial pig farm in Crete.

After the judgment seat of Christ, one more event will take place in heaven before the Lord’s triumphal return, and it’s a biggie. **“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God.’ And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus.**

Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Revelation 19:6-10)

This is the consummation of the courtship that has been going on between Yahshua and His bride for the last two thousand years. As was customary in first-century Israel, the marriage supper is held at the groom’s house—in this case, that would be heaven. We’ve seen these bright white linen garments before—actually the bride is radiating God’s light, which if you’ll recall is the very definition of “praising Yahweh,” which is, not coincidentally, what “Alleluia” means. The garments of light are described here as “the righteous acts of the saints.” We need to remember that our good works, by themselves, are nothing—it is only by virtue of Yahshua’s imputed holiness that they gain any value in God’s eyes.

And who, precisely, is the bride of Christ (as if you didn’t know)? It is the Church, the *Ekklesia*—that assembly of believers called out from the world to worship Yahshua as the Messiah. Paul explains: **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”** (Ephesians 5:25-27) Throughout this book, I’ve demonstrated time after time that the Church has not replaced Israel in the affections of Yahweh (as many misguided commentators insist). Rather, it enjoys its own place in His heart, alongside its beloved but errant sister. Both Joshua and Caleb entered and prospered in the Promised Land.

If you’re willing to take a few verses out of context, you might arrive at the conclusion that Israel was only a metaphor for “believers,” and that now that the Church had been established, God was through with the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We read things like **“They are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham,”** (Romans 9:7-8) and deduce that perhaps God is confused as to who He made His promises to. But as we have seen, there is a vast body of scripture that clarifies the matter. And even here in Romans, the context reinforces the fact that Yahweh has plans for both Israel and the *Ekklesia*, and they aren’t the same plans.

Back in the first chapter of this book, I mentioned that there were four books in the Old Testament that didn’t contain any yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy, one of them being the Song of Solomon. But going back and re-reading this little book, I think I lied to you about that. The whole poem, it seems, is a picture of the intense courtship between Yahshua and His bride. The story revolves around three main characters, the Beloved (a picture of Yahshua), the daughters of Jerusalem (obviously the nation of Israel), and the Shulamite (a metaphor for the Church). I’m not going to quote and analyze the whole thing, for as I said, it doesn’t contain much in the way of specific “prophecies.” I would, however, recommend

that you go back and read it for yourself, bearing in mind the prophetic picture it paints of the marriage of the Lamb.

Several truths that really aren't discussed anywhere else in scripture are made clear here. First is the three-way relationship between the Messiah, the Church, and Israel. The daughters of Jerusalem are seen supporting and encouraging the love match: **"We will be glad and rejoice in you."** (Song of Solomon 1:4) Today Jews tend to resent or dismiss the identification of *our* Yahshua with *their* Messiah, but the underlying jealousy and misunderstanding will be forgotten during the Millennium. Second (and this should come as no surprise, though it might), the Church is madly in love with the Messiah, an emotional, physical, mental, *and* hormonal sort of thing. We can't wait until the moment when we can hold Him close forever. Waiting for His return is agony; we crave His touch, His voice, the warmth of His presence. We feel like it's torture being separated from Him, saying breathlessly with the Shulamite, **"I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved!"** (Song of Solomon 5:2) Third (and this *may* come as a surprise, because we're not used to thinking of Him in this light), Yahshua feels exactly the same way about us! He sees us just as any young man in love would see the woman who is in love with him—with passion, longing, and desire. He says, **"My dove, my perfect one, is the only one."** (Song of Solomon 6:9) He's in love—He thinks we're perfect. Love is blind, thank God.

This all puts the marriage supper of the Lamb in a whole new light. I can still remember the excitement, the passion, the *hunger*, of my wedding night. (Hey, it was only thirty-seven years ago—I may be old but I'm not dead.) Yahshua feels precisely the same way about His bride, the Church. He wants to hold us, to be with us, to look deep into our eyes and tell us we're beautiful. He wants us to know that He loves us—always has, always will.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go and take a cold shower.

The judgment seat of Christ and the marriage of the Lamb apparently both happen in Heaven sometime during the Tribulation, before Christ returns to the earth to assume His rightful place on the throne of humanity. At the end of my chapter 19 if you'll recall, I offered a hypothetical timeline for the significant events that are predicted to take place during the first half of the Tribulation. Here's the second half. Again, I'll put the Biblical certainties in italics and my educated guesses in plain text.

Day 1,260: The mid-point of the Tribulation. The two witnesses continue chastising the Antichrist and calling down plagues and drought upon the earth; the believing Jews have fled into the wilderness.

Day 1,275: The Antichrist sends a large ground force to retrieve the Jews. The army is destroyed, swallowed by the desert.

Day 1,290: The Antichrist declares a one-world monetary system, forgives all debts, public and private, consolidates and reorganizes all banks and finances under his banner. His popularity peaks.

Day 1,350: Demonic locusts emerge from the abyss and begin tormenting those who are not sealed by God.

Day 1,500: The demonic locusts cease their five-month plague.

Day 1,550: The judgment seat of Christ begins in heaven.

Day 1,621 (SF5): A 200,000,000-man army begins its conquest of the Far East.

Day 1,900: The marriage supper of the Lamb begins in heaven.

Day 2,350: The Antichrist summons the world's armies to fight against the Jews in Israel. The build-up for Armageddon begins.

Day 2,480: The Euphrates River goes dry. The Chinese army begins its final push toward Israel. They rendezvous with the rest of Antichrist's forces at Armageddon.

Day 2,490: The Jews begin their return to Jerusalem, leaving their hiding places in the wilderness. They meet no resistance. The Antichrist's 42-month reign of terror begins to crumble.

Day 2,512: The two witnesses are slain in Jerusalem. The world celebrates.

Day 2,516: The Day of Atonement. The two witnesses are resurrected. Yahshua returns to the earth. Israel recognizes its Messiah and mourns. A great earthquake is triggered as Yahshua's return splits the Mount of Olives.

Day 2,517: Jews flee from Jerusalem through the newly created valley to Azal.

Day 2,519: The Battle of Armageddon commences—and concludes.

Day 2,520: The Antichrist and false prophet are sent to hell. The Tribulation ends.

Day 2,521: The Feast of Tabernacles Begins—the first day of the Millennium.

Day 2,527: The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Day 2,528: The separation of the "sheep" from the "goats" (the judgment of the Tribulation survivors) begins.

Day 2,565: The sheep-and-goats judgment is completed (1,335 days after the Abomination of Desolation).

Sandwiched into the Revelation narrative, we finally find the words we've been longing to hear: **"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more...."** Satan has been a thorn in the side of mankind since Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden. But once we acquired our sinful nature through Adam, the devil hasn't had to work all that hard to keep us separated from the God Who made us. A suggestion here, a temptation there, and we fall out of fellowship with Yahweh like a ton of bricks. Of course, we usually blame our shortcomings on Satan—*the devil made me do it!* So what will happen when Lucifer and his minions are bound and gagged, unable to influence things directly anymore? We (that is, the mortals of the Millennium) will find that we're *still* prone to sin. It's in our nature: we sin because we're sinners. Fortunately, Yahshua doesn't change. He will continue to forgive because He's a forgiving God. All we have to do is ask.

I wish that last scripture had ended where I cut it off. But alas, there's more to it. Satan has been bound **"so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while."** (Revelation 20:1-3) *Must* be? Why? Because just like us, people born during the Millennium will choose either to follow Yahshua or rebel against Him. But now that the King has returned, there's a rub. During this time, crimes will be dealt with swiftly and surely. No one will be able to "get away with murder" like they routinely do now. So naturally, pretty much everyone will be God-fearing, law-abiding citizens, or so it would appear. Those few who openly rebel will find themselves gone. What, then, is the King to do with those who harbor rebellious attitudes in their hearts but don't actually act them out? He can't let them seethe forever in suppressed hatred, sullenly nurturing their secret pent-up rage against Him. But neither can He in all fairness punish them for something they haven't done yet. So (as usual) He's come up with the perfect—albeit painful—solution. Once again He will make man's choices crystal clear. One last drama will unfold at the very end of the Millennium. It's not over till it's over.