

Chapter 30

Heaven, Hell, and Eternity

The popular conception of what the afterlife holds for us—whether positive or negative—has been thoroughly muddled by time and tradition. Now that we have established the scriptural principle that there are three possible eternal destinations for human souls, not just two, we need to more clearly define our terminology. Several words are used in scripture to describe places to which we might go after we die, where fallen angels will be consigned, or where the saved and the lost will spend their respective eternities. Folks tend to call everything good about the afterlife “heaven” and everything bad “hell,” but the practice of using all these various terms interchangeably has, as we have seen, invariably to error and confusion.

Let’s begin with “heaven.” In the Old Testament, the words used almost exclusively are the Hebrew *shameh*, it’s plural *shamayim* (“the heavens”), or the Chaldean equivalent *shamayin*. Strong’s tells us it is derived from an unused root meaning “to be lofty. It is the sky (as aloft; the dual [or plural] perhaps alluding to the visible arch in which the clouds move, as well as to the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve).” Thus *shameh* means the air or atmosphere and anything above that: properly, the “heights above” or the “upper regions.” By extension, the word can even be used of one who studies them: an astrologer.

Twice, both in the Psalms, the word *shachaq* is used, meaning “a powder; by analogy, a thin vapor; by extension, the firmament—a cloud, small dust, heaven, or sky.” I imagine this is the word they would have used for smog. And once (in the Psalms again) the word *galgal* is used. This too is weather related, meaning wheel, or by analogy, a whirlwind. Thus “heaven” basically meant the sky, where rain and snow came from (e.g. Genesis 8:2, Job 38:29), where the stars were (e.g. Genesis 22:17), where the angels stayed (e.g. Nehemiah 9:6); and where Yahweh lived (e.g. I Kings 8:30, Psalm 11:4). The big surprise is that in the Old Testament, heaven is *never* spoken of as a place where people go after they die.

And what about the New Testament? The basic Greek word for heaven is *ouranos*, meaning, according to Thayer, “the vaulted expanse of the sky with all the things visible in it,” including the aerial heavens or sky and the sidereal or starry heavens; and “the region above the sidereal heavens, the seat of an order of things eternal and consummately perfect, where God and the other heavenly beings dwell.” This definition lines up perfectly with the Hebrew *shameh*. Note that it’s not a technically “religious” term; it’s an ordinary Koine Greek word, with all the baggage that half a millennium of Greek culture would have added to it.

The Rabbis imagined a seven-leveled heaven, though the idea is not given credence in scripture. (Paul described being caught up to the “third heaven,” but this is not the third of the rabbinical seven but rather a common description of the abode of God—the first heaven being the atmosphere of our planet and the second being the starry sky.) Two other Greek words are translated “heaven,” but they just stress one part of it over the other—they don’t expand the meaning beyond *ouranos*, which is actually a component of both words. *Mesouranema* merely means “mid-sky,” in other words, “up in the air.” *Epouranious* means “above the sky—celestial,” used in such phrases as “heavenly Father.”

Okay, are you sitting down? In the New Testament as in the Old, “heaven” is never explicitly spoken of as a place in which believers permanently dwell after death. I know that will come as a shock to many, but before you pick up rocks to stone me (again), let me explain. The problem is not with Yahweh’s promises or with the genuineness of our salvation—it’s with our sloppy use of Biblical terminology. Notwithstanding passages that speak of great rewards in “heaven” (e.g. Matthew 5:12), treasures being laid up there (e.g. Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21) or the hope of “**an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven,**” (I Peter 1:4) the only time in scripture that believers *themselves* are specifically spoken of as being “in heaven” is during the Tribulation. During that time the great martyred multitude waits before the throne of God for their company to be completed (cf. Revelation 6:10, 11:12). They are later seen—still in heaven—rejoicing as the Messiah assumes the throne of planet earth (Revelation 19).

Of course, until the Millennium begins, the twenty-four elders, symbolically representing the saved of all previous ages, will be there as well. So yes, if a believer dies today, his or her soul, having been made alive by Yahweh’s Spirit, will go to heaven, the abode of God. But as we shall see, the *eternal* disposition of all these souls is not a mere continuation of the heavenly status quo. Yahweh has something else—something very special—planned. You can call it heaven if you want. God calls it “the New Jerusalem.”

But I’m getting ahead of myself. We were discussing the Biblical terminology of the afterlife. Another word we use too loosely is “paradise.” A term borrowed in both Hebrew (*pardes*) and Greek (*paradeisos*) from the Persians (*pairidaeza*), it simply meant “a walled garden.” In the Old Testament it invariably means just that (e.g., the Septuagint uses *paradeisos* to describe the Garden of Eden). Paradise doesn’t take on any eschatological ramifications until we get to the New Testament. But the study of how it’s used there can shed some valuable light on the afterlife.

The word *paradeisos* is used only three times in the New Testament. The first is the familiar passage recording the exchange between Yahshua and the two

thieves being crucified beside Him. **“One of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”** (Luke 23:39-43) Was Yahshua on His way to heaven? Only by way of the tomb. As Paul reminds us, **“He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth.”** (Ephesians 4:9) He didn’t bodily ascend to heaven for several days. Thus paradise can only be logically identified with a place called “Abraham’s Bosom,” a division of sheol (the grave) housing the righteous dead, something we’ll discuss in detail a bit later.

The second use of the word “paradise” tells a different story. Paul was recounting his own near-death experience when he wrote, **“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.... He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”** (II Corinthians 12:2-4) He quite clearly identifies paradise not with sheol but with the third heaven, i.e., the abode of God.

The definition is complicated further by Yahshua’s use of the word in his letter to the church at Ephesus recorded in Revelation: **“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”** (Revelation 2:7) This tree of life is described in the last chapter of Revelation as being found not in the present heaven but in the New Jerusalem! Focusing strictly on its geography, paradise was once part of sheol, was moved to the third heaven (i.e., God’s abode) at the resurrection of Yahshua (along with the righteous dead who inhabited it)—and will be moved *again* when Yahshua reveals the New Jerusalem—the “place” He talked about going to prepare for us in John 14:2. But I think the key to understanding paradise is latent in its basic meaning—it’s a walled garden, a place of shelter, protection, and God’s provision. In paradise, no harm can come to you, all your needs are met, and you get to “walk with Yahweh in the cool (literally: Spirit—*Ruach*) of the day.” (Genesis 3:8)

If the Old Testament’s heaven had nothing to do with the afterlife, then what happened to everybody who died? The place conceived to be the destination of good and bad alike was called *sheol*. The word is used 65 times in the Old Testament, rendered in the KJV as “hell” in 31 instances, as “the grave” in 31,

and as “the pit” in 3. Strong’s merely defines sheol as “the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat) including its accessories and inmates.” This makes the “hell” translation presumptive, if not flat-out wrong. The root word upon which sheol is based, *sa’al*, means to inquire or ask, which at the very least suggests an expectation of some sort of life after one enters the grave.

In the Old Testament, hell (in the normally understood sense of the word—an eternal, fiery destination for wicked men and fallen angels) is a concept couched in language easily construed as mere metaphorical hyperbole. More often, the wicked, as we have seen, were warned of destruction and dissipation, not eternal torment. In concrete terms, pre-Christian-era man knew of nothing beyond sheol for the lost, and had only a vague conception of life after death for the righteous.

Job, by all accounts a righteous man, at first painted a gloomy picture of the place he expected to soon inhabit: **“Are not my days few? Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort before I go to the place from which I shall not return, to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land as dark as darkness itself, as the shadow of death, without any order, where even the light is like darkness.”** (Job 10:20-22) In his distress, he is pessimistically anticipating his egress through door number two. A bit later, however, we see him coming out of his depression, expressing instead the hope that for him there is something beyond the grave—that Yahweh would remember him in sheol, call to him—and *change* him: **“Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You.”** (Job 14:13-15)

By chapter 19, Job has emerged from his blue funk. Though his circumstances haven’t changed, his long-range outlook is now totally optimistic: **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me.”** (Job 19:25-27) That’s bodily resurrection—precisely the same thing Paul described in I Corinthians 15. (We discussed it in detail, if you’ll recall, back in chapter 8). Job’s observation is worth noting: if you have no living Redeemer—One who has paid your debt—you will not see God.

To what can we attribute the change in Job’s demeanor? It came about as he remembered the character of his God—a God whose power reached even into the grave. **“The dead tremble, those under the waters and those inhabiting them. Sheol is naked before Him, and Destruction has no covering.”** (Job 26:5-6) David concurs: **“Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in sheol, behold, You are there.”** (Psalm 139:7-8) Notice something important here. Hell, in the ultimate sense of the word, is a

place where the lost are separated from Yahweh—that’s what makes it *hell*. But this is not the case with sheol, at least not all of it. Hell and sheol therefore cannot be the same thing.

Sheol is pictured as being the destiny of all men, the righteous and wicked alike. In a remarkable Biblical ghost story, Israel’s first king, having lost his spiritual bearings, visits his local gypsy fortune teller, the witch of Endor, hoping to get some last-minute advice from the recently deceased Samuel. The prophet’s ghost shows up (much to the witch’s surprise) and announces to Saul, **“Yahweh will deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me [i.e., dead—in sheol].”** (I Samuel 28:19) Samuel was probably thinking, *There goes the neighborhood.*

The clearest picture we have of the inner workings of sheol comes from a story Yahshua told. **“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.”** Although rich men aren’t necessarily all scoundrels and poor men aren’t necessarily all saints, that was the case here. **“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom....”** Hades is the Greek word invariably used to translate the Hebrew/Aramaic word Yahshua undoubtedly used, sheol. Notice, however, that for the first time in scripture, we see a division in the underworld. Dives, as he has come to be known (pronounced Die-vees, Latin for “rich man”) is “in torments,” while Lazarus is getting ministered to by angels and comforted by Abraham. They’re both in sheol, and both conscious of their surroundings, but in separate compartments. And Lazarus is clearly enjoying this more than Dives is.

“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented....” This isn’t saying that everyone’s circumstances will be automatically reversed in the afterlife, good for evil and vice versa, but it implies that there are a range of rewards or punishments in store for both the saved and the lost, based on the correlation between what we were given to work with in life and what we did with it. (I’ll have more to say about that in a moment.) This meshes perfectly with Christ’s parables about the servants and talents.

Bear in mind that this is sheol—the grave—not heaven, hell, the lake of fire, the abyss, tartaros, or some other description of the afterlife. The final Great White Throne judgment has not yet taken place, and yet both the rich man and

Lazarus have *already* been categorized as either saved or lost, redeemed or reprobate. Having the punishment commence before the trial rubs most Americans the wrong way, but remember, the Judge in this case is omniscient. The Great White Throne judgment, as we have seen, is not to decide one's guilt or innocence but to separate the dead from the damned. At this point, all three categories of expired mortals are being held in sheol.

Today there is a raging controversy as to whether or not the unsaved dead receive divine punishment before Judgment Day. To my mind, Yahshua's illustration makes the answer crystal clear: they do—or at least, they can. Because Dives is said to be suffering “torment,” he has clearly been identified as destined for “door number three,” in other words, his *neshama* is indwelled with a demonic spirit, one that cannot die. So he knows exactly what he's faced with—an eternity separated from Yahweh. No wonder he's in torment. The “flame” that torments him is not literal fire, but rather that which refines and separates the good from the evil: Dives knows he's been found to be impure dross, a fact that wasn't so evident in the living cauldron of mortal humanity.

Those who deny that men in sheol can, before the final judgment, suffer punishment are blissfully unaware that the Great White Throne does not establish guilt or innocence, but merely parts the lifeless from the living dead. They invariably say, “It's *only* a parable—one designed to teach a moral lesson, not establish doctrine.” They say, “The story was directed at the Pharisees—Jesus was merely accommodating their erroneous ideas about consciousness after death.” Actually, this story is not called a parable in scripture, although it could well be one. Yahshua, however, *never* accommodated anyone's false doctrine (e.g. Matthew 22:29). And remember, He's the only man in history (outside of Samuel's ghost) who was in a position to state with certainty what sheol was really like.

I can't countenance the idea that He would intentionally mislead us on such an important topic—especially since it would have been a simple matter to tell the story without resorting to detailed “lies” about the nature of sheol. If it weren't true, why would he go out of his way to say things like, **“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.”** Then [the rich man] said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:19-31) Dives' five brothers were “twofers”—they had embraced neither Yahweh's Spirit nor Satan's. (Note that there were six brothers

all together—they represent humanity.) The rich man is not so much pleading that someone go back and make his brothers love Yahweh, but rather to warn them not to align themselves with Satan’s spirit, as he had. Dives would have been better off dead—annihilated, dissipated—than to have walked through door number three, and he knew it.

There’s your moral lesson. Don’t ally yourself with Satan. The Jewish leaders—those who hadn’t yet irrevocably fallen (see Acts 15:5)—were being called to repentance when one (not-so-coincidentally named Lazarus) actually did come back from the dead to warn them. Instead of repenting, however, their politically correct solution to the “Lazarus problem” was to try to kill him *permanently* so he couldn’t confuse people with facts (cf. John 12:10-11). Then they succeeded in getting the Romans to crucify the very One who’d brought him back to life. Brilliant.

“Abraham’s bosom,” where Lazarus (the one in Yahshua’s story) went after death, is a perfect match for the “paradise” of which Yahshua spoke to the repentant thief on the cross. From its description, we can safely conclude that it is the region of sheol reserved for those who trust in Yahweh’s grace to save them. The Greek word used for the rich man’s destination was *hades*, defined by Strong’s as “properly, unseen—the place (or state) of departed souls—the grave.” It is used eleven times in the New Testament, and the Authorized Version erroneously translates it ten of those times as “hell,” including the Luke 16 passage we just looked at. The one exception is I Corinthians 15:55, where it’s called “the grave.” I suppose considering what poor Dives was going through, calling *hades* “hell” is an understandable mistake. But technically, they’re not the same thing. In light of the information in Yahshua’s story, we can confidently describe the abode of the dead—at least until His resurrection—as sheol, a place divided into two sections: paradise (a.k.a. Abraham’s Bosom) for the saved, and *hades* for the lost.

In a way, the New Testament use of the word *hades* seems odd. Its meaning sprang entirely from the context of pagan thought. In Greek mythology, Hades (a.k.a. Aides or Aidoneus) was the name of the god of the underworld—the unseen. He was supposedly the son of Cronus and Rhea, and brother of Zeus and Poseidon—with whom he gambled for control of the heavens, the sea, and the infernal regions. Hades apparently lost, and thus his lair, the “house of Hades,” was described as a forbidding abode deep within the earth (or alternately, beyond the ocean in the far West—the region seen by the Greeks as the realm of darkness and death, just as the East is of light and life). In the oldest Greek tales, it was (like the Hebrew sheol) the home of all the dead, good and bad alike. Homer and later poets, however, contrasted *hades* with a rough equivalent of Paradise called Elysium, where “there falls not rain, nor hail, nor snow, but Oceanus breathes

ever with a West wind that sings softly from the sea, and gives fresh life to all men.” (The Odyssey, Book IV) The house of Hades, by contrast, was a place where the dead were but shadowy reflections of their former selves: “The goddess [Circe] answered, ‘Ulysses, noble son of Laertes, . . . there is another journey which you have to take before you can sail homewards. You must go to the house of Hades and of dread Proserpine to consult the ghost of the blind Theban prophet Teiresias whose reason is still unshaken. To him alone has Proserpine left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly.’” (The Odyssey, Book X)

Yahshua’s “Dives and Lazarus” story thus lines up sheol with the Greek concept of hades in some ways but not in others. Like Homer’s underworld, the abode of the dead is, according to Yahshua, split into separate areas for the saved and the damned. But as Yahshua described hades, the dead are conscious and in torment, not “ghosts flitting about aimlessly,” as Homer put it—a concept that fits neither the dead nor the damned.

The traditional Hebrew concept was not all that far removed from that of the Greeks. A treatise from Josephus sheds light on the first-century rabbinical view of hades, a view that again coincides with Yahshua’s description in some ways and disagrees in others. He writes, “Hades is . . . a subterraneous region, wherein the light of this world does not shine It cannot be but there must be in it perpetual darkness. This region is allotted as a place of custody for souls, ill which angels are appointed as guardians to them, who distribute to them temporary punishments, agreeable to every one’s behavior and manners.” Note that although Yahshua describes the rich man as being “in torments,” he says nothing about angels administering the punishment.

“In this region” Josephus continues, “there is a certain place set apart, as a lake of unquenchable fire, whereinto we suppose no one hath hitherto been cast; but it is prepared for a day afore-determined by God, in which one righteous sentence shall deservedly be passed upon all men” The rabbis saw the lake of fire as a feature of hades or sheol (cf. Isaiah 66:24). John’s vision, on the other hand, makes it clear that hades will eventually be cast *into* it (cf. Revelation 20:14), though as we learned in the previous chapter, the lake of fire is of necessity more a metaphorical description than a physical one. “The unjust . . . shall be adjudged to this everlasting punishment . . . while the just shall obtain an incorruptible and never-fading kingdom. These are now indeed confined in Hades, but not in the same place wherein the unjust are confined.” This lines up perfectly with Yahshua’s story about the rich man and Lazarus: there are (or were) two separate compartments in sheol/hades.

Josephus then describes the rabbinical view of paradise: “For there is one descent into this region, at whose gate we believe there stands an archangel with

an host; which gate when those pass through that are conducted down by the angels appointed over souls, they do not go the same way; but the just are guided to the right hand, and are led with hymns, sung by the angels appointed over that place, unto a region of light, in which the just have dwelt from the beginning of the world; not constrained by necessity, but ever enjoying the prospect of the good things they see, and rejoice in the expectation of those new enjoyments which will be peculiar to every one of them, and esteeming those things beyond what we have here; with whom there is no place of toil, no burning heat, no piercing cold, nor are any briars there; but the countenance of the just, which they see, always smiles on them, while they wait for that rest and eternal new life in heaven, which is to succeed this region. This place we call The Bosom of Abraham.” It is clear from Josephus, then, that Yahshua was using contemporary terminology when describing sheol/hades—He did not invent the phrase “Abraham’s bosom.” (Josephus lived a generation after Yahshua, but it’s clear that he didn’t get his material from the writings of the Apostles.)

Josephus’ description of hades (i.e., the bad side of town) is just as graphic (and just as long-winded). “But as to the unjust, they are dragged by force to the left hand by the angels allotted for punishment, no longer going with a good-will, but as prisoners driven by violence; to whom are sent the angels appointed over them to reproach them and threaten them with their terrible looks, and to thrust them still downwards. Now those angels that are set over these souls drag them into the neighborhood of hell itself; who, when they are hard by it, continually hear the noise of it, and do not stand clear of the hot vapor itself; but when they have a near view of this spectacle, as of a terrible and exceeding great prospect of fire, they are struck with a fearful expectation of a future judgment, and in effect punished thereby: and not only so, but where they see the place [or choir] of the fathers and of the just, even hereby are they punished; for a chasm deep and large is fixed between them; insomuch that a just man that hath compassion upon them cannot be admitted, nor can one that is unjust, if he were bold enough to attempt it, pass over it.” Thus we see that Yahshua’s concept of an impassible “great gulf fixed” between hades and paradise—a chasm that cannot be crossed but allows a view of the other side—is just as the rabbis of his day pictured it. Josephus’ depiction of the primary nature of the torments of hades—the knowledge of separation from the blessed and the anticipation of judgments yet to come—also lines up with Yahshua’s teachings. As for the lost souls being dragged off to hades by angels who “threaten them with their terrible looks,” it would appear that the rabbis’ imaginations were working overtime, though no one suggests that it would be a pleasant experience.

Of course, we need to remember that the damned denizens of hades are disembodied souls—they won’t receive their resurrection bodies until much later—at the end of the Millennium (cf. Revelation 20:5. The saints, in contrast,

will receive theirs on rapture day or at the beginning of the Millennium—see Revelation 20:4.) Therefore, the nature of these “torments” is a matter of speculation. What, precisely, does a disembodied soul feel? Remorse? Mental anguish? The “thirst” that Dives sought to quench could easily be a metaphor for the emptiness of soul that is part of being separated from God, just as the “flame” that tormented him could be a metaphor for divine judgment. Without a material body, physical pain isn’t possible. It’s a sure bet, however, that being alive in hades isn’t much fun.

Hades isn’t the only word translated “hell” in the KJV New Testament. Whereas hades and sheol are indicative of “the grave,” the interim abode of the dead, the word *geenna* (Gehenna or Ge-Hinnom) indicates a more permanent condition—hell itself. Significantly, of the twelve usages of the word in the New Testament, eleven are in quotations from Yahshua. Gehenna, as we have seen, is a name borrowed from the Valley of Hinnom, on the southern edge of old Jerusalem, a place where infant sacrifices to the Canaanite god Molech were once made. Specifically, the southeast end of the valley, where the horrific rites were performed, was called Tophet, or Topheth—the place of fire, so named because of the perpetual trash fires that burned there in later times.

One more word is translated “hell,” but it is used only once, in reference to the imprisonment of fallen angels. **“God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [*tartaros*] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”** (II Peter 2:4) *Tartaros* (or *tartarus*) is just another word from pagan Greek mythology that was pressed into service to communicate a Biblical truth. The Greeks envisioned it as being as far beneath earth as earth is beneath heaven. It was said that a bronze anvil thrown from heaven would take nine days to reach earth, and it would take that long again to fall from earth to *tartarus*. Basically, the idea here is *deep*. *Tartaros* is defined in Strong’s as the “deepest abyss of hades.” But it is presumptuous to geographically associate the abyss, where the most dangerous demons were held prisoner, with sheol or hades. The two places have entirely distinct functions.

Tartaros is apparently synonymous with the abyss (Greek: *abussos*) or bottomless pit mentioned in Revelation 9. It’s like the County lockup where criminal angels stay until their trial. After the judgment, however, they’ll be sent to the Federal pen—the lake of fire—hell—from which nothing is ever released. The fact is that Yahweh never intended for *men* to go there at all (no matter what the Calvinists say). Hell was created strictly for the angels who followed Satan in

his rebellion, as we saw when we studied the separation of the sheep and the goats at the end of the Tribulation: **“Then He will also say to those on the left hand [the goats], ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’**” (Matthew 25:41) In case you were wondering, the word “prepared” in the Greek is a participle—it should read “having been prepared.” It’s in the perfect tense—which means that Yahweh’s preparation of hell is an action that is complete but also has an ongoing resultant state of being. In other words, hell (i.e., the “everlasting fire”) exists today—it has already been prepared—even though no one, demonic or human, inhabits it yet. The word “fire” is the primitive Greek word *pur*, which ordinarily means “fire” in the literal sense. But it is also used symbolically. The *Complete Word Study Dictionary*, edited by Spiros Zodhiates, states: “Because fire [*pur*] is a frequent apocalyptic figure for divine judgment, one need not imagine that the flames spoken of in reference to hell are material. Undoubtedly fire signifies a horrible, painful and real judgment. Still, its symbolic usage in Scripture must be taken into account when interpreting these passages.”

If you’re like me, you’re probably curious as to how we got the word “hell” out of sheol, hades, Gehenna, tophet, or tartaros. We didn’t. The Scandinavian, or Norse, tribes of northwestern Europe had a death goddess (much like the Greeks’ Hades) whose name was Hel (Hellia in Germania). As in the Greek, the name of the goddess was eventually used to describe her domain as well. So when Christian missionaries brought their scriptures north, the word *infernus*—which had been used to translate the Greek Hades (itself just a rough equivalent for the Hebrew sheol) into Latin—was rendered Hel, or Hell. We got our generic English word for deity the same way: the Germanic gott, filtered through the Anglo-Saxon tongue, became “god.”

The place we normally think of as hell—the place “prepared for the devil and his angels” of which Yahshua spoke—isn’t actually designated by any of these epithets. It’s merely described in symbolic terms: in Revelation it’s called “the lake of fire.” We saw it (though not as a lake) in the warning of the angel to the Tribulation populace not to accept the mark of the Beast: **“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”** (Revelation 14:9-11) The passage describes the fate of a particular group of non-believers—those who overtly worshipped Satan and his Antichrist during the Tribulation. There’s no destruction or dissipation of souls here: these are all destined for what we’ve been calling door number three. Notice: (1) they are in a fiery torment—just like the rich man in

Yahshua's story; (2) the ordeal never ceases—it goes on without a break for all eternity; and (3) they are “before” [Greek: *enopion*] or “in the presence or sight of” both Yahshua and His angels—casting into doubt the idea that hell is “merely” a place devoid of the presence of Yahweh. God is Spirit, omnipotent and omniscient—it's not simply a case of being there or not being there. Clearly the Lamb and His angels are witnesses to God's wrath. It is left to our conjecture, however, whether that implies their presence or merely their knowledge of the administration of the “cup of His indignation.”

It bears mention that the Greeks, a few Jewish Rabbis, and even some of the early Christian patriarchs like Origen envisioned a temporary hell. For example, Socrates, according to Plato in the *Phaedo*, declared that minor sinners “are plunged into Tartarus, the pains of which they are compelled to undergo for a year, but at the end of the year the wave casts them forth.” Origen thought that even Satan could successfully repent and regain his original place, given enough time. Passages like the one above beg to differ. The Bible never even hints that hell's torments might be something less than permanent. In reference to the Revelation 14 passage at hand, R. C. H. Lenski pointed out that “The strongest expression for our ‘forever’ is *eis tous aionan ton aionon*, ‘for the eons of eons’; many aeons, each of vast duration, are multiplied by many more, which we imitate by ‘forever and ever.’ Human language is able to use only temporal terms to express what is altogether beyond time and timeless. The Greek takes its greatest term for time, the eon, pluralizes this, and then multiplies it by its own plural, even using articles which make these eons the definite ones.” If God had meant to convey something less than a permanent and unending hell, He couldn't have chosen more misleading words.

And what about torment? It has become fashionable to imagine a hell in which *no* lost souls will be punished (as scripture so clearly indicates) but rather are *all* to be annihilated—that a “merciful” God would never allow anyone to suffer for eternity. While this is true (as we saw in the previous chapter) for those lost souls who never aligned themselves with Satan's spirit, I must reiterate that Yahweh's mercy was provided *up front*. It's not His fault that some would reject that provision and spit on His sacrifice, choosing instead to be indwelt with the spirit of the adversary. John reports that the followers of the Antichrist “**shall be tormented with fire and brimstone.**” (Revelation 14:10) The word he uses for “tormented” is *basanizo*, which means torture, pain, toil, torment, or vexation. Thayer notes that the word is derived from the testing of metals (with a touchstone), hence “to question by applying torture.” This is not the word God would choose if the traitors enduring *basanizo* were to simply be annihilated. It implies consciousness, awareness, and anguish. Deal with it, world.

The lake of fire (as such) is most clearly delineated in Revelation 19 and 20: **“Then the beast [i.e., the Antichrist] was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.”** (Revelation 19:20) This could be taken to imply that the lake of fire is somewhere beneath the surface of the earth, for if the Antichrist and the false prophet are to be thrown *alive* into this place, there should logically be some physical connection, some portal, between the two worlds. On the other hand, Satan, a spiritual being, will be incarcerated in the same place: **“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 20:10) It’s pretty clear that no earthly, material prison could hold our Adversary. So perhaps the real explanation will turn out to be something that we mortals in our three-dimensional experience aren’t equipped to comprehend—like a “parallel universe,” or some similarly esoteric concept. I don’t know (and don’t look so smug: you don’t either). But wherever (and whatever) hell is, it’s a place or state where “they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” My advice is, don’t go there.

We have seen the Antichrist, his false prophet, the Tribulation rebels, and then Satan himself being thrown into the lake of fire. What about the rest of the unsaved, those from past ages? Immediately after the Great White Throne judgment, we’re told, **“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) Death (Greek: *thanatos*) is, according to Thayer, (1) “the death of the body, i.e., that separation of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended.” (2) Metaphorically, it can also mean, “the loss of that life which alone is worthy of the name, i.e., the misery of the soul arising from sin which begins on earth and increases after the death of the body,” or (3) the miserable state of the wicked dead in hell.” Take your pick. As we saw in the previous chapter, the lake of fire is apparently where the lost dead of door number two get sorted out from the lost damned of door number three. More significantly, the very possibility of human death is destroyed at this time, for hades—including its inmates—is sent to the lake of fire. The lost dead of door number two have been dissipated into nothingness, and the damned of door number three have been consigned to eternal torment. Together, these destinations are called the “second *thanatos*.” With the believers clothed in their immortal resurrection bodies and with no new souls being made through human procreation, physical death has become an obsolete concept.

Who, then, are to be cast into this lake of fire, this second death? The simple answer is: **“The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and**

brimstone, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8) In other words, **“anyone not found written in the Book of Life,”** as we saw earlier. That list is enough to give me pause, for if I’m honest with myself, I must admit that at one time or another, I have been many of those things, in thought if not in deed—which is enough to make me guilty. But (praise God) Yahweh sees none of it—my sins are covered by the sacrificial blood of Yahshua. My name, therefore, *will* be found in the Book of Life. To put the shoe on the other foot, John explains who will *not* experience this condemnation: it is he who reflects the love of Christ. **“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”** (I John 3:14-15)

John made it clear that people whose lives are *characterized* by their sinful lifestyles are in grave danger. Stated another way, **“Sodom and Gomorrah...are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”** (Jude 7) God’s mercy was extended to them, as it is to us, and they rejected it—becoming a byword, a proverb of the end to which our sins can lead us. But there are those who will find themselves worse off than Sodom in the end. Yahweh, being the epitome of fairness, takes into account the amount of “light” that has been shed upon a person or a people, and adjusts the punishment accordingly. The severity of judgment corresponds to the degree of enlightenment that was made available.

And how much more light could you get than to have Yahshua Himself, or his first disciples, teaching in your streets? To towns in Israel that heard His message and rejected Him anyway, He said, **“Know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day [i.e., judgment day] for Sodom than for that city.”** Then He gives some examples: **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades....”** He’s talking about the grave here, not hell (though that surely follows for the towns’ unbelieving inhabitants). The historical fact is that these towns that rejected Him dried up and blew away, awaiting the archeologist’s spade—unlike places like Nazareth and Bethany, which still survive to this day. There’s a lesson for America here. We who have been blessed with so much light have all too often, like spoiled children, turned our backs on the One from whom the blessings flow. Can God in all fairness ignore this? Or does He owe Capernaum an apology? **“He who hears you [disciples] hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”** (Luke 10:11-16, cf. Matthew 11:20-24)

In a similar vein, Yahshua contrasts the light shed by Jonah and Solomon on their audiences—and the subsequent reactions—to the intransigence of His

contemporaries. **“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed [one] greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed [one] greater than Solomon is here.”** (Matthew 12:41-42) Being a child of God is like being anybody’s child—either you are or you aren’t. But the severity of judgment for those who aren’t will be based upon the opportunities they had for enlightenment, or the lack of opportunity. The Jews of Yahshua’s day had been graced with a greater light than men like Jonah and Solomon could have possibly provided. Therefore they will be held all the more responsible for having failed to read the writing on the wall. As will we.

What did the citizens of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba do that the Jews as a whole did not? They repented and received Godly wisdom. The word for “repent” here (Greek: *metanoeo*) doesn’t mean regret (there’s another Greek word—*metamellomai*—also translated repent, for that). According to Thayer, *metanoeo* means “to change one’s mind,” particularly “for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.”

While we’re on the subject of differing degrees of punishment in hell, we should note whom Yahshua identified as the worst of all: religious people who use God’s grace as a scam: **“Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”** (Luke 20:46-47) In their pride and arrogance these “teachers of the Law” misapplied God’s truth, slanting it to benefit themselves and in the process giving the people who depended upon them for guidance a false impression of what Yahweh wanted from them. Jude called false teachers like this **“wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”** (Jude 13) Those who would presume to teach others about the word of God should do so with fear and reverence, for the Great Shepherd hates it when His sheep are led astray to be fleeced.

Yahshua, in his usual tolerant, non-confrontational manner, warned his listeners about leading God’s sheep astray: **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell [Gehenna], into the fire that shall never be quenched— where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’”** (Mark 9:42-44, cf. Matthew 5:29-30, Matthew 18:8-9) It was such an important concept, he repeated it—twice. At the end there, He was quoting from Isaiah: **“‘All flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says Yahweh. And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their**

worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” (Isaiah 66:23-24) Gee, I guess the folks who say that a loving, merciful God could not have a hell in His universe are mistaken. The truth is that His love and mercy are proven not by His refusal to punish those who align themselves against Him, but by making astonishing efforts to save them—and their victims—from their very wickedness. Not very politically correct, I’m afraid.

Much of our misunderstanding of the nature of hell stems from the old Zoroastrian horse manure about the innate balance between the forces of good and evil—something that is only an illusion precipitated by Yahweh’s insistence on our right to choose between them. This naturally leads to the error that Satan controls hell as God controls heaven. There is a popular misconception that hell’s tortures are administered by demons, typified in Gary Larson’s hilarious *Far Side* cartoons about hell. In one, the devil torments be-bop sax legend Charlie Parker by personally playing “elevator music” on the piano for him—forever tickling the ivories. (My personal *Far Side* favorite is the guy who arrives in hell, avails himself of the complementary beverage service, and remarks, “Wow, they’ve thought of everything—even the coffee’s cold.”) The truth is that Satan does not rule hell—he’s merely going to be one of the inmates, toothless and ineffectual.

Satan can’t consign anyone to hell, and Yahweh doesn’t want to. He **“is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”** (II Peter 3:9) In fact, the only way to get there is to choose to go, to ride Satan’s coattails, so to speak. As we saw, the place was neither designed nor intended for people, only fallen angels. Our sins—the results of our very nature—have separated us from Him, and only our unbelief, our failure to choose to accept his grace, condemns us to remain separated from Him. But there’s separation, and then there’s *separation*. In our natural state, we *are* separated from God, a condition that becomes permanent when we die. Death in this sense is indeed tragic, but it’s not nearly the catastrophe that choosing to follow Satan’s lies will precipitate. Yahshua said, **“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”** He doesn’t *have* to judge him, for he is “condemned already,” as it says in John 3:18. **“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.”** (John 12:44-48) To “abide in darkness” is the ultimate calamity.

Will God forgive us? Yes, we have only to ask. Of *any* sin? Yes. And no. Yahshua explains: **“Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”** (Matthew 12:31-32; cf. Luke 12:10) Mark adds, **“He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness,**

but is subject to eternal condemnation.” (Mark 3:29) That sounds bad. So it’s important that we understand precisely what the “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” is.

The context of the passage is the Pharisees’ claim that Yahshua could only cast out demons because he was operating in the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons—they were attributing the works of God to Satan. It’s easy to see how Yahweh would consider that blasphemy. But in the end, I think the principle applies to attributing the works of God to anything or anyone other than Himself—it’s the third commandment all over again. Thus the systematic worship of a false god (Tammuz, Zeus, Allah, or Shiva, for example) can be blasphemy against the Holy Spirit if the worshipper never repents—changes his mind. Attributing Yahweh’s magnificent creation to blind evolutionary chance is blasphemy as well—not to mention stupid. It’s interesting (and typical of God’s patience) that Yahshua recognizes that some will not immediately recognize the incarnation of deity in “the Son of Man” (Himself), and will in their ignorance speak words against Him. Paul is the perfect example of that. Our repentance will bring forgiveness of even that, as Paul’s subsequent career amply attests. But we can’t expect a holy God to eternally ignore our willful rebellion against Him—our blasphemy. As Yahshua put it in the same passage, **“He who is not with Me is against Me.”** (Matthew 12:30) If you’re worried about having inadvertently committed the unpardonable sin, you haven’t. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, in the end, is the conscious refusal to accept the grace the Spirit of Yahweh has freely offered to all men through Yahshua’s atoning sacrifice. The Spirit of God beckons. How will we respond?

And what of those who *are* “with Him?” What do the scriptures have to say about heaven (in the sense of an eternal state of blessing, not “the sky”)? A lot, as it turns out. Yahshua pointed out to his Jewish antagonists, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life [and the implication is, ‘You’re absolutely right to do so’]; and these are they which testify of Me.”** (John 5:39)

He went on to say, **“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they [in context, the children of Israel—Isaiah 54:13, cf. Jeremiah 31:33-34] shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life....”** This was a most provocative thing to say at this point in His ministry, but He, knowing

the hard hearts of his audience, wasn't in a mood to be gentle with them. It was a bucket of cold water in the face for these religious leaders to be told, in effect, *If you had any kind of relationship with Yahweh, you would recognize that He and I are one—only through Me can you have the eternal life you seek.*

And then He made His message even harder to swallow: **“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”** The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.’” (John 6:44-54) It wasn't that the scribes and Pharisees couldn't understand that He was speaking metaphorically. The hurdle for them was their misconception of who the Messiah should be. They were prepared to follow someone (like Bar Kochba a century later, for example) who would throw out the Romans and rule with a rod of iron (retaining them in His top echelons of government, of course). They were not ready for a personal savior who would live within them, save them from their sins, and give them eternal life. That sort of thing was fine for *sinners*, of course, but...

John the Baptist, unlike the Pharisees, saw things clearly. Speaking of Yahshua, he said, **“He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give [Him] the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”** (John 3:34-36) He was speaking to people who, for all they could tell, *were* alive—walking, talking, and breathing. But they were spiritually dead, and they would remain dead until and unless they believed in—trusted and relied upon—the Son of God for salvation. Later Yahshua revealed the flip side of this coin: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”** (John 8:51)

In what is probably the most well-known passage in the entire Bible, Yahshua told Nicodemus of this unending life—and how we could attain it: **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** (John 3:14-16) The “serpent in the wilderness” refers to an incident in Numbers 21 when the rebellious Israelites were being plagued by poisonous snakes. When they repented and asked God for deliverance, He told Moses to put a bronze serpent (a symbol of both their sin and the slithering

plague) on a pole: anyone who looked upon it in faith would be healed. In the same way, when we acknowledge that Yahshua took our sins upon Himself as he was crucified, we too shall be healed: we shall receive “everlasting life.”

By the way, the word we translate “cross” (Greek: *stauros*) actually means pole, or post. The “cross” consists of the upright *stauros* pointing toward heaven and what is known in Latin as the *patibulum*—the crosspiece, upon which Yahshua’s arms were outstretched in an invitation to avail ourselves of His grace. Moses’ snake-bite cure was therefore *designed* to be prophetic of our salvation through Yahshua’s sacrifice.

But I digress. The “everlasting life” of which Yahshua spoke is a byproduct of His own deity: **“We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which Yahweh erected.... For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”** (Hebrews 8:1-2, 9:24) And just as Christ has “entered His rest” in heaven, so shall we. **“If Joshua had given them rest, then He [not Joshua but Yahweh] would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”** (Hebrews 4:8-10) This reference is one more implied confirmation of God’s seven-thousand-year plan. The Millennium, our day of rest, corresponds to Yahweh’s “rest” from His labors on the seventh day of creation.

When we follow our King into this ultimate Sabbath “rest,” we will do it as sons, not as subjects, and certainly not as slaves: **“You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”** (Galatians 4:7) It is axiomatic that princes and princesses, if conducting themselves according to the wishes of their father the king, never have to worry about obtaining the basic necessities of life. So Yahshua reminds us, **“Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Luke 12:31-34) Because we’re “royals” in the Kingdom of Heaven, our circumstances here on earth should be of little concern to us. It’s like the old concept of *noblesse oblige*. Go ahead and be generous with the King’s wealth; spend it freely in alleviating the suffering you see around you—there’s always more where that came from.

The point (you know this by now, I’m sure) is not that you can buy your way into heaven, but that the possessions we think we own in this life are an illusion. The real wealth is stored up on the other side of our mortality, if it’s stored up anywhere. If you don’t believe me, try taking your money with you when you die.

As Paul put it, **“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”** (I Timothy 6:7)

Yahshua tried to get this truth across to a wealthy young man, but without much success: **“Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. ‘You know the commandments: “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not bear false witness,” “Honor your father and your mother.”’ And he said, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’ So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”** (Luke 18:18-22) God will always call upon us to give up whatever it is we’re putting before Him in our lives. This, if you’ll recall, was the heart of His very first commandment: **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”** (Exodus 20:3)

Yahshua taught this truth from many different angles. For example, **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Matthew 6:19-21) There are several lessons here. (1) It’s pointless to amass wealth in this life that you can’t enjoy in the next. (2) Wealth on earth is fleeting and vulnerable, whereas wealth in heaven is permanent and incorruptible. (3) It’s perfectly natural to look after our investments, no matter what they are. (4) If we are *primarily* invested in the things of this life, we will have little interest in the next. And perhaps the most amazing point: (5) we actually *can* “lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven.” We can’t touch the principal, of course, but the interest, compounded daily, is paid in this life: **“love, joy, peace, [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self control.”** (Galatians 5:22-23) It’s called “the fruit of the Spirit,” and it’s tax free. This “fruit” is our passbook—the evidence that we do indeed have a bank account in heaven, and that eternal life has been deposited there for us: **“Having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:22-23) Can we trust this bank? Absolutely. As Paul says, **“I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”** (II Timothy 1:12)

A variation on the “treasure-in-heaven” theme can be heard in Yahshua’s take on the popular reaction to His feeding of the 5,000: **“Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”** (John 6:26-27) He had given them lunch, so they

followed Him. However, they should not have been as impressed with the food as they were with the creative power of God—wielded in their presence and on their behalf by the Son of Man. Though they were going to be physically hungry again, they would never again have to experience spiritual emptiness.

A Samaritan woman Yahshua met at a well received the same truth. **“Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** (John 4:13-14) What food, what drink, could one possibly ingest that would make him live forever? The Word of God. **“Oh, taste and see that Yahweh is good. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him.”** (Psalm 34:8)

For God’s part, the reason He provided the free lunch for the multitude is the same reason He provides eternal life for us: **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”** (Ephesians 2:4-7) Mercy, grace, kindness, love. And notice that this being “made alive” is not only something we will attain in the “ages to come,” but is also something we can have right now: **“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”** (Colossians 1:13)

It can’t properly be said that heaven is our reward for living a righteous life. For one thing, none of us leads such a life. What righteousness we have in God’s eyes is a gift from Yahshua; and heaven, like our righteousness, is also a gift, unearned and undeserved. But there *are* rewards for faithfulness, and the kingdom of heaven is where we will receive them. **“Seeing the multitudes, [Yahshua] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn and weep now, for they shall laugh and be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are you who hunger now, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they hate you, revile and persecute you, exclude you, cast out your name as evil, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice in that day, leap for joy, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** (Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 6:21-23, blended) The rewards begin in this age, and will come to maturity like a savings bond (though not devalued by inflation) during the Millennium. The poor in spirit, those who

mourn (especially for the sinful condition of the present world—see Ezekiel 9:4), the meek, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will all be vindicated during Yahshua's thousand-year reign on earth. The merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers are seen as having a special relationship with God. And those who are persecuted for the cause of their faith will receive a great reward in heaven. Of course, these aren't mutually exclusive groups, but rather characteristics shared broadly among all the redeemed of Yahweh.

These who are redeemed by Yahweh's spirit are also sealed—that is, their eternal life cannot be taken from them—as Paul explains: **“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”** (Ephesians 4:30) No matter what happens to our mortal bodies, our eternal destinies are secure in Christ. **“I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.”** (II Timothy 4:17-18) Paul also expresses **“hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.”** (Titus 1:2) He explains that **“having been justified by His grace we...become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”** (Titus 3:7)

The certainty of eternal life for believers, something that was alluded to only sporadically in the Old Covenant scriptures, is a ubiquitous and unambiguous doctrine in the New. Paul points out the rather obvious fact that if the Jewish leaders had understood that there was life beyond sheol they might have been more careful in choosing their enemies. But eternal life is a doctrine revealed with clarity only in the New Testament—a “mystery,” in his parlance. **“The wisdom of...the rulers of this age...[is] coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’”** (I Corinthians 2:6-9) We can't begin to imagine what heaven is like outside of scriptural revelation, and even when we're told, it's impossible to adequately visualize.

Perhaps this New Testament emphasis on our eternal hope helps explain the differences in outlook between Jews and Christians—the Law and the Prophets *predict* God's plan of redemption, but the Gospels and Epistles *reveal* how it all works out in the real world. If all you've got is the Old Testament—if you don't factor Yahshua's historical role into your thinking—all you're left with is a strange mixture of guilt and hope, the quintessential Jewish mindset. It's like leaving the theater halfway through the movie or putting down the mystery novel before you've found out “who done it.”

Paul isn't the only one who speaks of our eternal destiny as believers. Each of the four gospels report how Yahshua brought it to pass. Indeed, every New Testament writer addresses the subject. **“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for**

the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” (Jude 21) **“Having been perfected, [Christ] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”** (Hebrews 5:9. We don’t really know who wrote the book of Hebrews—It was probably Paul, but it might have been Apollos or someone else.) **“An entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”** (II Peter 1:11) James said that the man who endures temptation **“will receive the crown of life which Yahweh has promised to those who love Him.”** (James 1:12)

John too mentions it—every time he turns around. **“This is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.”** (I John 2:25) Stated another way, **“The truth which abides in us...will be with us forever.”** (II John 1) And just in case we missed it, he writes, **“This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”** (I John 5:11-13) I don’t know how anybody could make it any simpler than that.

And yet, the recurring dream of fallen man is to somehow achieve eternal life *without* Yahweh. How revealing it is that to many, “heaven” is nirvana, an eternal cessation of all feeling, good or bad: *“No hell below us, above us only sky.”* The best thing they can conceive of is door number two: death, annihilation, destruction. How sad. But Yahshua made it clear that eternal life *is* possible, and it’s defined by knowing Him. He prayed as His crucifixion approached, **“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”** (John 17:1-3) Not “know *of* you,” not “know *about* You,” but “*know* You”—it’s a personal relationship, not a topic for study and discussion. The only possible alternative to this relationship is eternal separation from “the only true God,” one way or the other. This separation will be all the more painful for those who have attached themselves to a spirit other than Yahweh, the “only true God”: those in this state *do* know *about* Him, since **“at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.”** (Philippians 2:10)

Yahshua often made the point that He had come to fulfill Yahweh’s promises in the Old Testament—not to start some new religion. He said things like, **“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.**

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” (Matthew 5:17-18, cf. Luke 16:16-17) And **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”** (Luke 21:33, cf. Mark 13:31) Because of the importance of His “continuity” message, we often miss the truth of the “figure of speech” He uses to provide emphasis—that the heaven and earth we know are temporary. They *will* someday “pass away.”

Just when we’re finally gaining enough scientific knowledge to truly appreciate the awesome power of Yahweh through His creation, just when we’re coming to grips with the fact that He has the universe so exquisitely balanced that a slight shift in any of a hundred factors would make our life utterly impossible, we learn that God doesn’t intend to keep it that way forever. In an earlier chapter, I hypothesized that Yahweh created time, space, and matter (cf. Genesis 1:1) just so we—His intended companions—could have a place to “live” in our mortal bodies. It’s the only reason I can think of for God to have gone to all the trouble of creating “the heavens and the earth.” (Somehow I don’t think He did it out of boredom.)

But all of this begs the question: once no one inhabits a mortal body anymore, what further need will there be for earth as we know it? Once all of His “friends” have been raised to their new lives in incorruptible bodies and his “enemies” have been given what they always thought they wanted—to be separated from God’s inconvenient presence—there will no longer be a need for the things we once considered indispensable: food, water, clothing, shelter, the ground beneath our feet, or the sky above. In the light of Yahweh’s love, all of our “needs” will be rendered obsolete. Our new bodies will presumably have all new needs—different needs, spiritual needs. Having observed how God has met our needs in the past—going so far as to create the very elements we are made of—it only seems reasonable to expect that He would continue to meet the needs we will have in our new immortal bodies—even if it means creating a whole new heaven and earth for us. It bears repeating: the wonders of creation—whether the old creation or the new—are not so much an expression of God’s power as they are of His love.

Once we get over the shock of the prospect of kissing this world goodbye, we begin to see that none of this should have been particularly surprising. Yahweh has been telling us for thousands of years what He intends to do. Isaiah, for instance, wrote: **“All the host [i.e., stars] of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll. All their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree.”** (Isaiah 34:4) Scientists tell us that all stars (including our sun) have a life cycle—they are born, mature, and die. Isaiah agrees, saying that at some point, God will “roll up the heavens like a scroll,” as if to say, “Your purpose has been fulfilled.”

The prophet goes on to say, **“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner. But My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished.”** (Isaiah 51:6) Creatures of the earth will share in earth’s demise. But we who are mere pilgrims here will find ourselves enjoying a life in Yahweh’s new creation that will never grow old. **“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,”** says Yahweh, **“So shall your descendants and your name remain.”** (Isaiah 66:22)

This is really getting interesting: Yahweh, it seems, may be getting ready to repeal the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the one that says that the entropy—a measure of the unavailability of energy to do useful work in a closed system—tends to increase with time. In other words, things tend to proceed toward disorder and chaos. This law has been “on the books” since the Big Bang, and all of the scientific data ever collected has tended to confirm it. (And it in itself shatters the theory of undirected organic evolution.) But time and again, the scriptures speak of a time when the decaying universe as we know it will have been replaced by a *permanent* environment for God’s people, one that will not wear out. **“The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”** (I John 1:17) It’s possible, of course, that this fundamental law of physics will remain in operation, compensated for by the constant provision of Yahweh’s grace—the effect is the same either way.

When the scriptures speak of the “new heavens and new earth,” we should read “heavens” in the classic sense—the sky and the starry universe, not the abode of God. This is made clear in a couple of passages from the Psalms: **“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”** (Psalm 45:6) God is exempt from the entropy that characterizes our universe. **“You, Yahweh, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.”** (Psalm 102:25-27, cf. Hebrews 1:8-12) The “new heavens,” can be expected to be much like the heavenly home of Yahweh—i.e., too wonderful for words.

God told us about the new heavens and new earth because if we truly appreciate what’s about to happen, it will have a profound effect on our outlook on life. Peter put it in perspective for us. **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”** As for the timing, the “day of Yahweh” in its broadest sense extends from the rapture through the Millennium and beyond. Peter seems to be implying that this re-creation will occur suddenly, immediately after the thousand-year reign (as opposed to it being a leisurely process that Yahweh will unfold over a long period

of time). This observation is bolstered by the apparent timing of the first few verses of Revelation 21, which we'll study shortly. Once the Great White Throne judgment is behind us, there's no reason for Yahweh to wait any longer with His grand renovation project. But Peter's reason for telling us about it concerns what we do now, in this life: **"Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."** (II Peter 3:10-13) The lesson is that we shouldn't get too wrapped up in the things of this world, 'cause they're about to go poof.

Peter's mention of "elements" doesn't necessarily mean the breakdown of atomic structure throughout the galaxy—although it could. Remember, he was writing with a first-century vocabulary. The word *stoicheion* means "something orderly in arrangement," and by implication, a "fundamental constituent," ergo, an "element." So "The elements melting with fervent heat" could mean anything from an enthusiastic remodeling of the earth's surface to the unmaking of the very fabric of the universe—its disassembly at the sub-atomic level. As we're about to see, however, God's new universe *will* include an "earth" where men and nations operate in the light of God's love for eternity—an earth that bears little resemblance to our present fragile, stormy planet. At the very least, it's clear that Yahweh has something radical in mind—a new spiritual environment designed for our new spiritual bodies.

This new environment, whatever form it takes, represents nothing less than the lifting of the curse of sin from Yahweh's creation. Paul writes, **"For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."** (Romans 8:19-22) The "revealing of the sons (and daughters) of God" is the trigger event for the unveiling of God's new heaven and new earth. Again, I would correlate this with the moment when the last human mortal is given his resurrection body—at the end of the Millennium.

I say "unveiling" rather than "creation" because God has apparently *already* built our new environment. The writer of Hebrews listed a succession of faithful men and women whose unwavering belief in Yahweh's promises was accounted

to them as righteousness, but who never lived to see God's plan unfold. **"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them.... But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."** (Hebrews 11:13, 16) A city? What city would that be, and where is it? Ask yourself: what city in particular does Yahweh say He loves? There's only one: Jerusalem. We've already seen how Jerusalem becomes the premier city of the world during the Millennium—due primarily to the physical presence of King Yahshua. Beyond the thousand-year reign of Christ, however, Yahweh has something a bit grander planned: a new Jerusalem, capital of the new earth—capital of the new universe. **"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy."** (Isaiah 65:17-18)

John saw the same thing, but in a bit more detail. **"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea...."** This is our first clue of just how radically different this new earth is. At present, three fourths of our planet is covered with salty water, but it apparently was not always so. Hints in the creation and flood records (e.g. Genesis 2:5, 7:11) lead me to the conclusion that the world the antediluvian patriarchs knew may have been quite different than ours, a world of rivers and lakes, where the earth was lush and well watered from springs and heavy mists. A water-vapor canopy (cf. Genesis 1:7) blocked the sun's harmful rays from reaching the ground and kept the surface temperature of the planet at very nearly the same balmy level from the poles to the equator. There were no storms, no deserts, no frozen wastelands. Much of the planet's water was contained in vast subterranean vaults, far more extensive than the ground water systems that exist today. And the vapor canopy suspended many times more water than our atmosphere is capable of holding today. It is possible (though not explicitly stated) that the "new earth" will be something like that. After all, in its original pristine state, God called His creation "very good" (cf. Genesis 1:31).

And what about this new Jerusalem? **"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'"** (Revelation 21:1-5) Wow. Now that the curse has been lifted, Yahweh pulls out all the stops. Notice several things here: (1) The city descends from heaven (i.e., the abode of God); it is not built upon the surface of the earth. We'll see why in a

moment. (2) The city is as beautiful as God knows how to make it, and that's *saying* something. (3) Both Yahshua and His people (some of us, but not all, as we shall see) will live within the city. And (4) it will be a perfect place, totally free of the residual effects of the curse of sin. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews said, **"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."** (Hebrews 13:14)

John's vision continues. **"And He [i.e., Yahshua, "He who sat on the throne,"] said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.'" (Revelation 21:5-7)** Here we see the disciple/prophet receiving instruction, encouragement, and a reminder of God's agenda: He wants to bless us, to refresh us, and to have a close, intimate, father-and-child relationship with us.

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last [i.e., ultimate] plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God...." The "bride, the Lamb's wife" is (as we saw back in chapter 25) the Church—those of us whose names are found in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is we who will make the New Jerusalem our home; this magnificent "city" is the location of the "many dwelling places in His Father's household" that Yahshua spoke of going to prepare for us in John 14:2. So here, the city is a picture of the Church itself—not some earthly religious organization, but the *Ekklesia*, the called-out assembly of Yahshua's followers.

"Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west." Any thinking Christian will readily acknowledge that the "gateway" to our salvation was Israel—from the faith of Abraham to the sacrifice of Yahshua. But our faith in Yahshua was built on the "foundation" of the labors and sacrifice of His Apostles, also reflected in the architecture of the New Jerusalem: **"Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...."** One cannot enter the holy city without coming to terms with He who is both the legacy of Israel and the heart of the true Church—Yahshua the Messiah.

The really stunning feature of this "city" is its size. It can't be remotely compared to any city ever built on earth. **"And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as**

great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal...." The word translated "furlong" is the Greek *stadion* (plural: *stadia*), from which we derive our word "stadium." A *stadion* was 606.75 feet long; so 12,000 *stadia* comes out to 1,379 miles! If you drew a line from Boston to Miami to Laredo to Minneapolis and then back to Boston, you could fit this box inside the borders of the New Jerusalem with miles to spare. But it's also said to be 1,379 miles *tall*. Clearly, this "city" isn't going to be sitting on the surface of the earth: it's roughly five-eighths the size of the moon. And that's not a bad comparison. It's sheer mass indicates that Yahweh will place it not *upon* the earth, but *above* it—orbiting the planet like a second moon. Note that since it's said to "descend out of heaven," it won't be made of materials harvested from the earth.

The dimensions given seem to indicate a cube, and it could be. But because of the city's other architectural features I don't think this is the case. I'm having a hard time picturing a cube with a wall around it. I envision, rather, a square "ground plan" with one or more mega-structures reaching to a height equal to the width and breadth of the city. It might be a pyramid shape, but I'm thinking (SF9) more in terms of a forest of skyscrapers—like Manhattan on steroids. If it's put into place as a satellite orbiting the new earth, of course, it wouldn't have to have a flat "bottom" but could have any conceivable shape within the scripturally mandated overall dimensions. Yahweh is clearly thinking "outside the box" here; there's no reason for us not to follow His example.

Obviously, I'm guessing at the details, but some specs are spelled out. The city's massive wall is described next: **"Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."** (Revelation 21:9-21) If it weren't for the dimensions given, I'd be tempted to see this whole thing in terms of metaphor. But it's hard to explain away a 216-foot-high (or possibly *thick*) wall around a city with a ground plane area of almost two million square miles. The dimensions aren't so important here as the way they're presented. 144 cubits is 12 by 12: twelve tribes of Israel "multiplied" by twelve apostles of Christ—just as we saw the twelve tribes "added" to the twelve apostles in the case of the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:4.

As we have seen, the city has twelve foundations, each one representing one of the apostles. Here we see precious stones associated with each of them as well. Obviously, since the stones are not of earthly origin, they needn't be pinned down to a particular mineral composition. What's important is what they looked like to John. Andreas, bishop of Caesurae, presumed to associate each of these minerals with their respective disciples, but since he had no scriptural support, I won't bore you with his opinion. Note, however, that this isn't the only listing of twelve gemstones in the Bible. In Exodus 28 (repeated in chapter 39) Moses describes the High Priest's ephod. (This was a kind of vest or apron hung from the shoulders and tied at the waist, covering the chest. It's called the "breastplate of judgment" in Exodus 28:29.) Each of its twelve stones bore the name of one of the tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:21). Could it be that these are the same stones, and if so, what do they represent?

At first glance, it's "close, but no cigar." But remember, Exodus was written in paleo-Hebrew, and Revelation was penned in koine Greek. I'm pretty sure that the lists actually *are* the same. There is no consensus as to precisely what these stones were, however. Some of them seem to be quite similar. Many semi-precious stones have a wide range of appearances, so much so that several of their names are used interchangeably. But like I said, we're trying to see through the eyes of John here. What was he looking at? More to the point, what greater truth did they symbolize? No one seems to know for sure, and most commentaries don't even attempt to explain them. But they obviously symbolize *something*. Yahweh went to all the trouble of listing them, so I'll give it my best shot. Feel free to disagree with my conclusions if you can come up with something better. They're only guesses, after all.

Jasper. (Greek: *iaspis*; Hebrew: *yashpneh*). The first stone listed in the foundation is the last stone on the ephod. This is a fine-grained, opaque, cryptocrystalline variety of quartz. It is often striped or spotted. Jasper can be red, brown, green, gray-blue, and yellow, but green was particularly valued in ancient times. A variety called bloodstone is dark green with small spots of red (iron oxide) scattered throughout. This is a pretty good picture of the blood of God's perfect sacrifice, Yahshua, sprinkled upon the mercy seat to atone for our sins. He did, after all, describe Himself as "the first and the last" in Revelation 1:11.

Sapphire. (Greek: *sappheiros*; Hebrew *sappiyr*). Listed second in the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, it was the middle stone on the second row of the ephod. The blue sapphire we know today—a form of corundum, an extremely hard aluminum oxide—was not used until the third century B.C. The "sapphire" of Exodus, then, was more likely the lapis lazuli, a silicate of alumina, calcium, and sodium. Both stones are a rich, blue color, symbolic of heaven, i.e., our eternal destiny in Christ. (Maybe *that's* why the sky is blue.)

Chalcedony. (Greek: *chalkedon*). The third foundation stone is probably the same as the agate (Hebrew: *shebuw*) listed in the center of the third row of the priestly ephod. Today, chalcedony is a catch-all phrase for a variety of translucent to transparent milky quartz stones with distinctive microscopic crystals arranged in slender fibers in parallel bands. Agate, bloodstone, carnelian, chrysoprase, flint, jasper, and onyx are all varieties of chalcedony. It occurs in a variety of colors ranging from blue-gray to reddish brown to a creamy white. Because of this variety, and since it forms six-sided elongated crystals, my guess is that Yahweh intended this to be representative of mankind, the object of His unfathomable love, and the humanity of Yahshua that enabled Him to rescue us.

Emerald. (Greek: *smaragdos*; Hebrew: *bareqeth*). The fourth foundation stone was found third in the first row on the ephod. Also translated as beryl or carbuncle, the emerald is a hard, brittle gemstone, the most valuable form of beryl (a silicate of beryllium and aluminum). It was used to describe the rainbow surrounding God's throne in Heaven (cf. Revelation 4:3). This description, and the fact that the stone must be oiled to retain its luster, leads me to conclude that the emerald may symbolize our need for the Holy Spirit—God's very presence living within us. We, too, must apply the "oil" of the Spirit to our lives if we wish to glean for God's glory.

Sardonyx. (Greek: *sardonux*). Listed fifth in the foundation stones, sardonyx was composed of two layers, sard, or sardius—a translucent deep red or red-orange form of chalcedony—and onyx, a white form of calcium carbonate soft enough to be easily carved. Onyx (Hebrew: *shoham*) was listed in the middle of the fourth row of the ephod. Sardonyx was prized for making cameos and signet rings—the soft onyx carving standing out against the red sardius background. Signet rings, of course, were used for impressing the owner's seal into hot wax—a means of identification, proof of ownership, and exercise of authority. The sardonyx, then symbolizes our being "sealed" by Yahshua—the red of the sardius represents His blood, while the white onyx speaks of His purity.

Sardius. (Greek: *sardios*; Hebrew: *'odem*). As we have seen, this red form of chalcedony represents the blood of Yahshua, shed for our sins. Its hexagonal crystalline structure speaks again of His humanity, for the blood of sacrificial animals was never sufficient to atone for our transgressions. This stone was sixth in the city's foundation, and first in the top row of the ephod. It is also translated carnelian, ruby, and garnet.

Chrysolite. (Greek *chrusolithos*). Mentioned in position number seven in the wall of New Jerusalem, this stone was gold in color (*chrusos*=gold; *lithos*=stone), indicative of the unfathomable riches of God's love toward us. It is probably the NKJV's "beryl," or yellow jasper (Hebrew: *tarshiysh*) listed as the first stone of the bottom row of the High Priest's ephod.

Beryl. (Greek: *berullos*). This is a transparent or translucent gemstone, colorless to pale blue-green, also known as aquamarine. It is in position number eight in the foundation wall. This is quite possibly the “diamond” (also translated emerald and white moonstone—Hebrew: *yahalom*) listed last in the ephod’s gems. What does it symbolize? Have you ever seen the crystal-clear seawater off the Bahamas? (Me neither, but I’ve seen pictures.) The pristine ocean—the color of *berullos*—always reminds me of Yahweh’s loving provision for us—the exquisite balance of earth and water, heat and cold, gravity and momentum. From the first moment of creation, Yahweh’s goal was to build an environment for us to live in that He could call “very good.” This is what I see when I contemplate beryl.

Topaz. (Greek: *topazion*; Hebrew: *pitdah*). Foundation stone number nine, and centered in the top row of the ephod, is topaz. This is a form of quartz that has, through being heated, changed color—generally from a citrine or smoky quartz to a pale yellow (although other varieties exist—blue, brown, pink, or even colorless). According to *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, topaz “is almost as hard as the diamond. It has the power of double refraction, and when heated or rubbed becomes electric.” The symbol it presents (to me at least) is Yahshua’s work in us through the testing of this world: our God ensures that rather than destroying us, the tribulation we endure makes us more useful, more beautiful, and infinitely more valuable.

Chrysoprase. (Greek: *chrusoprasos*; Hebrew: *nophek*). Listed tenth among the foundation stones and first in the second row of the ephod, chrysoprase is the most highly valued form of chalcedony (whose hexagonal crystal structure, you’ll recall, indicates humanity). *Chrusos*, as we saw, means “gold,” and *prasos* means “leek,” as in the vegetable. The name thus indicates the golden-green color of this translucent gemstone. Also known as Australian jade, it’s often translated “turquoise” in Old Testament passages (emerald in the KJV). To my mind, it symbolizes the fruit of the Spirit in the believer’s life: love. (The rest of the Galatians 5 list—joy, peace, patience, etc.—is a description of love.) I realize some of my symbolic interpretations might seem like a stretch. Feel free to prayerfully consider alternate views.

Jacinth. (Greek: *huakinthos*; Hebrew: *leshem*). The name of this stone is derived from the hyacinth, a flower of deep blue or violet, though the stone itself ranges from colorless to yellow to golden brown in color. It was listed the eleventh of the foundation stones, and is found first in the third row of ephod stones. It is also translated amber or ligure. Jacinth is a form of zircon, a beautiful transparent natural gem (not to be confused with the synthetic “cubic zirconia”). Perhaps this is what John saw when he described the New Jerusalem and its street

as “pure gold, like clear glass.” (Revelation 21:18, 21) If so, it symbolizes our glorious future in the “dwelling places” Yahshua has prepared for us.

Amethyst. (Greek: *amethystos*; Hebrew: *'achlamah*). The final stone in the city's foundation was listed last in the third row of the ephod. The Greek name meant “not drunk,” because (according to Pliny) its color (lilac, mauve, or purple) approached that of wine but didn't quite get there. The color, though, is the likely key to its symbolism: purple is the symbol of royalty (because purple dye, made from the murex shellfish, was rare and expensive). Also, amethysts are crystals formed within geodes: they are thus separate (read: holy) from the rocks around them. Amethyst, then, is the symbol of divine royalty, Yahshua—and through Him of the redeemed, described as a “royal priesthood” in I Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6.

My ruminations on the subject are all highly speculative, of course, but no more so that those of Rabanus Maurus (786-856), Archbishop of Mainz: “In the jasper is figured the truth of faith; in the sapphire, the height of celestial hope; in the chalcedony, the flame of inner charity. In the emerald is expressed the strength of faith in adversity; in the sardonyx, the humility of the saints in spite of their virtues; in the sard, the venerable blood of the martyrs. In the chrysolite, indeed, is shown true spiritual preaching accompanied by miracles; in the beryl, the perfect operation of prophecy; in the topaz, the ardent contemplation of the prophecies. Lastly, in the chrysoprase is demonstrated the work of the blessed martyrs and their reward; in the hyacinth [jacinth], the celestial rapture of the learned in their high thoughts and humble descent to human things out of regard for the weak; in the amethyst, the constant thought of the heavenly kingdom in humble souls.”

John's description of the celestial city continues: **“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple....”** The temple was a place for sacrifices to be performed—either in anticipation of the coming Messiah, or, as revealed in the closing chapters of the Book of Ezekiel, in memory of that same pivotal moment celebrated during the Millennial reign of Christ. But now, when there is no one left who has yet to choose between life and death, there is no longer any need or function for a temple. Indeed, the Lamb of God will dwell forever among men—a living temple reminding us of Yahweh's eternal love.

“The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.” (Revelation 21:22-27) Here we get a glimpse of the relationship between the New

Jerusalem and the New Earth. First, the sun does not provide light or energy for the celestial city; rather, the Lamb Himself, within the city, is the light source. Note that the sun isn't necessarily gone at this point (though it could be). But it is certainly superfluous—no longer required for life or light on earth.

Second, the “satellite” concept is supported by the language of this passage. Not only does the glory of God illuminate the city, He also provides light for the New Earth beneath. The nations—all of the peoples inhabiting the New Earth—will bask in its light. These, you'll recall, are no longer mortals, but will have received their resurrection bodies at the close of the Millennium, just as the Old Testament Saints and the Church did at the rapture.

Third, their respective populations differ. The New Jerusalem, as we have seen, is the eternal home of the *ekklesia*, the Bride of Christ. (The Old Testament gentile saints, like Abel, Seth, Noah, Rahab, and Ruth may be included, but we aren't specifically told.) The New Earth is therefore “heaven” to the redeemed multitudes of the Millennium. These comprise the “nations,” of whom the premier member is Israel (presumably both its Old and New Testament saints, though again, the scriptures don't say). The “kings of the earth” mentioned above are those who proved themselves worthy during their sojourn as mortals upon the old earth during the Millennium, “laying up for themselves,” as Yahshua put it, “treasures in heaven.” (The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, in contrast, are *all* described as “kings and priests” in Revelation 1:6.)

Fourth, there is “commerce” of some kind between the New Earth and the New Jerusalem. The nations of the New Earth, led by their “kings,” will freely visit the celestial city, bringing glory and honor to the Lamb. The twelve “pearly gates” are symbolic of the great price Yahshua paid for our redemption. They are not there to shut out evil (as is the usual function of city gates), for the entire universe has been made holy at this point—it no longer “groans and travails” (cf. Romans 8:22) as it once did.

I believe, however (SF2), that space travel won't be restricted to shuttling back and forth between these two places. Although the New Jerusalem and New Earth are our eternal “home,” wouldn't it be wonderful to visit the far-flung reaches of Yahweh's universe, the New Heaven, never ceasing to learn new things about His greatness? To tour God's creation would be an incredible experience—but to have the Creator Himself as our tour guide would be even more “heavenly.” In our immortal resurrection bodies, of course, we wouldn't be saddled with the physical limitations that hold us back now. We won't necessarily even require complicated machines and eons of time to make these journeys. But every day that goes by—for all of eternity—our knowledge and appreciation for Yahweh will increase—and with it, our ability to love Him.

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, and there shall be no more curse....”

The river of life is reminiscent of the twin rivers that flowed east and west from the Millennial temple (cf. Ezekiel 47), rivers that restored the old world’s dead oceans and even healed the Dead Sea. This river, though, flows directly from the throne of God in the New Jerusalem. The river is surely symbolic of the grace of Yahweh, the spiritual water that alone can satisfy our thirst for righteousness. And the tree of life symbolizes that same grace, which heals the damage we have done to ourselves. But I see no reason to suppose that these aren’t also literal features of the heavenly landscape.

The twelve annual crops grown upon trees of life (one of which apparently grows on each bank of the river) is again symbolic of the legacy of both the twelve Jewish tribes and the twelve apostles of the Messiah, i.e., Israel and the Ekklesia. A tree of life was also present in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, because it represents eternal life, it was the immediate reason Adam and Eve had to be expelled. Attaining everlasting life while clothed in a mortal, sinful body would be the worst of curses—ask any octogenarian. But now, in the New Jerusalem, the tree’s fruit is available for nourishment and enjoyment to all whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, people who now inhabit bodies that are designed to last forever. The leaves of the tree of life symbolize the removal of the curse of sin from our lives.

“But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it [that is, in the city], and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:1-5) Within the New Jerusalem, those who reign are those who serve. That’s the pattern Yahshua established for us, and it should be the model for human governments in this world (though it seldom is, to the shame of those who hold the reins of power).

Back in chapter 4, we talked about the promises made to “him who overcomes” in the seven churches that represent the future history of the *ekklesia* (see Revelation 2 and 3). Here we see those same promises being fulfilled. To reprise, Yahshua had said, **“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.... He shall not be hurt by the second death.... I will give [him] some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.... [He] shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.... I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God [no longer a physical location, but the Lamb Himself], and he**

shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.... I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne....” Those of the Church age who were “overcomers” are the same souls now seen living in the New Jerusalem.

Returning to Revelation’s final chapter, we read: **“Then he [the angel] said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true.’ And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.”** We are coming to the end of our story; we have seen and heard thousands of these “things.” But they all boil down to one astounding truth: **“Behold, I [Yahshua] am coming quickly [i.e., suddenly]! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”** (Revelation 22:6-7) “Blessed” (Greek: *makarios*) means “supremely blest, fortunate, well off, happy.” He is not necessarily blessed who merely hears these words of prophecy—it is rather he who *keeps* them. “Keep” is the Greek *tereo*, which means to guard from loss by constant watchfulness, to observe attentively, to take careful note of, to keep the eyes fixed upon. Now that we know what Yahweh is about to do, and why, (and probably even *when*) we must not take our eyes off these truths, even for a moment. The time for pedantic theological cogitation has come and gone. We must stop confusing tradition with faith, stop compromising with the world, stop sleeping on the job. Like Lot, we who are living settled and secure in Sodom must prepare to flee. There is fire and brimstone just over the horizon. We are almost out of time.

As the vision came to an end, John was so moved, he didn’t know quite what to do. **“Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’”** Natural response, though wrong object. Can you really blame him? Who could retain his composure upon seeing these things? **“And he said to me, ‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.’”** (Revelation 22:8-11) Many years before, Daniel had been told that the prophecies he had seen would be **“closed up and sealed until the time of the end.”** (Daniel 12:9) John was told no such thing: his vision was imminent—his readers were to treat it as if it could come to pass at any time. The fact that nearly two thousand years have gone by since then doesn’t change anything.

The next admonition, that against trying to change people’s behavior from the outside in, is one we would be wise to heed in these Last Days. The angel reiterates God’s great gift to mankind: choice. He says, in effect, *Go ahead and do what you want. Your deeds will reveal what you believe and whose you are.* It

has always been a thankless task trying to “legislate morality,” whether through law or social pressure. Real change must come from the inside—from the Holy Spirit living within—if it is to come at all. There may have been some rationale for forcing people to behave themselves a few hundred years ago, when keeping a lid on society’s overt sin made life a little safer and more conducive to growth for God’s people. But as the days grow short, trying to wring good conduct out of lost souls is pointless and counterproductive. “Holy” means separate, not well-behaved. Our instructions are the same as they’ve always been: preach the gospel, reflect God’s love, and keep ourselves separated to Yahweh—in the world, but not *of* it.

Yahshua ends this most astonishing vision by reminding John who He is and why He has told him all this: **“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last...”** One final time, Yahshua is telling us that He *is* Yahweh—He who is self-existent, eternal, the source and conclusion of all things. As such, He alone is worthy to judge our works.

Like any father, God judges His own children’s works on an entirely different basis than those of strangers. And no amount of good work is sufficient to transform a stranger into a child of Yahweh. You have to be “born” (by adoption) into His family—you have to *want* to have a relationship with the Father. But once that relationship is established, our works mean a great deal to Him—not so much for their intrinsic value, but for the spirit in which they were done. If the “picture” we’ve painted for Papa was done with love and sincere effort, He’ll proudly put it up on the celestial refrigerator, even if we’re not all that talented. If all we’ve produced is a hasty, careless scrawl, drawn out of duty or self-indulgence, He’ll set it aside, for He knows the difference. But what about the pictures other people’s children have painted? Even if they’re real masterpieces, there’s no particular reason God should care. It doesn’t matter how “good” they are. He’s only interested in what His own kids have done.

Stated another way, **“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie....”** Only the children have access to their Father. Strangers—those souls, identified by their works, who willfully rejected the opportunity to become children of God—are left “outside,” ultimately reduced to nonexistence or worse, living in hell.

Again we hear from Yahshua: **“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star....”** We are again reminded of Yahshua’s credentials, being both the root of David (i.e., Yahweh Himself) and his offspring, the promised Messiah. The

“bright and morning star” was promised to those who overcame the world and kept His word until the end (cf. Revelation 2:28). Yahshua, the bright morning star, is the authentic original that Lucifer tried so unsuccessfully to counterfeit all these years. Satan’s pitiful efforts to “be like God” now serve only to emphasize the glory of the genuine Messiah.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely...” This relationship with God is available freely to anyone who desires to have it. It’s not the exclusive province of perfect people (they don’t exist) or Jews or Protestants or Americans or Caucasians or rich people or poor folks—or any other artificially contrived subset of humanity. Yahweh doesn’t want anyone to perish; rather, He desires that everyone would repent and become His children. The invitation to come and drink of the water of life is extended by the Holy Spirit, as it has always been, but also by Yahshua’s bride, the called-out assembly of believers who have put their faith in Yahshua.

John adds a warning to those who would tamper with this vision, intending to use it to promote their own agenda: **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book....”** I, for one, take that very seriously, which is why I have kept the Biblical text clearly differentiated from my own thoughts. I pray that this study has helped you better understand what Yahweh has planned for us. And I pray that you may be filled, as I am, with the joyful anticipation and sure knowledge of His coming.

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Revelation 22:12-20)