

Worshiping God in

Spirit and Truth

A Magazine for Understanding God's Truth

January – June 2018

What Now?

**A Frank Discussion about
What Lies Ahead in Prophecy**

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Truth or Consequences: In the hymn “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms” lie the “fruits” of *atonement* and the results of being “at one” with God. In Deuteronomy 33:26-29, we find the elements that explain the “heart” that is demanded to make such a great reconciliation possible. *Atonement* hinges on the most important *choice* that Israelite, Jew, and Gentile can make to inherit such a fellowship, joy, blessedness, peace, “pilgrim way,” no dread, and no fear. That is the scope of this discussion about the Day of Atonement that is *required* for God’s true people (Lev. 23:26-32). **Page 23**

The “Day” of the Lord: In Revelation 1:10, John says that he was in the Spirit on *the Lord’s day*. From that point on, Jesus Christ identifies Himself and the purpose of the appearances in which John saw Him. The objective in this study is to understand Jesus Christ’s fuller revelation about the purpose of this “day.” What does it mean? **Page 27**



From the Desk of ... the Pastor

The present circumstances we see afoot in the world are the kind of rich fodder that many in the religious world feed upon relative to prophecy. Many of the things that are happening around the world can be used to point to one kind or another of prophetic pronouncement for “proof” that we are at one point or another of the prophetic spectrum. Wars. Rumors of wars. Nations and kingdoms in great conflict. Famines. Droughts. Earthquakes in various places. Martyrdoms. “Blood moons” around the Feast of Tabernacles in 2016. The recent solar eclipse. Name some kind of extraordinary and/or dreaded event, and its prophetic importance can be beaten into fine powder and sifted even finer in the search for clues and evidence that some momentous prophecy is about to be fulfilled.

The objective of this study is, therefore, to provide some guidance about the prophetic spectrum relative to our day and time. With all of the disruption and mayhem in our midst – along with the wars and fears of total destruction at the hands of terrorists and mad nuclear bombers – we need to calmly and deliberately try to make sense of the question: **What now?** What can we rationally and dependably rely on from God’s word for our direction? Shall we run scared at the whims of false prophets and false Christs? Is there a way to know where we are and what is on the near horizon?

Matthew 24:1-14

Matthew 24 is the standard for measuring and judging prophecy from the time of Jesus Christ until the “fulness of times.” In v. 3, the Disciples asked three basic questions of Jesus Christ in their discussion with Him:

1. When shall these things be?
2. What shall be the sign of your coming?

3. What shall be the sign of the end of the age?

In questions 2 and 3, they are asking if there will be some kind of supernatural miracle or wonder that will be manifested as evidence that something is about to happen. Humans do not deal well with time and chance.

Notice, however, that Jesus Christ does not indicate any such sign from their time up to v. 14. What He serves up is something that is basically commonplace in a world that feeds on the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. It is a common ex-

hibition of behavior for those who are led by the carnal mind (Rom. 8:5-8; Gal. 5:13-21).

While there are many notable kinds of events, there is not a supernatural miracle or wonder that precedes any one of them. Even the rise of false prophets (v. 11) is not considered to be a sign. It is not until the gospel of the Kingdom is preached to the whole world that the end will come (v. 14). What follows that moves closer to what can be considered as supernatural evidence.

What does this tell us about the question: **What now?** It basically tells us that humans are going to be humans and suffer the humiliating errors, failures, defeats, and weaknesses, moral failures, shortcomings, flaws, and imperfections of carnal-minded humans. It basically tells us that God's people are not to be like those who whistle in the dark or run from shadows.

We have many things that we will have to endure, but unless and until we see the gospel preached to all nations, we cannot spend our time assuming that we are even near the supernatural miracle or wonder that will be manifested as evidence that something momentous is about to happen. Those with great religious empires are more likely to claim that they are reaching the entire world with the gospel of the Kingdom. For many who make such a claim, they are merely "preaching Jesus and Him crucified."

It appears from Jesus Christ's statement to His Disciples that the "time of the end" will be of short duration as compared to the time leading up to it. Jesus gives us no indication how long vv. 4-14 will take in coming to pass. However, v. 15 is a turning point.

Revelation 6:1-4

At best, we can probably use Revelation 6:1-4 to help determine where we are in the prophetic spectrum. For example: We have known since Apostolic times that false "Christianity" is afoot in the world and increasing in size and scope (v. 2). I have noted over the past 30+ years that "Christian" denominations have increased from about 400⁺ to 32,000⁺.

We also know from modern world events that peace has been taken from the earth and that the

prospect of bringing the killing of every stripe (wars, murders, natural disasters, etc.) to an end is unrealistic (v. 4). It should be noted in the comment at the end of v. 4 that the rider of the red horse was given "a great sword." A great sword for a great task.

When these first two "horsemen" are harmonized with Matthew 24:1-14, we should be able to see that the combination of the two prophecies generally describes the time from Jesus' day to our present day. Beyond that, it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty. That said, we should bear in mind that these two "horsemen" are not the supernatural sign that Jesus revealed to His disciples.

Matthew 24:15-28

What I want you to focus on in these verses is the acceleration of the action – the rapidity with which the "end" shall come. What is the first sign for which we are to look? "The abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet." Why is that to be considered as a supernatural wonder?

Because it is part of the claim by the Lord God in Isaiah 46:9, 10:

Remember this, and show yourselves to be men: bring it again to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (see also Isa. 55:11).

This means that we should acquaint ourselves with Daniel 9:27 and 11:31. These verses are in the context of some kind of "covenant" that will be made with the Jewish nation. Daniel 9:27 speaks of that covenant in the framework of 2,520 days – seven prophetic years in length – about 6.9 years by our present calendar. After 1,260 days have passed, something goes wrong with that "covenant." It will be in the "midst [middle] of the

week” that the “abomination of desolation” will occur. *There is your sign!*

Daniel 11 provides a context in which this action will occur. This is probably one of the places where prophecy has a dual application. In this case, the action was originally focused on four kings of Persia [known as Iran today] ... but you should be able to see in the context of the prophecy that it involves more than the lifetime of these four kings.

In vv. 2b, 3, it covers the defeat of Alexander the Great of the Greco-Macedonian Empire and the division of his empire among his four generals. It eventually devolves to the dominance of Ptolemy (who ruled over Egypt and was known as the “king of the south”) and Seleucus (who ruled over Syria and was known as the “king of the north”). They join forces and work together for a considerable period of time, only to have it end in warfare against one another (vv. 5-20).

Verses 21-45 represent the place where the prophecy most likely becomes dual; that is, applicable anciently as a model for what will happen during the “end time.” Verses 27, 29, 35, 40, and 12:1 are the “hints” we have been given for the dual nature of this action relative to Daniel 9:27.

Daniel 12:1 is the point at which the tribulation begins after the “abomination of desolation” occurs (Matt. 24:15). As you should be able to understand, we have not yet reached that point in history. Unless or until we do, we should pay no attention to those who crow to the world that Jesus can come at any moment – or that the “end time” is nipping at our heels. There is presently no indication that

such is the case. Therefore, we must continue to watch and wait.

Jesus explains in Matthew 24:23-28 that false prophets and false Christs will increase rapidly among us. I dare say that this will include the politicians and preachers among us. Isaiah 28:1-15 is an apt description of how the prophets and priests have made their offices unclean by their errors in judgment and in their visions. Read Joel 1. Read Malachi 1, 2.

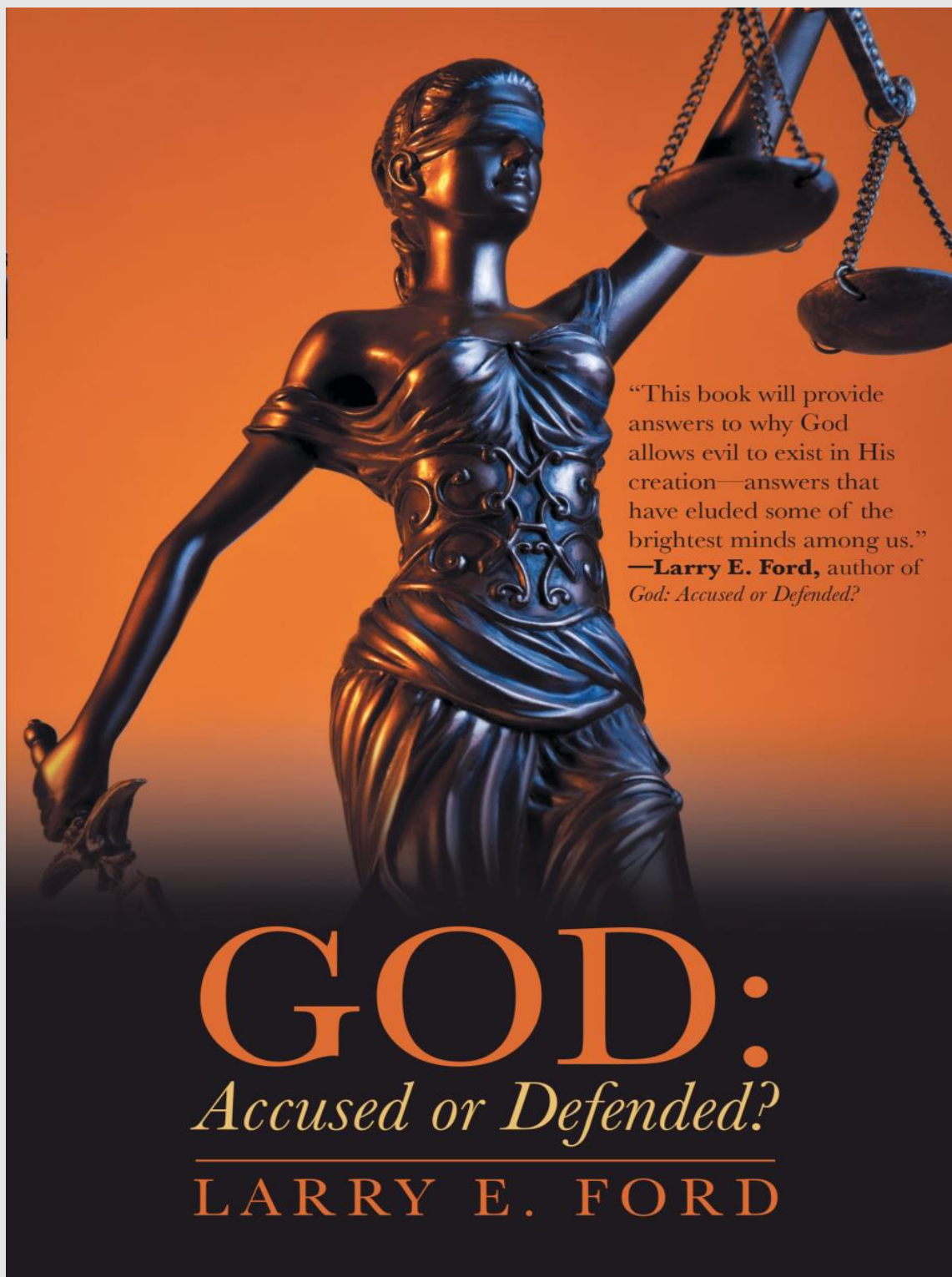
What shall we say about these things relative to Matthew 24:23-28? Does the present proliferation of such “false prophets” and “false Christs” and “false ministers” indicate that the “time of the end” is upon us? No. It is not presently the supernatural sign for which we are to look. The coming false prophets and false Christs will be doing signs and wonders that can deceive even the very elect if they are not paying attention to what is happening before their very eyes! That kind of power will also be part of God’s supernatural sign that the “end” is even at the door (Matt. 24:24-28)!

We will have some interesting studies in this issue that will help you to get a handle on the things that are happening ... as compared to the things for which we must look. Take these articles seriously: They could mean the difference between God’s truth and you being deceived.

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Special Announcement!

Beginning with this issue of Spirit and Truth, we will be publishing the magazine two times a year. We will try to pack as many articles as possible into the new format and give you sufficient opportunity to study God’s truth.



“This book will provide answers to why God allows evil to exist in His creation—answers that have eluded some of the brightest minds among us.”
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GOD:

Accused or Defended?

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The “Latter End”

One of the “mysteries” of God is found in the terms “latter days” and “end times.” Many are unaware of how this “mystery” is unveiled by God. Few even consider the possibility that the expression “latter end” in Deuteronomy 8:16 (*KJV*) and other places in the Old Testament is related to the expressions “last days” and “end times.” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* defines “latter end” as being the “latter part ... of a people’s existence” and “the final period of history.” It basically concludes that: “the sense varies with the context, but it often = the ideal or Messianic future” (p. 31). One can rightly conclude from this that Deuteronomy 8:16 (“... that He might humble you, and that He might prove you, [in order] to do you good at your latter end”) shows a connection between the “end times,” or “last days,” and something that the Lord God desires for His covenant people, Israel.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to assist you in making sense of this connection so you can more fully understand the truth that the Lord God is revealing to us regarding *Israel’s* “latter end.” If we misunderstand this connection, we might very well misunderstand a large swath of the Lord God’s truth about His future relationship with Israel. If we are “in Christ,” then it behooves us to understand more fully this connection.

The Message of Deuteronomy 8

Deuteronomy 8 is a basic explanation of why the Lord God did not summarily “zap” the Israelites with Holy Spirit and settle them permanently in the land that He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He shows that He did not create them to be mindless automatons for His mere pleasure.

He asks them through Moses in Deuteronomy 32:6: “Has not He made you, and established you?” Made means that He created Israel for Himself (*BDB*; p. 794). Established means that He firmly (in the sense of permanently) founded Israel as His Kingdom among whom He placed His very own throne and sanctuary (*Ibid*; p. 466).

If you read the genealogies of the Old Testament, you will discover a straight line from Seth to the nation of Israel. In essence, she was “custom made” to be His “wife.” His decision to take her forever to be His “wife” demonstrates that He has a vested interest in how she ultimately qualifies to assume that role in the future before she is changed from flesh to spirit prior to His permanent establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth (see Rev. 19:7-9). His focus on an eternal relationship

with Israel has been there from the day He found her (*Ezek.* 16:1-14).

In Deuteronomy 8:1, Moses makes it clear that the secret to Israel’s success lies in observing all that the Lord God has commanded them. This is similar to the instruction Jesus Christ gave His disciples in John 14:15: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” It is the root and core of His instruction regarding a question asked of Him in Matthew 22:36-40. Make special note of v. 40: “All of the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments” (see also Matt. 5:17).

The question as it was asked seems harmless enough. However, there also seems to be an underlying ploy to get Jesus Christ to favor one Commandment against all of the rest. If He did that, then they could accuse Him of favoritism and diminishing God’s word – a thing of which the Israelites were guilty.

Jesus did not enumerate all 10 of the Commandments; rather, He placed direct emphasis on the intention of the two divisions in them: The Commandments related to loving God supremely and those related to loving fellowman as oneself. These two simplified Commandments are the life-

spring and foundation of all 10 of the Commandments. As Paul puts it in Romans 13:8: “Love is the fulfilling of the Law.” If you cannot or will not obey any one of them, then you are guilty of breaking all of them (James 2:8-12).

Clarke explains that these two Commandments are like the first and last links in a chain. All of the other links depend on those two links to do their jobs. If either the first or last link fails, the entire chain fails. I think Clarke overlooks how each link is as important as any other link. As the old saying goes: “A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.” Loving God supremely is one primary link; loving fellowman as yourself is the other. Jesus knew that He could not show favoritism in the singular issue of love. Although He did not specifically say it, He also knew that all 10 of the Commandments are equally important. His statutes and judgments are derived from the ten.

Verses 2 and 3 are very instructive with regard to a generally unrecognized characteristic of God. Moses tells Israel that the Lord God had a special purpose in the discipline He meted out for their rebellion ... why He humbled them and tested them and allowed them to go hungry and thirsty.

One aspect of it was for His own personal learning experience: “To know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His Commandments.” This is the purpose stated in Jeremiah 17:9, 10. He “tries the reins” and “searches the hearts” in order to determine how to judge the individual. He is, after all, a learning God. That judgment is the person’s future “latter end.”

The other aspect of it was for the benefit of Israel’s learning experience: “To make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Verse 5 is a short form of Hebrews 12:1-11 ... which translations other than *KJV* render as discipline or training, rather than chastisement or scourging.

Verse 16 brings us to the point of this discussion: The Lord God was attempting to humble Israel and to prove her. Why? Let me put it in a way that best explains the experience. The humbling process is designed to make one conscious of his/her shortcomings and reduce his/her dependence on his/her own strength and abilities. It is not so much that you want to make them mindless and

totally dependent; it is that you want them to know where to draw the line about what you can and cannot do. Read verses 17, 18 to get the full force of this thought.

The proving process involves setting a standard by which to make judgments. The lessons and tests you had in your educational and vocational experiences are a ready example of this process. The proof gathered forms a picture of what you are capable of learning and doing ... and at which level you are able (and, maybe, likely) to succeed and/or fail. The resume’ is also an example of how you have been “proved” by education and experience.

Make note of the last part of v. 16: “To do you good at your latter end” (emphases added). That speaks to the outcome to which the Lord God wants to bring His people. Read and understand very clearly vv. 17, 18. Israel could not produce her own food and water ... and preserve her clothing and footwear during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. She was limited – and she needed to know those limitations and the limitations of the false gods to whom she turned when she did not want to be trained to be a holy people.

His blessings were what He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... blessings that the Israelites could not provide for themselves. If they were to be a holy people who ultimately would be the spirit-composed “wife” of the Lord God, they needed to know that they were totally incapable of doing that for themselves. They had no “spark” of immortality in them, and they were not immortal souls that would abandon a mortal body when that body died.

What is the point of this discussion? It is the introduction to how Israel’s “latter end” is tied to the “end times” and the “last days.” It is necessary to have this discussion because the House of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians between 721 and 718 BC – never to have been returned to the Land of Promise. That being the case, many are not aware that she has not yet experienced her “latter end.” They do not know who she is or where she is. All they know of the nation Israel is the House of Judah. Even though each “House” was independently governed, there are some interesting similarities in how they responded to the Lord God religiously. It should be no mystery that the

religious life was more of a driving force than the political life.

The Response to the Humbling and Proving Processes

We will look first at Elijah's experience with the House of Israel in 1 Kings 18. Elijah was not sent to the House of Judah. In 1 Kings 18:18, he points out two major problems that threaten their "latter end": (1) They had forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and (2) they had followed Baalism. Each problem was a death sentence.

There are no records in Scripture that show the true depth of the problem ... but Elijah's experience indicates that the entire national structure (social, religious, political) was thoroughly poisoned by Baalism. The ruling class, headed by King Ahab (918-897 BC) and his wife Jezebel (a devotee of the Asherah cult), were paganized through and through. In 1 Kings 18:19, we see that the prophets of Baal and Asherah enjoyed official status at Jezebel's table. It appears that nothing had been done from Solomon's time to Ahab's to correct Solomon's pagan excesses (1 Kings 11:1-3). Even Jehu's purge about 884 BC was directed only at the Tyrian Baal. He did not uproot native paganisms ... nor did he seriously attempt to do so.

Elijah points out that the majority of the House of Israel went "limping between two opinions" (v. 21). Neither the royalty nor the priesthood did anything to correct the situation. The native Canaanites were free to practice Baalism ... even to proselytize the Israelites. As is far too often the case in such situations, compromises are made and syncretism sets in. In the House of Israel's case, Baalism was adopted to the worship of Yahweh.

David and Solomon had created a program for absorbing numerous Canaanites into Israel's national tribal system. This had given the nation a mass of citizens with little comprehension of covenant or covenant law. This caused serious religious decay whereby the native Israelites themselves followed suit and lost their own conception of covenant and covenant law. This led to an eventual serious lack of concern for it. Present-day "open border" policies threaten the national security of numerous nations for the same reason. If there is no

regard for the "constitution" that defines the national reason for existence, then the national existence is grave peril over time.

Such was the case with the House of Israel. The Lord God's message through Elijah was simple: "Choose whom you are going to serve: Baal or the Lord God." Limping between two opinions is not acceptable." It is interesting that the people had no reply. One would have expected, at the least, what might have been a divided expression of allegiance. Apparently, the silence was deafening because the people did not know what to think. And there were many people present.

Here is the astonishing thing about the mindset of the House of Israel: Her faith was totally perverted. She clung to the normative faith in Israel's election, covenant, and promises. However, a deep inner perversion of the true faith changed Yahwism into a pagan form of Yahwistic Baalism. Regardless of Elijah's challenge, the House of Israel was convinced that something in the nature of her relationship with Yahweh assured her of Yahweh's unconditional favor.

Paul points out in Romans 1:18-32 that the suppression of God's truth leads to being turned over to the consequences of the sins committed (vv. 24, 26, 28). He also points out that social and sexual degeneration go hand-in-hand with religious decay: losing or abandoning true knowledge of God (v. 28).

Jesus made a pregnant point in Matthew 7:21-23 about the vanity of religious zeal and practice that violates the will of God. All of the "feel good" and "do good" nature of such religious practice is not acceptable if it violates God's will. The religious shrines of the House of Israel were very busy. Great crowds of Israelites worshiped there and lavishly supported those who maintained them. But, no matter how much they attached Yahweh's name to them, their syncretized religion was a stench in the nostrils of a holy God.

Amos came along about 780 BC (although some excavators say the earthquake in Amos 1:1 occurred around 760 BC). Experts place Jeroboam II's reign at 786-746 BC. All of that notwithstanding, Amos was actively prophesying against both Israel and Judah for about a year. He also included numerous national neighbors of Israel and Judah (Amos 1:3-2:3).

Inept Assyrian overlords caused a waning of Assyrian power, which allowed the opportunistic Jeroboam II to restore his northern and southern borders and establish control over the House of Israel's trade routes. The successes and prosperity that followed combined to give them the "big head" ... especially with regard to the covenant. Social distinctions became even more evident. Even though social injustice became the norm, religion flourished. Both Israel and Judah felt very comfortable and were convinced that they had the Lord God's favor and support ... after all, they were the "covenant" people.

Judah did not keep the Commandments. Their lies caused grievous errors to be published abroad (Amos 2:4, 5). The wealthy in Israel employed robbers and thugs to victimize their unsuspecting neighbors. Anyone who attempted to reveal the truth was silenced. In Amos 3, we find that the leaders in both Houses who had the responsibility for establishing and executing justice were the very ones who turned against the commoners and poor.

Judges, priests, and prophets accumulated personal wealth and showed indifference toward their covenant brothers. Yet, they would claim that Yahweh was in their midst and no evil would befall them.

The aristocracy in Jerusalem included many with a non-Israelite background. They were the equivalent of our modern "globalists." They had an international outlook and little to no feeling for

the essential nature of Yahwism. The rural population would have been described in modern terms as those who liked the "old time religion" and "clung to their Bibles and guns."

The "globalists" seemed to be more tolerant on the surface; so, they had the upper hand. Paganism was fostered and/or tolerated ... so it grew and grew. This attitude allowed sacred prostitution and homosexuality to flourish. As far as social matters are concerned, they would have been the "best buds" of the modern marijuana crowd, liberal political elitists, and "all religious roads lead to heaven."

Jeremiah 19:5 and 32:34 pretty much sum up the outcome of the proving and humbling processes. They blatantly disregarded the Lord God's warnings about the consequences they would suffer (see Jer. 7). By His own admission, it never occurred to the Lord God that Israel and Judah would be so utterly rebellious in their loyalty to false gods. Read 32:30-44. Notice how He moves from the punishment to the "latter end." This is something into which we must deeply study. We must have a serious grasp on a love that is this profound and enduring.

If Paul is right in 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 about Israel serving as an example to us today. Then it is not a matter of the duality of prophecy; it is a matter of the fulfillment of ancient prophecies to which we have been made a part because of our own covenant agreement with the Lord God: Jesus Christ.

How human was Jesus Christ?

In a recent conversation I had with a man, I pointed out that the Bible nowhere says that man is, or has, an immortal soul. His quick-witted reply was that *the Bible also does not say that Jesus Christ "went to the bathroom."* If you base your knowledge of the Bible on such inane quips, then you will overlook a very important aspect of scriptural revelation. In other words, *the Bible can and does reveal things without specifically saying them.* For instance: If Hebrews 2:16-18 reveals that Jesus Christ was a human and was subjected to the same things to which all humans are subjected (see also John 1:1-3, 14), then, by inference, the Bible tacitly reveals that Jesus "went to the bathroom" (see also Heb. 4:7-9). If Ecclesiastes 9:4, 5, 10 reveals that "...the dead know not anything...[and] they have no memory of anything...there is no work, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom in the grave..." (author's paraphrase based on *KJV*, *MLB* and *RSV* translations), then it is very easy to understand that man is not, nor does he have, an immortal soul (see also Gen. 3:19, 22). Now, what does Hebrews 5:11-14 reveal about inane quips?

Faulty Paradigms

A paradigm is a model or pattern upon which a concept is based. The paradigm drives the construction of the concept, and generally does not allow for deviations from the conclusions formed by the concept. For example: John 17:17 (“Your word is truth.”) is a paradigm from which we derive the concept that God’s word, as expressed in the Bible, is trustworthy and that it reveals His truth to mankind. Paul expresses his trust in the Law portion of God’s word by saying that it is “holy, just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). Such a conclusion based on this concept is consistent with the paradigm that God’s word is truth. The Lord God sets forth this same paradigm in Deuteronomy 4:2 when He declares the concept that His word is not to be “added” to or “diminished” from ... an idea that is repeated in 12:32, Joshua 1:7, Proverbs 30:6, and Revelation 22:18, 19. Why? Because God’s word is sufficient and trustworthy in and of itself. The truth of it can be applied to countless situations in life.

All one needs to do in order to have a faulty paradigm is to “add” to or “diminish” from God’s word ... to change it in one way or another to make it say something that it most assuredly does not say (see Rom. 1:25). Great care must be exercised in order to avoid the faulty paradigm. That said, we are going to discuss some examples of faulty paradigms and learn how to understand the proper pattern upon which God’s concept of truth is based (see 2 Tim. 2:15 and John 4:23, 24).

The “Authority” Paradigm

One sense of the term authority is that it bestows on someone the right or power to determine how a certain responsibility is to be pursued. Consider the following three quotes as examples of this part of the lesson:

The Catholic Church of its own infallible authority created Sunday a holy day to take the place of the Sabbath of the old law (*Kansas City Catholic*, Feb. 9, 1893; emphases added).

The Catholic Church ... by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday (*Catholic Mirror*, official organ of Cardinal Gibbons, Sept. 23, 1893; emphases added).

You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we

never sanctify (Cardinal Gibbons, in “The Faith of Our Fathers,” edition 1892, page 111; emphases added).

These examples are used by the Roman Catholic Church as “proof” that she was given the authority by God to make such a change ... “proof” that the change was done without scriptural warrant through “infallible authority” and “by virtue of her divine mission.”

On its face, this is a tacit admission that the change was done by either “adding to” or “diminishing from” God’s scriptural word. *They say that the authority to do so is not revealed anywhere in Scripture*. From where, then, do they claim to derive the authority to do so?

They believe that Matthew 16:18, 19 is the point in time when Jesus Christ made Peter the Chief Apostle of the Church and gave to him the authority to “loose and bind” all manner of things without let or hindrance. All subsequent “popes” inherit that authority from Peter and are infallible when they speak by the Spirit that was in Peter.

Again, no such intention in Jesus Christ’s statement is evident in Scripture, but they consider

their interpretation of this incident as being infallible ... that is: without error and as good as the voice of God Himself. What conclusions can we draw from such examples?

First and foremost, we should adhere to Deuteronomy 4:2: “adding to” and “diminishing from” God’s word is prohibited. Secondly, proper authority to make such changes should be derived from Scripture ... and the Scripture should be easily understood as definitely being a revelation of God’s will to change or reverse His word. Such an understanding would be the result of “rightly dividing the word of truth,” not someone’s “convenient” claim to have God’s authority to do so.

The “Prophetic” Paradigm

Prophecy is a very volatile area for the faulty paradigm. One wrong concept regarding the interpretation of prophecy can seriously distort and/or pervert God’s word. Since God claims to be the God of truth, it would make little sense for Him to accept anything less than the true interpretation of His prophecies.

Yet, religious men – even men who are high-ranking ministers – make some very serious mistakes about the interpretation of Scripture and some of the prophecies contained in it. Let’s examine Job 1:1-12 and 2:1-6 with this in mind. What is the concept embedded in these verses?

The concept involves the righteousness of Job in God’s sight. What did God say about Job in Job 1:8 and 2:3? Read this carefully:

Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, *a perfect and upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil?* (emphasis added)

... He holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause. (emphases added)

Was this false praise? Based on what we have learned about God’s word being truth, one would be foolish to claim that this is false praise. What does the Lord God mean that He was moved to destroy Job without cause? Self-righteousness

would have been a cause for which He would allow Satan to torment Job with so many pains and so much sorrow! Instead, the Lord God challenges Satan to break Job’s righteousness, rather than using Satan to punish him for self-righteousness.

From the paradigm that this is not false praise, we adhere to the concept that God’s word is trustworthy as the revelation of His truth. What is God’s truth about Job’s righteousness? Were the trials because of self-righteousness? Or, was it because the Lord God wanted to show Satan that a truly righteous man will not – cannot – be moved away from true faith and righteousness? Does that give you a good idea about why Job suffered the things he suffered? With those questions in mind, let’s consider how some religious people “paint” Job’s righteousness.

Now read Job 42:1-8. After all of the things that Job suffered, what did God say about the way Job’s friends had treated Job with their accusations and defamations? Two times God says to them: “You have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has” (emphases added). Twice God says that Job was right in what he said and that he was His servant. From this, what concept do you form regarding Job’s righteousness? Let’s put your concept to the test.

Writing about the “Laodicean” righteousness described in Revelation 3:14-19, one Church leader says that the Laodiceans “have need of nothing” because they are self-righteous. He attributes to the self-righteous a deceptive drive and energy that is comparable to the self-righteousness in Job.

He admits that Job had some remarkable “religious” deeds that virtually none of us can duplicate. But ... he insists that God had to step in and reveal to Job something that his four friends could not do. It took God’s personal intervention to reveal to Job his self-righteousness.

This assessment of Job is predicated on the “authority” paradigm of two men: one was the teacher; the other was the student who became the founder of another Church group after the teacher died. The teacher’s successor forced the student out of the parent organization. The successor went on to bring the teacher’s work to utter and complete ruin by denouncing all of his teachings.

The teacher was the founder of the parent Church, and ... his teachings were regarded very

highly. The founding teacher had declared for years that Job was self-righteous. The teacher's paradigm was uncritically and unquestioningly followed by the student, and members of the organization in general, primarily because of the teacher's rank and perceived authority.

Here are your questions:

1. Based on God's word as revealed in Job 1, 2, and 42, would you conclude that Job was self-righteous and had to be purged of it by being turned over to Satan (see Luke 22:31, 32 and 1 Cor. 5:5)?
2. Did Job have to "suffer horribly" before he could see his problem?
3. When you get right down to the real nitty-gritty, would you presently follow the teacher and the student in the concept they constructed from their paradigm?
4. Why did Job really suffer the things he suffered?

Now, let's apply this "Laodicean" situation to the "prophetic" paradigm. It is human nature, I suppose, to be a bit suspicious of someone's teachings when you have caught them being off-base with the paradigms, concepts, and conclusions they have drawn in a wide range of topics ... how they use God's word to form them and proceed to teach them.

It is not wrong for you to accept the challenge of checking up on them and "proving" things to yourself. In fact, they often invite you to do so. Your goal in doing that is to be true to God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Here are your questions:

1. Based on Revelation 3:14-19; 6:9-11; 7:1-17; and 12:11, 12, do you find any indication that the "Laodicean" must die during the Tribulation in order to be officially and permanently sealed for eternal life?
2. Do you find any indication that the martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11 and the

144,000 of Revelation 7:1-17 are all the same Laodicean martyrs who die during the Tribulation?

3. Do suffering tribulation and spiritual refinement automatically equate to dying?

4. If your answers are "No," why would anyone conclude that they have scriptural warrant to draw those conclusions in opposition to a high-ranking minister?

Now read the following statements and determine if you could "rightly divide" the following conclusions supposedly derived from God's word:

The Laodiceans are comprised of the remnant members of the parent Church and other groups that have left the parent Church. The former student's Church group is not included among the Laodiceans.

The Laodiceans did not "come out" of the Tribulation like those described in Revelation 7:13-17. The martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11 and the 144,000 of Revelation 7:1-8 are both in the Tribulation because they are the same group: Laodiceans.

The Laodiceans must admit that they have rebelled against what God taught through the founder of the parent Church and repent – and then DIE to prove to God that they accept fully the teachings of the founder of the parent Church. The Laodiceans have to prove their unmitigated faith and practice of the founder's "truth" by dying for God.

If you are not now a member of the student's Church, what terrible fate awaits you?

Does such a concept intimidate you? Does it make you fearful enough to begin contacting the former student about joining forces with him? Or, is there something about your acquired knowledge

of God's truth that would cause you to hold fast to what you see there (Rev. 3:11)? Do you wonder how someone can take prophetic statements and apply them to some seemingly unrelated things today? Maybe it is born out of a faulty paradigm.

If your paradigm is that "most prophecy is dual," then you might begin to frame your interpretation of prophecy so that most prophecies have some application to a specific, modern Church group that is unnamed in Scripture. It is very easy to find comments in Scripture that can be twisted to mean what you want them to mean. For example: The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Pope, for all practical purposes, is imbued with the spirit of Peter – that he actually stands in the place of Peter to the degree that Peter actually speaks through him.

With that kind of mindset, it would not be far-fetched for someone to believe that coming *in the spirit of Elijah* could mean the same thing ... that is, that Elijah is actually working through a particular religious personage in our day and time. Is that what Scripture teaches about the end-time "Elijah" (Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 17:1-13)?

While John the Baptist fulfilled an "Elijah" role, Malachi 4:5 places an "Elijah" among us just prior to "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." We have not yet entered that event; so, we must expect someone to come to fulfill that role at that time. Do you bequeath that honor upon anyone who comes and does a great work for God's truth? No. We have to be careful about putting certain "stamps of approval" on great religious leaders.

This is where we must understand the "prophetic paradigms" used by those who teach that they have the "keys" to prophecies that no one else has. That claim is possible, but the "proof" is in the "pudding." We must take care to understand that Matthew 24:24 reveals that the "very elect" can be deceived into believing a lie if they are not careful about the circumstances involved.

The Difference between a Principle and a Prophetic Fulfillment

Too often, some attempt to make a Scripture appear as though a particular concept is a prophet-

ic fulfillment, when it is actually based on a principle (an idea that can be applied to various other similar situations). Some have done this with Hosea 6:2. How so?

Because of the mention of Israel being "revived" on the second day and "raised up" on the third day, they claim that Hosea is prophesying that the Tribulation is to be shortened from 3½ prophetic years to 2½ prophetic years because Matthew 24:21, 22 says that it will be cut short by the return of Jesus Christ. Your task is to verify this by God's word. Do you have enough knowledge and understanding of God's word to do this ... or, are you at the mercy of those who make such a claim?

Those who make such a claim connect this to the "day of the Lord" that begins 900 prophetic days into the Tribulation. In doing so, they conclude something about the Tribulation that is not evident in Scripture. In fact, their concept is based on a faulty paradigm about the occurrence and duration of the "day of the Lord" ... as well as a faulty conclusion about the meaning of Hosea 6:2. Let's follow the reasoning.

What is described in Daniel 7:25 as "a time, and times, and the dividing of time" is connected to Revelation 11:2, 3 ("forty and two months" and "a thousand two hundred and threescore days"), Revelation 12:14 ("a time, and times, and half a time"), and Revelation 13:5 ("forty and two months"). All of these expressions are generally understood by commentators to be the same specified duration of the Tribulation period: 1,260 days/42 months/3½ "prophetic" years long (30 days x 42 months = 1,260 days).

How does the faulty paradigm skew God's revelation about the duration of the Tribulation? Working with the idea that the Tribulation period must be cut short (Matt. 24:21, 22), they use Hosea 6:2 to subtract 360 days (a "prophetic" year) from the prophesied 3½ prophetic years in the Scriptures above.

A prophetic "year" consists of 12 months of 30 days each (1,260 days). If you take 360 days off the 1,260-day Tribulation, then it lasts only 900 days: 2½ prophetic years (360 x 2.5 = 900). For them, Hosea 6:2 is God's "proof" that such will be the case. They overlook an important principle!

Let me explain what is going on in Hosea 6:2 and what it means in the context in which it is

found. The prophecy has to do with the return of the entire nation of Israel from being scattered to the four winds and punished for her sins. We must work from that vantage point to get the correct understanding.

In Hosea 6:1, the comment about “Come, let us return...” is Israel’s comment and is considered by commentators to be a move by the Lord God to make it plain that the decision to do so must be Israel’s idea (both “houses”: read Hos. 5). They have to resolve to repent and make the return to the Land instead of remaining in Babylon (Judah) and being scattered all over the world (Ephraim). He will not force that decision upon them. It has to be their free-will decision to do so. This conclusion is based on Hosea 5:14, 15.

Hosea 6:1-4 is the Lord God’s assessment of Israel’s national spiritual ability to make such a decision. They think that the Lord God will rush in to make up with them and that the reunion will be quick and easy ... despite the long and torturous relationship they have had with their “lovers” among the heathens and how they had so soon and so easily kissed off their covenant relationship with the Lord God. They thought this reconciliation could be done within 2 to 3 days at the most.

The Lord God shows that such a thought is unrealistic optimism. Verse 4 is the injection of the Lord God’s understanding of the true spiritual condition of Israel: “...Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away.” That comment alone makes it plain that Israel is not really ready to enter into a true heart-to-heart relationship with her Husband. She is “flickty” and “fickle” and “superficial.”

At the very core of her being, Israel lacks the steadfastness, trustworthiness, faithfulness, and loyalty demanded by covenant “love” – motivated, not by external law, but by virtue of their Spirit-driven free will and acceptance of His grace and mercy ... a relationship not characterized by impulsive changes in thought and deed (see Mal. 3:6) but by unchanging faithfulness and continual, persistent trustworthiness that never entertains the thought of being bound by covenant to anyone else but the Lord God forever. The Lord God was not satisfied that Israel was ready to be like Him in the covenant relationship (Lev. 19:2) ... not yet, any-

way. They had to thoroughly learn the lesson about truly being His people forever.

I do not doubt that this prophecy portends some very good news for Israel in the “end times.” I do not doubt that this prophecy shows us that Paul was exactly right in Romans 11:25-27 when he said that God will again give Israel her spiritual insight and knowledge of Him, forgive her sins completely, and enter into a new covenant relationship with her (Jer. 31:31-34).

From this, I could derive a principle about the Laodiceans, but I could not claim that this prophecy is dual and, therefore, applies specifically to the so-called Laodicean era of the Church (the remnants of WCG) during the coming Tribulation.

Nor could I say that Hosea 6:2 demands that the Tribulation period will be only 2½ years long because of the “after two days” and “in the third day” comments in v. 2. Concluding that, I think, is “adding to” or “diminishing from” God’s word and changing our “knowledge” of God’s truth.

The question that I have had since I learned about this conclusion by the founder and the ministers who believe his findings to be “carved in stone” is simple: *Why would the Lord God put such a prophecy in Hosea 6:2 and then proceed to contradict it over 800 years later in Revelation?* If we applied a “thousand years as a day” (2 Pet. 3:8) as opposed to a “year for a day” (Num. 14:33, 34; Ezek. 4:4-6) then the “day of the Lord” could be projected to be 1,000+ years long! It’s the paradigm that drives the concept! Is the paradigm true?

Conclusion

We have to be careful about handling God’s word in spirit and in truth if that is the way He says we must worship Him (John 4:23, 24). We must develop in our spiritual character the will and determination to learn God’s word to the point that we are not led astray by faulty concepts born out of faulty paradigms – in either the minds of others or our own. Beware of false “prophets” (Matt. 24:24).

Obedying God rather than man means that we must develop the spiritual strength and determination to put even the greatest among mankind to the test regarding God’s word of truth. The greatest among us have the greatest ability to lead us astray.

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“Jacob’s Trouble”

Jeremiah 30:3 declares that the Lord God is going to bring Israel and Judah out of captivity and return them to the land that He promised to Abraham and his descendants and swore an oath to confirm that the promise is immutable – that is, it will not ... and cannot ... be changed (see Gen. 15:7-20 and Heb. 6:13-20). This statement is the “good news” part of a “good news/bad news” message to both “Houses” of the nation of Israel. It is a demonstration of the Lord God’s faithful execution of the covenant agreement He had with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) (see Gen. 26:5 and 35:9-12; Rom. 11:29).

Then comes the “bad news” part of His message. The “captivity” out of which He will return them to the Land of Promise is not one in which they are presently suffering. It will be a time of great distress “*for that day is great, so that none is like it*” (emphases added). It is to be a captivity which He labels as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). It is but a short description that He gives to this “day” – a description that is used in two other places in Scripture: Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21, 22.

How do Israel and Judah (“Jacob”) become captive together ... and delivered from that captivity together? That is, after all, what was revealed to Jeremiah. We have an idea about where Judah is today. However, the world is mostly ignorant about the whereabouts of the House of Israel. There is much to learn here about the future of God’s True Church relative to “Jacob’s trouble.”

Are We Living in the “Last Days”?

People have said for centuries that “the last days” are at hand because of the conditions extant in the world at large during their times. The problem in their discernment has been one of scriptural ignorance, either because they have not known God’s word or because they have fallen victim to Isaiah 28:13: They knew only enough about God’s word that it actually became a snare for them and caused great confusion for them.

Even people with great knowledge of Scripture have not had an advantage in being able to solve the “mystery” of much of prophecy. “Prophets of doom” have been among us and have died ignominious deaths as liars and deceivers. Some, however, have been able to observe the conditions of their times and draw conclusions about them.

Dr. George Wald of Harvard University, winner of the 1967 Nobel Prize in Physiology, said this:

Civilization will end within fifteen to thirty years unless immediate action is taken against problems now facing mankind, especially pollution, overpopulation and

the possibility of nuclear war (emphases added).

Dr. Herbert F. York (1922-2009), a former chief scientist at the Pentagon and co-inventor of the atomic bomb, warned the world that “unless the nations agree to an arms rollback, our civilization is doomed.”

Former President Dwight Eisenhower said in his 1952 inaugural address that “Science seems ready to confer upon us, as its final gift, the power to erase human life from this planet.”

Even more pointed and grim was General Douglas MacArthur’s address to the Congress of the United States in 1951:

I know war as few other men now living know it, and nothing to me – *nothing to me* – is more revolting ... Men since the beginning of time have sought peace ... Military alliances, balances of power, leagues of nations, all in turn failed, leaving the only path to be by the crucible of war. *The utter destructiveness of war now blocks this alternative.* WE HAVE HAD OUR

LAST CHANCE. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, our “ARMAGEDDON” will be at our door.

MacArthur’s solution was that the problem is *theological*: Mankind must have a revival in right and proper character that is in synchrony with his scientific and technological advances so as to serve the best purposes of human good. He summed it up like this: “It must be of the *spirit* if we are to save the flesh.”

While no one should claim that these men were *prophets* (much less *false* prophets), they would have to admit that these men were capable of discerning what they thought might have been *a time like none other in history*. The bad thing about that thought is that the world is going to experience more extraordinarily bad times before we actually get to the time of “Jacob’s trouble” and “Aramageddon.”

That was part of Jesus Christ’s message to His Disciples in Matthew 24:4-14. His continued message in v. 15 is that someone, somewhere will be telling the world about the way out of the mess. A clue like that in Jeremiah 30 assures us that human life will *not* be erased from this planet, civilization is *not* doomed, and nuclear war will *not* be our death and destruction by suicide.

While true Christians can have faith and confidence in that knowledge, it does not, by any means, lessen the severity of what is to come upon Israel and Judah prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Oddly enough, the rest of the world will also suffer from this time that has never in history come upon the world.

Isaiah 55:10, 11 is the Lord God’s message to those who have “eyes that see and ears that hear.” He will, without failure,” accomplish all that He has declared as His goal for His creation of the heavens and earth and the humans who inhabit it. Not only that, but those who now lie in their graves will be brought back to life in order to fulfill the purpose for which they were brought to life (see John 5:21-29).

Are we living in the “last days”? No. We are living in “troubled times” (Matt. 24:3-14). As long as the prophecy about “Jacob’s trouble” has not begun to be fulfilled, we have not entered the “last days” of the Babylonian system and success-

sion of empires prophesied in Daniel 2. We are not yet at the end of “man’s age.” As obvious as it should be to God’s true people, the “end” is not upon us ... yet.

The Relationship Between “Jacob’s Trouble” and the Tribulation Period

One of the most difficult thoughts to pass on to a “Christian” world is that the focus of Scripture is on the relationship between the Lord God and Israel since He “married” her at Mt. Sinai after the exodus out of Egypt. It is even more difficult to get those who do understand that piece of information to understand that the focus of “end time” prophecies is directed *primarily* toward modern *Israel* and *Judah*. Because God often uses other nations to carry out Israel’s punishment, they, of necessity, must also be identified, in one way or another, in the prophecies involved.

Jeremiah 23:5-8 is an interesting prophecy relative to our discussion. It prophesies the coming of Jesus Christ to be the King over all of the earth and over both “houses” of Israel. Notice that this is *after* Israel has endured the “trouble” He is going to bring upon them. In vv. 7 and 8, He says that the “exodus” at that time will be *greater* than the one out of Egypt. It will be so great that people will not even talk about the exodus from Egypt anymore. It will be a great rescue for those in Israel who repent. The Lord God has always been willing to reason with Israel and forgive her upon repentance and restore her (see Isa. 1:16-20; Deut. 30).

Notice from where the House of Israel will come: “Out of the *north* country, and from all countries where I have driven them.” This is why the House of Israel is commonly referred to as the “lost” House of Israel. Judah is readily identified wherever they live, but not so the other Israelites. This is a different story from that which identifies “lost” Israel with the Native American tribes of the western hemisphere.

One well-known Church evangelist and author once made the following observation about prophetic Scripture relative to Israel:

Every time you encounter prophecies concerning Israel and the return of Jesus

Christ, Israel is found to be in a state of captivity, horrible slavery, privation, suffering, starvation.

Why would you suppose that such is the case?

Paul gives us understanding of the problem in Romans 9:22 through 10:21. Paul recalls that even the Gentiles will share in God's blessings through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:26-29). In 9:27, he cites Isaiah 1:9 regarding the "remnant" that would continue to be in covenant with Jesus Christ and survive as His "Church" (see Acts 7:38 and Rom. 11:1-5).

In Romans 10:13-21, he explains that Israel was taught the "gospel" of the Kingdom of God (see Ex. 19:5, 6 and Mark 1:14, 15). What was Israel's response? Jesus Christ covered this very specifically in Matthew 23:27-39. The so-called "righteous" among Israel were the worst offenders! Romans 10:16 cites Isaiah's query about whether or not the messages of the Lord God were obeyed. Verse 21 is his answer.

In order to understand Paul's reasoning here, you must understand Leviticus 26:14-46 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68. While the Lord God gave all of Israel the "good news" about His blessings first, He also gave them the "bad news" about what they would suffer if they were not obedient. After being punished, they would reap even more severe punishment if they continued to walk contrary to His commandments, statutes, and laws – up to seven times in severity (Lev. 26:18-35).

Read very carefully Leviticus 26:40-46. The Lord God's point is simple: "Repent and accept your punishment in order for us to renew the covenant I had with Israel ... which was predicated upon my covenant with Abraham." In short, the Lord God promises not to destroy Israel if she will repent and walk in true covenant agreement with Him. This kind of mercy is displayed in the book of Jonah where Nineveh thoroughly repented when they were threatened by the Lord God with imminent destruction.

The message is essentially the same in Deuteronomy 28. Pay attention to vv. 45-52; 62-66. Notice the kind of nation it will be that reduces Israel to abject slavery (vv. 49, 50). It will be so bad that Israel will resort to cannibalism (vv. 53-57). Her numbers will be reduced significantly (vv. 62, 63).

She will be scattered once again "from one end of the earth to the other" (v. 64). The severity of these curses will be unparalleled in Israel's history.

Now consider Romans 9:27-29. Paul's citation of the prophecy of Isaiah 1:1-9 sounds very ominous if you consider that it was given between 745-695 B.C. The House of Israel was eventually taken out of the land between 721-718 B.C by the Assyrians. To date, that kind of punishment will have been executed for over 2,700 years. This was prophesied by Isaiah in Isaiah 10:5-7. However, this is not "Jacob's trouble."

Isaiah 10:7 reveals that it is in the heart of the Assyrian king to exterminate and destroy. It is because the Lord God identifies Assyria as the rod of His anger (v. 5) that some are convinced that the Assyrians will be used again in the "end times" to punish both "Houses" of Israel by taking them into captivity. What does that mean?

Let's consider the premise of the "Beast" book based on Daniel 2 and 7. Daniel 2 addresses the great statue about which the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar dreamed. The "feet and toes of miry clay" represent the Roman Empire ... and the "feet and toes of miry clay" is the place on the statue where the "stone ... cut out without hands" will strike in order to reduce the entire Babylonian statue to dust that is blown away into oblivion (Dan, 2:34, 35; 41-45). This tells us that the "Roman" Empire (in whatever form it exists at the time) will be the agent by which Israel and Judah are to be punished during the time called "Jacob's trouble."

Daniel 7 is a similar prophecy. This is a dream had by Daniel in which the Lord God revealed to him four "beasts" that represent the same idea represented by Nebuchadnezzar's statue. The difference between them is that Daniel 7 uses 10 "horns" instead of 10 "toes" (vv. 7, 20, 24). It is the same "empire" as that portrayed in Daniel 2:40-43. In both dreams, the Lord God comes to deliver His people and give to them the Kingdom of God. All vestiges of the "Babylonian" succession of empires will be totally destroyed and never again allowed to exist.

Because the "Roman Empire" was eventually replaced by the "Holy Roman Empire" under the leadership of various Germanic tribes, it was, in fact, overtaken by those who were descended from the ancient Assyrians. That is the reason I traced

the development of the Roman Empire from Julius Caesar to modern Germany in my book *Understanding the "Beasts" of Revelation 13*. It establishes the concept of O. T. prophecies that Israel (Judah and Israel) will fall victim to the "Beast" power before being delivered by Jesus Christ (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 13:1-10). The "Beast" will be responsible for the Tribulation Period and "Jacob's Trouble." They are one and the same event. Read Revelation 12 and 13 together to get the sense of this statement. The "woman" in Revelation 12 plays a major role in understanding the focus of the prophecy on Israel and God's True Church.

Yes ... it is true that much of the rest of the world also will suffer because of this most terrible time. That is the nature of the role that "Israel" plays in the world today. Why? Let's consider who "Israel" represents in the world today:

Ephraim and Manasseh = "Jacob" (Gen. 48:16) are considered to be Great Britain and the United States.

Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and other British-descended nations are also included under "Ephraim and Manasseh."

Other "Israelites" include: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Iceland, and Greenland.

There are countless other countries where Israel and Judah have been scattered (ex.: some elements of "Israel" are still in Iran because they did not migrate to northwest Europe with the Assyrians).

Wherever they are, they eventually will be brought back to the Land of Promise to be included in the New Covenant with Jesus Christ – the Lord God of the Old Testament who originally "married" them. You should be able to understand from this the scope of the Lord God's statement that He will bring them from the "north country" and "wherever in the world I have scattered them." Israel and Judah both are very widely scattered

around the world. That is the scope of the next "exodus."

The Timing of the Next Exodus

This will be a generalized discussion because of Matthew 24:36: No one except God the Father knows when it will begin. Regardless, we can know the nature of the situation. Matthew 24:37-40 gives us the idea that the world will be like it was just prior to the Noachian Flood. Events will build toward the moment, but the world will be generally oblivious to what is really happening. Of course, we cannot overlook that a group of Christians expect Planet X to collide with the earth to-day (9/20/17) and completely destroy it! **Wrong!**

Here is what is noteworthy about this information: Matthew 24:29-30 tells us that the "sign of the Son of man" will occur "immediately after the tribulation of those days." This tells us that the Tribulation Period will have been wreaking havoc for some time before this "sign" appears. If "Jacob's trouble" and the Tribulation Period are the same, then the punishment of Israel and Judah already will have been in effect for a little less than 1,260 days (3½ prophetic years) prior to this event. We see this "sign" mentioned in Revelation 6:12-17, which is the prelude to the destruction of the Babylonish system.

Another example is found in Revelation 11:1-14, which reveals the ministry of the Two Witnesses in Jerusalem for 1,260 days. Verse 5 shows that God put out a "no hit" notice that the Two were not to be molested during their *testimony*. When that testimony has been sufficiently spread abroad, the "Beast" will be allowed to attack them and kill them. There is no hint that their "testimony" will be cut shorter than 1,260 days. They will be killed, and the world will celebrate the occasion with parties and gift-giving. Their bodies will be dragged through the streets of Jerusalem and left unburied for 3½ days while all of this goes on.

Notice the point at which they are resurrected from their deaths and called up to "heaven" (v. 12). What does this mean? It does not mean that they are called to "heaven" *where God's throne is*. Verse 12 says that they "ascended up to heaven in a cloud." At the same time, according to vv. 13-15,

the seventh trumpet is sounded that announces the first resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 14:14-16). Because they are part of the saints of God, they will be among the firstfruits of all ages who have been called out by the Lord God to be His “ruling realm” with Him in God’s Kingdom (Rev. 11:15; 20:4-6). So, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, they will meet all of the other saints (Heb. 11:39, 40) “in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (emphases added).

We can be sure that this is God’s truth if we understand the meaning of the term “heaven” as it is used in the context of Revelation 11:12. The Greek term from which it is translated is ouranos. The term “heaven” ... to most mainstream Christians ... means “the divine abode of God and His angels.” To those who believe in the immortal soul doctrine, the souls of the Two Witnesses would have gone to “heaven” the second they died. That is not even remotely alluded to here. The “heaven” in Revelation 11:12 refers to the upper atmosphere of the earth – which can include “space” (see Gen. 1:1). So, where is this ouranos?

The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* wrongly defines it, *in this case*, as “the abode of the divine” – probably because it follows mainstream Christian doctrine about going to “heaven” in such cases. Based on what we can understand from Scripture, we use a better, more fundamentally true definition from BAG: “as a part of the universe ... the place of the atmosphere; the clouds hover in it” (emphases added). Why would I choose such a definition?

Revelation 1:7 prophesies that Jesus Christ “comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him” (emphases added). Under the definition “the firmament or *sky* over the earth; out of the reach of men,” BAG cites Revelation 6:14-17. This indicates that Jesus will be in our “air space” when He is revealed at the beginning of “the great day of His wrath” (v. 17).

Those who believe in the “rapture” doctrine claim that Jesus will come to take Christians “back to heaven” (“the abode of the divine”). However, BAG’s definition shows that He is not expected to be in heaven calling anyone up to heaven (“the abode of the divine”). Revelation 12:14-17 demonstrates that He will pose a “clear and present danger to the godless of the earth! They will see Him

because He will be in our “airspace” where the clouds are! It will be the sight of Him that will horrify the unconverted inhabitants of the earth.

If you harmonize Matthew 24:29-31 with Revelation 14:14-16, you can understand the process of the seventh trumpet – the last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52). In Revelation 14:14-16, we see Jesus Christ seated on a cloud waiting for a special event. Judging by vv. 15, 16, He is waiting for word from the Father to sound the last trumpet plague, which begins with the “reaping” of the firstfruit saints (see Matt. 24:36) and ends with the destruction of “Babylon.” He is not sitting there doing nothing, however.

At this point, He already will have been there for a goodly portion of the 360 days of intervention against the “Beast” and the wicked of the earth on behalf of His people (Matt. 24:21, 22). He will have already overseen the execution of the first six “trumpet” plagues (Revelation 8:1-11:14). Almost all of the allotted 1,260 days of the Tribulation Period already will have occurred. This is Jesus Christ’s effort to prevent the Tribulation from going beyond its allotted 1,260-day time period. In other words, the Tribulation will be “shortened” by not allowing it to be driven to the destruction of all flesh ... which, presumably, will occur if it is unchecked at this time.

The 360 days of “trumpet” and “bowl” plagues are an “abridgment” or “curtailment” of the death and destruction that could be executed by the “Beast” under Satan’s direction if left unchecked. Satan’s attitude is evident: “I will rule all of this ... or, I will destroy it!” We have witnessed many such maniacs in our history – Kim Jung Un of North Korea, the Mullahs of Iran, and ISIS being the latest such monsters in a long line. The last despot under Satan’s control will meet an inglorious end at the hands of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 7:1-3 says that there will be a short “pause” in the action before the seven trumpet plagues (Ch. 8, 9, 11) begin to be poured out on the world during the Tribulation and “Jacob’s Trouble” (Rev. 11:7-10). *The Two Witnesses will have testified in Jerusalem for 1,260 days prior to the seventh trumpet being blown* (Rev. 11:2, 3)! Is that a contradiction to the idea that the “Day of the Lord” overlaps the final year of the Tribulation by 360 days? No. Let’s understand why this is true.

Revelation 9:13-21 provides part of the answer. The sixth trumpet plague is poured out on a totally unrepentant mankind (v. 21). Revelation 10 is an inset chapter that tells us that part of the vision was not to be recorded (v. 4). In v. 6, the “mighty angel” of v. 1 declares that there will be no more delay in the execution of Christ’s intervention (the seventh trumpet plague).

Read carefully Revelation 10:7:

In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He has declared to His servants the prophets (KJV; emphases added).

Why do I point this out to you? This shows that Jesus Christ has been intervening for almost 360 days prior to this moment. Why? Because the “Beast” power continues to pursue the cause of Satan the devil to destroy Israel, Judah, and God’s Church on his way to take over the entire world!

This can be seen in the imagery presented in Revelation 12 (the action of this entire Revelation prophecy is not given sequentially). The “woman” serves a multi-purpose role in this prophecy. In one place, she appears to be *Jerusalem, the mother of us all* (Galatians 4:26; Rev. 12:1), or *Israel* (Rev. 12:2). In another place, she appears to be *the mother of the Christ* (vv. 4-6, 13). In yet another place, she appears to be *the Church* (vv. 14-17). When you consider that *Israel, Judah, and the Church are all being sought out by the “Beast” power*, then it might be easier to understand the nature of the prophecy.

Revelation 9:1-12, lays out what is called the first woe (the fifth trumpet plague). Revelation 9:13-21; 11:1-14 marks the sixth trumpet plague, which is completed with a great earthquake (the second woe). *When they finally kill the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11, the time for the completion of the mystery of God has arrived.* This is the point at which the seventh angel is about to unleash the seventh trumpet plague (the third woe), which will consist of the following:

1. The proclamation that the Kingdom of God is being established on the earth (Rev. 14:6, 7);

2. The proclamation that “Babylon the Great” is fallen and will never be revived (Dan. 2:44, 45; 7:13-27; Rev. 17, 18);

3. The resurrection or change of composition of the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 14:14-16); and

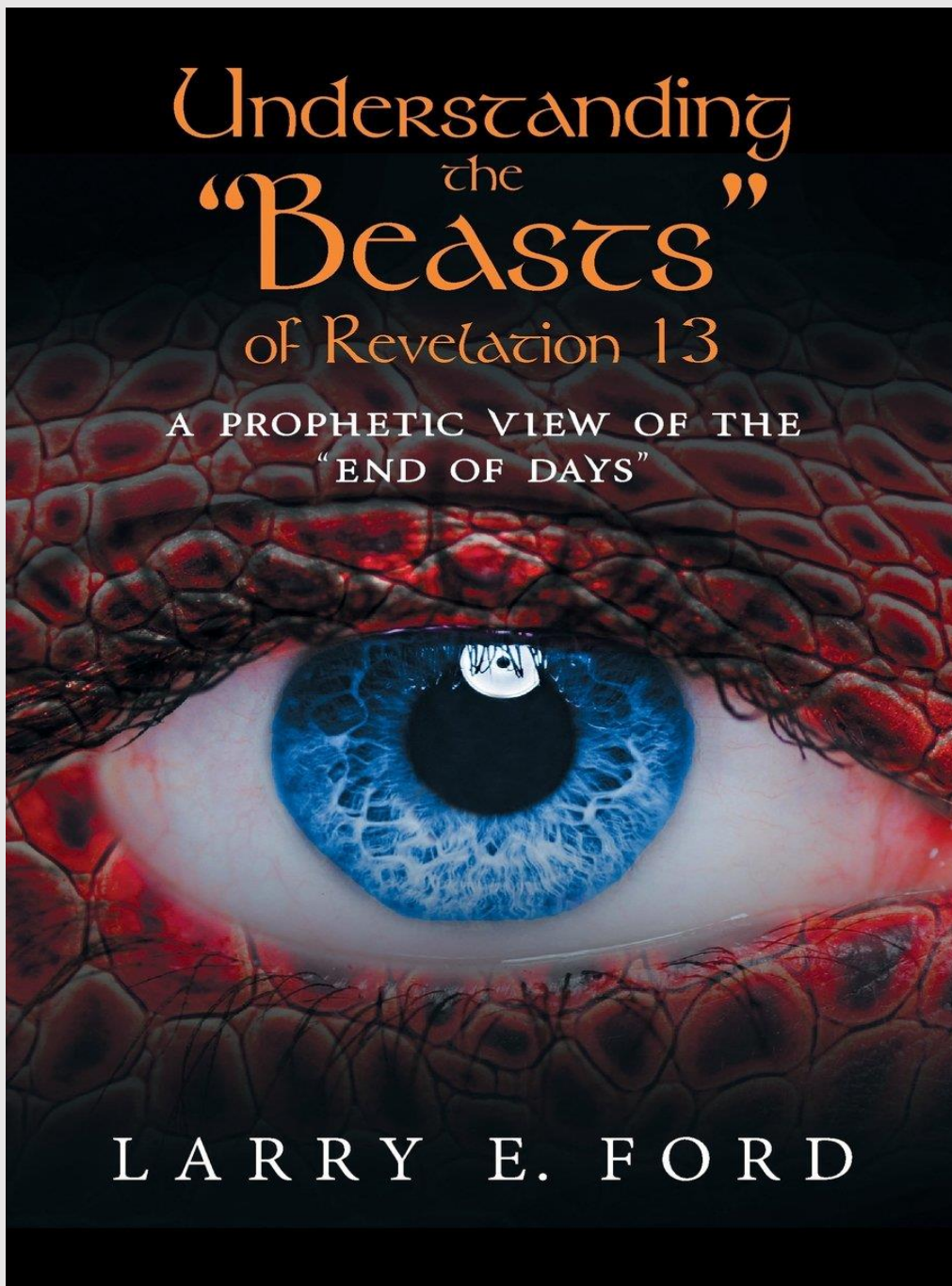
4. The pouring out of the seven bowl plagues (Rev. 15, 16).

The sixth bowl plague (Rev. 16:12-16) is the preparation for the “battle on the great day of God Almighty” (v. 14). Revelation 17:12-14 is a description of that battle. Note in the last part of v. 14 that the firstfruits are with Jesus Christ in this battle (see also Rev. 19:6-21). Who are these firstfruits? They are Christianized Israel (Rev. 7:1-8) and a great multitude of Christianized Gentiles who have been grafted into Christianized Israel as full citizens of Israel (Rom. 11:11-32).

Some translate Romans 11:25 to mean that God has a certain number of Gentiles in mind for grafting into Israel before the return of Jesus Christ. Thus, Israel, Judah, and the number of Gentiles intended by God will be in that part of the great exodus that will make the Egyptian exodus pale into insignificance. They will be at Christ’s side when He invades Jerusalem for what is commonly called “the battle of Armageddon,” which is part of the sixth bowl plague (see Zech. 14 and Rev. 16:12-16).

Those who are saved out of this great tribulation in the flesh (Zech. 14:16) will become the human subjects of Jesus Christ and His saints as they engage in 1,000 years of ruling the earth in order to complete the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:17-21) of all things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Col 1:20; Phil. 2:10, 11).

The “Time of Jacob’s Trouble” will be a last-ditch effort by Satan the Devil and his “Beast” to put an end to Israel – God’s very own “Kingdom” through whom He is to bless all nations of the earth (Gen. 26:4, 5). The “trumpet plagues” will be the means by which God will attempt to bring all of mankind to their senses and salvation. Beyond that, there will never again be a human government. God will reign supreme over all forever after.



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Truth or Consequences

(Deuteronomy 33:26-29)

Perhaps, one of the most popular hymns in mainstream Christianity has been “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms” ... originally published by Elisha H. Hoffman (1839-1929). It is about fellowship, joy, blessedness, peace, walking in the “pilgrim way,” and having no dread or fear due to “leaning on the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27). Few, if any, “New Testament” Christians relate this song to the covenant that Israel had with the Lord God. Few, if any, relate it to the outcome of a positive choice laid before Israel just before Moses died (Deut. 30:15-20). Few know or understand that such a choice lies before modern Israel and Judah ... wherever across the wide, wide world they are presently scattered. It is, at its base, a choice between God’s truth (John 4:23, 24; 8:31, 32) or the impending consequences for choosing not to be in holy covenant with the Lord God.

In this song lie the “fruits” of atonement. In this song lie the results of being “at one” with God. In Deuteronomy 33:26-29, we find the elements that explain the “heart” that is demanded to make such a great reconciliation possible. Atonement hinges on the most important choice that Israelite, Jew, and Gentile can make to inherit such a fellowship, joy, blessedness, peace, “pilgrim way,” no dread, and no fear. That is the scope of this discussion about this Holy Day that is required for God’s true people (Lev. 23:26-32).

A Short Synopsis of Deuteronomy

When the forty years of discipline in the wilderness because of rebellion came to an end, the Lord God stopped Israel on the west bank of the Jordan River before He allowed them to take possession of the land of promise (Deut. 1:1-5). In the thesis of the entire book, there are three basic questions of faith set before Israel:

1. What is the meaning of the Lord God’s great acts in saving and preserving a chosen people who so manifestly do not deserve or merit His gracious consideration?
2. What is the meaning of the covenant and the revelation of God’s will within it?
3. What are the peculiar temptations of the nation in the land, and wherein lies its true security that its days may be prolonged upon the good earth which the

Lord God has given it? (*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 2, p. 311).

The theme of the message is probably best stated in Deuteronomy 10:12-22. It is basically stated that the righteousness of the Lord God is unlike any other in existence. His will is that the nation is not only to be governed by that righteousness ... the people are to inculcate it into their hearts and minds and openly express it in their lives. Failure to do so will result in the withdrawal of His favor and blessings, and Israel will be left to be overtaken by self-inflicted destruction. Deuteronomy 6:5, 13, and 16 are basic requirements. You also see these required of Christians in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27. Only when individuals have selflessly yielded to those demands can they ever hope to “lean on the everlasting arms” of the Lord God.

Saving and Preserving a Chosen People

Before Elohim had created one atom of the orderly universe, they determined that the being they

planned to create would bear their image and be holy, blameless, and loving (Gen. 1:26-28; Eph. 1:4). Even then, they anticipated the possibility that independent-minded creatures could choose to be unholy, blamable, and/or unloving (see also 2 Pet. 1:3, 4). That accomplished, the creature subsequently could be adopted into the Elohim family by being changed from flesh to spirit (Eph. 1:5).

With that prospect facing them, Elohim figured out how to remedy such a contingency: A mechanism for atonement was needed. Why? Because they were intent on saving and preserving what they were about to create (2 Pet. 3:9). This was pre-creation grace and mercy ... but not entirely devoid of using destruction as a means for dealing with any rebellion against the desired outcome, that is: God's will.

First Peter 1:18-20 shows the mechanism. Before the creation of the orderly universe, a divine being was chosen to be a redemptive sacrifice through which repentant, sinful individuals could be forgiven and restored to the original plan to be made members of the Elohim Family.

Philippians 2:5-11 explains how that pre-creation decision was made. The "Christ" personage, who later became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14), volunteered to be that sacrificial "lamb" (1 Pet. 1:9). His sacrifice was once-and-for-all (Heb. 10:4, 5, 14) ... with the caveat that the individual will never again turn away from the covenant relationship with Him (Heb. 6:4-8; 10:16-18, 26, 27). To do so would move one from God's truth to God's consequences.

This is the basis for Moses' instruction to all of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:15-20. The nature of the book of Deuteronomy is to plainly explain the significance of being called and chosen (John 6:44, 65; Matt. 20:16; 22:14; Rev. 17:14). What is the claim in Deuteronomy 4:20? Israel is the Lord God's inheritance! She belongs to Him by divine right through covenant. This is stated also in 9:24-29 and 32:8-10. She was called and chosen.

Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 applies specifically to this concept in Deuteronomy because the Lord God redeemed Israel out of Egypt with the promise of His own shed blood (Ex. 12:5-14; Lev. 16:15, 16)! Despite the sins and uncleanness of Israel and other sinners, it has been Elohim's will since before the creation of the or-

derly universe to: (1) choose those who will be part of their Family, (2) preserve them through their education in His holiness, blamelessness, and loving-kindness in the flesh, and (3) save them by bringing them to the new "birth" whereby they will be changed from flesh to spirit forever (John 3:3-8; 1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

The Lord God's Will Manifested in the Covenant

How do you make a people holy, blameless, and loving? That, after all, has been God's will from before the creation of the orderly universe. This is a necessary question since humans do not come pre-packaged with those qualities. Had they been pre-packaged with them, then they would not have to choose to be that way. Part of Moses' challenge in Deuteronomy 30:19 is that a personal, free-will choice has to be made between two "trees": blessing/life and curse/death (Gen. 2:16-17).

Verse 20 makes some interesting statements about: (a) loving the Lord, (b) obeying Him, and (c) cleaving (that is: being faithful) to Him. In order to understand that, we must rely on the witness of Scripture.

For example, Paul says in Romans 13:8 that love is the fulfillment of the Law. Jesus says in John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commandments." In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus Christ says that God must be loved supremely and fellow man as oneself. Moses explains in Deuteronomy 30:20 that "the Lord is your life." He says in 32:46, 47 that the words of God's laws "are not idle words for you – they are your life."

How do you separate the Lord God from the thoughts, ways, and laws He reveals for your spiritual edification? How do you separate them from His will (Isa. 55:10, 11)?

In Deuteronomy 6:20-25, Moses poses the situation where a son asks his parent the meaning of the things the Lord God commanded – the testimonies, statutes, and judgments. The summation of the explanation is this:

It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments be-

fore the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.

What does Moses mean by the term *righteousness*? The Hebrew word is *tzedakah*. It means that a person acts with the same mind that is in God: strict honesty and uprightness of character (1Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5). It has to do with personal ethics by which one adheres to a system of moral standards without compromise. It is part of the instruction in Leviticus 19:2 to be holy as God is holy ... and Matthew 5:48 to be perfect as the Father is perfect.

For this purpose, the Lord God provided Israel 10 Commandments as the legal bases for their “marriage.” He expected that those commandments would provide the means by which they would become holy, blameless, and loving.

That was Paul’s assessment in Galatians 3:19-25 – the point of which is that non-compliance is *faithlessness* and *sin*. It is *carnality* because it is based on *self-righteousness* ... a clear and present danger to *covenant* “love.” *Faith* in that context means adhering to the Lord God’s moral standards. The Lord God knew that such *faith* and *righteousness* is a process of education and is not completed in one fell-swoop. Once the individual has learned the spiritual applications of the relationship required in the “marriage” between God and man, s/he will be as faithful to that relationship as Jesus Christ is in His relationship to the Father. At that point, a “tutor” will not be required any longer. It will have entered the “heart” and “mind.”

Paul says four things about the 10 commandments (which would naturally apply to any statutes, testimonies, and judgments derived from them): They are holy, just, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14). In Romans 3:31, Paul says that our faith ordains and recognizes the legitimacy and permanence of the Law. Why? It is expressive of *God’s will* concerning our relationship with Him and our fellow man. Our fidelity to those moral standards represents our righteousness before God.

All of that is *God’s will* as it is expressed in His covenant. All of that is the means by which God, through Jesus Christ, enables His people to become holy, blameless, and loving. It is, for a certainty, an educational process to train the human mind and heart to be in unity with God’s thoughts and ways. The Law represents His rules that gov-

ern the holiness that is to be put into our hearts and minds as part of the New Covenant. Outside of that covenant *will*, there is no true spiritual relationship to be had with Him (John 4:23, 24).

True Security Amid Temptations

It should be self-explanatory that Deuteronomy 4 is our source of information for this topic because it provides the basis for the curses that are incurred for getting caught up in the temptations of the nations in the land and forgetting the benefits of true security through obedience to the Lord God’s will. Let’s take this chapter in sections so we can properly digest the Lord God’s instruction.

In vv. 1, 2, Moses reminds Israel that they were taught to *live by* God’s law so they could enjoy the longevity of life in the land ... safe from their enemies. He warned them not to add to or diminish from His commandments. Doing otherwise would constitute rebellion and covenant-breaking.

Verses 3, 4 are reminders of what Israel witnessed over the 40 years between Egypt and the Promised Land. Those who had rebelled and violated the covenant Law had been destroyed, while those who had kept faith with Him were preserved and allowed to possess the Land. Notice where the emphasis continues to be put in order to impress upon them the path to true security.

What was so special about Israel’s relationship with the Lord God? Moses covers that in vv. 5-8. The wisdom and understanding gained from learning and living by the Lord God’s Law would impress the Gentiles ... and would attract them to His truth and the benefits *they* would gain from also keeping it. It is implied that the Gentiles would eventually become part of the “covenant people.”

In vv. 9-13, Moses warns them again about keeping faith with the Lord God by allowing themselves to be educated in His thoughts and ways. They had had a remarkable personal experience with Him at Mt. Sinai. Moses reminds them that the “covenant law” of their “marriage” to Him consisted of only 10 commandments preserved in His handwriting on two stone tablets.

Moses reminds them again in vv. 14-19 that the key to entering the Lord God’s *rest* (Heb. 3:7-4:11) is found in being faithful to His commandments,

statutes, and judgments. Mixing and mingling with the pagans religiously and in marriage was not the way He desired it to be done because they would be adding to and diminishing from His word and will. Why? Because the pagan religious practices were not His will and command. Mixing and mingling with them amounted to spiritual adultery.

Verse 20 is an important scriptural fact to know and understand: The Lord God's purpose for the creation of Israel and entering a "marriage" covenant with Him was to make her His *inheritance*. In that relationship, it is implied that she would become "bone" of His "bones" and "spirit" of His "spirit." You can study through Ephesians 5:18-33. Even marriage of humans is intended to be about "spiritual" unity – not simply a physical relationship. To become "one" is far more than a sexual relationship (see John 17:11-26).

In vv. 21-24, Moses explains that the Lord God was not allowing him to go into the land of promise. This was the result of an incident given in Numbers 20:1-13. The Israelites complained and contended with Moses and Aaron about having no water to drink. It is sufficient to say that they were more concerned with their *present* condition than they were about the *goal* of their deliverance ... even to the point of wishing that they had never begun their exodus out of slavery.

The Lord God told Moses to gather them together before the rock (the "Bethel" stone that Jacob had blessed when he had his famous "ladder" dream in Gen. 28). Israel had carried that "Bethel" stone, which marked one of the borders of Joseph's territory, with them into Egypt. The name means "House of God." Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that Israel "drank from the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was *Christ*."

Moses was told to *speak* to the rock, but in a fit of anger he said: "Shall *we* provide you water?". It was as if he and Aaron would be the ones who could command the rock to release the water they needed. Then he angrily struck the rock with his rod. The symbolism is rich here. How dare the chosen leader take it upon himself to allow personal anger to ignore the Lord God's instructions? Oh, Israel got they water they demanded ... but at the expense of the Rock being angrily smitten. In that angry moment, Moses was really no different from

the unruly, thankless Israelites with whom he was contending. Jesus Christ demands better of those who will be His leaders. Moses had to be taught a serious lesson. The last part of Deuteronomy 4:25 is especially poignant: *Do not do evil in the sight of the Lord because it will provoke His anger.*

Then, in vv. 25-40, comes Moses' summation of the great lesson that Israel should learn from the Lord God. It is as if he was saying:

You, also, have a great penalty to pay for your rebellion, murmuring, and complaints. Although you are going in to possess the land *at this point*, you will not be able to hold it because the Lord God will eventually *dispossess* you of the land, drive you out of it, and scatter you among the heathen ... where you will lose knowledge and understanding of Him and His thoughts and ways. In the tribulation of the latter days, He will not forsake you, nor destroy you, *if you will turn to Him with all of your heart. He will not forget the covenant that He swore unto your fathers.*

The great, overriding lesson in this chapter of Deuteronomy is simple: If you want true safety amid the problems and temptations of this world, you must know the source of that true safety. It does not lie within yourself or the worldly society that surrounds you. It comes from the Rock of our salvation. It comes from the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for our sins ... having had them laid upon Himself (2 Cor. 5:17-21). You cannot gripe and complain about your present circumstances to force Him to satisfy your bad attitudes. You cannot smite Him in anger and not suffer some dire consequences. You must *speak* to Him (Isa. 1:16-20).

In this instruction, you have been given understanding about how to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ: (1) the meaning of the Lord God's great acts in saving and preserving a chosen people, (2) the meaning of the covenant and the revelation of God's will within it, and (3) the source of true security that *your* days may be prolonged upon the good earth in God's Kingdom. That is the great goal of *Atonement*. That is how you *lean on the everlasting arms* of God.

The “Day” of the Lord

(Revelation 1:10)

The Apostle John says in Revelation 1:10: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.” From that point on, Jesus Christ identifies Himself and the purpose of the appearances in which John saw Him. The **first** interesting point here is that Jesus Christ is, therefore, identified as the source of both the great voice and the trumpet (v. 11). The **second** interesting point here is that Jesus Christ gives messages to seven Churches located along a particular mail route that existed in what is the most western part of modern Turkey, east of the Aegean Sea (located east of Greece). Pergamos, Smyrna, and Ephesus are along the coast, and Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea are about 75 to 100 miles farther east inland. Revelation 2:17, 29 indicate that these messages are for all of the Churches, even though each one has its own set of praiseworthy and unpraiseworthy characteristics ... and trials and problems.

The **third** interesting point is very necessary for understanding John’s expression about being “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” Many Bible marginal references and footnotes will consider this to have been a divine identification of the first day of the week as the New Testament Sabbath and will give Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:20, and Revelation 1:10; 4:2 as scriptural “proofs” that such was the case ... although *no such statement of that fact exists in any of those references*. What is most interesting about this vision in Revelation is that Revelation 6 through 22 is the broader discussion about what John saw during this so-called “Lord’s day” vision (see Rev. 4:1).

Therefore, our objective in this study is to find out why that is true by understanding Jesus Christ’s fuller revelation about the purpose of this “day.” Can the expression the Lord’s day have a meaning other than “the first day of the week”? If so, how does this involve the expression: “the Lord’s day”?

“New Testament” Christians

A “squawk” in the July 13, 2016 *Albany Herald* newspaper spells out what many “New Testament” Christians actually believe about the two divisions of the Bible:

Squawker, you are talking about a story from the Old Testament. I was talking about the New Testament, the one Christians believe, that starts a New Covenant of forgiveness (p. 2A; emphases added).

The problems with this statement are numerous because this individual shows himself to have the same theological problem as the Sadducees to whom Jesus Christ spoke in Matthew 22:29: “You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power

of God.” Why so? I will give two substantial reasons taken from New Testament Scriptures – one from Jesus Christ and one from the Apostle Paul:

Matthew 4:4: Jesus Christ says that we must live “by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” He is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 in the Old Testament because that was the only Scriptures He had at the time.

2 Timothy 3:16, 17: Paul taught that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” and listed the reasons for which God inspired it (emphases added). Paul only had the Old Testament from which to quote God’s mind and will. And ... Paul was a “New Testament” Christian who depend-

ed heavily on the Old Testament for guidance and its underlying message of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness that are bound up in His love through Jesus Christ.

What this tells us is that the Old Testament is just as valid in God's sight today as it ever was. It declares God's testimony about His covenant with Abraham and Israel relative to His reason for creating mankind and what He intends to do with mankind. In 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11, Paul says that the history of Israel provides "New Testament" Christians with valuable lessons in how we must live relative to God's plan and will – the Israelites serve as "types" and "examples."

Paul does the same thing in Hebrews 6:13-20 as he explains the story from Genesis 15 where the Lord God (the one who became Jesus Christ) made a promissory covenant with Abraham and further validated it with His oath. Clearly, that promise and oath had "New Testament" intentions because Paul tells "New Testament" Christians that it provides two unchangeable things by which the Lord God cannot lie: God's oath and promise.

He also tells us that we can have "strong consolation" and "lay hold upon the hope set before us." He tells us that we can have great hope in this promissory covenant with Abraham and make it "a steadfast anchor for our lives" (see also Gal. 3:26-29). You can add to those two reasons Acts 2:14-40; 8:26-39 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. Peter and Philip were preaching what was anticipated in Jeremiah. In John 5:46, Jesus said that Moses wrote of Him.

Paul explains some of this in 2 Corinthians 3. His comments in vv. 3, 6 depend upon what was revealed to Jeremiah. He shows in vv. 7, 14 that the Old Covenant was anticipated: (1) to have a fading glory and (2) to be replaced by a greater glory. Indeed, Jesus Christ anticipated the continual necessity and usage of the Old Testament in His comment in Luke 24:44: "... All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and the psalms concerning me" (emphases added; see also Matt. 5:17-19; Luke 16:19-31; and Acts 15:5-21). As stated by Paul, the Old Covenant has a fading glory.

Why is this important in our present discussion? Because we depend so very much on Old Testament prophecies in "Moses," the prophets, and the Psalms for our information about the "last days" and "the day of the Lord" – that is, "the Lord's day." Why? Because God has given to some the special privilege of understanding how the path will be cleared for Jesus Christ to usher in 1,000 years of righteous rulership on the earth in order to defeat all of God's enemies and thereby to reconcile all things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Phil. 2:9-11). In the bargain, the path will be cleared for Him and His saints to further institute the "New Covenant" that He began at His last Passover with His disciples (Matt. 26:26-29). The "New" Covenant is as much a "marriage" covenant as was the Old Covenant (Rev. 19:7-9). All of this is part and parcel to the concept of "the Lord's day" as revealed in Old Testament Scriptures.

Defining "Lord's Day"

The Interpreter's Bible introduces the book of "Revelation" with a discussion about the difference between a prophecy and an apocalyptic. While most people do not concern themselves with such fine details relative to Scripture, I believe that it is instructive to ponder the discussion offered by *Interpreter's*. There are two main parts to their definition of apocalyptic that we should notice:

1. The *eschatological* belief that the power of evil that controls the temporal and hopelessly evil age of human history is soon to be overcome and ended by God's direct intervention (*eschatology* > the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and destiny – from Greek *eskhatos*: "last"). God will thereafter create an entirely new, perfect, and eternal age under His immediate control.
2. The apocalyptic is always *eschatological* and is always concerned with last things, death, the end of this present age, and the life in the age to come. It is that ultimate goal toward which God's plan

and will are headed. Although apocalypticism is always eschatological, eschatology is not always apocalyptic – it also can be prophetic (vol. 12; p. 347; author’s paraphrase).

Because of that definition, *Interpreter’s* differentiates between prophecy and apocalypticism by pointing out that Old Testament prophecy held value and promise “for this present age, not in an entirely new and different age to be created by God” – and Jesus, during His earthly ministry, resorted to prophecy, not apocalypticism (Ibid; emphases added). For that reason, they maintain that “The Revelation” is more properly titled “The Apocalypse” – that is: the coming of a new age (Rev. 21).

Now, what difference does this make? Simply this: Judging from the definition of “day” in Revelation 1:10, a very strong case can be made for John not being in an apocalyptic trance on Sunday. Notice the first definition above where eschatology juxtaposes the “evil age” with the “eternal age.” What is the point here?

The word “day” in Revelation 1:10 is translated from the Greek term *hemera*. While this term can be translated to mean a single, 24-hour period of time, its figurative meaning is “always defined more or less clearly by the context in which it is used” (*Strong’s*; Greek #2250; p. 40; emphases added). Here’s the logic derived from the definition: It also can mean: “age + alway[s], daily + forever, judgment, time, [a] while, years.” All of these are offered as possible alternative definitions to “a 24-hour period of time.”

Did an anti-Semitic bias against the so-called “Jewish” Sabbath prompt the interpretation in favor of a 24-hour period (Sunday) instead of “an age or period of judgment”? According to the context of “The Apocalypse,” John could have been translated as saying: “I was in a vision about an [or: the] age or period of judgment.” After all, the figurative meaning of the term “day” is “always defined more or less clearly by the context in which it is used” (Ibid; emphases added).

The discussion that follows Revelation 1:10 is most definitely in the context of a *time* or *period* or *age* or *year* of judgment. So, the expression “Lord’s Day” is not hardwired to the identification of Sunday as the New Testament Sabbath – not by

definition; not by context. It is hardwired to Sunday only by mainstream tradition that pays little attention to Matthew 5:17-19. Let’s understand this more thoroughly. After all, it is God’s will that we worship Him in “spirit and truth” ... as Jesus Christ points out in John 4:23, 24.

Understanding Isaiah 61:2 and 63:4

It is generally believed among many offshoots of the former Worldwide Church of God (which would include TSDCA) that Luke 4:16-21 shows Jesus Christ using Isaiah 61:1, 2a as a prophetic pronouncement of the focus of His ministry among the Jews. It has generally been interpreted among these offshoots (TSDCA included) that Jesus stopped short of v. 2b because He was not going to be fulfilling that part of Isaiah’s prophecy during His earthly ministry – that is: “the day of vengeance of our God” was not included.

Yet, it has also been said among the Church of God groups that the inclusion of “the acceptable year of our Lord” is an example of the “year-for-a-day” principle in interpreting prophecy. Isaiah 63:4 has been used as “backup” (the “second witness”) for Isaiah 61:2.

Here, I pose a new question: Why translate day as though it is a 24-hour period of time and year as though it is 360 days? I understand that a prophetic “year is 360 days long. I understand that Jesus Christ’s intervention during the Tribulation Period will last 360 days, but the duration of His judgment of the nations will last considerably longer than 360 days. Let me explain further.

Strong’s Hebrew dictionary gives the figurative definition of day as being “a space of time defined by an associated term.” So, day, as expressed in the quip “back in the day,” does not mean a 24-hour period of time (#3117). *Strong’s* also allows year to mean a “whole age” (#8141). When day is juxtaposed with year (day ... year), it can express an “age of time.” After all, Jesus Christ’s ministry was not a single year long. The same argument can be made from *Brown-Driver-Briggs’s* definitions of year (p. 1040) and day (pp. 398, 399). I would conclude, therefore, that Isaiah 61:2 and 63:4 do not represent a “year-for-a-day” principle. *They express periods of undefined time.*

While such “principles” and “formulae” do exist in Scripture, we do not need to apply such principles/formulae every time we see certain words. It is nice to know about certain scriptural “keys to understanding,” but we must not overuse them. *The Interpreter’s Bible* explains an aspect of this problem in two ways:

1. The expression “the day of vengeance of our God” is dubious because many sources use the term with the plain meaning of “rescue” and “requital.” [I do not understand the point here because a requital can be a form of vengeance (look up the term requite).]

2. The line regarding vengeance is not used in Jesus’ statement in Luke. Their implication is simple: Jesus did not use it because it did not exist in the original Isaiah text. Why? Because “redemption and deliverance are the indissoluble elements of eschatological time.”

Does that mean that the redemption and deliverance process has no element of vengeance in it? Read Exodus 7:1-5 and 9:15, 16. Was the exodus from Egypt a redemption and deliverance process? Was vengeance part of the process? Was it part of prophecy or apocalypticism? By *Interpreter’s* definition, it was prophecy and, therefore, applicable only to Israel’s time and circumstances. Yet, we know that it is a shadow of a much greater exodus for God’s people in the future. Such an idea is expressed in the symbolism of God’s holy days in Leviticus 23 and the Prophets.

It is interesting that *The Anchor Bible* translates this verse to read: “To announce a year of grace for Yahweh, a day of deliverance for our God.” There is no mention of vengeance. They speak of a “period of time” in that translation. Several other translations that I have consulted do not agree with that translation.

How are we to come to understand this prophecy or apocalyptic in the face of all of this discussion? As stated above: “By the context in which it is used.” What is that context in Isaiah 61 and 63? You have to understand the entirety of the book of Isaiah in order to understand the context of any

given part of it. The thesis of the entire prophecy has to do with Israel’s rebellion against the Lord God and the fact that He was going to cast off all but a “very small remnant” (Isa. 1:9; 6:8-13). The rest of the entire prophecy contains the judgments against Israel, how He is going to give her over to the world powers, reduce her to nothing, and then set about reclaiming her as His own.

It is inevitable. It is inviolable. Justice is going to be done, and Israel is going to be put through a thoroughly cleansing punishment before she is delivered from it. By *Interpreter’s* definition, that sounds both prophetic and apocalyptic because it involves Isaiah’s present-day circumstances for Israel and the future, ultimate outcome.

Scattered throughout “Isaiah” are bits and pieces of how God’s grace and deliverance are going to be accomplished. Mixed in here and there are discussions about the punishment as it is rendered by other nations ... and the part adversarial spirits play. Other parts are revelations about His power and glory and ability to declare things at one time and wait great ages before He actually brings them to pass. How His word accomplishes without fail the purpose for which He sends it forth. How He created all that is and stabilized it by His own power. As He gets to the end, He begins to speak of a time when one must decide to yield to His thoughts and ways and enjoy the grace, mercy, forgiveness, and bountiful blessings that will come to the righteous – the total renewal of all of creation in preparation for the eternity beyond.

We must understand that before we can give serious thought to the proclamations in Isaiah 61:2 and 63:4. The statements are more than the parsing of prophecies to define Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry as separated from the spiritual ministry during and after His return. They are more than “proof” that Scripture uses a “year-for-a-day” formula in some instances to aid our understanding of certain prophecies and apocalypics. They are, in fact, a declaration of a period of time when He will begin to accomplish the salvation of Israel to which He so longingly looks forward.

The word “day” – translated from the Hebrew word yowm – means pretty much the same thing as the Greek term hemera ... from a 24-hour period of time to an age, year(s), and a time of judgment. Does this mean that the return of Jesus Christ will

accomplish in one 24-hour period of time what is revealed in “The Revelation”? No. It means far more than that. *The “Lord’s Day” even requires more time than the brief 360-day period at the end of 900 days of the Great Tribulation period ...* although it has been taught by traditional Christianity as though that one-day moment of time is sufficient – and by the Churches of God that it is a prophetic 360-day “year.” Let’s see how that would affect the holy days from Trumpets to Tabernacles.

Relating the Feast of Trumpets to the “Day” Described in “The Apocalypse”

Although the Feast of Trumpets is observed during a single, 24-hour period of time (the first day of the seventh month), that is no indication that the events involved in the fulfillment will, in fact, last only 24 hours. If Matthew 24 and Revelation 6-20 are any reliable measure of God’s revealed truth, then we are looking for an “age” and a “period of judgment.”

“Judgment Day” is generally understood in mainstream Christianity to be a time when God will make one, short, fell swoop stroke of judgment and put an end to the “world.” It is interpreted as though Jesus Christ will simply appear in the sky above to gather to Himself all who belong to Him, take them to heaven, and the rest will be consigned to ever-burning hellfire. Then it is *forever* over. But ... that would be a gross contradiction of the intentions behind the Feast of Trumpets ... and the “day of the Lord.”

Matthew 24 and Revelation 6-20 are the primary New Testament sources for our understanding. Both show long periods of time during which “judgment” is leveled against a wicked world (see Rom. 1:18-32). However, up to a certain point, there are no “trumpets” that are attached to that long history. Most of the time of the great tribulation revealed in Matthew 24:15-28 is not the time for the “trumpets” symbolized in this Feast of Trumpets – even though it is a type of “judgment.” They are not “sounded” until *the final 360 days* of the 1,260-day period of time.

Jesus’ comment about the vultures in Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17:37 demonstrates that the cor-

ruption and death that are in the world system will attract the “vultures” that will pick the carcass clean to the bones. Consider Zephaniah 1 and Revelation 11-21. So, the secular proverb used by Jesus means: “Wherever there is a reason for judgment, then judgment will take place.” If it is coupled with the context of Matthew 8:18-22, then it could mean that those who dispose of the dead will be gathered where the dead are fallen. *Anti-thetic* to that, it means that He who gives spirit life will be among those to whom spirit life is to be given (1. Cor. 15:42-54).

Matthew 24:29-31 signals a point at which a “trumpet” will be employed – but v. 31 only applies to the last trumpet, not the others that have gone before it (Rev. 8-11). The expression “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days*” does not mean at the end of the prophesied 1,260 days of the Tribulation (see Rev. 11:1-3; 12:14; 13:5). It means the days of tribulation up to the time that Jesus Christ appears in the earth’s upper atmosphere. Why does He make such a spectacular appearance?

Revelation 6:12-17 provides us the answer. Compare vv. 12-16 to Matthew 24:29-31. It should be obvious that the time frame is the same. Matthew 24:30 refers to this appearance as being “the sign of the Son of man in heaven.” Revelation 6:17 refers to it as “the great day of [the Lamb’s] wrath” (emphases added). The word day is the same Greek term used in Revelation 1:10 ... and it is not speaking of a single, 24-hour period of time.

This lends credence to the idea that John actually said: “I was in a vision about an age of judgment.” That “age of judgment” actually begins when the Lamb begins to open the seven-sealed scroll (Rev. 6:1). Revelation 6:1-11 is not the complete “day of the Lord.” When the seventh seal is finally opened, then the culmination (the highest, most intense point) of that judgment will come crashing down around the ears of all of the rebellious by means of seven trumpet plagues.

Five of the seals are opened before the “sign of the Son of man in heaven” occurs. That “sign” occurs when the sixth seal is opened (Rev. 6:12) – after which preparations are made for the “reaping” that is to take place at its appointed time. So, the sixth seal is the point at which that sign is

revealed. But ... we must not assume that this is the point at which the first resurrection is executed.

Revelation 7 reveals the beginning of the process to actually redeem and deliver the “firstfruits” of Israel ... including the Gentile “firstfruits” who have been grafted into Israel (read Rom. 11:10-27; the Gentiles actually become “Israelites”). This is the point at which they are “sealed” for identification purposes – that is, they are “marked out for preservation” prior to the actual change from flesh to spirit. Note why I express it that way.

Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30 demonstrate that true believers already will have been “sealed” with the Holy Spirit as “firstfruit” saints (see also Acts 2:38). It appears that Revelation 7 is the confirmation that they will have remained faithful and not allowed that seal to have been adulterated (see Matt. 24:13 and Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26). These, apparently, are the ones who will be protected prior to the period of the seventh and last trumpet plague (the seven bowl plagues). How so? They will be taken to a “place of safety” until the seventh trumpet is executed (Rev. 12:14-17).

Let’s read the main points of Revelation 14 in order to understand this better. Verses 1-5 give the vision of the 144,000 standing with Jesus Christ on the heavenly Mt. Zion. It is symbolic ... not actual. These represent those who have not adulterated God’s revealed truth with falsehoods, human traditions, and/or paganism. Verses 6-11 represent the angelic announcements of the imminent establishment of the Kingdom of God (see Rev. 11:15) and the impending destruction of “Babylon.”

Verses 12, 13 are the difficult ones to explain unless you understand the order of events. It is apparent from Revelation 12:7-17 that there will come a time when Satan is cast down to the earth and allowed to cause serious trouble among the inhabitants of the earth. He will marshal forces that will persecute and martyr members of God’s true Church – possibly even affecting some who are “traditional” Christians.”

Revelation 12:14, 17 reveal that some are taken to a “place of safety,” while some are allowed to be martyred – what v.17 renders as “the remnant of her seed.” I do not get the sense that they are “last minute” converts from those “left behind” by the so-called “rapture” – that they listen to the preachments by the Two Witnesses (Rev. 11:1-15)

and become converts to Christ. They might well be the “Laodicean” type who get “tried by fire” (Rev. 3:14-18) ... as opposed to the “Philadelphian” type who do not (v. 7-10).

Revelation 12:14, 17 could easily clarify John’s comment in Revelation 14:13: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth...” (emphases added). It is not until Revelation 14:14-16 that the first resurrection from the dead is executed. Until that time, some are in the “place of safety” and some are being martyred. When the first resurrection occurs, all of the firstfruits – living or dead – will be changed from flesh to spirit ... before the unleashing of the seven bowl plagues.

Now read Revelation 8:1, 2 to understand this process. What is about to happen? Does this involve seven angels who are going to sound seven trumpets? There’s your sign! This is the point at which trumpets begin to signal a more specific, more intense execution of the Lamb’s wrath through judgments. Revelation 8 through 19 gives descriptions of a series of judgments that will be the fulfillment of Daniel 2:44, 45 and 7:13-11.

Revelation 9:1-6 demonstrates that the fifth trumpet will not be over and done in one 24-hour period of time. Revelation 11:15 and Revelation 14 are in concert with Zechariah 14 (see especially Zech. 14:9): The Lord Jesus Christ will set into motion – at the last trumpet – all of the action bound up in Zechariah 14, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and Revelation 15:1-20:6. Those seven trumpets are the judgments bound up in the symbolism of the Feast of Trumpets.

Relating Atonement to the “Day” Described in the “Apocalypse”

After the original transgression by Adam and Eve, the Lord God blocked their access to the Tree of Life and removed them from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). Their sin had given the Lord God evidence that mankind’s natural mind, in and of itself ... without the influence of His holy spirit ... would not be in unity with His thoughts and ways (Isa. 55:8, 9; Rom. 8:5-9; 1 Cor. 2:6-16). The action He took toward them demonstrated that special conditions would be necessary for healing

the breach between man and God. It should be patently obvious that eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil must come to an end.

Paul shows in Romans 1:18-32 and 8:19-23 that there will be a span of time during which mankind will have to learn an awful lesson about the ultimate results of allowing sin to exist within the Kingdom of Man. As a matter of fact, the solution, according to Leviticus 16:16, 21, will involve the necessity of redemption from the death penalty levied by divine judgment and the complete removal of everything regarded as “sin” (see also Psa. 103:1-18 and 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

While Matthew (27:46), Luke (23:46), and John (19:30) highlight different aspects of the time at which Jesus died, one should not think that they contradict one another. The most outstanding point is that the Father allowed Jesus to actually die because our sins had been laid upon Him. That was the point at which Jesus cried out “Why have you forsaken me?”. That was the point at which our sins were completely removed by His sacrifice.

In this scenario, it should be obvious that the “atonement” is a process of judgment that has not yet been brought to its conclusion. It is not a brief “moment” of time or a 24-hour period of time. It is very much a part of this “age of judgment” that we call “the Lord’s day.” In other words, the appearance of Jesus Christ in the earth’s upper atmosphere will begin the culmination of the “atonement” process. While the crucifixion of Jesus Christ completed the sacrificial part of the “atonement” process (the payment of the redemption price; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20) and fixed the certainty of the “atonement” available to sinful mankind, it did not complete the fulfillment of the Atonement symbolism in Leviticus 16:16, 21: (a) the release from the limitations of the flesh and (b) the complete removal of “sin.” Each of the resurrections from the dead will complete both the “redemption” and the “removal” parts for those involved (1 Cor. 15:22, 23; Rev. 20:5).

If you operate on the basis of there being a two-pronged approach to this “atonement,” then you should be able to understand that the “Lord’s day” will be a “time of judgment” during which, at the least, the Lord will be establishing the means by which the intent of “redemption” will also be

played out over a 1,000-year period of time during which “sin” will be ultimately destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 20:14, 15).

This would indicate that the symbolism involved in the Atonement ritual will be completely fulfilled – not merely at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but through the actual fulfillment of the full purpose of the “redemption” involved and the complete “removal” of sin from the confines of all of creation.

The incorrigibly wicked will pay their own “redemption” price, be relieved of the limitations of the flesh (by complete destruction), and the complete removal of their sins (see Mal. 4:1; Isa. 65:17). You can accept God’s method of “atonement” ... or you can pay your own bill for your sins. Either way, the “atonement” is finally settled and the sins are “removed.”

Let me explain how this works so that you can understand the process more fully. Contrary to the “New Testament Christian’s” comment about the new “covenant of forgiveness,” Elohim anticipated the need for forgiveness before they had created one single atom (or smaller) of the orderly universe. They understood the necessity of forgiveness before they even began to execute their planned creation. In the conception of their plan, Elohim demonstrated their grace and forgiveness before they had created anything!

We can infer this from Ephesians 1:4 and 1 Peter 1:18-20. The anointing of a “Savior/Christ” implies that there will be someone who will execute the redemption and the destruction of sin in order to execute the freedom from the limitations of the flesh. Peter says that Jesus Christ was ordained, before the creation of the orderly universe, to be that sacrifice.

While it is necessary to forgive transgressions while en route to the ultimate fulfillment, the full forgiveness will come only when there is no more possibility that the sins can/will recur and be remembered (see Psa. 103:8-12; 130; Isa. 65:17). So, the “day” of atonement is more than a mere 24-hour period of time or a single moment of time like that point at which Jesus Christ actually died on the cross or when you repented of your sins and accepted that sacrifice for them. Atonement is a process that will be at work until we reach the fulfill-

ment of Jeremiah 31:33, 34 (see also 1 Cor. 15:25, 26 and Rev. 20:14, 15).

The “ministry of reconciliation” in which we are presently involved (2 Cor. 5:17-21) is the active administration of the “atonement” process. We must be aware that this process will not be complete until both prongs of God’s plan of salvation have been fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-19): full “redemption” and full “atonement.” We must understand from Matthew 24:13, Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26, 27, 31 that it is possible for the true Christian to walk away from this great plan of salvation and lose any future right to its benefits.

Relating the Feast of Tabernacles to the “Day” Described in the “Apocalypse”

The Feast of Tabernacles is a reminder that Israel lived in “tabernacles” (or, booths) during their exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land (Lev. 23:40-43). The Feast of Tabernacles has the unique feature of the movement from the temporary to the eternal. The temporary is the focus of the first seven days, that is, man’s so-called “six days” and God’s seventh-day “Sabbath.”

Outside of the mention in Leviticus 23:36, there is no further mention of the significance of the eighth day other than the comment about holding a holy convocation and a solemn assembly. Verse 39 adds that it is to be a yearly Sabbath like the first day of Tabernacles. (We understand that the “eighth day” of the Feast of Tabernacles does not always fall on the first day of the week.) What does this mean?

If you operate on the basis that Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles symbolize two different “harvests” (one small and one large), then there must be some kind of symbolism attached to the “eighth day” at the end of Tabernacles. However, there is no specific indication in Scripture that the “eighth day” has the meaning that we have historically attached to it. We only have the symbolism involved in the concept of “Sabbath.” In other words: *There is more to the “eighth day” than meets the eye.*

This we can know: “...Israel had a tendency to bring every religious celebration into connection with the saving acts of God” (*The Interpreter’s*

Bible; vol. 2; p. 116; emphases added). How can we know, then, the significance of the “saving acts of God” embedded in the “eighth day”? And ... does that symbolism have anything to do with the “Lord’s day”? We have to pay attention to the meaning attached to the idea of Isaiah 61:2 and 63:4: “day of vengeance” and “year of redemption.” Let’s begin with the Feast of Tabernacles. Is this an indication that God’s vengeance has a shorter life-span than His pursuit of redemption?

The symbolism of the seven-day period of the Feast of Tabernacles covers what might be considered as being the “sacred week.” That is my own designation apart from anything I have read from Scripture or commentary. There is a very good reason why I would pose such consideration for the 1,000-year period of time this holy day represents. What will be accomplished during that interval of time? Now, read Matthew 25:31-34.

The events leading up to that time of judgment are indicative of what will be accomplished. We can begin with Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 2:31-45. The King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, had a dream about a huge statue and subsequently summoned Daniel to come before him and interpret the dream (Daniel 2:1-13). Verse 31 begins Daniel’s interpretation.

In vv. 34, 35, Daniel speaks of a “stone” that is to come to destroy the entire statue. The destruction will be so thorough that the statue will be reduced to chaff and blown away by the wind ... never to be reconstituted again (vv. 44, 45). In its place, the “stone” will establish a government that will eventually fill the entire earth (read also Isa. 2:1-5). Who is this “stone” and what is this “government” to be?

Daniel 7 describes a dream that Daniel had after Nebuchadnezzar had died (v.1). Verses 1-14 provide for us a scenario of history (vv. 1-8) that explains briefly the actions of four “beasts” — “beasts” that represent the same statue described in Daniel 2. The fourth “beast” will be active in history from the destruction of the third “beast” until the appearance of the “Ancient of Days” to sit in judgment for the destruction of the fourth “beast.” This judgment is to be rendered until that “beast” is destroyed in the Lake of Fire and “judgment is set and the books [are] opened” (vv. 9-11).

Verse 14 shows that “one like the Son of Man” is brought before the Ancient of Days to be made the eternal King over “all people, nations, and languages.” His kingdom will not pass away, return to human control, or be destroyed by any power in existence from that time forward.

Daniel 7:15-28 is the interpretation of vv. 1-14 (see vv. 15, 16). Again, it is a brief overview of history up to the point that the “Son of Man” comes to sit in judgment and destroy the dominion of the “beast” power (vv. 26, 27). Please note that v. 25 must be understood in this context – even though we know that the powers of the “Babylonish” system of government have done their fair share of forcing changes in the “times and seasons” of God’s law ... which definitely also involves changing God’s calendar. The net effect of this “period of judgment” is that the symbolism of the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles will be fulfilled. The fulfillment of this symbolism is the foundation for the fulfillment of the symbolism of the “eighth day.” Remember the idea about moving from the temporary to the eternal.

Zechariah 14 echoes Daniel’s prophecy in several significant ways. First, Zechariah calls the action involved in this prophecy “the day of the Lord” (v.1). Second, he shows the Lord engaging in a great battle against the nations of the world – a battle to which the Lord has drawn all of these nations into one area of the world (v. 3). Third, He is accompanied by His saints (v. 5b). Fourth, He becomes the King of the earth (v. 9). Fifth, humans will continue to exist after the Lord has won His great victory. And sixth, they will receive instruction in God’s righteousness as the Lord’s government rules over them -- judgment (v. 16).

All of this validates Isaiah’s earlier prophecy about how the Kingdom of God will be established in Jerusalem to execute judgment upon the nations of the world (Isa. 2:1-5). This judgment is not just about calling individuals before a judgment seat to consign them to eternal life or destruction. It is about solving problems, teaching them about God’s thoughts and ways, and bringing peace and plenty to them. The main goal is redemption and removal of sin ... the two prongs of atonement (2 Pet. 3:9; John 3:16-18).

If we go to the New Testament, we find that the message and expectation is the same. There is

no evidence of two different “covenants” at work in God’s great plan for humankind! Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 are accounts of Jesus’ repetition of the same Old Testament prophecies: unsettled times with conflicts among nations, wars and natural disasters, and all manner of lawlessness among mankind leading to the point when “judgment [is] set.” Jesus Christ is identified as the “Son of Man” (Matt. 16:13; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44).

The Apostle Paul gives two accounts of the appearance of the “Son of Man” – 1 Corinthians 15:22-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – to effect the full “redemption” and “removal of sin” for the first round of recipients of His judgment: His Church “Bride.” We see in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 what His objective is and the amount of time He has to execute His objective (that is: until He has conquered all of God’s enemies, including death).

We find in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 18 that He will take this first group up to the clouds in the upper atmosphere of the earth. This is related to the Apostle John’s prophecy in Revelation 14:14-16. In Revelation 19, we see that six of the trumpet plagues have had their effect upon “Babylon” and the “Beast.” The seventh trumpet has blown and the first resurrection has occurred (see vv. 6-9). At this point, the seven bowl plagues (Rev. 15-18) have not been completed. They will be completed once the “marriage supper” is completed – the point at which Jesus Christ will consummate the “New Covenant” with His Church.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:2 that the “espousal” of the Church to Christ is presently in progress – that is, the Church is in the process of being “married” to Christ through the New Covenant. That “marriage” will be completed when the first resurrection to spirit composition makes it possible for Christ and His Church to be equally yoked by virtue of the change from flesh to spirit (1 Cor. 15:50; temporary to eternal) – her complete cleansing from sin and the freedom from the limitations of the flesh (see Hos. 2:14-23).

The Church (spiritual Israel) is first taken to the cloud where Jesus Christ is (1 Thes. 4:17) and “married” to Him just prior to His assault of the nations gathered at Jerusalem for the final battle that destroys all human governments and establishes the Kingdom of God on the earth ... head-

quartered at Jerusalem. Revelation 19 does *not* make it clear that the “marriage supper” is to take place on the cloud (Rev. 14:14). No specific place of the “marriage” is stated. Even if it takes place in heaven itself, that would not negate the prophecies about the New Heavens and New Earth (Isa. 65:17-25; Rev. 21, 22).

The question here is whether or not that action brings to an end the “day of the Lord” and the “time of judgment” that is to take place. Paul reveals in 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3 that we shall judge the world and the angels. John shows in Revelation 5:10 that we shall be kings and priests in that Kingdom on the earth. Revelation 20:4-6 reveals that we shall have three offices of responsibility: judge, priest, and king.

Christ revealed this plan to His disciples at the last Passover meal He had with them (see Luke 22:29, 30). This is what makes Him King of kings and Lord of lords at His return (Revelation 11:15). Logic demands that the “time of judgment” will continue if there are going to be “judges” present who hold the offices of king and priest to judge the world and angels.

Second Corinthians 5:17-21 lays out the answer to this situation. Briefly summarized, Paul reveals that we have been made active participants in God’s “ministry of reconciliation” (v. 18). While that ministry is presently active in proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God as “seed spreaders,” “water bearers,” and “fishers of men,” that is by no means the totality of our ambassadorships (v. 20) under Jesus Christ. Far from it!

In fact, we will have 1,000 years during which we will assist Jesus Christ in accomplishing what Paul reveals in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28: bringing to the creation that “Sabbath rest” that is yet in store for all of creation (Heb. 3, 4) as we dismantle and repair the effects of the vanity and bondage of corruption to which all of creation has been subjected (Rom. 8:20-23).

By the time all of God’s enemies are destroyed, there will have been a massive remaking both of the earth’s environment and its inhabitants. Read the symbolism in Leviticus 16:14-28. Note the cleansing and removal and the burning of the refuse. That is part of the focus of reconciling everything in heaven, on earth, and under the earth to God – atonement.

Therefore, I have some questions about how 2 Peter 3:7-13 fits into this scheme of things. After all, Peter says in vv. 10, 12 that there is a connection between the “day of the Lord” and the “new heavens and new earth.” It is as though entrance into the “new heavens and new earth” is predicated upon the “time of judgment” involved from the “sign of the Son of man in heaven” until the consummation of the 1,000 years of the completion of “the ministry of reconciliation of all things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth” discussed by Paul in Ephesians 1:10; Philippians 2:9-11; and Colossians 1:20. Let’s understand that Peter’s comments are made as part of the transition from the “temporary” to the “eternal.”

The Transition from the Temporary to the Eternal

The questions I have about Peter’s comments regarding the seeming destruction of the present heavens and earth by fervent heat have to be understood relative to what I call “*the transition from the temporary to the eternal*.” The creation will be gradually released from the vanity and bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:19-21) during the 1,000 years, but there will be a point at which the transformation from the temporary to the eternal will be in full effect: new heavens and new earth. At that point, the “day of the Lord” will be brought to an end.

The first question I have about Peter’s comment in 2 Peter 2:10, 12 has to do with the point at which this “great noise” and “fervent heat” will occur. Some assume that this is when the “end of the world” occurs – an “end” that signals the sudden, complete destruction of the present heavens and earth. The continuing presence of humans on the earth would call into question such a sudden, massive heat storm.

The “elements” mentioned in v. 10 have to do with the four basic elements from which everything in the natural world was believed to have been made: earth, air, fire, and water. Will God, in fact, “break up and destroy” the very building blocks of creation? The answer to this question must make sense with regard to the continued presence of human beings. In a sudden, complete

destruction scenario, where would they be taken for protection ... and for how long?

The Greek term for dissolve (KJV) is luo. It is the third definition in the BAG lexicon that helps to clarify exactly what is to go on: “to break up into its component parts, destroy, of a building tear down of the parts of the universe, as it is broken up and destroyed in the final conflagration” (p. 485). This BAG definition seems to support the sudden, complete destruction of the present heavens and earth. Does it?

How does Hebrews 1:12 describe it? It is like changing one’s garments. Does changing a garment totally destroy the person on whom the garment rests? No. (You can also consider the following Scriptures: Matt. 3:7-12; Mal. 3:1-3; Luke 3:16, 16; 12:49; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; Heb. 1:7; 11:34; 12:29; Rev. 3:18.)

Our problem comes from the general assumption among mainstream Christianity that this “fiery” event occurs during one final, fell swoop of time. I think that such a conclusion is unwarranted. Is it possible that Peter was made privy to a process of the “breaking up” of the heavens and the earth that takes place from the time that Jesus Christ and the saints conquer the nations of the earth and set up the Kingdom of God until the 1,000-year ministry of reconciliation is completed?

Let me pose a couple of other questions that might well lend some aid in understanding what is planned. What is happening in Isaiah 34:1-10? Does this appear to be set during the “day of the Lord”? I fully understand that anytime the Lord goes forth to battle and sets His mind to punish a nation or a group of nations it can be called “the day of the Lord” relative to a period of judgment.

But make note of the imagery used here: (a) the Lord’s indignation upon all nations (v. 2); (b) the host of heaven dissolved and the heavens rolled together as a scroll (v.4); (c) “the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompense” (v. 8 – May we apply Peter’s comment in 2 Pet. 3:8 here?); and (d) the unquenchable burning (vv. 9, 10). Now, compare that to Revelation 19.

Let’s also consider Isaiah 40:3, 4. What is happening as the valleys are raised and the mountains are lowered? What is happening as the crooked is straightened and the rough is made smooth? Is

there some breaking up going on? What about Isaiah 41:14-20? How do the mountains get reduced to chaff that is carried away by the wind?

Read Isaiah 35. Is this the Lord God’s revelation that the vanity and bondage of corruption will be lifted and a process of renewal set into motion (Acts 3:19-21)? Note especially Peter’s comment that such a thing was spoken by God through the mouths of His holy prophets since the world began. This presupposes that God knew that He would have to clean up the mess made by man’s sins. What role does the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10, 14, 15) play in this? It will exist during the entire 1,000-year period.

Does Isaiah 65:17-25 give voice to a process by which the heavens and earth are renewed ... with all of God’s creatures benefitting from it? What shall we make of Isaiah 66:15? How do Revelation 19:20 and 20:10, 14, 15 fit into this notion of a fiery dissolution of things on the earth? Whatever might constitute the “fire” that cleanses the heavens is not made clear in Peter’s comment ... but it will not affect those humans who are to populate the new heavens and new earth.

In summary, the “breaking up” (dissolution) of the heavens and earth is a process by which the vanity and bondage to corruption are lifted, the earth’s surface is changed and its environment is made more temperate, all manner of healing takes place throughout all of creation, and that which is part and parcel to the old heavens and earth is purged by being reduced to chaff and blown away or reduced to ashes by fire (see Mal. 4:1-3 and Dan. 2:34, 35). It is a cleansing process that leaves the present heavens and earth intact ... but purged of the effects of all of the sins committed by angels and mankind – without totally destroying them and building again.

The Eighth Day: Moving toward Eternity

This is the point at which the temporary moves more fully to the eternal – that great, endless Sabbath that God has in store for His people – thought by some to be prophetically indicated by Gen. 2:2, 3 because there is no mention of “evening and morning: the seventh day.” Let’s understand with

what we are dealing here. If there is prophetic significance to Genesis 2:2, 3, then we need to understand what it is.

In other studies, we have learned that Genesis 1:1 represents the original creation as Elohim intended it to be. We understand from Isaiah 45:18 that this original creation was not in chaos and confusion, but was stable and habitable. We understand from Job 38 that the completion of that original creation caused such an emotional reaction among the angels that they broke out into songs of praise and shouts of joy that Elohim had accomplished such a marvelous feat.

Yet, in Genesis 1:2 we read that the earth “was without form, and [was] void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” The Hebrew terms are tohu and bohu ... which mean “chaos” and “confusion.” That does not square with Isaiah 45:18. The implication of Genesis 1:2 is that, at the least, the earth came to be in chaos and confusion after its original perfect, habitable state had been established. In other words, something terrible had happened to mar and disfigure the earth, at the least, so that it was no longer in its original pristine condition as described in Isaiah 45:18. The damage was caused by a “war in heaven” (Rev. 12:3-9; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) led by Lucifer against God before Yahweh Elohim created man (Isa. 14:12-17).

For the six days (evenings and mornings), Elohim set about repairing the damage that was done by that war and completed parts of the creation that had not been completed. Isaiah 45:18 indicates that it was suitable for habitation, not that the inhabitants had actually been created. Once that repair was made and the inhabitants were created, Elohim took a rest (Sabbath) because they had accomplished that part of their “work.”

Jesus indicates in John 5:17 that He and the Father did not take an eternal Sabbath at the end of those six days. He even indicated that God’s work is permissible on the seventh-day Sabbath that was created in Genesis 2:2, 3. In Mark 2:27, 28, Jesus indicates that the seventh-day Sabbath rest was created for the benefit of mankind – which would indicate that Elohim does not really need to rest (see Psa. 121:3, 4).

Symbolism, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder. Does Genesis 2:3, 4 imply or demand that there is some kind of underlying symbolism in-

volved because there is no mention of an “evening and morning: the seventh day”? No – even though it is an interesting observation. What is patently obvious is that Elohim declared a “rest” for man-kind’s benefit, not their own. If the concept of “new heavens” and “new earth” was not revealed at this point in Scripture ... or until Isaiah 65:17 ... there would be no expectation of any such “endless Sabbath” symbolism in Genesis 2:3, 4.

Nevertheless, that symbolism is eventually revealed in Scripture either by inference or direct revelation. What do I mean by that? Paul alludes to it in Hebrews 4:4-11. He bases that allusion on a group of Scriptures that contrasts with Genesis 2:2, 3 – a group of Scriptures that were not available for several hundred years after Genesis 2:2, 3:

1. Psalm 95:7-11: A psalm about how God had established a place of rest for Israel (see Gen. 15:13-21). Israel, however, provoked Him for 40 years ... and He swore that they would not enter the “rest” He had prepared for them. This indicates that the “rest” was different from the “day” and “place” in which it was to occur – and we know from subsequent history that Israel entered and possessed only a portion of the “Promised Land.”

2. The offer of the “rest” is also contingent on Israel hearing His voice and not hardening their hearts (v. 7; also cited in Heb. 3:11). It is offered “today” ... which indicates that there is coming a time when “today” will no longer exist (see also Isa. 55:6-11).

3. Hebrews 4:8: When Joshua (Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua) led Israel into the Land of Promise, that mere act did not give to Israel the “rest” that God had intended. Since “today” still presents an opportunity to enter that “rest,” then there is yet a “Sabbath” for God’s people to enter. That “rest” will be the eternal rest.

4. We can conclude, therefore, that the 1,000-year conclusion of the ministry of reconciliation is not indicative of that

eternal rest because there will be so much work still being done to change hearts and minds and rid the creation of all of the things that yet disturb any eternal rest that God had originally intended.

So, what conclusion can we draw from this information? Simply this: The original “week” in Genesis 1:2 through 2:3 is not part of the eternal Sabbath that is yet to come. “Today” is the period of time during which the invitation to enter that eternal Sabbath is offered. “Today” will last to the point where Jesus Christ has conquered all of God’s enemies and turned the Kingdom over to the Father. Then, and only then, can there exist an environment in which the true, eternal “rest” of God can take place. It will still be God’s Sabbath, and we will enter it with Him.

Notice that Leviticus 23:39 declares the “eighth day” a Sabbath. The first seven days are a reminder of the temporary nature of things (Lev. 23:40-43). The “eighth day” is the point at which we fully move from the temporary to the eternal. Our journey out of the “Egypt” of this world will have been completed, and we thereafter shall rest in complete peace and contentment for eternity.

Summary/Conclusion

We have defined the “Lord’s Day.” We have seen how the Fall Festivals outline God’s great

plan to bring His judgment against a world that will have been entrenched so long in sin and shame. We have seen, therefore, that the “Lord’s day” about which John wrote in “The Apocalypse” is about an “age” or “period” of judgment during which God’s original plan to create man in His image will be resumed. He put that plan on hold in order to deal with the sin that had infected it through sinful actions by angels and mankind.

Once the redemption price was paid, the path toward the restoration of all things in heaven, upon the earth, and under the earth was opened wide. It then became possible to move toward the destruction of sin and the limitations of the flesh. All of that resolved, God could then move into the endless eternity ahead to expand His family in plenty, peace, and harmony and spread it all over His vast creation (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

It is little understood that Israel is the kingdom that the Lord God created to be His own so that He could make us acceptable to God the Father and grant us entrance into the very family as children of God: Elohim. It is little understood that any who come to Jesus Christ to be joined to Him as His “wife” will have been added to Israel – whether or not they were originally Israelites by birth (read Rom. 11). So it will be that the Kingdom that is finally established upon all of this earth and, in the future, out into the vast universe, will be the Kingdom of God: Israel. Bought out of sin and unfettered by the limitations of the flesh.

New Bible Study Course

I am currently rewriting the Bible Study Course in book form. This rewrite will no longer be the question-and-answer format with a test booklet after each four lessons. It will be in book form with thorough explanations of each topic. At the end of each chapter, there will be a set of review questions that will give you an opportunity to know how well you have grasped the subject matter. While this series of books covers the fundamental “principles of the doctrine of Christ,” it is an approach that will lead you to a more spiritually mature understanding of God’s truth. From this, you will be able to go on to learn the deeper, more complex things of God’s revelation of His thoughts and ways (Hebrews 6:1).

Now you can view Pastor Larry E. Ford's internationally telecasted interview with Bishop O. C. Pringle of Preach the Word's "Books of the Month." The topic is Pastor Ford's recent book God: Accused or Defended?

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