

Chapter 28

The End of the Beginning

The Seventh Millennium won't last forever—any more than the six previous millennia of Yahweh's plan for man did. It was never designed to. As good as life will be during this time (in comparison to previous ages), this thousand-year period is not meant to be the end product of God's dealings with man, but rather a doorway to—a prophecy of—something infinitely larger and more wonderful. There are still loose ends here, and Yahweh is a God of order who will not allow issues to remain unresolved forever. The Millennium is God's way of bringing the story of mortal man to a conclusion, to tie up these loose ends, to finally balance the equation of life. It is not the marriage; it's the honeymoon. It is not the end; it's merely the end of the beginning.

Just as the Millennium will be a microcosm of the eternity that follows, Israel will be a microcosm of mankind. What happens among the Jews will be symbolic of Yahweh's global plan. When God makes promises to Israel, He is also teaching principles that apply to the nations. **“Your people [Israel] shall all be righteous. They shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, Yahweh, will hasten it in its time.”** (Isaiah 60:21-22) This promise is made to Israel, but I believe they will be a bellwether for believing gentiles during the Millennium: if they are righteous, they too will prosper.

In retrospect, it is a logical question to ask: “Why the Jews?” Why of all people did Yahweh choose to love and bless and dwell among the nation of Israel? I believe it's His idea of a worst-case scenario. If He can make and keep promises to a people who have been so rebellious throughout so much of their history—if He can bring even *them* to a place of permanent fellowship—then cleansing the rest of us from our sins can't be impossible. (Like the old Sinatra song said, “If I can make it here, I can make it *anywhere*.”) Since Yahweh's favorite human, David, was a murdering, adulterous Jewish scalawag who nevertheless loved and trusted God with all his heart, then there's hope for me, too.

It's a big clean-up job, but Yahweh is willing to purify the world, starting with the dirtiest corner: Israel. Isaiah writes, **“And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.”** They will be “called holy” not because they've somehow achieved perfection in their own strength, but because Yahweh has honored their newfound faith in Him with imputed righteousness—courtesy of the blood of Yahshua. **“When Yahweh has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged**

the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then Yahweh will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.” (Isaiah 4:3-6) Yahweh Himself will be Israel’s protector. The Shekinah—the same manifestation of Yahweh that guided the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings with a cloud of smoke and a pillar of fire—will again be seen guarding the nation of Israel.

Ezekiel saw Israel’s miraculous turnaround as well, her cleansing and her restoration. **“Thus says the Lord Yahweh: ‘On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.” Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, Yahweh, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and I will do it.’”** (Ezekiel 36:33-36) Desolate land and ruined cities are commonplace in Israel today. Despite Israeli efforts, the destructive influence of Islam can still be seen in lands left fallow for fourteen centuries, and places like Bethlehem and Ramallah look like war zones—because they are. But God’s Millennial peace will bring with it healing and restoration. Why is Yahweh so interested in rebuilding Israel? Because by doing so, He will be demonstrating his love and power to all of the nations of the earth. The mortal descendants of the “sheep,” the Millennial patriarchs, will look at Israel and say, “Yahweh is awesome.”

Zechariah expands upon the thought: **“In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.”** This fountain—a literal water source flowing from beneath the temple (as the prophet described a few verses later in 14:8)—is metaphorical of the spiritual restoration that Yahshua will provide for the whole earth, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading throughout the planet. **“‘It shall be in that day,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land. It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, “You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of Yahweh.” And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies....”** *Gee, that’s pretty harsh*, you’re probably thinking. Yes, it is, but Israel will by now realize that *not* being harsh with false prophets is how they got themselves in trouble in the first place. Now that they’re back, they’ll stop at nothing to stay in fellowship with Yahweh—just as He commanded back in Deuteronomy 18:20.

During the Millennium, no one will “prophecy” in the name of Yahweh, for Yahweh—in His human manifestation of King Yahshua—will be there among them, ready to call them liars. **“And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive. But he will say, ‘I am no prophet, I am a farmer; for a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.’ And one will say to him, ‘What are these wounds between your arms?’ Then he will answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’”** (Zechariah 13:1-6) Zack pictures false prophets the way he knew them—wearing rough John-the-Baptist garb and bearing the marks of self mutilation (cf. I Kings 18:28). False prophets these days are more likely to wear expensive Italian suits and ride in chauffeured limousines. But in the Millennium, those tempted to fleece the sheep in the name of God will think twice.

I don’t know about the rest of the world, but in Israel, it will be impossible to fool the faithful anyway, for **“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ says Yahweh: ‘I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, “Know Yahweh,” for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”** (Hebrews 8:10-12, cf. Jeremiah 31:33-34) It is one thing to know *about* someone. It is something else entirely to *know* them. Israel will have a personal, intimate relationship with Yahshua their King, because He will dwell among them. They will have no more need for rabbis, theologians, or books like this one. They will no longer see “through a glass, darkly” but will have the Truth living with them.

Yahshua spoke often of the “kingdom of God,” or the “kingdom of heaven,” terms that are apparently used interchangeably. For all practical purposes, this kingdom began at Yahshua’s birth in Bethlehem on the Feast of Tabernacles, 2 B.C. The shepherds who heard the good news of His birth were told that He was the Messiah—the promised heir to the throne of David, and a bit later the wise men asked Herod, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” As His public ministry began, **“Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’”** (Mark 1:14-15) At its heart this gospel, this good news, was that He Himself was the Messiah—the Anointed King. Christ confirmed this kingly status during His trial before Pontius Pilate. And as for the timing, we are given this clue: **“For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than**

he.” (Luke 7:28) John was the last of the Old Testament prophets—and in a way, the greatest of them, for he was given the privilege of announcing the coming of the Messiah. But John wasn’t actually a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, for he was murdered before King Yahshua took the throne by accepting the cross. Thus the least of us who gratefully live our lives in the shadow of the resurrection can consider ourselves “greater,” that is, more privileged, than John himself.

For those who have made Yahshua King over their lives in this age then, the kingdom of God is already in full swing. As real as it is to us however, we must admit that it is a kingdom in exile—our King is not physically present with us (in the sense of being seated on an earthly throne), and we ourselves feel like pilgrims in a land that is not our home.

That will change when the Kingdom of God moves into phase two at the beginning of the Millennium. For a thousand years, King Yahshua will rule the earth from His throne in Jerusalem—assisted by those who took part in the “first resurrection,” Old Testament and Church-age believers and Tribulation martyrs, all of whom are by this time clothed in their immortal resurrected bodies. The mortals over whom they will reign are the Millennial patriarchs and matriarchs (the “sheep” of Matthew 25) and their descendants—who will eventually number in the billions.

Here’s the rub: all who “enter the kingdom” must do so as mortals, for the faith required to make the choice to love Yahweh is a component of our mortality—immortals no longer need faith, for they will “know as they are known.” (cf. I Corinthians 13:12) Thus once phase two is over, no one will remain who has not made his or her choice either to love Yahweh or reject Him. As Paul put it, **“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”** (Acts 17:30-31) The teachings of Yahshua concerning the kingdom must be applied in practice before the close of the Millennium or not at all.

The ramifications of these teachings, however, will last throughout eternity—phase three of the kingdom of God. It therefore behooves us to pay careful attention to Yahshua’s teachings on the matter. We shouldn’t be too surprised to find that much of what He said defined who will enter the kingdom of heaven and who would not. The criteria must have been a bit shocking to his immediate first-century audience. The first surprise was that being a physical descendant of Abraham had nothing to do with one’s entrance or position in the kingdom: **“I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matthew 8:11-12) The Jews

considered themselves the “sons of the kingdom” by virtue of their family heritage. But Yahshua was proclaiming that an individual’s faith, not genetic serendipity, was what made him a citizen of the kingdom of God. Further, there were to be negative consequences for failing to make the faith-inspired choice to enter the kingdom. In the end, there were only two places, the kingdom of heaven and elsewhere.

Nor was there any correlation between one’s temporal circumstances and their status in the kingdom. **“Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible....’”** The disciples were of the mindset that if a man was rich, Yahweh must have blessed him—hence he was favored by God and would surely have a prominent role in the kingdom of heaven. On the contrary, Yahshua observed that more often than not, a rich man’s wealth is an impediment to faith, not the result of it. The accumulation of wealth can, in this sinful world, result just as easily from greed and aggression as it can from God’s blessings upon our labors. As He pointed out, one cannot serve two masters. The illustration of the camel going through the eye of a needle (Greek *raphis*, a sewing needle) gets to the heart of the matter. The Aramaic word Yahshua probably used, *gamla*, can mean either camel or rope (since ropes were made from camels’ hair). Either way, the point is *not* (as is often taught) that the camel must be unloaded—the wealth put down—before one can enter; rather, the point is the utter impossibility of man entering the kingdom of heaven through his own efforts. No matter how hard he tries, he can’t work his way in, and no matter how rich he is, he can’t buy his way in. Only Yahweh can provide access to Yahweh.

Peter, who clearly didn’t get it (yet), was laboring under a works-equals-salvation mentality. Yahshua gently corrected him, shifting his perception to a works-equals-rewards scenario. **“Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.’”** (Matthew 19:23-30, cf. Mark 10:23-31, Luke 18:24-30) Bringing the conversation back around to his original point, Yahshua reiterated that one’s status in this world—rich or poor, powerful or insignificant, successful or struggling—has absolutely nothing to do with his position in the kingdom of heaven. In fact, in many cases, the roles would be reversed—adversity can build character.

By the way, note that Yahshua has confirmed here the doctrine of a pre-millennial rapture. He knew the apostles would all have died many centuries *before* He returned to “sit on the throne of His glory,” going so far as to tell Peter *how* he would die. And yet he promised them positions of honor in His kingdom. That requires “regeneration,” the process Paul described in I Corinthians 15 whereby our corrupt mortal bodies are to be exchanged for incorruptible immortal bodies. Yahshua has left the Amillennialists no wiggle room whatsoever.

Still trying to shake his disciples out of their works-based mindset, Yahshua told them this parable: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”** So far, everything makes sense. The laborers agreed to work a full day for a workingman’s normal day’s wage, one denarius. **“And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive....”** At various times throughout the day, the master hired more workers. The picture is one of joining Yahshua’s service—entering his kingdom—at different stages of life. Some of us enter the kingdom as mere children, spending many years thereafter in God’s vineyard; others (like the repentant thief on the cross) make the choice to follow Yahshua very late in their lives—too late to “accomplish” anything for God.

“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.” (Matthew 20:1-16) No matter how late it was when the workers entered the vineyard, they all received the same wages. In the same way, those who enter the kingdom of heaven late in life receive the same salvation as those who came in earlier. That’s grace. Nobody gets more grace than anybody else, because our works have nothing to do with our salvation. Nor can we logically be jealous of those who waited until the

eleventh hour to apply for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Life without Christ is no picnic, no matter what the beer commercials say.

What does that last enigmatic phrase— **“Many are called but few are chosen”**—mean? “Called” is the Greek word *kletos*, meaning “invited.” Interestingly, it is part of the word we use to describe the Holy Spirit—*parakletos*—an intercessor, consoler, advocate, or comforter—one who is called upon, invited, to aid or plead the case of another. Citizens of the kingdom of Heaven call upon the Holy Spirit who lives within them, the same Holy Spirit who called or invited them into the kingdom in the first place. Sadly, though, not all who are called will accept the invitation. Thus they are not “chosen” (Greek *eklektos*) or “picked out” by God. Remember, the choice is *our* prerogative: Yahweh will not choose us if we do not wish to be chosen.

Using the vineyard again as a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven, Yahshua endeavored to teach the chief priests and elders the error of their ways: **“What do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went.”** That’s repentance. **“Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.”** That’s hypocrisy. **“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, ‘The first.’”** Obviously. **“Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John [the Baptist] came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.’”** (Matthew 21:28-32) The Jewish elders no doubt thought that their exalted position in the hierarchy of Israel’s religious establishment would qualify them for similar honor in the kingdom of heaven. Yahweh pointedly informed them that they hadn’t even *entered* the kingdom—and never would if they didn’t repent like the tax collectors and prostitutes had when they’d heard John’s message. The parable points out the fallacy of religious pretension. It is worse than pointless—it’s counterproductive—to say you’re doing God’s will if you’re merely being religious. Don’t deceive yourself. He’s not stupid. He knows the difference.

By the way, Yahshua wasn’t advocating the path of reformed hookers and ex-government-sponsored thieves as the ideal way to enter the kingdom of heaven. His point was the necessity of repentance—of facing up to our guilt and turning away from it. But knowing that the consequences of our sins would remain to plague us even after we repented from them, He wished to spare us. Yes, you could get the questionable tattoo, repent, and have it removed, but it would be far less painful to simply avoid getting the tattoo in the first place. We are all sinners, but the less we have to repent from, the better it is for us. **“The disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little**

child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.’ (Matthew 18:1-5) And again, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” (Mark 10:14-15)

It’s not that little children are sinless—as a father, I can assure you that they are not. It’s their reliance on the relationship they have with their parents that Yahshua was telling us to emulate. Kids trust their moms and dads; they rely on them, communicate with them, center their world around them, seek to please them—in short, they love them, unconditionally, even irrationally sometimes. So when Yahshua says that we are to be “converted and become as little children,” He’s saying that we need to have the same kind of close relationship with our Heavenly Father that a three- or four-year-old (ideally) has with his daddy. Little kids don’t want to be independent; they want to be like their folks. They don’t want to impress their parents; they want to please them. They don’t work on that crayon drawing in order to gain favor with mom and dad; they do it as a natural outpouring of their love. And when their folks get angry with them, they don’t rationalize and they don’t fight back—they just crumble. That’s why “Jesus called them to Him and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’” (Luke 18:16-17)

We’re getting the picture that the citizenship requirements for the kingdom of heaven are not particularly intuitive. Where we would naturally think, based upon our earthbound observations, that the intelligent, powerful, beautiful, wealthy, and hard working would have the inside track, we learn from Yahshua that it’s not like that at all. He’s looking for the trusting, loving, loyal, dependent—even helpless—soul. We are *children* of God. There’s nothing a little kid can do to earn his food—he must simply accept it from the parents who love him.

Nor is Yahshua particularly interested in quantity—in huge numbers of “converts.” True, God does not *want* anyone to perish in his sins, but He is not willing to compromise His standards of holiness in order to populate the kingdom with people who don’t really have any desire to be there. “One said to Him, ‘Lord, are there few who are saved?’ And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able....’” Buried within the man’s question was the idea, “Precisely how hard am I going to have to work to make the cut?” Yahshua didn’t bother answering directly but, as usual, cut right to the chase: you can’t get into the kingdom of heaven by working for it. Consequently, all works-based religions are blind alleys (and all religions, by the

way, *are* works-based—real Christianity is not a religion). Contrary to popular theology, there are not “many paths to God.” There is only one: Yahshua. He is the narrow gate because He alone provides the portal through which sinful man can approach a Holy God.

One way or another, there will come for every man a time when his choices are set in stone. If he has chosen not to walk through the narrow gate, he will one day find that gate closed forever. **“When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’”** There has been no lack of opportunity to accept God’s grace. Through the Church, the scriptures, and the Spirit of God, the world has been rubbing shoulders with Yahshua for the last two millennia (and even when the Church has fallen down on the job and suppressed the scriptures, Yahweh has made His glory known through the magnificence of His creation). **“But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’”** No matter how many “works” we did, the only thing that counts in the end is whether or not Yahweh “knows us,” for if He doesn’t, all our works, however altruistic they might have seemed, are nothing but iniquity, filth, sin. **“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you [Jews] see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They [i.e., the gentiles] will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”** (Luke 13:23-30) This last few verses bring out an important point. Those locked out of the kingdom will be perfectly aware of its existence and of who lives there. Lost spirits will *know* what they’re missing—hence the remorseful “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Yahshua’s story about a guy who owed ten thousand talents reinforces the concept of grace. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents....”** It’s judgment day, and this poor fellow is in so deep it’s ridiculous (just like you and me). A talent was a weight of a precious metal; estimates range from 75 to 90 pounds. Thus a talent of gold at today’s prices (let’s round it off to \$400 per ounce) would be worth (at the more conservative 75-pound figure) about \$480,000. So this guy owed roughly 4.8 *billion* dollars.

“But as he was not able to pay (What was your first clue, Sherlock?), his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt....” We’re talkin’ Grace here, with a capital G. The servant’s plea was ludicrous, not to mention impossible—the rough equivalent of you or me telling Yahweh, “Bail me out, Lord, and I won’t do anything wrong for the rest of my life.” The debt we owe is so large (even if it’s only one little sin), we could never reasonably hope to make a dent in it, nor could we transform ourselves into sinless creatures for ten minutes, let alone the rest of our lives. But the Master, in His compassion, offers to cancel the debt—the whole 4.8 billion bucks worth. That’s not all there is to it, though. In the parable, it’s real money (as opposed to Federal Reserve funny money). The real cost has to be borne by *somebody*, and that somebody is the Master Himself. Remarkably, He’s willing to pay it, but there’s a catch, sort of. The servant has to accept it.

“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii....” To put this in perspective, a talent is worth 6,000 denarii. A denarius in turn comes out to about \$80 in today’s money—a typical unskilled workingman’s daily wage at eight or ten bucks an hour. This guy, then, owed the first servant about what the typical American owes on his credit card—a significant amount, but not out of reach. **“And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’”** These are the very same words that had elicited mercy from the Master. **“And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”** (Matthew 18:23-35) To my mind, it wasn’t just the servant’s unmerciful spirit that got him back in trouble with the Master. It was the fact that he was still trying to pay off the debt on his own. *Hey, a hundred denarii here and a hundred there can really start to add up.* He hadn’t accepted the grace that had been offered to him; he was still trying to work his way back into favor after the debt had been forgiven—paid for in full by the Master’s personal sacrifice. The wicked servant was saying, in effect, “Your sacrifice is of no value to me—my works ought to be sufficient.” No, they’re not.

Notice, by the way, that when the Master first demanded payment, the servant was only going to be sold to someone else—he was going to lose his freedom,

family, and possessions. But after he had rejected the Masters magnanimous gift, he was sent off to be *tortured* until he could do the impossible. Is that significant? You tell me.

Don't misunderstand. There's nothing wrong with doing good works. But outside of the will of God, they are, at best, their own reward. Yahshua said, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** (Matthew 7:21-23) Even heavy-duty industrial-strength good works like prophesying in God's name, exorcising demons, and performing miracles will be considered "lawlessness" on the day of judgment if the one doing the works has no relationship with Yahweh. Good works are to be done *because* we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven; they are of no use whatsoever in achieving that status. Illegal aliens are not commended for obeying the traffic laws. In a sense, driving under the speed limit or stopping at red lights is *still* illegal for them.

I think we can safely say that Yahshua has by this time clearly defined the criteria for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Neither money nor effort nor position nor lineage have anything to do with it. The only thing that will avail is our acceptance of the grace of God. "**The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" (Romans 6:23) But there's more to the kingdom than the front door. He also had a few things to say about the kingdom's growth and development, some of which are not what we might expect.

For example, let's revisit the parable of the wheat and the tares (i.e., weeds that look like wheat), for it has a direct bearing on the subject at hand—the wrapping up of the final loose end: mortal man's time upon the earth. Matthew records the parable in one place and Yahshua's explanation a few verses later; I'd like to blend them together, putting Christ's definitions in parentheses. "**The kingdom of heaven is like a man (the Son of Man—Yahshua) who sowed good seed (the sons of the kingdom) in his field (the world); but while men slept, his enemy (the devil) came and sowed tares (the sons of the wicked one) among the wheat (the sons of the kingdom) and went his way...."** At first glance, everybody in the world looks pretty much alike—we're all sinners. Some have been saved by grace, however, while others are counting on other means (religion, temporal riches, *denial*) to attain their conception of the kingdom of heaven. They may look like "wheat" kernels but they're actually weed seeds. By the way, notice that Satan was only able to pull this off because "men" (that's us) were asleep. We need to wake up, watch and pray.

“But when the grain (the sons of the kingdom) had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares (the sons of the wicked one) also appeared.” There comes a point in time when our beliefs mature and we can be identified by the fruit we bear—or don’t bear. **“So the servants of the owner (the Son of Man) came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed (the sons of the kingdom) in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy (the devil) has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares (the sons of the wicked one) you also uproot the wheat (the sons of the kingdom) with them. Let both grow together until the harvest (the end of the age)....”** Did you ever find yourself wishing that God would come down and wipe out all the evil in the world—just wipe the slate clean? Not a Noah’s-flood-style cataclysm, you understand, just removal of everything that didn’t mesh with your “Christian” world view. I suppose He could, but you’d be in deep trouble if He did. The company you work for would fold, either because most of the employees were gone or most of its clients were. But you couldn’t get to work anyway, because the fuel your car runs on depends on “evil” people at some stage to make it from the ground to your gas tank. That farmer who grows the lettuce in your salad? He’s history, as is the truck driver who would have brought it to the market that isn’t open any more. You get the picture. Yahweh can’t delete the evil from the world without causing serious problems for his own people. And His love precludes Him from “rushing to judgment” before everyone has had ample opportunity to make a well reasoned choice to either love Him or not. So He lets the “sons of the kingdom” and the “sons of the wicked one” grow side by side today, and they will continue to do so until the rapture.

Is the rapture, then, what Yahshua was referring to when He spoke of “the harvest?” I don’t think so. Note carefully the order Yahshua specifies here: **“And at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers (the angels), ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn....”** At the time of the rapture, the wheat is taken *first* and the tares are left—the opposite of the order of events in the parable. There is obviously going to be one fulfillment of this prophecy in the separation of the sheep and goats at the beginning of the Millennium. But the “wheat” consists of more than just the Old Testament saints, the Church, and the Tribulation believers. It is defined as “the sons of the kingdom,” and thus includes the Millennial saints as well. The ultimate harvest—the end of the age—is therefore the final judgment God has scheduled for the conclusion of the Millennium (something we’ll cover a bit later in this chapter).

Yahshua concludes by confirming the bad news—and the good news: **“Therefore as the tares (the sons of the wicked one) are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the**

righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43) The weeds (those who are offensive and lawless) will be removed from the kingdom and burned. This must refer to phase two of the kingdom of God—the Millennium—first because we’ve seen that it’s the wheat, not the weeds, that will be taken out at the end of the Church age, and second, because (as we shall see) *only* wheat will be left on earth at the end of the thousand-year reign of Yahshua. As far as I can tell, we’ll never really “shine forth as the sun” as long as we live in these cursed mortal bodies; I believe (SF2) we’re being given our first glimpse of heaven here. The “kingdom of their father” is specifically phase three, when all of God’s children will have received their immortal resurrection bodies.

Mark records more of Yahshua’s teaching on the way the kingdom of heaven would grow. **“And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head....”**” To look at a seed, you would never guess that putting it in the earth would enable it to grow into a plant. A wheat kernel doesn’t seem to resemble the plant that will grow from it, nor does a stout oak tree bear any obvious similarity to the acorn from which it sprouted. And yet there is a relationship—at the molecular level. A plant’s DNA determines that a kernel of wheat won’t grow into a peach tree, nor will an acorn develop into a corn stalk. In the same way, the kingdom of heaven derives its “DNA” directly from Yahshua. We may not look much like Him while we’re still mere seedlings, but time will reveal just who’s spiritual DNA flows within us. I’ll admit, in the Church age, selective breeding has produced many rather odd looking variations, ranging from the tangy Pentecostal breed of “wheat” to the somewhat more bland Greek Orthodox variety. The breeds are so diverse, in fact, that if you didn’t know, you might think they were different kinds of plants. But there’s one way to know for sure: look at the fruit they bear. In every case, you can take the grain they produce, grind it up in the mill of life, and make bread out of it that will nourish the world. But—and this is very important—if there is no grain when the plant is mature, then it’s not really wheat, but a look-alike weed.

Yahshua’s simile wasn’t quite done. **“But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come....”** The wheat doesn’t just stand there in the field indefinitely. When it’s mature, it’s harvested. The kingdom of heaven is no different. Yes, our mortal bodies are planted in the earth; they sprout, grow, and mature. But at the end of the age, we will be harvested—and changed into something infinitely better.

“Then He said, ‘To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than

all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.”

(Mark 4:26-32) The kingdom of God would begin as a tiny seed: a handful of Christ’s followers, powerless, discouraged, and fearful. But with God’s DNA—the Holy Spirit—coursing through their veins, it has grown into a surprisingly large “tree,” (as it’s called in the parallel passage in Matthew 13) with many branches reaching toward heaven. Note that it’s the mustard *plant* that’s the metaphor for the kingdom. The birds who are taking shelter there are not “in the kingdom” except by proximity; they’re mere opportunists, hanging around the mustard bush for what they can get out of it.

Stated another way, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

(Matthew 13:47-50) Like the wheat and the weeds, and like the mustard plant and the birds, we see the fishermen gathering all “kinds” of fish in the same net. (The word “kind” is actually the Greek *genos*, denoting family, race, birth—the distinction here is between Yahweh’s “fish” and somebody else’s.) At the final sorting: the “good” fish will be “gathered,” (a picture of the rapture and subsequent harvests) and the “bad,” inedible fish will be thrown away. As usual, the theme is separation: the righteous from the evil, the fruitful from the barren, the producer from the parasite. Yahweh said to “be holy, for I am holy.” That’s all holiness is: separation from the world, being set apart for God. You can’t keep a foot in both places forever.

The reason Yahshua had to describe the kingdom of God through a series of parables is that it defies direct comparison with any earthly institution. It’s not, strictly speaking, an organization, club, political entity, or even a religion. It can’t be seen, visited, taxed, assisted, or conquered. It’s like a family in that you can’t join it—you have to be born into it. But it’s a family that you can *choose* to be born into. As Yahshua put it to Nicodemus, **“Unless one is born again (literally: from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Unless one is born of water (physical birth) and the Spirit (spiritual re-birth in Yahweh’s Spirit), he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** (John 3:3, 5-6) Unfortunately, if it is possible to be “born from above,” it is also possible to be “born from below,” re-born into the spirit and family of Satan—but like God’s family, you must choose to belong to the devil: he cannot force anyone to align themselves with him.

The kingdom of God has a King, of course, but His is a dynasty of One: the King is eternal. In short, the kingdom of heaven is a relationship unique in our

experience—a relationship between two fundamentally different types of beings, an infinite Creator, and a finite creature whom He made for this specific purpose. We'll never really get a handle on this relationship, the kingdom of God, until we begin to understand the nature of God Himself—and more importantly, how He's different from us.

We understand “finite,” of course, because that's what we are. “Infinite,” though, is merely a word we use for our own convenience; it has no meaning we can fully comprehend. It's not just being “more,” like taking a straight line from one end of the universe to the other and then imagining a line even longer than that. In fact, there is evidence that in the three dimensions of our existence, Yahweh is *not* “infinite.” Before you pick up rocks to stone me, consider this: Why did David, in agony over his sins, plead with Yahweh not to take his Holy Spirit away from him? And why did Yahshua promise to *send* the Holy Spirit to live within His followers? If God were infinite in our three dimensions, then there would logically be no place where He could *not* be. The Holy Spirit would have to be *everywhere* whether he wanted to be there or not—including within unbelievers. Or how about this? If you define “hell,” as a place where God chooses not to go, how is that possible if He is infinite—everywhere? Deal with it: Yahweh exercises volition over His own attributes.

Complicating matters is this enigmatic snippet from Luke's gospel. **“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’”** (Luke 17:20-21) The kingdom of God was *within* the Pharisees? I don't think so, although the Greek word *entos* can mean within or inside. It can also mean “among” or “in the midst of”—and Yahshua was indeed standing there among them. This leads me to the conclusion that Yahshua *Himself* is the kingdom of God—the very personification of the relationship between infinite God and finite man.

Clearly, though, we're missing something when we confine ourselves to our own world when trying to comprehend our Creator. We exist in three dimensions (length, breadth, and depth) and can understand a fourth, time. Angelic beings apparently exist in all four of these dimensions, though like us, they are finite in each of them. Yahweh, on the other hand, has even more dimensions—perhaps many more—and is clearly infinite in time and perhaps in other dimensions as well. That, of course, is why He chose to use prophecy to convey and confirm his intentions for the course of human history. But it's also why we have such a hard time understanding His greatness.

A friend of mine uses a provocative metaphor to illustrate what we're up against: think of God as Walt Disney, and think of humanity as Mickey Mouse. Walt exists in three dimensions, but Mickey exists in only two. Walt, being

Mickey's creator, knows all about him—as a matter of fact, he built a little of his own personality into his cartoon mouse (something he chose not to do with other creations like Donald Duck or Pluto). But does Mickey understand Walt? Can Mickey communicate with him, relate to him, love him? Only insofar as Walt himself enables it. Mickey doesn't have enough dimensions to comprehend his creator on his own.

In a similar way, we can't fully appreciate our Creator in our mortal three-dimensional bodies. And it should drive us to our knees when we realize that Yahshua's sacrifice wasn't confined to the cross. That was merely the grand finale. He voluntarily relinquished *dimensions* in order to come and save us—it's as if Walt Disney *became* Mickey Mouse in order to rescue Donald and Pluto. We sometimes illustrate Christ's advent with the fable of a man becoming an ant so he could save the ant colony, but it's worse than that: the man would have to become a *picture* of an ant. By the same token, however, I have reason to believe that we will *gain* dimensions (at least one—time) when we are given our immortal resurrection bodies. And that in turn will allow us to comprehend more clearly who Yahweh is and what He has done for us.

At the end of the chapter 25, we discussed the seemingly odd fact that Satan won't be destroyed at the beginning of the Millennium, but will rather be merely locked up for a thousand years. We may safely presume that his demons are incarcerated as well, for Paul tells us, "**Having disarmed principalities and powers, [Yahshua] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.**" (Colossians 2:15)

So as the Millennium draws to a close, we witness with a shudder what John records: "**Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea....**" Apparently, some people can't learn from books and teachers; they have to get their knowledge the hard way—by bitter experience. It is quite reasonable to assume that by this time the world's population will have grown back to today's levels—pushing the seven billion mark. The population of earth consists of the repentant Jews, the "sheep" who entered the Millennium at the close of the Tribulation, and their descendants. Bear in mind that all of these offspring have the same fallen, sinful nature that plagues us today.

They have been living all their lives in a perfect society, free of war and crime, environmentally restored, and prosperous beyond the dreams of pre-

Tribulation man. And yet, when Satan is released, he will apparently have no problem deceiving many of them into thinking that Yahshua is somehow treating them unfairly, being unduly harsh with the rebels who occasionally pop their heads up, or that He's otherwise unfit to be their King. They will have absolutely no frame of reference, of course, except for the horror stories that are told of what life was like before he returned (or as Satan will put it, *took over*). These disgruntled citizens (with a little satanic suggestion) will find it intolerable that their leaders have to bow to the King and honor his people, the Jews, showing their faces every year at the Feast of Tabernacles. *And what is it with those animal sacrifices they've got going on in the Jerusalem temple? They're barbaric and old fashioned, blah, blah, blah.* They'll swallow Satan's bait, hook, line, and sinker. After all, he's the one who, upon finding himself the best angel in the universe, decided that wasn't good enough—He wanted to be like God. He's the king of discontent.

Why does John call them Gog and Magog? Are the rebels Scythian hordes? Are they Muslims, like the last time? No, but they'll follow the same incredibly stupid game plan. **"They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city."** That's right: they're going after the Jews! **"And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them...."** Can you believe it? It's the un-battle of Magog all over again. The only positive element I see here is that Israel, for once in their lives, are not part of this rebellion. This time, they will be impervious to the devil's trickery. If I were a betting man, I'd wager that not a single Jew will be deceived (SF3).

So what's going to happen to Satan this time? Another thousand-year stint in the hoosegow? Nope. He's a three-time loser. **"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."** (Revelation 20:7-10) That's a life sentence, if you can call it livin'. No more possibility of parole.

Seven hundred years before Christ's first advent, Isaiah saw it unfolding: **"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!..."** This is the only time in the entire Bible where Satan's name is mentioned. The Hebrew word (if we take Strong's acceptance of the Masoretic text's vowel points as reliable) is *heyel*, meaning "the morning star." But the word from which this is derived—and perhaps the actual word itself, since the consonants are identical, is *halal*: to be clear, to shine, which has a second, less flattering connotation as well. It can mean "to make a show, to boast," hence, to be "clamorously foolish," to "stultify." Webster defines *stultify*: "To make or cause to appear foolish or ridiculous; to reduce to foolishness or absurdity; to render wholly futile or ineffectual." The next time you're tempted to give Satan any credit or respect, remember that. By

the way, *halal* in Arabic means “moon god,” a proper definition of Allah. If you didn’t know before, now you do: Allah and Satan are one.

“How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God [a euphemism for angels]; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High....’” Sorry, big guy. You’re a couple of dimensions short of deity. This is like Goofy announcing that he’s going to draw Walt from now on—it’s absurd.

Isaiah had his number. **“Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol [the abode of the dead], to the lowest depths of the Pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?’”** (Isaiah 14:12-17) We’re going to be discussing Sheol, Hades, Hell, and the lake of fire later. But for now, notice that Satan and the men he deceived into doing his bidding (“those who see you”) are all going to be together in the “Pit,” but “his prisoners” seem to be in a different category. Satan—he who seemed so formidable when he roamed the earth “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”—will be an object of scorn and derision in this brave new underworld. Forget the odd idea that hell is Satan’s realm—he’s merely one of the inmates, toothless and impotent.

The demons, and no doubt Satan as well, know that their judgment is coming, and they have some idea as to when. This is illustrated by an encounter that took place near the Sea of Galilee. **“When [Yahshua] had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, ‘What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?’”** (Matthew 8:28-29) The demons inhabiting these poor guys knew Yahshua, and they knew He would “torment” them at some future point. But they were pretty sure they had some time left before their ultimate judgment day (and Yahshua did not disagree). We aren’t specifically told, but it’s reasonable to assume that this judgment day occurs at the same time as Satan’s, which we just saw: **“The devil...was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...and will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”** (Revelation 20:10)

Some demons are loose in the world today, but some really nasty ones, as we have seen, have been locked up in the abyss (where Satan cooled his heels for a thousand years) awaiting their doom. **“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”** (Jude 6) Peter concurs: **“God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [tartaros: the deepest part of sheol or hades]**

and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.” (II Peter 2:4)
This “great day” of judgment is scheduled for the end of the Millennium.

The timing—the idea that the final judgment of demons and men all takes place at the same time—is confirmed by Isaiah: **“It shall come to pass in that day that Yahweh will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth.”** The demons are not all earthbound, as men are. They will be retrieved from their places “on high” (wherever that is) as the kings of the earth are brought together for punishment. But they’ll all share the same fate: **“They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison. After many days they will be punished....”** Yahweh is letting His prophet know that evil will be allowed to run rampant upon the earth for “many days”—but not forever.

Isaiah’s parting shot is fascinating: **“Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.”** (Isaiah 24:21-23) Virtually every “religion” on earth from the dawn of time forward has incorporated some permutation of either sun or moon worship as a central pillar. We have stumbled across this phenomenon dozens of times in previous chapters, from the Babylonians’ Tammuz to the Romans’ Mithras to the Muslims’ Allah. The source of all of this nonsense is Satan himself: *heylel (or halal) ben shachar*, “Lucifer, son of the morning.” The morning star, of course, is the sun—the giver of light and life (or at least that’s what Satan would like you to believe). Satan doesn’t much care whether you worship him directly as the sun god, venerate his reflection as the moon god, or worship a vague “spirit of enlightenment,” just so long as he can prevent you from focusing on the One True God, Yahweh. Here we see both the sun and moon disqualified as “god material,” out-shined by the source of all light sources, Yahweh Himself.

And what of those discontented Millennial souls who took Satan’s advice to go public with their heartfelt hatred of Yahshua? Paul once wrote, **“The Lord Jesus Christ...will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.”** (II Timothy 4:1) That time has come. The last mortal has made his choice, demonstrating by his actions whom he believes and trusts—Yahweh or Satan. John saw it all: **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God....”** If you’ll recall, a bit earlier (in verse 5) we read that “the rest of the dead (that is, other than the Millennial Martyrs who were being resurrected there at the end of the Tribulation) did not live again until the

thousand years—the Millennial reign of Yahshua—were finished.” Now that the thousand years are in the history books, we see these people “living again” so that they might experience judgment.

“And books were opened.” This is the record of their words and deeds—their works. **“And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life.”** (Revelation 20:11-12) This isn’t the first time the “Book of Life” is seen in scripture. As far back as the Exodus, it was understood that there was a heavenly “book” in which was recorded the names of God’s people. **“Then Moses returned to Yahweh and said, ‘Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will, forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.’ And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.’”** (Exodus 32:31-33) Significantly, the names of people aren’t added to the book when they’re saved, but rather they’re deleted—“blotted out”—when they choose *not* to follow Yahweh—or worse, choose to align themselves with Satan. Everybody starts out written in the Book of Life—you have to “ask” to be removed from the list. And as Moses (and later Paul, cf. Romans 9:3) found out, you can’t relinquish your place in the Book in the hope of saving others—it doesn’t work that way.

David’s prayer was that his adversaries (and prophetically, Messiah’s—cf. verse 21) would not enter the kingdom of heaven: **“Add iniquity to their iniquity, and let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”** (Psalm 69:28) Daniel foresaw temporal deliverance for the faithful: **“At that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.”** (Daniel 12:1) On the other hand, Yahweh put things in perspective when He taught that citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is far more significant than anything that transpires here on earth. **“Behold, I give you [disciples] the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”** (Luke 10:19-20)

The final mention of the Book of Life occurs in the last verse of the next-to-last chapter in the Bible. **“There shall by no means enter [the New Jerusalem] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”** (Revelation 21:27) We’ll discuss the New Jerusalem later. Notice that the Lamb’s Book of Life is the final arbiter of holiness—no one whose holiness isn’t certified by his name’s entry will be admitted to where God is. The book separates the saved from the lost; it lists those whose sins are covered by the blood of Yahshua, but those who have rejected God’s grace have been “blotted out.”

Thus we read, **“And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”** (Revelation 20:12) These “books,” as we saw earlier, are not the Lamb’s Book of Life, but rather the comprehensive record of the words and deeds of every person who ever lived. “Religious” people the world over are going to get exactly what they always said they wanted: to be judged on their works. What’s happening here is that the Book of Life is used as a reference guide: if their names aren’t found in that volume, the Judge has no alternative but to base His decision upon what the defendants did in their lives. It’s the only evidence available.

In our imaginations, we may be picturing a typical courtroom. The Judge knows going in that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”** (Romans 3:23) but He’s the epitome of fairness—He’s still willing to look at all the evidence, perform all the forensic tests, and listen to all the witnesses. The problem for most defendants is that they’re expecting to be evaluated on a sliding scale—the old shades-of-gray mentality. They think the “better” people should get to slide in, and the “worse” people (of whom there surely must be quite a few) won’t make the cut. *But it doesn’t work like that*, the bailiff informs them. *Because God is holy, those who want to live in His presence must be holy as well—darkness and light cannot coexist. But because nobody is holy, God provided the covering of Yahshua’s sacrifice for them—it’s like a garment the saints put on, making their sins invisible to God. (He’s not stupid, of course. He knows how it works. But it’s Yahweh’s prerogative to choose to blind Himself to the sins of His children.) Anyway, all they had to do is accept it, put it on. Did you?*

No, the defendant bristles. *The garment didn’t fit my lifestyle very well. It wasn’t in fashion, and I didn’t much care for the color, either. White is so boring. Besides, why would I want to hang out with a bunch of people wearing these ridiculous outfits? I like mine much better.*

Yes, the Judge sighs. *It’s very stylish. But I can still see your sins showing through.*

There’s far more going on than this, but I’ll have to save it for the next chapter, where I’ll try to get to the bottom of precisely what’s being decided here at the GWT. I can solemnly assure you that this kind of light banter *won’t* be taking place—not after we just read, **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.”** When the books of a man’s deeds are opened and he’s faced with Yahweh’s holy presence, no defense will sound plausible.

Who, exactly, is in view here, standing before the Great White Throne? Perhaps we should start by defining who is *not* here: **“There is...no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”** (Romans 8:1) Paul goes on to explain, **“Who shall bring a charge against God’s**

elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” (Romans 8:33-34) If God has justified us, He isn’t about to turn around and condemn us. It doesn’t matter if Satan himself is standing before God’s throne breathing accusations and slander; Yahshua is there too, defending us. As Paul told the believers at Thessalonica, “**Jesus...delivers us from the wrath to come.**” (I Thessalonians 1:10)

Peter draws the same contrast Paul did: “**The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.**” (II Peter 2:9) The word for “temptations” is the Greek *peirasmos*, which means a “trial or proving” as much as it does an enticement to sin. Thus though the NKJV rendering is no doubt true, I would submit that Peter is actually talking about God’s willingness to “deliver the godly out of *trials*”—the same trials the “unjust” will face at the Great White Throne. Paul concurs: “**What have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside [the Church]? But those who are outside God judges.**” (I Corinthians 5:12-13) His point is that while the body of Christ is to constantly inspect itself in the interest of staying healthy and free from heresy and corruption, that is not our job in the case of nonbelievers. Yahweh Himself will take care of that—here at the Great White Throne.

Job put it this way: “**For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath.**” (Job 21:30) James was somewhat less succinct in his scathing rebuke of those whose god is their wealth: “**Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [i.e., armies]. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.**” (James 5:1-6) The lessons apply to everyone, not just the rich. The things we put ahead of God will be a “witness against us” at the final judgment.

Who, then, will stand before the Great White Throne? Dead people: “**The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.**” (Revelation 20:13) Unbelieving dead of every age—right up through the last “battle”—will face the GWT together. Everyone who is there is said to be evaluated on the basis of their *works*, which leads us to the grim conclusion that none of their names are to be found in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Since our timeline has reached the end of the Millennium, this might be a good time to do a complete breakdown of the disposition of all of the world's populations throughout history, both the saved and the lost:

- (1) Those who had died in Yahshua during, and perhaps prior to, the Church age will be caught up immediately before the living saints at the rapture of the Church. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17; I Corinthians 15:51-52) Having been given immortal, "spiritual" bodies, they (we) will all return to the earth with Christ at His second coming and reign with Him during the Millennium. The saved of the Old Testament period—those who, like Abraham and Job, trusted Yahweh for future redemption through His Messiah—may be included with this group. It's also possible that they were "harvested" at Yahshua's resurrection (see Matthew 27:52-53).
- (2) Those saved after the rapture but who subsequently die before the end of the Tribulation are also given (at Yahshua's final coming) immortal bodies like those in group (1) and will also reign with Christ during the Millennium. These two groups comprise the "first resurrection," and they're called "blessed and holy." (Revelation 20:4-6) An alternate scenario: some hold (though I do not—SF3) that those who become believers and die after the rapture—but are not specifically *beheaded* for their faith (since there are thousands of ways to die during the great unpleasantness, and they can't all be called martyrdom)—are not included in the group singled out in Revelation 20:4. If they're not, they will remain in their graves until the Great White Throne, at which time their names will be found in the Lamb's Book of Life. They would thus be declared "not guilty" by virtue of the blood of Christ and be given their immortal bodies at this time. The eternal outlook is identical either way.
- (3) Those saved after the rapture who are still alive at the close of the Tribulation will enter the Millennium in their mortal bodies, becoming the patriarchs and matriarchs of the restored world. Their eternal destinies are secure, even though they are still mortals (not unlike believers today, except for the fact that they will *experientially* know their status). They will possibly (SF3) live through the entire length of the Millennium (but if not, see #4).
- (4) *If* saints die during the Millennium (presumably of extreme old age—they're still mortal, after all), their names would be found in the Lamb's Book of Life at the Great White Throne judgment (cf. Revelation 20:15), assuring their entrance into the everlasting life that awaits all of the redeemed. It's important to understand that no believer will be *judged* at the Great White Throne: their sins are already paid for. But mortals cannot

enter the eternal state: the timing of the GWT and the final harvest of mortal saints must necessarily be very close together.

- (5) The last group of the saved are those believers among the mortal descendants of group (3) born during the Millennium. Still alive at the end of the thousand years, they will receive their immortal bodies at the close of the Millennium just as the Church-age Christians did at the rapture, moving seamlessly into a glorious eternity. Although it's never specifically named as such, I would call this the "second resurrection," in contrast to the event that occurred at the end of the Tribulation, called the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5-6. The believers of group (4), if there are any, will share in this second resurrection.
- (6) John reported at the beginning of the Millennium, **"The rest of the dead [i.e., the unsaved] did not live again until the thousand years were finished."** (Revelation 20:5) This includes the lost from the Old Testament period, the Church age, and through the end of the Tribulation. These are all consigned to Hades (I'll explain what this is later). The unbelievers who die during the Millennium will also share that fate, being held in Hades until they are called to face the Great White Throne judgment. There may be some surprises in store for us as to precisely who is included here, but I must save the subject for another chapter.
- (7) The only possible group left are unbelieving mortals still alive at the end of the Millennium. It is quite possible, however (SF5), that they will *all* be killed in Magog II, the final un-battle. Thus, just as at the beginning of the Millennium, the only mortals on the planet at the very end are believers—i.e., group (5). If I'm wrong, they will be judged in their mortal bodies at the GWT. Their eternal outlook is the same either way. We aren't told which event will come first, the Great White Throne or the second resurrection. They seem to be more or less simultaneous. At any rate, it seems highly unlikely that any living mortal, saved or lost, will stand before the Judge who sits upon the Great White Throne, because from its description, no one could survive the encounter: even **"the earth and the heaven fled away"** from before His face. If any rebels survive Magog II, they'll find the reprieve short-lived.

Although Daniel was not given any insight as to the timing of these events, he did report the same basic facts: **"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."** (Daniel 12:2-3) Note that he equates the "wise" with those who turn others to righteousness. They will shine "like the stars

forever and ever,” while their opposite number—those who led others away from God’s truth—will suffer shame and eternal contempt. We are made in the image of God, and as such, we are designed to live forever. Where and with whom is our choice to make.

“Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:14-15) That’s it. No more waiting, no more maximum-security prisons for errant spirits. It is, as C.S. Lewis called it, “The Great Divorce,” the final separation of good from evil, of right from wrong, of saved from lost—of those who chose to have a personal relationship with their Creator from those who did not. It is called the “second death” because it follows physical death, making permanent the process of separation that the first death merely initiated. Yahweh is holy, and all that He allows to inhabit His universe will be holy as well. All that is unholy must be consigned to a separate place, a place where He chooses not to go, and there’s only one such venue in all of creation: the lake of fire.

Paul puts the moment into perspective for us: **“Each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits [at His resurrection]; afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming [at the rapture]. Then comes the end [okay, he skipped over a few steps here], when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power....”** This admittedly sounds puzzling, because Yahshua and Yahweh are literally One. I think what Paul is getting at is that once Yahshua has defeated the last enemy—death, the curse itself—there will be no more reason to manifest Himself separately from “the Father,” as He did during His first-century advent and will again during the Millennium. There will no longer be any reason for Yahshua to restrict Himself to the number of dimensions to which He was confined in His role as the Messiah. And as for us, once we are all given our sanctified, immortal, “spiritual” bodies, we will at last be able to commune with God *as Spirit* as naturally as we did when God appeared as the glorified Son of Man during the Millennium. As Paul concludes, **“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”** (I Corinthians 15:23-27; cf. Psalm 8:6)

I don’t exactly know how this will work, but death itself (along with the holding tank for the wicked dead, Hades) will be thrown into the lake of fire along with everything else unholy. So what *is* death, anyway? The Greek word used here is *thanatos*, defined in Thayer’s Lexicon as “the death of the body, i.e., that separation of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended.” The word is used in a wide variety of applications, including being personified, as Thayer says, as “a tyrant, subjugating men to his power and confining them in his dark domains.” The Greek word for “dead” used in Revelation 20:13—**“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in**

them”—is *nekros*, meaning “one that has breathed his last, lifeless, deceased, departed, one whose soul is in Hades, one destitute of life, without life, inanimate, destitute of force or power, inactive, or inoperative.” (*Strong’s*) *Nekros* seems to focus on the lifelessness of the corpse, while *thanatos* stresses the separation of the soul from the body. Both words were used in reference to Yahshua’s death. Webster defines death as “the total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of an animal or plant.” That describes its effect, but doesn’t really say what it is.

Is death necessarily bad? Most people would automatically say it is, but think about it. That air you’re breathing: did Yahweh create it by snapping His fingers and saying “Let there be air” (which was certainly His prerogative) or did He employ millions of successive generations of photosynthetic algae during day number three of His creation week? The scientific evidence seems to solidly support the latter scenario. But if the former is true, why on earth did He create the algae? That soil you grow your tomatoes in: did God rough up the surface of “the third rock from the sun” the way a big league pitcher roughs up the surface of a baseball—or did He allow millions of generations of bacteria followed by successively higher forms of plant life (introduced in turn by the Divine Hand at the proper moment in Earth’s history) to prepare the ground for our use? That limestone façade on the county courthouse—or for that matter, the bedrock that Jerusalem itself is built upon (and built of): how did Yahweh make that stuff? It’s composed of calcium carbonate from the shells of trillions of aquatic animals—most of whom lived *and died* during the fifth “day” of creation. And consider the natural course of what happens when something *does* die. The corpse (whether animal or man) is immediately set upon by a succession of scavengers—microbes, egg-laying insects, and sometimes the larger four-footed variety—that quickly and efficiently work on the carcass until there’s nothing left but a skeleton. Now consider this: if Yahweh hadn’t planned for physical death to be a part of the natural order of things, why did he create the clean-up crew?

Clearly, we need to rethink the whole concept of death. If Yahweh used it on such a grand scale to prepare the earth for our use (as seems to be the case from a scientific point of view), why does He Himself characterize it as a bad thing? What did He mean when He told Adam, “**Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die**”? (Genesis 2:17) Adam did *not* die that day, not physically. His body lived on for 930 years! Notwithstanding the scriptural premise that one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day—making the prophecy true from God’s point of view—Yahweh obviously had some other definition of death in mind. And ponder this: how do you suppose Yahweh expected Adam to know what he meant about “death” if he had never seen anything die?

I'm going to go way out on a limb here and state my hypothesis, since we're only given hints and clues in scripture. Feel free to disagree with me if you've got a better theory. I believe (SF7) that Adam *had* seen physical death (at least of mosquitoes, geraniums and such like), and Yahweh was using that experience to teach him a higher truth. The death that Adam was promised if he ate the forbidden fruit would do the same thing to his *spirit* that he had witnessed happening to the pretty but temporary flowers that he had seen wilt and die, or the mosquito that he himself had swatted.

To get to the bottom of this, we're going to have to look closely at what the scriptures say about bodies, souls, and spirits—the three “dimensions” that define our human existence. We know what a body looks like, of course, and we're familiar with the difference between a dead one and a live one. What makes a body “alive” is called a *nephesh*, which could be best described as a living soul—our consciousness. In the creation account, God said, **“Let the earth bring forth the living creature [*nephesh*] according to its kind, cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind.”** (Genesis 1:24) The account goes on to describe all kinds of animals as having—or *being*—*nephesh*: living souls. The word for “beast” here is misleading: it's *chayah*, simply meaning “alive.” In addition to being descriptive of any living thing in God's creation, *nephesh* also means the inner self, what we'd call “the heart,” that is, the essence of life, including thinking, feeling, willing, and desiring. It's the animate part of any living being; it exists until death. Thus the phrase *mapach nephesh* in Job 11:20 means: dying, the exhaling gasp of the soul from the body—the beginning of the state of no longer being alive.

Souls are not eternal. They exist only as long as they are associated with their bodies. When Adam swatted the mosquito, the death he witnessed was a discontinuity—a separation of its soul—the *nephesh*—from its body. (I don't know what you'd call it in a plant, but there is apparently a “life force” that is either there or is not, defining whether the plant is alive or dead. There is an infinite difference between an organic substance and a living plant, and no amount of undirected energy input can get you from point A to point B.) I have a feeling that Adam understood that all the living things around him were vulnerable to this kind of death. He also understood that the kind of life that was within him was fundamentally different from that of the animals over which he was given dominion.

God had **“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”** (Genesis 2:7) This “breath of life” wasn't merely the kind of soul (*nephesh*) that animated the mosquito or the life force that inspired the geranium—it was the very essence of Yahweh. The word for “breath” here is the Hebrew *neshamah*. In addition to being the normal word for respiration,

neshamah is also a figurative extension of breath: it represents the innermost part of a person that can respond to God. It is something that animals do not possess, indeed, something that fundamentally separates man from the animal kingdom. There's no single English word that captures what this is—probably because most of us don't even realize it exists. "Conscience" comes close, but it's more than that. Dogs have been known to display guilt, hiding and cringing from their masters even before their misdeeds have been discovered. (Cats, on the other hand, are either totally amoral or they just don't care what we think.) The *neshamah* is a sort of God-consciousness—the proverbial "God-shaped vacuum" that lies within man that can't be filled with anything except Yahweh. It is the thing within us that allows us—that *requires* us—to be born anew, born spiritually from above, as Yahshua explained to Nicodemus in John 3.

But the *neshamah* is not in itself the spirit. There is a different Hebrew word for that: *ruach*. Based on the concept of wind (as *neshamah* is of breath) one's *ruach* is what makes him "alive" in the eternal sense. So just as our souls make our bodies alive, our spirits (provided we have been spiritually reborn) make our souls alive. The body is temporal and temporary; it's not built to last forever. A spirit, on the other hand, is eternal: once it exists, it cannot die. For a soul to live beyond the mortal body, it must be made alive—"quicken," in King James parlance—by its spirit. And the vehicle by which the spirit inhabits the human soul is the *neshamah*—the "breath of God."

Job's wise young friend Elihu helps us get it straight by using both terms in the same sentence: **"But there is a spirit [*ruach*] in man, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives him understanding."** (Job 32:8) The ultimate source of eternal life, then, is Yahweh's Spirit. Real understanding is only possible if and when the Spirit of Yahweh has been "breathed" into him—the function of the *neshamah*. But make no mistake, the *neshamah* enables Yahweh's Spirit to indwell us on an invitation-only basis.

Another passage using both words together sheds further light on the relationship between them. **"If He [Yahweh] should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit [*ruach*] and His breath [*neshamah*], all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust."** (Job 34:14-15) Without God's Spirit, mortal man is nothing but a body with a *nephesh*—a soul—which makes him a mere animal. But the *neshamah*, the "breath of God," sets us apart from the animal world, enabling us to receive His *Ruach*, His Spirit. And that is what makes eternal life possible, for spirits, unlike souls, live forever.

As an interesting sidebar, both Hebrew words, *ruach* and *neshamah*, are feminine nouns. Our spiritual life is in fact the particular gift of our Heavenly Mother, God's *Ruach Qodesh*, the Holy Spirit, bestowed upon us by our Heavenly Father, Yahweh. Now you know what God was really talking about

when He wrote with His own finger in stone, **“Honor [or glorify—literally: make weighty] your Father and your Mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.”** (Exodus 20:12) Yahweh designed the human family—father, mother, and child—to be a reflection of the structure of the very godhead. Yahweh, the “Father,” represents power, authority, the creative source. His *Ruach Qodesh* (the Holy Spirit), the “Mother,” represents God’s nurturing, protective side—the source of life. And the “Son,” Yahshua, symbolizes the One who represents His Father before the world—and especially before His adversaries. As Solomon says of a man’s children, **“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth.... They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with [Hebrew *dabar*: to declare, converse, command, promise, warn, or threaten] their enemies in the gate.”** (Psalm 127:4-5) God isn’t merely the Father—“He” is the whole family, so to speak. He is not “three persons” like the hymn says, but a complex unity. When Moses reports, **“Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one,”** (Deuteronomy 6:4) the word he used for “one” is *’echad*, meaning “that which is united as one in contrast to separate parts.” (From: *The Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*.)

Anyway, back to our subject. There is one really scary facet to the concept of eternal spiritual life: Yahweh is not the only spirit to whom we may be “reborn.” Satan and his demons are also spirits, and it is possible to be born anew in *their* spirit as well. Note: though it should be obvious, it is physically impossible to have two mothers. One cannot be born of both Yahweh’s *Ruach Qodesh* and Satan’s spirit. You can be born of One or the other, but not of both. And as long as we’re being obvious, let me point out that it’s also possible not to have been born at all. These two facts have eternal ramifications we need to ponder—and we shall in our next chapter.

Was Adam “mortal” on the day he was created? I don’t know. A God powerful enough to form him from the dust of the ground (dust that He Himself had created) would have had no problem maintaining him in a state of perpetual perfection—suspending entropy, as it were. However, the death of which Yahweh warned Adam wasn’t merely physical; it was spiritual. If he ate the fruit of the no-no tree, the unique divine spirit that Yahweh had breathed into him would immediately die (in the sense of being separated from his soul), even if his body—still alive by virtue of its *nephesh*—continued to walk around like some animal that had never been endowed with a spirit in the first place. The gradual breakdown of Adam’s body—now mortal—would be allowed to take its course; entropy would no longer be held at bay by the divine hand, for Adam had by his disobedience said, “Go away, God.”

His spirit—that unique spark which Yahweh had breathed into him—was now dead. It had experienced “the total and permanent cessation of all its vital

functions,” and hence could no longer commune with God as it once had. But Yahweh provided a way to reanimate the spirit he had breathed into Adam and Eve. Spiritually, if they wanted to live again, Adam and Eve would have to be *born* again. Though they didn’t understand what was going on, Yahweh had purposed to become a man Himself—imbued with the living Spirit of God as Adam had once been. And as a man, He would live a perfect, sinless life—at the conclusion of which He would offer Himself up as a sacrifice, paying the penalty for the transgression of Adam and Eve and all their descendants after them. As a prophetic demonstration of what He would accomplish some 4,000 years later, Yahweh killed (by separating its body from its soul) an innocent animal—a picture of the promised Messiah—and made clothing from its skin for His fallen companions. This covering is a prototype for the **“fine linen, clean and bright...the righteous acts of the saints”** in which the Bride of Christ was arrayed in Revelation 19:8.

At this point, Adam and Eve had a choice to make, the same choice all of us have. They *knew* they were guilty. They had already tried to “work” their way back to God by sewing fig leaves together in an unsuccessful attempt to hide their sin—not from each other, but from God. Yahweh, of course, had seen right through it. Now, they could either accept the new clothes and put on the imputed righteousness provided through the sacrifice, or refuse the gift, opting to walk around in their shame. They chose wisely. Not all of their children did.

So what is God talking about when He tells us that death will be destroyed? I believe He is referring specifically to spiritual death, the separation of the spirit from the soul. Once the last human has chosen to love Yahweh or reject Him, once all of redeemed mankind has been “clothed” in their immortal resurrection bodies, the very concept of their separation from God will be rendered impossible: Yahweh will have destroyed death. **“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity [for death] is hidden from My eyes.”** (Hosea 13:14)

Yahshua put it in even clearer terms for us, just before he demonstrated His power over the grave by raising a man back to life who had been dead for four days. In John 11:25-26 He told the man’s sister, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”**