

The Oracles of God

***Instructions for
Understanding, Believing, Obeying,
Walking and Delighting in, the
Spirit and Power of God***

Darell B. Dyal

Also by Darell B. Dyal

Limpy, the Lost Way of the Bible

*For Such a Time as This, We Need
to walk in the Power of the Holy Spirit*

The Oracles of God

Instructions for Understanding, Believing, Obeying, Walking and Delighting in, the Spirit and Power of God

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***Do not neglect to show hospitality to
strangers, for by this some have
entertained angels without knowing it.*** ¹

¹ Hebrews 13:2.

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Preface

Like most believers, Daniel, Skeeter, and Hoss (characters you will soon meet) think they know the Bible and live *pretty good* lives—that is, until a mysterious old man appears in their midst. His visit changes everything. This book tells *their* story, which, in truth, is proxy for the modern church of this age, the Lord’s beloved people, the *lukewarm Laodiceans*, whom He sternly rebukes

*So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘**I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing**’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...²*

So it is with the *characters*. They think they are *spiritually rich, and doing well* in their time on earth—for until Poka arrives, they have no concept of the darkness that threatens their eternal welfare. But the old man knows they do not understand. In fact, he knows their state is flawed to the extent that they cannot even read Scripture for what it *actually* says. His first task is to convince them of their blindness. You will be touched by (and even chuckle during) the ensuing debate, for, knowing men as you do, you realize that they will be offended by, and vigorously resist, his assertions—at least for a while. However, under his persuasive logic the men begin to recognize the far-reaching implications of their spiritual blindness. You may even hear some of your own opinions debated therein. If so, good, for the *characters* are created to provide an arm’s-length, non-intrusive platform from which to evaluate one’s own thoughts about eternal matters.

But, their ignorance hampers the goal of providing a reader-friendly teaching of God’s requirements of, and empowerments for, believers. You see, *The Oracles of God* sets forth truths needed to abide in Christ Jesus, walk in the Holy Spirit, and live overcoming lives that please the Lord. Yet—and here is the problem—one cannot live in victory **unless** he **comprehends** and **obeys** God’s Word. Hence the challenge to the writer to make these things clear; and to the reader, to understand, believe, and obey the Bible.

To leave *the friends* and their issues and to turn to the book itself, is to see that it is not dry theology; rather, it is jarringly refreshing. In a matter-of-fact way, the old man sees truth in every verse. He often tells the friends: *Read the words for what they actually say; not what somebody says they say; not what you, yourselves, think they say.* You will be amazed how much light this simple approach sheds on more than fifty so called Bible *mysteries* or

² Revelation 3:16-17.

confused doctrines ancillary to the core discussion.³ Likewise, insights into the Revelation clarify such things as the: *First Love; First Works; Identity and Deeds of the Nicolaitans; Beast's War with the Saints; Wrath of the Lamb; Wrath of God; Mystery Babylon; Day of the Lord; and the Identity of the Judge Who Sits on the Great White Throne*. In addition, topics such as *Walking in the Spirit; Keeping the Traditions; Pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church; The Restrainer, Pulling Down Strongholds*, and many others are carefully explained in the light of the Word of God.

As you pass through the book, you can note that the old man never asks the friends to *accept his word*. Knowing that Scripture speaks for itself,⁴ he simply guides them to pertinent passages, has them read the verses, and helps them apply *maxims of learning*⁵ to the texts for themselves.

The book's title recognizes the profoundness of the term, *The Oracles of God*. The rarely used New Testament (NT) word, *oracles*,⁶ makes a precious contribution to the richness of the Bible. It appears only four times, the first three giving priceless insight into the significance of the word; the fourth stating a solemn warning to those who presume to speak for God. The first NT appearance of *oracles* refers back to that most hallowed meeting between God and Moses on Mt. Sinai, where Moses received the *living oracles*.⁷ That is a supremely holy moment for Jews and Gentile believers. Likewise, the second appearance carries great weight. Paul asks, *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the **oracles of God***.⁸ To Paul, there was no more important way to recognize the significance of the Jewish nation than to tie it to that most holy gift, the *oracles of God*. The third text is a rebuke of believers who fall behind in the faith: *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the **oracles of God**...*⁹ Once again, a vital matter is tied directly to that holy anchor, the *oracles of God*. The final passage presses the point home. *If anyone speaks, let him speak as the **oracles of God***.¹⁰ The verse says that, if you intend to speak for the Lord, what you say must be as if God Himself says it; otherwise, be silent until one who is prepared to speak for God, does so.

3 You will come to savor the old man's approach: *carefully read Scripture for what it actually says*. You will delight, for example, to discover that the lucidity provided by a careful, *word-for-word reading* of Genesis chapters one and two eliminates the *supposed* conflict between *science* and *theology* concerning the *Big Bang* theory (and all other scientific advances) and the six thousand years of Adam's race. Scientists will rejoice to discover that they do not have to choose between *science* they know is true and *theology* they hope is true. God's Word, read for what it *actually* says, grandly accommodates all the truths of science and theology. (See Part V, Supplementing Studies, Supplement 1, *The Two Accounts of Creation*, for an exposition on this vital matter.)

4 In fact, the narrative uses well over six hundred footnotes and references many more biblical passages than that. You will see the depth and richness this brings to the discussion of *The Oracles of God*. You will also note that numerous scriptural quotations appear in the book, thus enabling the reader to focus on the teaching, and not be distracted by continuous *hunting* for the many biblical references.

5 This term and its usage, are explained in chapters three and four.

6 *Logion*, G3051, *Utterance of God, Oracle*.

7 Acts 7:38; Exodus 19:1-31:18.

8 Roman 3:2.

9 Hebrews 5:12.

10 1 Peter 4:11.

Together, these passages underscore the wondrous significance of *oracles*, for God's words are *living, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. They will not return to Him void, but will accomplish everything He sent them forth to accomplish.*¹¹ Therefore, in honor of the majesty of the Word of God, and the beauty of its synonym, the *Oracles of God*, the term is used as the leading phrase in the title of the book.

But, it is not enough to just describe the majesty of that introductory *phrase*. It is also necessary to show how the *mighty oracles*, and, by extension, this book about them, guide believers. And that is the purpose for the rest of the title. You see, *The Oracles* are the Word of God, rightly divided.¹² They provide instructions for *Understanding, Believing, Obeying, Walking and Delighting in, the Spirit and Power of God*. In doing so, they describe the work involved in overcoming evil, pleasing God, and receiving His gracious promise, an inheritance beyond comprehension, which is this...

***He who overcomes shall inherit all things,
and I will be his God and he shall be My son.***¹³

Can you imagine anything more glorious? Yet, such inheritance is not without price. While the gift of salvation is free, there is work to be done afterward, for the Bible says *...we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*¹⁴ Jesus said...*the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*¹⁵ The merchant had to sell—**and pay**—all he had to possess the marvelous *Pearl of Great Price*. The Lord explained, *My Father has been working until now, and I have been working...*¹⁶ Believers are to *endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*¹⁷ The responsibility to disengage from the affairs of this world and serve the Master (working in the business of His kingdom, as God Himself is also working) is discussed throughout the book.^{18, 19} The practice of works of righteousness and holy living cannot, must not, be ignored in the Christian pilgrimage—for without them, one is not on the straight and narrow road at all.

11 Isaiah 55:8-11; Hebrews 4:12.

12 Rightly divided. 2 Timothy 2:15.

13 Revelation 21:7.

14 Ephesians 2:10.

15 Matthew 13:45-46.

16 John 5:17-21, 36.

17 2 Timothy 2:3-4.

18 Those works of righteousness that the church must do are discussed throughout, but especially chapter eight, *The Time for Power*, and supplement four, *Keep the Traditions*.

19 No one earns salvation by works. That point is clear in the Word. That is not what the *call for works* herein is about. Works are to be a heart-response of love for God. They are for the purpose of overcoming evil, shepherding His children, and ministering to God and the beloved Body of Christ.

Moving from the *work of the kingdom*, let us consider why *characters* are used *at all* in such a serious book. While it is true that *they* create a way for readers to consider other perspectives in an open, fearless environment, the risk is that *characters* (in any form) suggest an element of fiction in a work that is not fiction *at all*. To mitigate that risk, therefore, characters are used long enough to buffer the abrasive edge of the assertion that *many believers have fallen short of the high calling of God*.²⁰ Once that point is established, the role of the *characters* diminishes rapidly. Yet, being introduced, *they* tend to develop a life of their own, and readers have the right to expect closure *to those lives*. In this book, *their* tale is completed in chapters nine and ten, where you will see how their lives unfold up to the point we leave them; you will even discover a glimpse of what *their* future might hold.

Now well into my eighth decade, I have come to understand that a major difficulty in writing a book of this nature is that many believers stubbornly cling to doctrinal positions based on *token* scholarship (or less), simply ignoring passages that do not support their preferences, and showing little interest in other positions, even those richly saturated in the Word. Worse, some *double-dog dare you*²¹ to try to persuade them otherwise. The scary thing about such narrow attitude is that, while I was slow to recognize it, the Lord knew it *from the beginning*.²² His rebuttal of the phenomenon is astoundingly shocking, and should compel all believers to walk humbly before Him who says,

He who hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

By extrapolation, His statement also means: *he who chooses to not hear, let him not hear*. But, the Lord makes it clear: such persons are accountable in the last day to all of the Word of God...

And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day!²³

Be certain of this: final judgment (good or bad) awaits all! And, it will be administered perfectly.

It is my prayer that *The Oracles of God* finds its way into the hands and hearts of faithful ones who will understand, obey, and teach others to walk in the Word of God. It is also my earnest prayer that it be used to awaken the *lukewarm ones of the modern church*, to whom the Lord Jesus cries out,

²⁰ Philippians 3:14.

²¹ I haven't heard this expression since I was a little boy. But, it says exactly what *they* mean.

²² Isaiah 46:9-10.

²³ John 12:47-48.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent.

24

Yet, history testifies that many of the *lukewarm ones* will simply insist on *a religion of their own making*. Today, three thousand years after the last, terrible words of the book of Judges,²⁵ they still ring true of the hearts of many in the modern church...

There was no king in Israel;²⁶ and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

God warns of the consequences of disregarding His commandments and choosing your own way. Persist in rebellion too long, O man, whoever you are, and you may hear, *but not understand*, the words,

Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.

Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.²⁷

To His majestic statement I add my own solemn cry...

Flee, O Church, flee from rebellion before it is too late!

The Oracles of God shows what must be done. It says to *Return to the Beginning* of God's will and way.²⁸ It describes His empowerments, giftings freely given to those who seek to understand and obey His Word. In its provisions, you will discover the blessed way of the *Overcomer*, and learn to please Almighty God and His Magnificent Son, Jesus Christ.

If you do those things, you will reap a most blessed inheritance forever.

24 Revelation 3:19.

25 Judges 21:25.

26 The people rejected God as King; the very God Who was their King. 1 Samuel 8:1-8.

27 Isaiah 6:9-10. Also, read the background of these words as told in Isaiah chapters one through five.

28 See Part III, chapters seven and eight.

Part I: The Setting

Chapter 1

A Mysterious Old Man

Fire burned in our hearts in the days we listened to him. We could see power in his eyes; feel it in our spirits. But it wasn't just that. The most astonishing thing was that after he was gone we could remember what he said, all of it, almost verbatim. And the thing was, he came to say it to us. With a sense of urgency, we ponder our next steps, even as we look over our shoulders for the catastrophic events soon to follow. We also realize that his visit was not just for a few crackers in south Florida on the edge of Lake Okeechobee. Surely it was for as *many as have ears to hear*.

In the pages that follow I'll tell you the story. Judge it for yourselves.

Here's what happened.

The old man appeared in Okeechobee, Florida, one Saturday in October. He rented a little cabin at ***Skeet's RV Haven*** down by the Lake and showed up at church the next morning. He was striking: surely more than 90 years old; barely 5 feet tall; probably less than 100 pounds. He always wore long-sleeved, khaki shirts and pants and like all old men, the leathery skin under his chin sagged and wrinkled on his neck. He had a full head of scraggly white hair. His beard, also snowy white, was scruffy and worn medium length. He had a prominent, high-crested nose and bushy, white eyebrows with long hairs pointing everywhere. He reminded me of a rustic painting of Isaiah that hung in the library when I was a boy. He never wore a hat; neither was he stooped at all. In fact, he seemed almost spry: blazing blue eyes set in a brown face surrounded by snowy hair. But when he walked, you could tell he was ancient. He took the short little off-balance steps of a very old man.

Though I hadn't been going to church much at the time, I was sitting in the back that day. It wasn't crowded so I spotted the old man as he slipped into a side pew to my left. His appearance was so arresting I couldn't help but watch him. As the service plodded on—announcements, song leader prattle, choir special, collection, vocalist, sermon, and finally, a poorly-followed message—I was amazed at the old man. He cried, somehow silently, throughout the service. I didn't know why. I couldn't help it: I had a lump in my throat the whole time. He shed a lot of tears that morning.

When the service ended I looked for him, but he was gone. I hurried (for me) to the front door. When I stepped out I smelled the first sprinkles of rain. Though I'd heard thunder, but didn't know it was already drizzling. The parking lot was still full, but when I looked at the road I saw him walking slowly down toward the Lake, white hair blowing in the swirling wind. I sort of hopped/ran to my truck, rushed to where he walked, rolled down the window and said, "Sir, may I offer you a ride?"

In an accent I'd never heard, he said, "Thank you, Son. That would be nice." His voice was slow but clear and louder and deeper than I expected. And you know, after thinking about it, I'm not even sure it was an accent. It wasn't a drawl or a twang. And I've traveled in the Midwest and North; it was none of that. In fact, maybe what I heard was that there was no accent at all. Listening to him across the ensuing days, I realized that every syllable was understandable, and if you will, clean; and he never used contractions.

Anyway, when he said yes, I got out and went around the back of my 350 Dually to where he stood by the road. Mine is a big red truck high on huge tires because I spend a lot of time in the swamps and sawgrass around the Lake. I have a power winch and a long cable on the front because I've stuck Big Red out there more than once. I knew the old man would have trouble getting in. Shoot, on a bad day I do too, with the bum knee I got in the Army. I was a Special Forces paratrooper until I hit wrong one day and tore it up pretty bad. Fact is, after twenty years it still aches most of the time, and pops out once in a while if I'm not careful how I walk. When that happens I turn chalk white and almost pass out. However, I've learned how to re-set it. I sit down (which isn't hard, since when it pops it's all I can do to stay off my face anyway) and pull my foot back toward my body. The knee, which is pointing up, pops back into place just before I can't pull any further. After that, I don't want to do much for a while. Sometimes it takes three or four days to get back to where the pain is tolerable. The doctors say they will give me an artificial knee any time I'd like, but I don't care much for that idea. They argue it will only get worse and I'd recover quicker if I do it while I'm young, or these days better make that, relatively young. They're probably right; but still, I can't get myself to hurry to be carved on like a piece of meat.

It's not that I don't have money. It turns out that our family has done well, even though you can't much tell. We've always lived simple lives here by the Lake. But Grandpa was smart. In the early '60s the Japanese came to the area looking for exotic foods, things like frog legs, gator tail, and catfish, and were prepared to pay a premium. Grandpa—who'd been thinking about retiring from the railroad anyway—saw an opportunity and decided to become a catfish supplier. So, when my Daddy, Grandpa's only child, was about thirteen years old, they went into business. Grandpa knew a lot about fishing and hunting, and had smarts and money enough to equip several fishing boats and build a small packing house. He hired two helpers, besides Daddy, and the four of them built and set a lot of trot lines. Early on, they caught so many catfish he had to add a worker to help Grandma dress them for freezing and shipping.

By the time the other fishermen around the Lake realized the potential of the Japanese market, Grandpa had become the preferred supplier. He'd met the buyers, mastered their requirements for packing and shipping, and demonstrated an unexpected level of competency. As his control increased, he wisely shared the new business with others around the lake. He began to buy and package catfish (and other delicacies) from the Lake's fishermen. His generosity enabled the local fishermen to prosper, while at the same time, kept himself as the single provider of Lake Okeechobee's produce to the Japanese. Over the next twelve years he and Daddy saved hundreds of thousands of dollars, and by the time the fad wound down in the mid-1970's they'd sold the business and made a lot of money, at least a lot of money for us.

By that time Daddy had grown up, married Mother, and I'd been born.

Grandpa's savvy didn't end there. He always read a lot and probably in those days was the only Wall Street Journal reader in Okeechobee. He began to study the stock market and by the late 70's had a lot of money invested. He was always interested in technology and had begun to buy Intel early on. He made some serious money when Apple went public in 1980, and later a fortune on Microsoft's IPO a few of years before he died in 1988.

While Grandpa was making the family fortune, Daddy built a machine shop and made parts for heavy equipment (huge draglines, pumps and tractors) for Florida's vegetable farming and sugar industry. He'd purchased drawings and technical data on the equipment and could machine almost any part. He loved to fly, and for a premium, would fabricate and deliver parts throughout South Florida. His service was highly valued by the farmers who operated expensive machines, raced against weather and competition, and couldn't afford downtime. He also did a lot of work for the South Florida Water Management District. One job he especially liked was his design and build of several barge-like plow boats to keep hundreds of miles of Florida's crisscrossing irrigation and flood control canals on the south side of the lake clear of water hyacinths, bushes and other debris. He was clever like that. SFWM used his boats a long time, and even gave him a special plaque as a *Creative Supplier*.

Daddy died eight years ago, at just sixty years old. At that time Mother decided, mostly in memory of him, to keep his shop open. I helped her select a manager, but it was not the same. We sold it after a couple of years, while it still had the accrued goodwill of Daddy's name.

Before we pass from the family, let me get back to Grandpa one more minute. I was about five when Daddy was working day and night to build his business. I think Grandpa saw a need in my life and made it the focus of his. He split his time between the market and me, his only grandchild. It seemed that he genuinely enjoyed taking me with him everywhere, and I loved it. I thought Grandpa was the smartest man in the world. I wanted to learn everything he knew, just because he knew it. He used to take me camping, and taught me the woods and hunting and fishing. I was probably the only eight-year-old who understood the life patterns of turkey and deer. For instance, Grandpa showed me that, especially during hunting

season, turkey don't fly up to roost until almost dark; and that, for safety, they stay on the roost until the ground fog lifts, even if it is 10:00 a.m. He also showed me the symbiotic relationship between crows and turkey, which I actually saw many times through the ensuing years. In the mornings, while turkey forage for seeds and bugs, the crows fly ahead treetop to treetop *searching for predators*. I tell you: that's what they're doing. If the woods are quiet, they sound the *all clear* caw and fly on. But, if they see men, they sound a resounding alarm and the turkey change direction immediately. Ignorant hunters, hidden in blinds, never even realize the turkey were almost upon them.

Many times we watched deer graze past our hiding places. We'd watch them in the beauty of their delicate grace, and note that one or another of the adults was always watching for danger. Grandpa always said, *the first to move loses*, and more than once we had to put our hands over our mouths to keep from laughing at *so called* hunters trudging noisily through the clearings with both arms draped over a shotgun across their shoulders. One time we even saw a buck, doe, and fawn, stand quietly in brush while a hunter plowed on by, oblivious of the beautiful statues watching him a few feet away.

In those days Daniel Boone and Davie Crockett were TV shows, and I tried to sneak around in the woods like they did. I learned to keep the sun to my back, to hunt from the shadows and behind shrubs/palmettos that grew all the way to the ground, to move very slowly except when sprinting across clearings. I earned Grandpa's praise when, still a boy, I waded across a cypress pond without scaring a flock of Ibis busily foraging in its shallows.

The bottom line is that he taught me just about everything I know. Some of my best memories are of the two of us sitting around campfires, Grandpa blowing his old harmonica and me singing at the top of my lungs. He taught me to read music, play the guitar, and appreciate mathematics.

By the time I was ten, he had introduced me to the stock market. He taught me how to evaluate businesses and manage money. He showed me the fundamentals of his investing strategy. He would decide which companies were *World Dominators* in their niche—companies like Coke and Hershey, non-capital intensive companies laden with Goodwill—that paid increasing dividends across the years. As time went by, we became trading partners, and in the end, Grandpa left his portfolio to me, with the instruction to sell enough stocks for Mother and Daddy to have the inheritance Grandpa specified. Even so, the bulk of his account was mine to nurture, and I'm pleased to say that it has continued to mature on my watch.

I'm Daniel Lego, a writer. I have BE and ME degrees from the University of Florida in Environmental Engineering. I also have a BA in Journalism since, even when I was a boy, I liked to write. I used to write short stories about some of our hunting adventures, and, if I do say so myself, they were well received at school by my teachers and classmates. Over the years, some have come to consider me an expert on the habitat and wildlife of South Florida, and so, from time to time I lecture at Florida's universities or other interested societies. I

write some fiction (for fun), but mostly do serious research in and around Lake Okeechobee and further south into the Everglades. When working on a story, I often camp for days in the swamps or on the Lake. Don't worry: I have the right equipment. I use a swamp buggy or air boat (with a pop-up camper mounted on each), and one on the back of my truck. Daddy made me all sorts of camping rigs, hoists, etc. It was always incredible to see, and use, his designs. I also have generators to power a small refrigerator, lights, fan, laptop, etc. I can even use a portable air conditioner if I need to, but usually don't. So, it's not like I suffer in the woods. In Florida, the worse thing—besides the heat—is mosquitoes. I hate the little buggers. My skin is almost splotchy from bug spray. I'll probably die from chemically induced skin cancer. I despise cursed mosquitoes, flies, and pesky little gnats; I'd much rather deal with snakes, spiders, and gators.

But, I've digressed. Let's get back to the amazing old man.

After rounding the truck, I walked up to the old gentleman and said, "Sir, my name is Danny. May I help you get in?" I slipped by him and opened the door.

He said, "Thank you, Daniel. This truck is huge!"

I'm a pretty big guy, about six feet and, I hate to say it, over two hundred and sixty pounds. It's not all muscle either like I fancy maybe it once was. I reached back toward the old man. He grabbed my hand and stepped up onto the running board. I lifted some of his weight and moved his hand to the pull bar which was there for that purpose. He grasped it and swung onto the seat rather easily. I closed his door, went back around the truck, got in and looked at him.

He smiled and said, "Daniel, you may call me Poka."

"Yes Sir," I said. "Mr. Poka it is. Where can I take you?"

He laughed. It was a warm, friendly chuckle, the kind that makes you laugh yourself. "No, Poka will be fine. Just call me, Poka."

Now I have a lot of respect for old folks, especially someone as old and obviously distinguished as this gentleman. So I hesitated, "Ah, Sir, I'm not really comfortable..."

He laughed again and said, "Daniel, it is all right. Please, just Poka."

"Yes, Sir," I said and grinned.

He continued, "It is not far. I am staying at Skeet's RV Haven just down the road."

"I know the place. Skeet and I went to school, played ball, hunted and fished together until I went into the Army. He and Mary Alice have done a good job with their park. It's an interesting

story. Maybe I'll get to tell you about it sometime." But really, I just wanted to see if the old man was all right. I couldn't get his tears out of my mind. "Say, Mr., I mean, ah, Poka..."

"Good, good," he said with a warm smile.

"Would you be my guest for lunch? We have a great diner at the other end of town. I eat there often. It's country cooking at its best. It's open for breakfast and lunch."

"Thank you, Daniel Lego. I would like that. I came yesterday and have not had much time for eating."

Daniel Lego!

My name resounded like a shot! I hadn't mentioned my last name. My head snapped around and I blurted, "How'd you know my name?"

He smiled softly, looked directly into my eyes, and said, "Actually Daniel, I know a lot about you. That is part of the reason why I am here. If you bear with me a little while, I will tell you what I mean."

That he knew me was mystifying, almost offensive, while I'd never seen or heard of him. Yet there was something in his gaze—and for that matter, his entire demeanor—that made me pause. Somehow I knew it was okay.

I said, "Well, I don't understand. It just seems..."

He chuckled again, leaned over and touched my shoulder lightly, and said, "You offered me lunch. Let us go eat."

I turned the truck around and drove down to Sassy's Diner. It was full by the time we got there but in a bit, Betty Ann, a friend since she was a little girl, cleared a booth by the window that faced Park Street. As she wiped up the last of the mess she said in her southern drawl, "Hey, Dan, how're you today? Who's your friend?"

"Hi Betty Ann. This is Poka; Poka this is Betty Ann Wade. Her older brother, Jeff, and I were in school together. She was a little twerp in those days."

She laughed and Poka said, "Hello, Betty Ann. I am delighted to know you." He reached over and shook her hand. I looked at him carefully. The twinkle in his eye matched the clever smile on his face. He clearly said, *I'm glad to know, not meet, you*. But he didn't say anything else, so we sat down.

"Want to see menus, Danny?"

I looked at Poka, who seemed very comfortable, and I said, “Don’t think so, Betty Ann. Is Sunday’s special still that great meatloaf?”

“Yes, it is, and Sassy’s on top of her game today. It’s really good, as are the mashed potatoes, corn, and collards. I had some already.”

“That works for me,” I said and looked at Poka again. “Sassy also makes biscuits that melt in your mouth and go great with honey, right, Betty Ann?”

“She does indeed.”

He smiled and said, “Make it two.”

“Sweet tea, right Danny?” I nodded, and she added, “How about you, Sir?”

Poka said, “Tea will be just fine, thank you.”

She winked at him and said, as she scurried to the kitchen, “I knew we’d be friends.”

I watched her thread her way through the tables. She was cute, about thirty, rather tall, maybe 5’ 9”. She married right after high school, but it didn’t last. Jerry was mean when he drank, and wouldn’t leave the bottle alone. It was rough on Betty Ann because she tried to make it work, but finally gave up when he was sent to prison. She has two children (Roy and Paulette) whom she loves dearly. When the kids are grown I know she’ll make it to college. She always was smarter than Jeff, now an attorney in Miami.

Poka and I were silent. I sat and stared at him. On his part, he watched me intently. Finally, I said, “I hope I’m not being too nosy, but are you okay? I mean, in church...”

He interrupted, “Daniel, I am perturbed. Many things are wrong in the church today. God’s Word says *His people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*. It means exactly that. Most are separated from God’s plan and do not even know it. *Having a form of religion*, in ignorance (or, sometimes, self-serving malice) much of the clergy deny its power, misguide the Lord’s sheep, and will ultimately pay a huge price for their insolence and error. To answer your question, **I am not okay.**”

I was startled by his censure. “Wow...” was all I could finally mutter.

He was silent again but looked at me steadily. I could see grief, fury, passion in his eyes. Even so, I didn’t know what to say or do.

Betty Ann was back soon with a large tray of ice tea, salad, biscuits, and two plates with thick slices of meatloaf, huge servings of mashed potatoes, collards, and corn, and dark gravy

floating in the potatoes and on the meat. The steaming food smelled delicious. She quickly spread the dishes and asked, “Anything else for now?”

I looked at Poka who shook his head, so I said, “Just some ketchup, please.” She laughed and pointed at the ketchup bottle on the table, and said in a teasing voice, “Didn’t think I’d forget your ketchup did you Danny?”

I smiled sheepishly, “I should ’a known...”

She left and Poka said, “Daniel, please thank the Lord for our food.”

I looked at him hesitantly and then mumbled a prayer. We ate silently for some time, until finally Poka said, “You were right. This is good.”

“I come here often, too often, in fact. I’ve put on about fifty pounds in the last ten years, and Sassy’s Diner is part of the problem. I have to do something about this weight. I can’t tie both shoes in one breath anymore.”

What he said next was startling, “What I am going to say will make you mad, Daniel, but if you hear me it will give you hope. In fact, it is your only hope.”

I managed a weak, “Okay,” but didn’t much like the prospect.

He looked at me for several seconds, then said, “Your health is indicative of your spiritual condition, as is the fact that you no longer pray and rarely go to church. And when you do, the power of God is not there. You and your church are deceived, slumber in darkness, and are at risk of great loss.”

I almost dropped my fork. I’m sure my face turned red. “You’re right,” I stammered, “I don’t care for what you said at all. If your goal was to offend me, you succeeded. I don’t need to hear that from you.” I glared at the little old man. Who did he think he was?

But, what was interesting was that he wasn’t offended at all by my outburst; nor was he intimidated by my hostility, even though I was more than twice his size. He just sat there quietly eating and watching me.

In about thirty seconds I cooled down some and started eating again myself. Besides, as I thought about what he’d said, I knew it was true. My life wasn’t what it should be, and for certain the church wasn’t what it used to be. So I began to feel pretty stupid.

After a few more bites I ventured, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to react like that. I’m not even sure why I did. It’s just that what you said hurt a lot.”

“It is not a problem, Daniel. That you care enough to react is good; as is the fact that what I said hurts. If neither were true, I would be very concerned for you.”

I said, “Please continue.”

And so he did, “Do you remember when you were ten years old? In those days you loved the Lord Jesus and enjoyed church, right?”

As I wondered how he knew that, the thoughts of those happy days flooded back into my mind. God was so real. I knew Him. We had such love in the church. Mother and I used to go all the time. The singing and worship were wonderful; and the Lord answered prayer.

I said, “Yes, I remember those days. It was amazing. I hadn’t thought about them in years. It’s more like a vague, distant memory than anything.” And then, half musing to myself, I said, “I wonder why?”

“It is not an accident that you do not think of the blessings of those days. It is by design, and that not of God. And that is part of the reason I have come. I will give you a short explanation now and go into detail when we sit down to talk.”

I wondered what he meant about *sit down to talk*, but he continued before I could speak, “When you were a boy the church was spiritually significant. Old Pastor Hanks and a few leaders were walking in truth. They realized that the Word of God is alive and powerful, and explains and governs spiritual warfare. They had begun to *wrestle against principalities and powers in heavenly places* for the church. And they began to *pull down strongholds that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God*. What you remember so fondly is the fruit of their labors. The mighty power of the Holy Spirit and the victories they achieved in the heavenlies are what made it good. That fruit was sweet; but it only lasted for a season because Satan resists the Holy Spirit, and unfortunately, it is not difficult to discover and exploit iniquity²⁹ emerging in the hearts of believers if/as their *first love* for God cools. Such iniquity breaches the hedge of righteousness,³⁰ and, once the devil gains access to the saints, the good work is tarnished, or ruined. Without going into detail, that is what happened.”³¹

“At this point, little but an impoverished shell remains of a once genuine work. No wonder you seldom attend services; no wonder I weep: God’s people are destroyed in their

29 W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William J. White, Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers), G458, *anomia*, lawlessness (iniquity), 357. Wherein Vine provides this profound summary: 1 John 3:4 adheres to the real meaning of the word, *every one that doeth sin (a practice, not a committal of an act) doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness*. This definition of sin sets forth its essential character as the rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self.

30 For an overview of *The Hedge of Righteousness*, See Part V, Supplements, Supplement 5.

31 It was to deal with iniquity in the church that Paul included the words, *and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled*, to his magnificent statement in 2 Corinthians 10:4-6.

disobedience and lack of knowledge.³² It is dreadful. And like those who preceded them,³³ as they drifted from Him, they did not even realize God's Spirit had been lifted."

"But, there is reason to hope, for young Pastor Hanks has begun to awaken to the problem."

I dumbly stared at him. How did he know Hoss Hanks and I were friends? But I didn't even ask. His lament was too much. We *sort of* picked at the balance of our plates until Betty Ann checked to see if we wanted desert. I said no and asked for the bill. As she handed it to me she said, "Thanks for coming, Gentlemen" and to Poka she added, "I'm delighted to meet you, Sir. Please come back."

"I will if I have time, Betty Ann. The food and service were excellent. Thank you."

Poka and I must've made quite a picture as we left: a big hobbling guy and a little old man taking halting steps. As we walked he said, "Thanks for lunch, Daniel. It was good."

"It was my pleasure, Sir." I helped him in and we drove back toward Skeet's. On the way I had a crazy idea, and said, "Poka, why don't you stay with me a few days. I've got a big place on the Kissimmee River. It's north of town on twenty acres with paths through Florida's palmettos, pines and oaks. You can take a walk if you wish. You'll probably see birds and squirrels, and maybe even a deer or turkey. I live alone so I'd enjoy your company, and, we can talk as much as we wish. What do you think?"

"Well, Daniel..."

Interrupting, I added, "Oh, and I know Skeet and Mary Alice very well. I'm sure they'll refund whatever you paid."

"That will not be necessary," Poka said, "but I like your idea. I will be happy to be your guest."

"Great. Let's pick up your stuff and head up to my place. We'll be at Skeet's in a couple of minutes. Which site is yours?"

"It is Number 7, the last one on the first row."

I turned in, drove past the office, stopped in front of 7 and said, "After we get your stuff we should let Eloise, Skeet's manager, know what's going on. Otherwise, I'm sure she'd worry about you."

³² Hosea 4:6, *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*

³³ This will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. *The Fall of the Church.*

I helped Poka out of the truck and walked over to the trailer with him. “May I do anything?” I asked.

“No. I only have a few clothes. Come in if you like; I will be just a minute.”

Instead, I stepped into the shade of the huge oak protecting the trailer from the sun and glanced at my watch. It was past 1:30 p.m. If Skeet hadn’t located it so carefully, the trailer would have been boiling inside because the only AC unit (which hung out the window at the west end of the trailer) was off. Poka must have shut it down when he left for church. He came out in a couple of minutes with a small suitcase and a canvas bag.

I took his stuff and he wiped his face with his handkerchief. “Welcome to Florida,” I grinned.

“I forgot how hot it gets here,” he said. “Even in October it is hot.”

We drove to the office and went inside. I was surprised to see Mary Alice. “Hey, Mary. Got the boss working today, huh?”

“Hi, Danny. Eloise is off. Skeet and I often split Sundays. He was here this morning. I got to sleep in. This must be Mr. Musterion,” she said with a smile.

I was surprised. The only name I knew was Poka. I looked at him and he nodded.

“Yes,” I said, “Mary Alice, this is Poka; Poka, this is Mary Alice Wiggins, Skeet’s better half.”

“I am glad to know you, Mary Alice,” Poka said, with that gleam in his eye.

“Pleased to meet you Mr. Mus...”

She didn’t get to finish either. He interrupted and said, “Oh no, Mary Alice. Just call me Poka, please.”

She smiled and said, “Okay, Poka.”

She turned to face us both and said, “May I help you?”

I said, “Mary, Poka’s gonna spend a few days with me. Just wanted y’all to know so you wouldn’t be worried about him.”

“Thanks for telling me, Dan. I’ll leave Eloise a note. You know she’d worry.”

“Yeah, that’s why we stopped.”

She said, “Poka, you’ll like it at Dan’s. He’s got a nice place up on the river.”

I said, "We're heading up there now. We'll call if Poka needs anything."

"OK, Danny." To Poka she said, "Pleased to meet you, Sir."

As we turned to go she added, "Dan, I'll be cooking Friday night for our early winter guests. The Tyson Family will play and there will be some other music. Love for you and Poka to join the party, and Danny, bring your mother. I haven't seen her in so long."

"Wow," I said, and then to Poka added, "Mary Alice is a real chef. She's been to school and cooks like you can only imagine. The Tyson's were professional musicians for years. They still have a great string quartet."

He smiled and I said, "Mary, I'll call by Thursday if we can make it. Will that be too late?"

"No Dan, that'll be fine. Hope to see you Friday," she said as we walked out the screen door.

"Thanks, Mary," I yelled back over my shoulder.

It takes almost thirty minutes to get up to my place. It's twenty miles north, where US 98 crosses the Kissimmee River (which empties into Lake Okeechobee just west of town). Some years back I bought twenty acres off the north end of Mother and Daddy's place. Like hers, my lot butts up against the river. It's beautiful, with trees throughout, especially along the bank. My favorite part is the cypress pond on the south end that uses over an acre on my side and even more on Mother's. I built my house toward the back near the river. Mother always hoped one day I'd fill it with children (which would've been fine with me) but it never happened. Can't say why...

When we arrived I showed Poka around and got him settled in his room. He said he was tired, but not hungry; and didn't think he would want to eat again that day. That described me, too. However, as I turned to leave his room, he said, "Daniel, will you do something for me?"

"Sure, if I can," I responded.

"Call Earnest Wiggins and Harry Hanks and ask them to spend the day with us tomorrow at your place. Tell them you met a strange old man who came to talk to the three of you. They will come."

I was speechless, so he continued, "Will you call them for me, Daniel?"

"Well, yes sir, I will," I managed, "but they might not be available."

"Just call them," he said, with that twinkle in his eyes. "And, invite them to breakfast. Okay?"

“Yes Sir.”

We decided to break until breakfast at 7:00 a.m. I showed him where he could get a snack if he wished, and how to turn on the coffee pot. Then he went to his room and I didn’t see him again until about 6:30 a.m. As for me, I went to my office to call Earnest (*Skeet*) Wiggins and Harry (*Hoss*) Hanks. Earnest got his nickname a long time ago. His family has always owned the property down by the Lake, and when we played at his place we had to fight a swarm of mosquitos. So we started calling him *Skeeter*. Across time it was sometimes shortened to Skeet.

Hoss’ family moved to town when we were in the second grade. His daddy was Pastor. I’m not sure how Harry got his nickname. It might have come from the stories he told about horses when they moved from Ocala. Anyway, it stuck. Then, when we got to high school he was a thumper of a fullback—built like a bowling ball. He was a little bull, a lot of man in a small package. So, *Hoss* worked then, too. But now he’s Pastor, so it doesn’t seem right to call him Hoss. I’ve managed to switch to Harry, or Pastor most of the time, but when I think about him, he’s always *Hoss*. He’s been married to Barbara for almost twenty years. They met and fell in Love in Bible school. She plays the piano in the church services, and is his best friend. She, a lovely woman, is a little taller than Hoss.

Not knowing what to say, I called my friends and gave them Poka’s message. To my surprise, they said they would come. After that, I called Mother. She sounded subdued, which is unusual, and since her house is only a few hundred yards from mine, I drove over to check on her. We had a nice visit. She was very interested in Poka and wanted to meet him, so she invited us to supper the next night. I said I’d let her know as soon as I talked to Poka.³⁴ It was dark by the time I got home. I puttered around for a while before finally going to bed. In truth, I was apprehensive about the next day. It was a long time before I dropped off, but the next thing I heard was the alarm at 6:00 a.m. I took a shower and went to the kitchen to fix breakfast for four men.

I’ll skip that conversation except to say the old man intrigued my friends as much as he did me.

After eating, we moved to the living room. It has a large window facing west, out toward the river. A sofa and a coffee table are in front of it, with a recliner at either end of the u-shaped setting. Skeet sat in one recliner; Poka the other. I perched on the sofa nearest Skeet, while Hoss was toward Poka. Hoss put his Bible, which he was never without, on the long, low coffee table.

We were silent. I almost held my breath while we waited. After a bit the old man swiveled his recliner from the river, faced us, and began to speak.

³⁴ It turns out that we did go to dinner with Mother. A description of that evening is included as an anecdote between chapters nine and ten. I moved it there because it diverted attention from the central argument in the book. Even so, I think you will enjoy reading the touching summary of *Mother’s* life.

Chapter 2

The Old Man Came...

To Rebuke, Instruct, and Encourage

Smiling at Hoss, Poka launched into a very long discussion. ³⁵

“I have been sent because Pastor Hanks’ intercession touched the heart of God.” ³⁶

He turned to Hoss.

“Victory in that which you have started is possible **if** you persist in knowledge, obedience, and faith **until** the Holy Spirit binds the enemy and secures the triumph. I have been sent to help you understand this matter.”

An instant later quick-on-the-draw Skeeter Wiggins blurted out,

“What’s he saying, Hoss?”

Hoss shrugged his shoulders,

“I’m not sure.”

The old man continued,

“Harry is correct, Earnest. He does not realize the significance of what he started.”

As an aside to Hoss, he said,

“Pastor, tell them about your fasting and praying.”

So Hoss said,

“Shamefully, my prayer vigil is a last-ditch effort to salvage the failure that is my ministry. I’m sick-to-death of our spiritual impotency. There’s no life at church; there’s no power; there’s no fruit; there’s no love; there’s no community. *Going to church* is nothing more than a poorly attended ritual. It’s like we have no clue what it’s about; neither do we know or experience the presence and power of the Living God in our midst.”

³⁵ Daniel is *participant* and *narrator*. This dual role gets the tale told and adds insight to circumstances about the story. The narration is presented in **eleven point Bold**, with a two-space paragraph indentation. When you see these inserts you will realize that the narrator has jumped back in to facilitate continuity, add missing information, or offer his opinions.

³⁶ See Daniel chapter 10.

“And that failure begins with me. I’m responsible; I must change.”

He was still and somber for a moment, then said,

“I remember when Daddy pastored our little church, there was life; and it was good. But when his mantle fell to me, things got worse, for I’m not able to bear its load or walk in Daddy’s long strides.”

He took a deep breath and continued,

“Finally, I could stand it no longer. I had to break through or admit I wasn’t called by God. Fear gripped my heart. If I failed I knew I’d have to give up the ministry, confess that the Lord hadn’t called me, and quit in disgrace.”

To listen was to *feel* Hoss’ burden. Still, not knowing what to say, we remained silent.

“I did know one thing: my prayer life was but a shadow of what it should’ve been. So, before I quit in defeat I had to really try to pray. I started as best I could, but soon discovered that my woeful prayers were lacking. I couldn’t stay focused; I had no sense of the Lord’s presence. Needless to say, there was no victory. In fact, there was no difference at all. I became even more discouraged. As despair settled upon me, I began the construct of a final sermon to announce my resignation.”

“But even then I knew I wasn’t fully engaged in prayer. There had to be more. That’s when, in desperation, I began to fast, and have continued in that for some time. Still, the only thing I can say is that now when I pray, at least my prayers finally reflect a frantic cry from deep within. I find myself weeping and tarrying before the Lord for His kingdom and church.”

He turned to Poka,

“Your visit is the only feedback I’ve had. I don’t understand it, but I’m glad you’re here.”

At that point Hoss stopped. Poka smiled at him and said,

“That is a good report, Harry. I have been sent to assure you that your Lord has led you thus far, and to encourage you to persevere. You cannot imagine the potential for good for your intercession.”³⁷

Then he added another amazing statement,

³⁷ Do not think such *communication* is unbiblical. Consider: **The Tower of Babel** (Genesis 11:1-9); **Sodom and Gomorrah** (Genesis 18:16-19:38); **Death of Ahab** (2 Chronicles 18:18-22); and **Paul’s ministry** (Acts 19:13-16).

“I am going to tell you how to live victorious lives that please God and allow you to sit with Him on His throne forever. I am also going to expand upon what your Lord already told you about the fall of the church and the individuals within it.”

There he paused, looked sharply at us, and with flaming eyes said,

“But, there is an overriding concern: your spiritual lives are so impoverished that, unless God grants mercy, you will not even understand what I say, let alone be able to do what you must do about it.”

But that was as far as he got. Skeeter brashly interrupted...

“Whoa! Who’re you to say we know almost nothing! How would you know?”

Skeet glanced at us as if to say, *Stick with me. I’ll take care of this right now!* But, his glance cost him the initiative. Before he could resume, the old man rebutted...

“Earnest, I know your life is lived in virtual ignorance and disobedience of the Bible.”

His astonishing answer caught Skeet, *a walking retort-at-the-ready*, off guard, and before he could figure out how to respond the old man continued...

“I will show you.”

To this Skeet snarled with a bravado he’d quickly regret,

“By all means: you do that, *if you can!*”

The old man flicked a faint smile, shook his head and said,

“I was going to tell you about *End Time Events* and *What You Must Do to Prepare for Them*. However, Mr. Wiggins, since you *are so enlightened*, you make that report for us.”

Mechanically Hoss and I turned to Skeeter. The lanky man with blond, haystack hair and freckles just sat there. He opened his mouth only to discover he had nothing with which to fill it. His face went through an amazing metamorphosis: arrogance to vacancy to sheepishness. He shifted positions in his chair a couple of times, cleared his throat, and, still wanting for words, fidgeted some more...

Finally, he ventured,

“Well, Hoss and Danny can tell you, I’ve never been much of a theologian. I usually let Pastor explain such matters...”

He glanced haplessly at Hoss, but got no further. Poka held up his hand and retorted,

“Wait! A minute ago I said you live a shallow spiritual life in ignorance and disobedience. But instead of being willing to examine yourself to see if what I said was true, you attacked me, someone who only came to help. So, Earnest, act like the *man of God* you presented yourself to be: tell us about *those end time things* and where you will be in that vital business.”

For the second time we automatically looked at Skeet. He’s a smart man, impulsive, but smart, and in his predicament at least he had the sense to recognize he was in over his head. He got that stupid little puppy-dog look Mary Alice finds so disarming, cleared his throat, and said...

“It seems that I spoke out of turn about things of which I know not...”

Then, after a pause he added...

“Please excuse me.”

The old man gazed at him solemnly for a moment, then burst out laughing. It was one of those deep, rolling belly laughs that you cannot resist, but simply must join. Hoss and I began to snicker, and then laugh out loud. And, finally, Skeet did too.

We stopped after a bit, that is, until Skeeter confessed,

“I’ve never, ever, been shut down like that before.”

Knowing that was true, Hoss and I laughed again. It was funny: long, tall, fast-mouthed Skeet was shut down by a little old man half his size.

The tension was gone.

Poka’s face was introspective.

“I see why your Lord loves you. Still, you are virtually blind. Much of what you *think* you know about truth is but a shadow of the reality of the living, sharp, powerful Word of God and the magnificence it describes. Your spiritual knowledge matches that of the thimbles your grandmothers used when patching the dungarees you wore as little boys. I tell you: the volume of your thimble understanding, when measured against what it should be, compares as unfavorably as your Grandma’s thimble to Lake Okeechobee.”

He paused to let that sink in, then finished,

“I do not say this to denigrate, but to enlighten. Even so, you will find it offensive and, at first, think it wrong. But I caution you: guard against the pride that will well up in your hearts, for when I dig deep enough to expose the meagerness of your knowledge, the *rooster pride* that

is your flesh will begin to crow madly. It will brandish its spurs and attack everything that dares differ from its opinion. It will go to any extreme to try to discredit what is being said, thereby attempting to justify its position to everyone else, especially itself, for it cares more about its image than about truth.”

“But if you somehow manage to overcome your pride and see that your knowledge is, *in fact*, impoverished, you must not let that discovery shipwreck your faith. Rather, you must recognize that such understanding is the mandatory first step to recovery. It is a blessing to really understand that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.* ³⁸ I assure you: God’s Word will repudiate your error-filled doctrines and practices so that you may recover the *lost way of the Bible*, ³⁹ the way the church lived in the *first days*, ***the way***, the only way, to please God.”

“I do not come to argue doctrine. I come to show you that in your ignorance you disobey God on a scale you cannot begin to imagine. And, as it is for you, so for the entire church. Yet, before you can be helped you must understand your frightful state. I challenge you to base your opinions singularly upon the Bible rightly divided along principles I shall show you. Your only hope is to read Scripture for what it **says**, not what you think it says; not what you want it to say; not what somebody tells you it says. If you will do this—and if, with all your heart, you resolve to obey it—the Holy Spirit will show you truth, ⁴⁰ and you will come out of this problem walking in the apex of life: the very presence of the Living God.”

While I hated what he was saying, I knew my spiritual life wasn’t what it should be. Actually, it couldn’t be, because, in truth, I had *no spiritual* life. Even so, I didn’t like him saying it; neither did I like his *know-it-all* attitude. I felt compelled to tell him, but while I was trying to figure out what to say, friend Skeeter, who barely survived the first frap of Poka’s fly swatter, buzzed back in for a second pass. But, I’ll give him this much, Skeet spoke with more restraint. Maybe he learned a little from his first attack on the old man.

Skeeter said,

“You imply that we walk around with so little understanding of the Bible that we’re virtually ignorant. Surely that can’t be right; that just can’t be what you mean.”

³⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16.

³⁹ As set forth in Darell B. Dyal, *Limpy, the Lost Way of the Bible*.

⁴⁰ John 8:31-32.

Chapter 3

The Old Man Came...

To Tell Us about our Present State

Poka was emphatic when he responded,

“That is what I am saying, Earnest! You are virtually ignorant of the Bible. It is so bad that, not only do you not obey it, you cannot even *read* it correctly.”

Skeet was incensed. He told Poka he was flat-out wrong. Skeeter said he could read, and Hoss and I could, too. He said he couldn’t imagine why the old man would say such a thing.

But Poka countered,

“Well, friend Earnest, you force me to demonstrate to you just how wrong you are.”

Then he did. It only took a couple of hours. It was a shocking (yet, in retrospect, almost funny) experience. I invite you to sit back and enjoy a chuckle at our expense in one of our more embarrassing moments. By the time you finish the tale, I think you’ll agree: our catastrophic *inability to read* is as serious as the old man said it was.

However, before you laugh at us too much, I ask you earnestly: Does what Poka showed us about ourselves also apply to you?

The old man began...

Oh, that you understood: *The Word says what it means; means what it says; is to be understood, believed, and obeyed; and that, the more you do this, the better you please God.* Yet, I tell you: you do not comprehend, and therefore, in ignorance, you make three mistakes:

- 1) You ratchet verses down to the level of your understanding, rather than allowing the Lord to elevate your understanding to the glory of His Word;
- 2) You do not read passages in the overall context of Scripture, but take them out of their actual framework; and
- 3) You act like the Bible is a Book of *Suggestions*, rather than *Commandments*.

You must change lest you find yourselves among those of God's people who are *destroyed for lack of knowledge*.⁴¹

Again Skeeter erupted,

"What? How can you say *God's people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge*? That doesn't even make sense. God is a God of mercy and love!"

The old man groaned, rolled his eyes, stared at Skeeter, and finally shook his head and said,

"Mr. Wiggins, all I did was quote Scripture."

"Well, that can't be in the Bible. It just doesn't seem right. You're saying *God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*. That can't be right, not if they're God's people."

Skeeter looked at Hoss for support, but the pastor could only say,

"Actually, Skeet, it's in the Bible."

Poka added,

"Hosea 4:6 says, *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*

Skeet muttered,

"Well, it just seems wrong..."

Then he was quiet, so the old man resumed,

"We shall discuss that point later, Earnest; but for now, I shall prove to you that You do not comprehend what you read in the Word."

Skeeter clasped his hand over his mouth before he said anything else. But, we didn't like it, and the old man could clearly read our body language. So, with fire in his eyes he said,

"How about a test, that is, if you have the nerve to back up your position, Mr. Wiggins?"

Overconfident, and with more than a touch of arrogance, Skeeter fired back,

"Poka, you're gonna be shocked at how wrong you are. What do you want me to do?"

⁴¹ Hosea 4:6.

With a glint in his eyes the old man said,

“Using a simple example from the front of the Bible and one from the back, you will see that you are absolutely wrong. And, listen to me carefully, if it would do any good, and if we had the time, I could show you one thousand others.”

Skeeter took the bait. He snapped,

“Okay, prove it.”

Example One

“Earnest, open Harry’s Bible to Genesis 1:1. We shall spend a few minutes in this chapter. But before we start, pause to consider the honor given you by Almighty God. It is as if **He**, **Himself**, invites you to sit in a cushy seat on the front row of a theatre of **His** Own making, and there, allows you to listen and admire **His** account of **His** Mighty Acts of Creation. As **He** unfolds the mystery, sit quietly and marvel as **He** tells of **His** wondrously powerful and creative works, things **He** did so very long ago. Be respectful, silence your opinions, silence those ideas of others that ring in your head. Listen as the Glorious Creator tells you what **He** did **in His Own Words**. Absorb them; accept them as they are; know that they are **truth**. Let them expand your understanding up to the magnificence of **His** story. You will be greatly blessed if you learn to do these things.”

With that, Skeeter turned in God’s Word, and began to read,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth...

Chuckling, Poka cut him off, saying...

“Pardon me. I was too slow. For starters, let us look at just the first sentence. When you read it, what did you see in your mind’s eye?”

Skeet thought for a moment and then said,

“Well, the first thing I saw were those beautiful satellite pictures of earth. I’m captivated by how blue and pretty the earth looks from space.”

Poka said, “Indeed! Those amazing pictures document a portion of God’s handiwork.”

But, then I swear I saw the twinkle in his eyes as he said,

“Earnest, would you re-read the first sentence?”

And he did,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Then it was that the old man's trap slammed shut!

"Tell me Earnest, how do you get the *satellite picture* of a beautiful earth from those few words?"

As his mind whirred, Skeet's mouth opened a couple of times. But nothing came out. Then, in a moment he said,

"The only possible answer is that I added what I thought I knew about what the verse means to what the words in the verse actually say."

"That is precisely what you did! To your horror, you will soon realize ***that*** is how you read ***most*** of God's Word ***most*** of the time! And, of course, that is ***not*** what you should do. You must learn to read (and digest) the words for what they *actually* say, not whatever *pops* into your mind. Surely you can see the risk associated with such substitution, right?"

Skeet thought for a moment, then said,

"I'm starting to. If I read the words in the Bible, or any other book for that matter, for *what I think they mean*, not what they actually say, then I'm not reading to understand what the author is really saying, and in the case of the Word of God, well, that's pretty short-sighted, given that God Himself is the Author..."

"That is my point. You only *look at* the words long enough to affirm what you *think* they mean. And, when you do that, you are not learning at all."

They just sat there smiling at each other. But Skeeter was somewhat contrite, as if his hand had been caught in the cookie jar.

Poka said,

"Let us start over. Would you again re-read the first sentence?"

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

"Now, tell us what it says, and what it means."

A wiser Skeeter reflected before he spoke...

“Well, what we *know* at this point from *this* sentence is that God created the heavens and the earth; and He did it in the beginning.” Then, after a moment he added, “That’s all we really know. We know nothing else about heaven or the earth...”

“That is right, Earnest! It is as you said: all you really know from what you have read so far is that *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. Anything else is speculation, or worse. Never forget: you either understand what is written because it is fully described, or you do not yet have enough information to understand.”

Poka then said,

“So, if you want to know more, what must you do?”

Skeeter exclaimed,

“Why, read on, of course! That’s so profoundly simple it’s downright amazing!”

The old man followed with,

“The way to understand *what the Lord is saying* is to read the entire text ⁴² and withhold your opinion about what it means until you understand ***all*** that is actually written.

You must let the Word shape your opinion; you must not let your opinion form your understanding of God’s Word!

Does that make sense?”

“Yes, Sir, it does indeed!”

“And remember, once you *think* you understand what a passage says, if you ever find a single verse that does not support your *hypothesis*, you can be sure that your *supposition* requires calibration until it agrees with all verses, and disagrees with none! Earnest, I tell you, if you embrace this single discipline you will be far ahead of many *so called* theologians who base their *dogmas* on what they themselves, or others, say about what a passage means—not what the words in the verse actually say.”

Skeet said,

“I totally get it!”

⁴² In addition, you must also include all parallel accounts of the same event into your study. Further, you will also need to consider all other related Bible verses. These things will be unfolded as the discussed proceeds.

Then they had the biggest grins you could imagine. They seemed delighted with themselves. It was as if they were having the grandest meeting, just the two of them.

I was very pleased for my friend. This was a place he'd not been before.

After a moment, Poka said,

"Let us read on, Earnest."

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Poka said,

"Tell us what the verse describes. What images does *it* bring to your mind?"

An astounded Skeet exclaimed,

"My goodness! It says ***the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*** It says that it was dark, and the earth had no form. And it was deep; and the depth was water. That is incredibly different from my opinion when we started. It's embarrassing to realize how far off I was. And yet, a few minutes ago in my ignorance I *got in your face* when you said I couldn't read! Wow! That's incredible. I'm sorry for my insolence."

The old man smiled but said nothing, so Skeeter continued.

"This is so cool! There's no guessing; no speculation. You either know what God is saying because the words are clear, or you don't because He hasn't completed His message. How nifty is that? Why, you don't have to go to Bible School to understand God's Word. Anyone can understand, if he will simply read it for *what it says*, not *what it doesn't say*. Don't add to the Word whatever you (or anybody else) thinks. God's Word speaks for itself, or, in reality, for God."

Then Skeeter returned to his analysis and concluded,

"So, in verse two we have a better understanding of what the earth was like after God created it in verse one."

The old man added,

"Earnest, the Lord is opening your eyes! Bless His holy name."

With awe in his voice, Skeeter said,

“This is stupendous. Indeed, in these first verses it is as you said: it’s as if the Lord grants readers a seat in His theatre to witness His unfolding creation story.”

After a moment, he added,

“When you consider Who is actually speaking, wouldn’t you think we’d just shut up and listen to what He’s saying all the time?”

Poka exclaimed,

“Amen!”

Then the old man continued,

“If you will, Earnest, read verses three through five.”

Then God said, *Let there be light*; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

Then Skeeter quipped,

“I suppose you want me to tell you about this, too?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, it is as it says: God created heaven, earth (in its formless void), and light in the first day. And He called the light, *Day*, and the darkness, which was already described, *Night*. And in essence, that is all we know up to this point.”

“Very good. But, tell me, when you think of light, what is it that you see in your minds’ eye?”

“Well, I see brightness, of course, and I see the sun. For, after all, the sun provides light.”

Then Skeet was quiet. He (and I) could sense that the old man wasn’t done with him about this. It was as if I could see Skeeter’s fast wheels a’ spinning. Then he burst out,

“I bet you were about to ask me, *Where then does the light come from, since God had not yet created the sun*, weren’t you?”

And this time it was Poka who burst out laughing, and said,

“Indeed, I was!”

So Skeeter said,

“If we say only what the Word says and don’t add to or take away from it, there’s only one answer: God created light from nothing! He created light in and of itself. He said, ***let there be light***, and there was light. The Lord didn’t need a sun to get light from. He made it from nothing, because He is God, the Great Almighty Creator. That He later chose to create stars, and to have them provide light, was something else He chose to do. What else can be said?” Then self-consciously he added, “But, even in this I get ahead of the text.”

At that point the old man did the coolest thing: he reached into his khaki shirt pocket, took out a small bag of Hershey Chocolate Kisses,⁴³ and pitched a couple to Earnest. We all roared with laughter.

“Atta boy, my friend. Good job!”

We couldn’t help it, Hoss and I applauded the entire scene. It was good stuff.

Poka continued,

“But, there is another thing, Earnest. The passage says that thus ended the first day. So, I was wondering, *do you expect that it was a typical twenty-four-hour day?*”

Once again we looked at Skeet. This time I knew I could smell the rubber burning. In a flash my lanky friend had the grandest expression on his face. He said,

“Actually, we don’t have enough information to be sure. It does say *the evening and the morning were the first day*, and perhaps that relates to the day as we know it. Even so, God had not yet created the universe, or even the earth in its final form. So, there is no evidence in the text to tell us that the duration was twenty-four hours. After all, that is the time it takes earth to rotate on its axis one cycle. I suppose that first day could’ve been longer? At this point we have no gage for what a year, or a day might have been. It might’ve been twenty-four hours, but who knows but God.”

This time Poka threw him the entire bag, and we all laughed again.

Skeeter pitched us all some candy, and the old man said,

“Fine work, my son! What you have just done is what you must always do. Keep it up and you will become a man who can be counted on to rightly divide Scripture.”

“But let us continue, for there are other things to note. Read six through thirteen.”

⁴³ Professor Keith Schillet, a member USF’s Executive MBA faculty, always delighted my classmates and me in this way for a well-fashioned response to one of his questions.

Then God said, *Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.* Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day. Then God said, *Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear;* and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, *Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth;* and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day.

“What do you make of this?”

Finally, Skeet muttered,

“That’s a different picture of the creation of Earth than I thought I understood! It certainly affirms that we must read what is actually written, doesn’t it?”

Poka continued his analysis, showing that—by carefully reading what is written (not what you think)—some amazing things are revealed in the dual accounts of creation as found in Genesis chapters one and two. But, while intriguing, to hear the rest of his teaching (at this point) would distract from the primary argument. ⁴⁴

Therefore, we tune back in as the old man was saying,

“Let us move on in the argument. However, I suppose you have begun to realize I was right when I said you cannot read the Bible for what it says.”

“Yes, Sir. As embarrassing as it is to admit, it’s true.” He paused for a minute, then followed with an ominous statement, “At least in this example.”

Poka cut his eyes back to Skeeter, and stared at him until finally, Skeet looked down to the table in front of him.

“That attitude of quickly forgetting the truth God shows you, is desperately dangerous. But, I am glad you spoke it out, for that carelessness is a reflection of the rebellious nature of

⁴⁴ But, let me add an important point. You see, there was much more Poka needed to teach us about this *misreading phenomenon*, and for that matter, the content of Genesis chapters one and two. But, for the sake of focus, the rest of his discourse has been moved to Part V, Supplementing Studies, Supplement 1: *The Two Accounts of Creation*.

your flesh. You shall soon see that what I tell you is true: *You, Earnest, cannot accurately read the Word of God.* If you could grasp this truth, it would terrorize you unto repentance, for it leads to ultimate separation from God!”

While we were peeved by his assertion, nonetheless, we had a sinking feeling that he was probably right. But, Poka was not expecting a response from Skeet, so we moved on.

“Let us look at the next illustration.”

Example Two

“As agreed, we are taking two examples, one from the front and one from the back. I said you would understand neither. So far, I am one-for-one. Turn to Revelation 1:1 and see if I will be correct both times.”

Skeeter began flipping the pages until he found the place.

Then Poka continued,

“I presume, Earnest, that you have read the Revelation, at least a few times. Right?”

“Yes, Sir. Although I don’t understand much about it.”

As soon as he said it and saw the old man’s knowing smile, Skeeter realized he’d fallen into another spider web concerning his *inability to read the Bible with understanding.*

It seemed to me the old man had the right to say, *That’s exactly what I’m saying, Earnest: you don’t understand; you can’t read the Word properly!*

However, Poka let that *teaching point* pass without comment, but it was not lost on us.

“Please start reading at chapter one, verse one.”

And Skeet did. He read until the old man stopped him. This is what he read,

1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. 2. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.⁴⁵

Then, the dialogue continued.

⁴⁵ Revelation 1:1-3.

“While each verse is full of information, let us jump to verse three:

3. *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, **and keep those things which are written in it**; for the time is near.*

What does this mean, Earnest?”

“Well,” said Skeeter, “it’s self-evident. There are two things: 1) *the one who understands and keeps the words of the prophecy, will be blessed*; and 2) *the time is near*.”

Poka raised his eyebrows,

“Self-evident? That is an interesting expression, Earnest. So tell us, *which **self-evident** words of the prophecy are to be kept?*”

It seemed, at first, that Skeet was going to jump right back in with the answer. At least his face and body language indicated he was. He sat straight up, leaned forward in his chair, and opened his mouth. But nothing followed. It was as if he couldn’t get his thoughts together...

So he shifted his position, lifted a hand to gesture with his thoughts, and again opened his mouth. Still, no words came out. Therefore, he slowly, contritely put his hand back into his lap, shut his mouth, and just sat there.

Poka left him alone until, finally, Skeeter weakly offered,

“Well, all of them, I suppose.”

And he squirmed there, miserably, a sheepish little grin under his long, freckled nose.

The old man just continued to watch him.

After a very long thirty seconds, Skeeter spoke again,

“Guess it’s obvious, huh? I don’t have a clue what I’m supposed to understand and obey.”

At first, it seemed so very funny. Once again the old man was right. But, as the inference to our own ignorance dawned upon us, we became as dead men. For, not only Skeeter, but I, too, had absolutely no idea what we must know and obey.

It was then that we began to realize the magnitude of that shocking eye-opener. Think about the implications of our confession: we had no idea about what it was that we had to understand and obey; that is, we had to understand it because our eternal destiny was wrapped up in our obedience to God—on those very points! Yet, we didn’t have a clue

even about what we were to understand; let alone, how to keep whatever the requirements were.

And, it was not only that we didn't understand. In our sloven, lukewarm state, it had never once occurred to us to ask for help.

Then the old man closed the thought with a final comment,

"Seven times the Lord Jesus Christ solemnly warned,

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give...⁴⁶

Alas, implicit in what He said is a somber conclusion, *If you do not care enough about what I say to ask, then do not ask; but, if you do not, O man, whoever you are, will perish in your folly!*"

The light slowly dawned upon us: Skeet and I were among the foolish ones—yet, until that very moment, we didn't even know it!

But, pause here with us for a moment. How about you, dear reader? Can you state the things in the prophecy of the Revelation that you, too, must know and obey? Or are you, too, *without ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches?*⁴⁷

Then he sealed the deal...

"Earnest, there is something even worse than your lack of knowledge: *If I were to leave this moment, you would not change!* Within days you would again think of yourselves as intelligent, informed, *good readers* with no *spiritual* problems. I tell you, it can hardly be worse than that."

He let Skeeter consider the magnitude of his charge. And Skeet wasn't the only one to enter into a *deep-think*. I was with him in that stinky, sinking dinghy.

Poka's assertion about our ignorance was mortifying. It was far worse than, just, embarrassing. It was catastrophic! We were oblivious to the requirements of Scripture defining our eternal destiny. Yet, until that moment, we'd dwelt in stupefying ignorance, all the while *smugly thinking* we were headed for *pretribulation rapture and rulership* with Jesus. Talk about mind-numbing presumptuousness! The most terrifying thing of all was that we didn't even know it until the old man came along.

Beyond words, we just sat there.

⁴⁶ At each occurrence, Jesus described one of seven different rewards. See Revelation 2:7; 17; 26-29; 3:5-6; 12-13; 21-22.

⁴⁷ If you find yourself in the same sorry state as we were, take heart, for the old man expanded this teaching later. And because of that, if you so choose, you, too, can come to understand, repent, and turn.

He just let the reality of our present state sink in to our hearts. Then, after a minute, he resumed,

“I assure you: I could repeat this exercise over and over again with each one of you. However, I am forced to leave you to work out your own choices before your Lord. As to our conversation, we shall transition to the macro cause of your demise, which is **the fall of the church**.

I do want to point out, however, that when we resumed the next morning, and before Poka turned to the *Fall of the Church*, he surprised us by a change in direction, in which he ended up encouraging us with a most useful teaching.

Let us look at the wonderful thing he taught us that morning.

Chapter 4

The Old Man Paused...

To Teach Us Five Useful Maxims

The Word of God asks: *How can a young man cleanse his way?* And, answers: *By taking heed according to Thy Word... Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.* ⁴⁸ Understanding and obeying God's Word pleases Him. Therefore, He commanded Joshua (and, thereby, all others ⁴⁹) to meditate in it day and night to learn and do the things that please Him.

I am going to give you five tenets to guide your meditations, but, before you are ready for the maxims, you need to know, really know, what the *Word of God* and the *Commandments of Christ* are—for they are not **ink on paper** to be *obeyed* or *ignored* at your whim. And, since I know that you do not understand, I shall turn aside to bring this matter to your attention.

At that point, in a most enlightening way, he explained the nature of the *Word of God* and the *Commandments of Christ*. When he finished, he simply returned to his narrative.

On my part, even though I realize how important that information is, I decided it was prudent to relocate them to Part V, where they can be found as Supplements One and Two. ⁵⁰

On our part, let us return to the old man who was saying,

Five maxims will help your meditations. You must:

- 1) Be willing to obey verses as the Holy Spirit opens them to you; ⁵¹
- 2) Read the words to learn what ***they actually say***, not what somebody says ***they say***; not what you, yourself, think ***they say***;
- 3) Ponder the text both in its context (verse/chapter/book) and in its parallel accounts;

⁴⁸ Psalm 119:9-11.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. You will learn herein: *all the things* recorded in the pages of the Lord's Book are to be studied, understood, and learned from (the good and the bad)—even as this vital lesson in the life of Joshua, to whom the Lord commanded: *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:8-9.*

⁵⁰ I urge you to review these important teachings.

⁵¹ The Holy Spirit is the Revealer of truth. John 14:16-17, 26; 16:13-15.

- 4) Meditate on the passage in the overall counsel of the Word of God; and
- 5) Wait prayerfully before the Lord until He gives clarity.

The first maxim is the most important, for if your heart is stubborn, if you will not embrace Scripture as the apple of your eye, if you will not submit to God in His Word, He will not open its truths to you.⁵² He told you not to cast your pearls before the swine; neither does He.⁵³ Instead of revealing truth, He *puts* a stupor, or worse, a reprobate mind *upon the disobedient, rebellious ones*,⁵⁴ and in their rebellion they are destroyed *for lack of knowledge*. In the face of such a dire warning, surely you see the importance of learning to use the five tenets.

Three passages will help you do so.

The First Example

“Harry, please read John 14:12-14.”

Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and **greater works than these** he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

“Do you agree that Jesus means what He says here in this passage?”

“Of course,” Harry replied. “Imagine the benefits if one understands, believes, and does these things, for the results would be beyond wonderful.”

“In that case, Harry, why do you not do what Jesus says?”

The old man’s prod was a line-stopper. What could Hoss say?

Finally, he ventured,

“I don’t know. I guess I’ve always taken this verse to be a *figure of speech*, because, after all, everybody knows it’s not possible to do the mighty things Jesus did, not to mention, even greater...”

His voice trailed off.

⁵² John 7:16-17.

⁵³ Matthew 7:6.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 6:9-10; Romans 2:18-32 (especially verse 28); Hosea 4:1-10. We will talk about this at length

Poka waited while Hoss contemplated the paradox. You could almost feel his mind working. He knew the Word was true; he knew it meant what it said; yet, to actually do the works Jesus did was so inconceivable that he couldn't process the implications.

Still, he said nothing, until finally, realizing the old man was waiting, Hoss ventured,

“Somehow I've always felt doing those things was impossible, even though Jesus said to do them. But, I've never actually heard anyone claim the words mean what they say. Think about it, the verse says ***we are to do the works Jesus did, and even greater works!***”

His voice trailed off again. However, in a moment his lights came on. Glancing at Poka he said,

“That's your point, isn't it? We don't believe the words mean what they say; nor do we ask the Lord to help us understand and obey them. You said it: we just *ratchet them down to the level of our pathetic understanding; we do not ask the Lord to elevate us up to the splendor of His Word.*”

Poka exclaimed,

“Because your bias is that the verse is impossible to perform, you fashion a watered-down version, squeeze it into your little thimbles, and blithely continue in a religion of your own making, unperturbed by how far below the presence and power of God you walk. Neither do you realize how little value you are to the kingdom of God; nor do you know what a joyous walk with the Lord you forfeit because of your stupefying ignorance. Yet, in the smugness of your *fleshly imagination*, you are so contentedly blind that you do not lift one *spiritual finger* to repent of your slothfulness and seek deliverance from the darkness that enshrouds you.”

“Further, you have abandoned all training in critical thinking, training intended to teach you to read and think about what the writer *actually* says, training that forces you to discover what the writer *actually* means. For it is only after you *know* what the author intends that you can decide whether you agree, or if not, why not. Keep in mind: I am using *writers* simply to illustrate the challenge of reading. However, more to the point: The Word of God is absolute. So, what you should do is read ***it*** to ***understand what it says*** so that you can test *yourself* against ***it***, with the idea of changing *your thinking and conduct* as necessary to align with God's Book.”

Chagrined, Hoss muttered,

“What you say sounds good, but somehow it just can't be right...”

He spoke no more, so we turned to Poka, whose face was pained, but patient, as if he knew something we should've known, but didn't.

On my part, I don't like to be caught like that, so I began to retrace the conversation, sure that we'd missed something. However, on the first cut I saw nothing. So, we just sat there like the dumbos we were, until finally, *tongue-in-cheek*, the old man said,

"So much for the five maxims, huh? I see you really used them as a guide to help evaluate the verse under discussion..."

He smiled at our bewilderment, then began to teach once again,

Let us restart, but this time we shall use the tenets. The verse says,

Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and **greater works than these** he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

The first maxim requires you to be willing to obey the passage when the Holy Spirit opens it to you.

And, before we could say anything, he added,

I know this to be true of you; else, I would not have been sent.

The second says: *read the words for what they actually say*. This, you almost did, but, when you began to realize that they *mean what they say*, fear and unbelief robbed you of the glory of full comprehension and derailed you from the path of truth.

However, it was concerning the third tenet that you stumbled badly. This maxim says you must *Ponder the text both in its context (verse/chapter/book) and in parallel accounts*. Let us do that together. Verse twelve says, *Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father*. This is a statement of glorious truth, a truth that—if understood—would change the face of the way the Gospel is preached today. However, permitting your lack of faith to derail you, you abandoned the rest of the counsel of both the passage and the tenet. And thus, incompletely informed, your negative confession overran you and you therefore concluded that you could not do what the verse said. In doing so, you exhibited ignorance, error, and lack of faith and training.

What you should have done was read the wonderful revelation of verse twelve, pondered it in its magnificence, and then—as you waited for the Lord to increase your understanding to the level of His Word—you should have continued reading the glorious clarification provided by the context of verses thirteen and fourteen: *And whatever you ask in My name, that **I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, **I will do it**.*

Had you contemplated these two additional verses (and taken the three together) you would have begun to see that a marvelous mystery was being unveiled: a mystery about the precious relationship between the Lord and the saint who understands and dares to believe His Word. You see, it is by *abiding in Jesus* that great and mighty things are done so *that the Father is glorified in the Son*.

When he said those words it was like the presence of God's knowledge and power filled the room and settled upon us. In that moment we almost grasped the fact that these things were absolutely true.

However, as that manifestation lifted, fear and doubt returned—even as when Peter, *who was walking on water*—began to look at the angry waves and *think* that no man can walk on water...

It was then that the old man loudly proclaimed,

***Yea, I say, if you will seek Him with all your heart;
if you will grasp His Word as a Pearl of Great Price,
in His time, He will grant you understanding; and
you will abide in Him as His friend in the Holy Spirit
and in the counsel of the Living Word of God.***

Our hair stood on end under the anointing of that prophecy.

Then he added,

That is the way to appropriate spiritual truth. A million of man's words will not suffice.

Leaving the awe of that moment, we passed to the second passage.

The Second Example

"Read Matthew 6:8-13."

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Turning to Skeeter, Poka said,

"Earnest, *to whom does the Lord speak* in this passage?"

“That’s easy. He was talking to His disciples.”

The challenge came quickly.

“Are you sure? How do you know?”

“Well,” and a bit late, Skeeter was more guarded, “I’m pretty sure.”

But Poka rejoined,

“How quickly you forget. Do you not remember: you must not guess about the meaning of a single verse? Either you *know* what it means, or you do not. And, as you demonstrated earlier, there is nothing wrong with saying *I am not sure*, or, *I do not know*, or, *I do not yet have enough information to say*. If either of these is the case, then you should search until you **know for sure**. Otherwise—and listen carefully—you will be defenseless against the devil. I assure you, you will be tested by one or more of the legion of darkness as to whether you understand and stand upon God’s Word. Remember, the devil even tried to misapply Scripture against the Lord Himself.⁵⁵ And, if he challenged Jesus, you can be sure he will *sift you as wheat*. Your opinion will not matter in those tests: you either understand and stand upon the rightly divided Word of God, or you will be swept away in your folly, as many before you have been *in their lack of knowledge*. This is not a game.”

We were a trio of somber listeners, humbled under the power of his persistent hammering.

“Earnest, let us reverse the questions. Tell us, *good reader*, what does the passage mean? After that, we will address *to whom* it speaks.”

Skeet asked me to pass the Bible. He looked at it, then began to talk,

“It’s straight forward. Jesus told His disciples *how to pray*, or maybe better, *for what to pray*.”

Poka probed,

“I take it as a given that you believe Jesus is both your Savior and Lord, right?”

“Yes I do.”

“You also realize that His words are commandments to be understood and obeyed, right?”

“Yes, Sir.”

⁵⁵ Matthew 4:1-11.

“And, you are a disciple of Jesus, right?”

Skeeter paused, then ventured,

“I’ve never really thought of myself as a disciple. I’m a believer, sure; but it was *sort of* my understanding that *disciples* have a greater level of commitment than *regular believers*.”

The old man’s face turned chalk white, but after a moment he said,

“I appreciate your candor, Earnest, but ***you must hear me now***: there is no such thing as *believers* who are not also *disciples*. You are either ***all in***, or you are ***not in at all***.”

As he let those heavy words sink in, he paused to consider whether to say more. But it seemed that he decided to leave it alone; so he resumed...

“The point is that Jesus—whom you agree is God—told those to whom He spoke, ***what and how to pray***. You seem to agree that Jesus’ statement was not ***suggestion***, but ***command***. It was, it is, to be obeyed, right?”

Skeeter’s response was resolute,

“Yes!”

“So then, *good reader*, ***do you pray the way He said? Do you obey His command?***”

A silent Skeeter was obviously stirred by the old man’s question. Finally, he ventured,

“Well, not really, at least not more than an infrequent little *Our Father* chant in church, which, to me, the way it’s done, isn’t really praying at all. But, to answer your question, No, I’m ashamed to say, *I don’t pray serious prayers like that*.”

“Why not? Did you not agree that the Lord commands it?”

With a voice slightly more than a whisper, Skeeter said,

“Yes.”

“What is it then, Earnest: Do you simply choose to ignore His command?”

Skeet was perturbed. He rocked sideways on his seat,

“Well, I guess I have to admit: *By my failure to obey, I am actually choosing to disobey His commandment...*”

After a moment, with an ashen face Skeeter exclaimed,

“I don’t pray like I’m instructed because I really don’t comprehend. I fail to realize that ***what He says, He means!*** Somehow I didn’t understand that Almighty God speaks directly to me through the Bible. I am, we are all, responsible to understand and obey what He says. And, after all,” he smiled weakly, “that is what you’re trying to tell us, isn’t it?”

The old man let us agonize in that revelation for a moment, then turned from Skeet to me,

“Daniel, to whom is the Lord speaking in this text?”

If you can imagine how you’d feel trying to explain a concept in physics to a physicist, then you’ll know how I felt trying to answer him. Even so, in desperation my eyes fell upon the passage, and I had a glimmer of hope. With some trepidation I ventured,

“Jesus was speaking to His disciples, to whom He said *you and your Father*. They are the ones who heard Him, and they have the right to pray to God and call Him ***Father***. So I think Skeet’s right.”

The old man replied,

“Well, if I understand what you said, perhaps that is a little better than just saying, *I think so*. But, could you win a debate with the devil based on that logic? Would you rest your case before a judge if you were in a court battle? What if your eternal life was at stake on the correctness of your answer?”

At this, I’d said my last. I was done bantering with a superior.

Sensing that, the old man turned to Hoss,

“Pastor, would you help your friends?”

Hoss cleared his throat and shifted his position on the couch. Finally, he took his Bible from my hands, looked at Skeet and me, and said, almost apologetically...

“Actually I’ve preached on this passage several times. What you need to know is that these few verses are part of a significantly larger teaching which we call *The Sermon on the Mount*, which starts at the first verse in Matthew chapter five and runs continuously through chapter seven. The answer to Poka’s question is found at the start and conclusion of Jesus’ message. Verses 5:1-2 say, *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated ***His disciples*** came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying...* The conclusion (7:28-29) says, *And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that ***the people*** were astonished at His teaching, for ***He taught them*** as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* Thus, the only way you can answer with full assurance is

to read the overall passage (5:1 through 7:29). Then you see that He was talking to both His disciples and to the multitude who heard Him speak.”

Then Poka asked,

“Do you see that Harry’s answer is much more reasoned?”

Skeeter quickly popped,

“Yes. We must consider each verse in its context. That makes perfect sense.”

After Skeet’s answer, Poka expanded the thought.

“In this way, you move closer to truth. Even so, there are other factors. One is to consider the passage within the overall counsel of God’s Word, and the other is to examine it in its *parallel passages*, if any. Let us first look at the overall counsel of Scripture; then we will look at *parallel passages*. The *overall counsel* is a broader view than any particular chapter or book. As we apply the concept, you can note that Harry’s explanation, by itself, leaves an unanswered question: *Does the passage apply only to believers who were on earth at the time Jesus walked among men, or does it apply to all believers of all times?*”

Turning to Hoss he said,

“Pastor, would you like to finish the thought?”

Hoss said,

“Yes, Sir, I would. I should’ve addressed it earlier. The *overall counsel of Scripture* makes it clear that God endures forever, but that, while on earth, individuals live for a finite period, die, and are succeeded by the next generation. But God does not rewrite Scripture for each new generation. His Word is living, powerful, and sharp, and applies from one era to the next. He told the patriarchs to pass His commandments to their children and their children’s children until the end. Thus, when Jesus told His disciples how to pray two thousand years ago, the same commandment holds for His disciples today.”

“Likewise, Paul spoke comforting words that equally apply to believers spanning millennia: *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

Speaking to Skeet and me, Poka added,

“You see how this supersedes time, and applies to all, right?”

We nodded, but Hoss continued,

“I’d like to add another passage. The Lord said, *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*”⁵⁷

Poka exclaimed,

“That passage reflects the enduring nature of God’s Word from beginning to end. Well done, Pastor.”

Then he said,

The Third Example

“Let us proceed with the third example, the *Great Commission*, as found in Mark 16:15-16. This passage permits us to reiterate some of the maxims’ important principles.”

*Jesus said... Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*⁵⁸

“While this seems straightforward, you will see that its understanding and application is surrounded by man’s opinions and error. Using our template as guide, let us discover its proper interpretation.”

“Earnest, to whom the Lord is speaking?”

Skeet said,

“I’m pretty sure about this. I’ve heard many sermons on the *Great Commission*. All the preachers agree: it’s the Lord’s mandate *to the church*. So I say what they say: the Lord is speaking *to the church*.”

Once again the old man uttered those terrible words,

“Are you sure?”

⁵⁷ John 17:20-24.

⁵⁸ Mark 16:15-16.

But this time Skeeter was undaunted,

“Yes. Like I said, I’ve heard it preached many times. And ***all*** of those preachers can’t be wrong! It certainly means *that the church is supposed to go and preach the Gospel...*” but finally, seeing no support in Poka’s face, Skeet’s voice trailed off as he muttered, “doesn’t it?”

Poka simply redirected the hot spot,

“Daniel, help him out. To whom is the Lord speaking?”

I groaned inwardly. While I agreed with Skeeter (that’s what I’d always heard), I knew I should at least look at the passage. As I did my eyes fell on verse fourteen, which said,

Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at table...

So, with this hastily gained insight I offered,

“Actually, Jesus was talking to His eleven disciples, at least in this passage they were the only ones present. The church isn’t even mentioned.”

But Skeet popped back in,

“But, Danny, we know that’s what it means.”

Before I could respond I saw Skeet’s hand fly to his mouth. And so did everybody else. We couldn’t help it: we laughed at him, again; and the laughter was good for us all.

Poka resumed,

“Let us table the question of *eleven* versus *church* for a moment. There are other issues. Based on Harry’s teaching, we could agree that Jesus’ command applies from NT days until the present, right?”

We did, so he continued,

“Look at the rest of the passage. Daniel, read verses seventeen and eighteen.”

And these ***signs*** will follow ***those who believe***: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

“Think about this: **signs** (miraculous testimony by God Himself) are to follow those who believe, for **signs** authenticate (to believers and observers) the reality of conversion, for **signs** reflect the power of the Gospel, power depicted by the words *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* ⁵⁹ Paul explained the reason: *And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the **power of God.*** ⁶⁰ Do you understand?”

Skeeter said,

“That makes perfect sense to me. God shows Himself powerful to those who believe. And I, for one, really appreciate that. It certainly lets us see that He is real.”

Poka resumed,

“Yes it does, Earnest. Next you need to determine to whom these words apply.”

Skeet responded,

“That’s easy. The passage spells it out clearly. It is talking about **those who believe**. It says that, *if **they** believe, **they** will do these things*. And, based on Hoss’ teaching, the words apply to every believer from the first church and onward until the Lord returns.”

“That is right, Earnest!”

Poka turned to Hoss,

“Why does it bother no one that these signs no longer occur, even though the Lord said they would?”

Hoss sat for a while, his face pasty, then finally muttered,

“I’m not sure. But I’ll tell you this: it is because of things like this I’ve been fasting and crying out to my Lord. I realize the church is impotent in every way, and I can stand it no longer.”

With no idea what to say, Skeet and I remained silent. Poka, too, but for a different reason: he knew Hoss had more to say.

And thus Hoss continued,

⁵⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

“These verses (and others like them) were *just* passed over in Bible School. I saw it then, but was too young and naïve to think about it. Yet, instead of being taught how to discover the mind of God for myself, I was *taught* whatever the *great* men of the faculty were *teaching*. It was only much later that I began to realize that much of what they *taught* wasn’t really what Scripture said. But in those days, if they didn’t emphasize it, I knew no better than to follow in their train.”

Poka said,

“Shame on them.”

And then the old man silently waited on Hoss to continue.

As I sat there and watched, it was as if the Lord was talking directly to Hoss. His thoughts seemed to coalesce in real-time; and he shared them with us almost as they formed in his mind.

“Regrettably, disbelief influences church doctrines. Regarding this passage, Dispensationalists explain it away (like they do others they don’t understand or can’t believe) by saying that *signs* were only for the apostolic generation. And, since *signs* aren’t occurring anyway, pastors are happy to hide behind this flimsy rationale. But I tell you: the absence of the manifested power of God in the Gospel should be of gravest concern—especially to the *so called* leaders—⁶¹for it signals the emergence of the dreaded church that has *a form of godliness but denies the power thereof*.⁶² Such indifference is illogical, but explains the impotent *lives* and *gospel* that we live today. Instead of seeking Him with all our hearts, we simply ignore God’s Word and proceed with religion defined by our own anemic practices.”

Hoss stopped. He almost blinked at what he’d just said.

In the silence that followed Poka seemed to consider whether to say more about *signs* and *wonders*. But he must have decided not to, for he simply returned to the theme.

“However, Harry, at this point ***signs*** are not our primary concern. Rather, we are talking about reading a passage for what it says, not what you want it to say, not what you have been told it says, not what you think it says. You men must discipline yourselves to read the simple words for what they simply say, knowing that your Creator knows your frame, is a wonderfully clear thinker, and when talking to you, uses words that both say what He means and can be understood by you. But to absorb His clarity, you must carefully read the words in their setting, that is, in the verse, chapter, and book in which they appear; you must

61 Consider John 14:10-11; Acts 2:22, 42-43; 4:23-31; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Galatians 3:1-5. You see that, just as the power of God testified of the truth of the Gospel during the birth of the body of Christ, so is that power to testify of the truth of the Gospel today. That it is not present, nor mourned, is a grave mistake.

62 2 Timothy 3:5.

consider the overall counsel of the Word of God; and you must wait before the Lord until the Holy Spirit reveals the truth of the meaning to you.”

What he was saying seemed so right I could hardly imagine why it was necessary for him to come and say those things to us. Surely we should have known these things ourselves.

But, he just continued,

“You must also look at the text in its parallel passages. Let us do that now, since *The Great Commission* is described in two other Gospels.”

At his instruction I read,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. ⁶³

And,

Then Jesus said to them, *Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.* ⁶⁴

“Note the robust fruit borne of the *Great Commission* when ***all of it*** is obeyed! When those who preach the Gospel ***tarry until*** they are ***endued with power***, their message is anointed until believers are filled with Jesus (***who is life, the very power of eternal life***) and signs and wonders accompany their new birth and walk. Of these, the Word says ***Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; all things have become new.*** They have the right, authority, and power ⁶⁵ to live holy, changed lives.”

“Taken together, if these three passages are understood, obeyed, preached, and practiced, new believers become trained disciples. They are taught to ***observe*** (understand and obey) ***all things*** their Lord commands, for *disciples* are not only pupils but also *adherents, in that they become imitators of their teachers.* ⁶⁶ Thus they follow those who brought them to Jesus; who, in turn, follow the Lord; who, when sent by His Father, obeyed all things He was

⁶³ Matthew 28:19-20.

⁶⁴ Luke 24:46-49.

⁶⁵ Vine, power, right, authority, *exousia*, 45; 479.

⁶⁶ Ibid., disciple, *mathetes*, 171.

commanded to do. When believers do that, they overcome evil and stand against the wiles of the devil in a spiritually unbroken chain of faith, obedience, and power.”

“Do you see how this differs from what you have heard?”

Then he added,

“One more thing: we need to resolve the matter of *who is to go forth?*”

Skeeter began to stir. In fact, he was about to burst,

“Something really bothers me about this *Great Commission* stuff the way I’ve always heard it preached. May I ask a question?”

“Certainly.”

“Most of my life I’ve heard it preached that it is **the primary mandate for the church (the entire church, all the people)** to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Many sermons harangue members to do this. They cause much guilt and misunderstanding. Often, the messages are preached by **evangelists** dumping heavy loads on the individuals in the churches. But, what has always bothered me is that those evangelists, *so called*, then get up, take their money, and rush to *the next church* to repeat the process.”

The old man’s eyes sparkled as, tongue in cheek, he replied,

“My, my, Earnest. Heard such things, have you? And those things bother you?”

“Yes, Sir, I have; and Yes, Sir, those things bother me a lot.”

So Poka asked,

“Did it not strike you as odd, Earnest, that evangelists were busy speaking in the comfort of the church? Would you not rather expect them to be out in the highways and hedges, going—as did John the Baptist, Paul, and many others—to new places to seek and save those who were lost? Is that not the job of the evangelist? Is he not supposed to be the one out in the world with the powerful message, the one who is to pave the way for the shepherds and teachers who are anointed to *disciple* new believers in the ways of the magnificent God? Does that not make more sense?”

Skeet was getting into it. He almost shouted,

“Well, it does to me! But, they say the world is too big for just a few evangelists.”

At this, the old man burst out laughing, but then after a moment said most somberly,

“Did *your* evangelists never read God’s Book? Did they not hear when the Pharisees cried out *that the world had gone after Jesus*, Who, after all, was just one man? Did *your* evangelists not hear the silversmiths cry out about Paul, *that all of Asia had gone after him*? Yet, Paul was just one man. And note that the silversmiths failed to mention Paul’s work in other nations such as Macedonia (Philippi, Amphipolis, and Berea), Achaia (Delphi); Greece (Corinth, Athens, and Cenchrea), Cypress (Salamis and Paphos), and Italy (Rome). Have your evangelists never heard of the great revival of the United Kingdom that spanned almost the entire eighteenth century under John and Charles Wesley and the few who were with them? Did they never hear of the mighty revival that swept South Africa under the Holy Spirit’s anointing of Rees Howells? Do they not know of Moody, Finney, Lake, and other such men who stirred entire nations unto repentance, revival, and the outpouring of great and mighty healings?”

“No, my friend, your evangelists clamor in error. It is not numbers that are needed: it is obedience; it is understanding; it is faith; it is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. All God requires is one church to commit itself to obey Him in His Word. If He has that, He has the fodder to fuel revival flames in the Holy Spirit. But until there is a turning to God in repentance and obedience to Him in His Word and ways, there is only the empty shell of man’s religion. You in Okeechobee must come to understand and obey the Word of God, realizing that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ,

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. ⁶⁷

“**If** the *body* of *Christ* is nurtured and loved in this way—that is, if the Word of God is understood and obeyed—**then** His power will flow as *rivers of living water*. His *body* (His *assembly*) will be a sanctuary to many, and from such *body* the Lord will **raise up** apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers and **send them out** as **He sees fit**. But, the only way His power will flow is **His way**, not the ways of the stinky, rebellious flesh of man.”

Thus it was that he demonstrated to us that we did not read or understand the Word of God as we should. And then he added a frightful summary.

⁶⁷ Ephesians 4:11-16. NASB

“Later, I will discuss with you the dreadful reason why you do not read as you ought. But for now, we shall return to the message I was about to deliver until friend Earnest, ah, shall we say, distracted us.”

Skeeter raised his hand about shoulder high, smiled weakly, and said he was sorry. But, Poka was most generous.

“It is all right, Earnest. Your *intrusion* provided a good segue into the next topic. You see, it was in the same folly as yours that the *first church age*, the church at Ephesus, turned aside and began to do what it *wanted to do*, rather than what it *should have done*. Its impetuosity was further trampled upon by the fleshly zeal of the leaders of much (but not all) of the six subsequent periods of church history—exactly as foretold by the Lord Jesus Christ to John on Patmos.”

“We are going to look at His marvelous prophecy and comment about how each of the seven church ages responded to His admonition. As we do, you will learn that, not only did He speak to all churches of all ages, but also to every believer of every church for the two-thousand-years of church history. It is a gripping story that should impact your decisions until the end of your days.”

“But, will it?”

Chapter 5

The Old Man Came...

To Tell Us How We Fell

(The Fall of the Church)

Poka begins his discourse with the Lord's *letters to the churches* which He gave to John on Patmos. Perhaps you will be as stricken by what the old man says as we. But, before we turn to his address, I need to underscore his preamble to the *letters*.

The old man points out that in seven short letters ⁶⁸ Jesus addresses every single believer and every church for two thousand years, each believer and church being accountable to the Lord's words. It is imperative that you look for, study, understand, and obey the seven admonitions of those epistles, for the Lord warns seven times, *he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. He also states that those who overcome the things of which He speaks—and *only those who overcome*—will receive the promises.

Poka also says that, in the majestic foreknowledge only God has, Jesus foretells the entire history that will befall the church. He adds that, in retrospect, it is possible to look back at church history to actually trace the events Jesus foretells. ⁶⁹ However, the old man reminds us that church and secular history are only as accurate and honest as are men, which means, it is at best, uncertain. Even so, he said he would include some historic points of interest.

He begins his address by quoting the solemn admonition...

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near. ⁷⁰

With that caution, let us consider the Lord's revelation of the things to befall *the Church* up to its ultimate rejection, ⁷¹ after which we shall turn to the *end time* events to follow.

Overview of the Age of the Church

⁶⁸ He said these profound things in an astonishingly few words: Revelation 2:1-3:22.

⁶⁹ Isaiah 46:9-10. *Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure...*

⁷⁰ Revelation 1:3.

⁷¹ That is, with His rejection of the last church age, the *Lukewarm Laodiceans*. Revelation 3:14-19.

Two of the seven churches ⁷² are commended by the Lord, and therefore will not be discussed herein. Five are told of seven evils that will befall them and aggregate in irredeemable slovenness, fit only for rejection. The seven evils are: 1) Forsaken First Love; 2) Abandoned First Works; 3) Curse of the Nicolaitan Usurpery; 4) Guile of the Balaamites; 5) Rebellion of Jezebelians; 6) Stupor of the Alive-but-deadites; and 7) Folly of the Lukewarmites.

Would you not think that, given such warning, the churches would have been looking for the signs Jesus foretold, and would have done anything to avoid them? Alas, they did not; for they *had not ears to hear*. Neither do the lukewarm Laodiceans (that is, the modern church) of today. Look to see, and remember, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who says these things, not some man, not any man.

1) The Forsaken First Love ⁷³

The Forsaken First Love was the first and worst transgression. It was a ruinous event that violated the *Great Commandment*, ⁷⁴ breached the hedge of righteousness, ⁷⁵ and paved the way for all other evil to impact the church. Disobedience to the great commandment to *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength* was exceedingly odious to God.

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be false*; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

But, I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else

**I am coming to you and will remove your
lampstand out of its place,
unless you repent.** ⁷⁶

⁷² They are Smyrna and Philadelphia: Revelation 2:8-11; 3:7-13.

⁷³ Revelation 2:1-7; Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31.

⁷⁴ Matthew 22:37-38; Mark 12:30.

⁷⁵ See Part V, Supplement 5, *The Hedge of Righteousness*.

⁷⁶ Revelation 2:1-5. NASB

They lacked **one thing: the paramourly important** first thing—proper **love for God!** Jesus told them to repent and return to the **first love** and **first works**, for they had ceased to love the Lord as at the beginning; neither did they love the brethren as at first. He commanded them to do first things first: love God completely and their brethren as themselves, or else He would remove their lampstand from its place. But they did not repent. They continued to *have religion their way*, to do what *they wanted to do*. They continued in *their works*, left the **first love** and forsook God's assigned **first works**. They did not *hear the Spirit*. Therefore, as He warned, He did: He removed their Lampstand.

Consider the magnitude of His warning and the severity of the cost of disobedience! The *church at Ephesus* was commanded to repent and return to the *first love* and *first works* **or** Jesus was going to remove its lampstand, its very right to churchhood in God's eyes.⁷⁷ Do you understand? The **church** risked losing God's very presence. It risked falling so far as to become a church by, and for, men: a church run by men, men's way, not God's; men's power, not God's; men's wisdom, not God's. Yet, in spite of His warning, they did not repent; they persisted in *having church their way*. Therefore, He removed their *lampstand*. All that remained was a self-seeking, self-approving church that, through ensuing ages, continually sunk further and further from the Lord and deeper into the sins He foretold.

**Do not Lightly Pass This Warning! Read it
again.**

Return to the First Love and Works or else!

You must grasp the seriousness of this notice. It ***should have been*** the gravest of all matters, for the *lampstand* is the conduit for oil, even as a branch⁷⁸ is the conduit for life flowing from the vine. The lampstand works in concert with a vessel of oil; and oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Lord warned the *assembly at Ephesus*⁷⁹ that He was going to remove the Holy Spirit from their midst unless they repented and returned to the *first love* and *first works*.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ The seven lampstands are the seven churches (*Revelation 1:20*). Hence, the *Lampstand* at Ephesus is the *church* at Ephesus.
⁷⁸ John 15:1-8.

⁷⁹ The first church age.

⁸⁰ The point rests in the following: When John saw the Lord, he also saw *seven lampstands* and *seven stars*. Jesus explained both terms (*the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches*). The link between the *seven lampstands* and the *Seven Spirits of God* is made in Jesus' letter to the church at Sardis (*Revelation 3:1-6*) which begins with the synonymic expression, *seven Spirits of God*, in place of the expected *seven lampstands*. Hence, the interrelationship between *seven lampstands* and *seven Spirits of God*. Ergo, *lampstand* stands for both the *Seven Spirits of God* (the Holy Spirit Himself) and the *churchhood of the assembly*—and that was what the Lord said He was going to remove if they did not repent and return to the *first love* and *works*.

They were at risk of losing the indwelling Holy Spirit!⁸¹

If He was removed, all that would remain would be *people doing religious things*. They would no longer be the Lord's church; neither would they be empowered by Him. He was going to turn them over to themselves to have religion however they chose. Yet, they did not repent, and therefore, He removed their Lampstand, and so it has been until today. Do you understand? Unless they, unless you, love the Lord with *all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength*; unless you love your neighbor as you love yourself—and, in that love, practice the first works, you, too, will lose your lampstand and be turned over to the folly of your own ways—no matter who you are or how religious you presume to be. Your brand of religion does not please the Lord any more than that of the church at Ephesus pleased Him.

The implication of those terrible words was almost unbearable. He paused, then said,

The thing that should trouble you most about this is that the *first church did not openly rebel against the Lord*. Rather, they simply continued to practice religion their own way—all the while thinking they served God. Yet they ignored what He said—and paid the ultimate price for their choice.

This was not the first time God's people did so. It permeated the conduct of ancient Israel and continues even today in the modern church. And God lets them choose. But, in their folly *His* church became *their* church! However, His power did not. His power (and signs and wonders) departed with the Holy Spirit, and left a hapless assembly floundering ignorantly in the penurious intellect of man. It should not be surprising that, from that point forward the *church* stumbled, bumbled, and fell into the devil's wiles for two thousand years, exactly as foretold by the Lord. What a grievous reward for *ignoring the Spirit's voice!*

Such betrayal! God's people chose to govern themselves instead of submitting to the only true and wise Ruler. Their decision had the terrible side-effect of *pitiful powerlessness*. Their rebellion opened the door to false religions shouting superiority to the slaving, *weak-kneed pretenders* claiming to wear Jesus' mantle; men who, lacking contact with the power of God, had/have no way to differentiate themselves from other religions. From then until now they have been scoffed at worldwide for lack of love, faith, power, and authenticity. Satan rails at God through their disobedience and failure. Their treachery is a disgusting, powerless sham that has continued for most of nineteen hundred years.

Even so, all is not lost, for *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever*. When men seek Him with all their hearts, He will be found. Church history shows that, from time to time (as men and women repented and sought God according to His Word) there were flurries of

81 Some claim that—without conditions—believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit *until* the redemption of the purchased possession. (Ephesians 1:13-14). But, note that the *epistle* is written *to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus*. (verse one) Those who are *not* *holy* and *faithful* do *not* meet the conditions of the text, and therefore, *do not* abide in its promises.

the Spirit's presence and power. (About this, you shall learn much as the story unfolds). But, for now, suffice it to say that such *revivals* were few, and when they did emerge, they were denounced as *disruptive* and *evil* by the **Usurping Nicolaitan Pretenders**, whose deeds Jesus hated, as you will see in item three, following.

Before that, however, we must look at the *First Works*.

2) Abandoned First Works⁸²

The *Forsaken First Love* was the beginning of the fall. Its companion was *Abandoned First Works*. Though the Lord highlighted this transgression, the church through the ages, and still today, realized not:

- 1) That the *first works* are commanded;
- 2) What *they* are; or
- 3) How to do *them*!

But, I now tell you about the *first works*, for they, alone, satisfy the Lord's requirement,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.⁸³

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.⁸⁴

The *First Works* were activated at Pentecost. This is how it happened,

*Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.*⁸⁵

⁸² Revelation 2:1-7.

⁸³ John 13:34-35; 15:12-14. NASB

⁸⁴ Philippians 2:1-4. NASB

⁸⁵ Luke 24:49.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁸⁶

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. ⁸⁷

Imagine how they felt as partakers in the fulfillment of ancient prophecy: the first in that marvelous outpouring. Their hearts, their very persons, became *new creations*. They were transformed by the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, as Scripture says: *Therefore, if any man be in Christ, **he is a new creation**. All things have become new and all things are of God...* ⁸⁸ *Out of their innermost being flowed rivers of living water.* ⁸⁹ Worries, fears, selfishness, sins of the flesh, were below them. They were seated with Christ in the heavenlies. In place of *selfishness*, there was *love for the brethren* beyond the capacity of natural man. It was joy, honor, and pleasure to gather daily to: worship God; listen to the Apostles teach; witness the power of God flowing through the Apostles in mighty signs and wonders; share meals, hearts, money, and yea, their very lives, with all who had need.

In love, the Body of Christ walked in

unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... ⁹⁰

Such is the Bible's description of the *first works*. It is selfless love for Jesus and His saints. You must understand: Jesus is the Gospel. He is Light and Life. He is what it is about. He is Beginning and End. He is Locus and Essence of life. He is where attention belongs. He is worthy. He is God's love manifested to man. And love is the soul's compass. It alone has the power to govern the heart. Love is the only force strong enough to put *others* in the place of *self*. It is only when self is denied by reciprocating, glowing love for Christ that there can be purity in religion. True *love for Christ* places Him in the center of every thought and action, and when He is enthroned, there is no room for self. Then, and only then, can love be pure, for then every desire is to serve and honor Him. There's no selfishness, for you seek to please Him by abiding in Him, walking in His Spirit, seeking Him in His Word, frolicking in the joy of

⁸⁶ Acts 2:2-4.

⁸⁷ Acts 2:17-18.

⁸⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

⁸⁹ John 7:38.

⁹⁰ Ephesians 4:13-16.

being with Him, cherishing His Holy Presence. Therein, *His Word is not burden*; rather, it is delight; having and keeping His commandments, joy, not sorrow, for Jesus said,

If a man loves me, he will keep my words.

In spite of this great outflowing Spirit of Christ, across time the *first assembly* forsook the *First Love and First Works*, ignored the warning of Revelation 2:4-5, and insisted on religion its own way. And that way subtly, quickly became the way of the Nicolaitan Usurpers.

3) Nicolaitan Usurpary⁹¹

It is no accident that Jesus addressed the deeds of the Nicolaitans immediately after the *First Love and Works*, for the Nicolaitan doctrine became the overarching premise of the false church order that followed. Its wickedness was so vile and far-reaching that Jesus hated it then, and commended the first church for also hating it. Yet today, it is engrained in church doctrine worldwide and embraced as if it is biblical truth. As I describe this heresy, open your minds or you will find it impossible to penetrate the veil covering this malevolence, for it overtook the church almost from its beginning and thrives today as a *beloved tenet*, an *honored tradition* without which *today's church* cannot function. It has been woven into church fiber so long it is presumed to be ordained by God Himself—even though Jesus hated it then and hates it still today; and even though it directly conflicts with the Word of God.

Given Jesus' hatred of deeds of the Nicolaitans, would you not think every assembly and every believer would make it a priority to find out who the Usurpers were that they too might hate and stand against the greedy, self-serving, preeminence-seeking spirit of Nicolaitanism—the spirit that is exactly opposite the giving, self-sacrificing, loving Spirit of Christ?

And yet, the modern church

reads the Bible so carelessly that it does not even realize that this astonishing warning applies to it and to every one of its individuals.

Alas, they are too busy having religion *their own way*. They will be mortified to realize that they embrace (as if from God) the Nicolaitan hierarchal one-man-rule, as well as the evils of the Balaamites and Jezebelians who, for their own purposes, the Nicolaitans integrated into their emerging pagan traditions. Wallowing in such debauchery, today's *Lukewarmites* will soon endure the ultimate shame—rejection by their Lord—which rejection will dump them into the midst of tribulation soon to follow.

⁹¹ Revelation 2:6, 15.

With that alarming introduction, the old man turned to the Nicolaitan Usurpation.

The trail of the Nicolaitans begins in the NT. John, Paul, Jude, and Peter warned of them; and later, church historians documented their ascendancy.

John penned,

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially *when they are* strangers; and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.⁹²

John reminded the church of the rightness of the practice of honoring and helping visiting brethren who had gone forth for Jesus, taking nothing from the Gentiles. Yet Diotrephes had the audacity to reject the custom. Rather, he insisted on preeminence and control. His spirit, which was diametrically opposite the Apostle John's, was in fact the very spirit of the Nicolaitans—the exact opposite of the Spirit of love and selflessness that characterized the *First Love* and *First Works*.

Indeed, you will find the Nicolaitans among the tares referred to by the Lord in His parable.⁹³ It was to such savage wolves Paul referred when he said they would *come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them?*⁹⁴ Jude added, *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁹⁵ Peter also warned of usurping, false teachers who lived vile, rebellious lives.⁹⁶

⁹² 3 John 5-11. NASB

⁹³ Matthew 13:24-30.

⁹⁴ Acts 20:30.

⁹⁵ Jude 3-4, 16-19.

⁹⁶ 2 Peter 2:1-3:18.

Such is Scripture's profile of the Nicolaitans,⁹⁷ where the word appears twice in Revelation chapter two. It derives from *nikao* (to conquer, vanquish, overcome) and *laos*, the people. The name, *Nicolas*, is translated by the term *conqueror of the people*.⁹⁸ And as is their name, so is their ministry. They were, they are, usurping connivers who care neither for the Lord's flock, nor obeying the Word or Spirit of God. Their first interest was/is in themselves and the preeminence they crave.

Church historians report that the Nicolaitan ascendancy is somewhat sketchily documented in the postapostolic era. Second century cleric, Irenaeus, pointed out that the internal threat came from the Nicolaitans.⁹⁹ He said they were followers of Nicolas of Antioch, one of the original seven deacons (nominated by the church and commissioned by the Twelve) as reported in Acts chapter six. Hippolytus adds that Nicolas had lapsed from the true doctrine and could not be restored.¹⁰⁰ John Wesley also remarked about this in his commentary in the section on the Revelation, chapter two.¹⁰¹ Johann Mosheim offered that the *true state of these divisions* [early cults, especially the Nicolaitans] *is more involved in darkness than any other part of ecclesiastical history*. Mosheim said *that they acquired credit and strength by degrees; and, even from the first dawn of the Gospel, imperceptibly laid the foundations of those sects, whose animosities and disputes produced afterwards such trouble and perplexity in the Christian church*.¹⁰²

Referring to Mosheim's work,¹⁰³ J. A. Seiss said, *the Church was hardly founded until it began to be troubled with lordly pretensions and doings of arrogant men, in violation of the common priesthood of believers*.¹⁰⁴ In his characterization of their emergence,¹⁰⁵ Seiss pointed out that the usurping Nicolaitans *gained adherents and force, and laid the foundations of all subsequent defections and troubles*. He asserts that their deeds had become beloved doctrines that paved the way for the evil marriage between church and state (Emperor Constantine) in 312 AD. The essence of Seiss' argument was that the Nicolaitan system supplanted God's ordained structure and usurped authority from the *priesthood of believers*. It made spiritually lame men (*laymen*) out of true believers, who, across time, lost the knowledge of how, and even the right, to minister to God. This was manifested in both the home and in the *assembly*. Instead of exercising the highest honor given to men—the right to personally worship and minister to the Living God—like whipped

97 And others.

98 Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, King James Version*, (Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers), 1866.

99 Henry Chadwick, *The Pelican History of the Church, Volume One, The Early Church*, (Middlesex, England: Pelican Books, Ltd), 74-83.

100 G. B. Caird, *Black's New Testament Commentary, the Revelation of Saint John*, (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers), 31.

101 *John Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible*, Rick Meyers, e-Sword® Computer Program.

102 Johann Lorenz Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History: From the Birth of Christ to the Beginning of the Present Century, In Five Volumes*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers) Vol. 1, page 47.

103 Mosheim, 47.

104 This overall argument is treated more fully in *limpy*. Nonetheless, as concerns the Nicolaitans, it is helpful to bring some of that discussion into the present text.

105 J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse, Lectures on the Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), 78.

dogs the Body of Christ acquiesced to the domination of ungodly Nicolaitans whose interest was not the welfare of the *church*, but rather, in gaining preeminence over it.

The impact of their ministration was odious beyond description. In the home, believing families were kept from ministering to the Lord in songs and praise and prayer. Men became incapable of being spiritual head and priest of their homes, unable to lead the family in worship, prayer, and godliness. It stole from husband and wife the glory of offering songs in the night to the Heavenly Bridegroom; and it deprived believers of the right to meditate in the Word day and night, learning those things that please Him Who bought them at such terrible price. It was, it is, an abomination defying description. It was, it is, absolutely, wickedly, unacceptably intolerable. And so, its perpetrators shall be judged. Jesus hated, and still hates, the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

The usurpation was so sweeping that, from the conversion of Constantine, in AD 316, until the reformation of the 1500s, believers were disinherited even from access to Scripture. They were taught, and still are today, in places, that *clergy* alone can interpret the Bible; that believers were to go to a building and be ministered to by a *non-Biblical*, Nicolaitan clerical system; that believers (God's very own children) were not sanctioned or empowered to seek Him on their own. In fact, the Nicolaitans expunged these truths from the minds of believers, as they also managed to remove Christ's plan to meet in the homes of His sheep.

The doctrines of the Nicolaitans so permeated the mindset of the reformers (themselves priests in the Catholic Church) that, as they broke/were expelled from Popery, the same Nicolaitan madness was upon them as they formulated the Protestant churches—except that they, themselves, became Nicolaitan Princes among Protestants. And thus, this most vile cancer metastasized. In a moment, you will see the clear manifestation of this evil.

But, it was here the old man paused to insert a proviso...

However, I do not say that all pastors are Nicolaitans, for many seek to serve their Lord and His people. But I caution that they have been deceived by the Nicolaitan doctrine of *one-man-rule* taught to them by men they loved, honored, and trusted; who, themselves, were likewise betrayed by their predecessors, generation after generation. These shall recoil in horror when they realize they permitted themselves to be duped because they lacked wisdom to realize that they had drifted from the Word of God, to which each man is singularly accountable.

It is incumbent on you (*upon whom the end of the ages has come* ¹⁰⁶) to repent and make this right before God. You must discover what the Word says; obey it yourselves; teach it to others; and **require** it from those who would be your *leaders*.

106 1 Corinthians 10:11.

He added that, before we finished he would show us how to do this, saying it was the path we had to walk. Others could join us if they chose. ¹⁰⁷

But first, he moved on to the other iniquities.

4) Guile of the Balaamites

The Lord said to the angel of the church in Pergamos,

But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁰⁸

Imagine the horror of your name being labeled—by God Himself—as a **synonym for sin!** But, that was Balaam's lot, whose transgression must be avoided at any cost! Yet, when you really understand who he was and the sinister reaches of his teaching, you'll be shocked to see that, still today, his allurements are not far from any man.

Consider Balaam's story in Numbers chapter twenty-two. Forty years in the wilderness had forged Israel into an army of the living God. After defeating Shion, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, they camped in the plains of Moab. Balak, king of Moab, was greatly alarmed. He feared lest...*this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.* Therefore, in confederation with the elders of Midian, he sent for Balaam to curse Israel. *Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.* Astoundingly, Balaam had power to bless, or curse! He was so powerful that it took the Lord, Himself, to deliver Israel from his curse.

Even so, following Balaam's counsel, Balak seduced Israel into physical and spiritual adultery. Quickly turning from God, the Israelites bowed to idols, forged wicked alliances with heathen nations, and lustfully entered into fornication and adultery with the Midianites. The Israelis' decadence was repeated during the Pergamos period, both physical and spiritual adultery, including the horrible marriage of Church and State at the time of Constantine in A.D. 312. Balaam's folly cost him his life, ¹⁰⁹ and even worse, earned God's eternal stigma upon his name, as a very icon of evil. ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Note: this is accomplished in Part III. *Return to the Beginning.*

¹⁰⁸ Revelation 2:12-17. NASB

¹⁰⁹ He was killed in the ensuing battle.

¹¹⁰ Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate), 23-24. Larkin, 1850-1924, was a Dispensationalist teacher who documented this period.

Jesus' warning to the Pergamites about Balaam's *attractions* should ring loudly in believers' ears today, for James called the church *adulterers and adulteresses!* He said, *Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* ¹¹¹ Surely every believer ought to pale at such language. Do not think the church is *too sophisticated* in these modern days to commit idolatry. Behold the essence of idolatry is giving something, anything, priority in place of (or before) God. The Word clearly warns, *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.* ¹¹² Where do you invest your time and money? Who among you is immune to friendships that draw you into the world, not into God. Beware of Balaam's *allurements*, whatever their deceptive form, for you either follow hard after the Lord of Glory in the *first love*, and are governed by that love, and you walk in the *first works*, devoting yourself to fellowship with and meeting the needs of the brethren, or your fall into the transgressions of Balaam will quickly follow.

5) Rebellion of the Jezebelians

Here, in the Lord's rebuke of the church at Thyatira, is found a double-edged warning. Consider what He said,

But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of *sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. ¹¹³

He was displeased with the church of Thyatira for it:

1) Let that woman **Jezebel**—*who calls herself a prophetess*—**teach** in the assembly; ¹¹⁴ and

2) Allowed her to **seduce** His servants to commit sexual immorality and spiritual idolatry.

¹¹¹ James 4:1-4.

¹¹² Colossians 3:5.

¹¹³ Revelation 2:20-23. NASB

¹¹⁴ 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

On the first point, Jesus identified the **self-proclaimed** *prophetess* of Thyatira as of the same nature as Jezebel of old—***a singularly, maliciously wicked queen of usurpery***—whose story is told in the books of the Kings.¹¹⁵ To read her life is to wince at the guile, rebellion, and hatred that spewed from her wicked heart. At the top of the list of many sins was her rebellion against God's divine order He established when He formed Eve to be *Adam's helper*.¹¹⁶ In spite of God's plan, Jezebel lusted for and insisted upon headship in the affairs of the home, the kingdom, and the religion of the land, and Ahab, her weak, wicked husband, acquiesced to her usurpery as did eight hundred and fifty priests of false religions. She wrested headship from them. Only God stood against her. He never recognized her coup; to her fury, God always sent His prophets to her husband, God's ordained head of the house.

The reward for her usurpery was threefold: 1) the dogs ate her flesh and scattered her as dung upon the ground; 2) even worse, Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, proclaimed her an icon of evil for all mankind to scorn; and 3) even worse still, she shall spend eternity in the lake of fire with the other rebels against Almighty God.

But, there was more involved than just the life and ministration of one evil woman. The second part of the treachery was far worse, for it was the spiritual prostitution and marriage of the *church* with the *state*, represented first by Constantine, and subsequently, his successors, until it ultimately became the Holy Roman Church, which was ruled by Popery (the long-standing Nicolaitan Usurpery) in lock-stride with the heathen state. Whereas, the Lord calls His beloved people out of the world and its sinful ways, the Catholics ran into the world to prostitute itself with the heathens, even falling so far as to call that corruption ***the Golden Age of the Church***.

Even so, you will probably not be surprised to see that, just as the reformers failed to discern the evil of Nicolaitanism, neither did they see the error of the profane marriage with the state. And so, they carried both errors with them into the founding of Protestantism. And, oh the tragedy of these two mistakes—both driven by a lack of knowledge of, and obedience to, the Word of God, rightly divided. All of this you will see manifested in the sixth of the evils about which the Lord Jesus warned.

About the abomination at Thyatira, Larkin summarized,

This church is charged with permitting a *prophetess* to teach pernicious doctrines, and seduce God's servants. It was during this period (606–1500) that the papal church introduced its many heathen practices...*Baptismal*

¹¹⁵ 1 Kings, chapters 16, 18, 19, 21; 2 Kings, chapter 9.

¹¹⁶ Genesis 2:22, Made; fashioned (NASB).

regeneration; Justification by works; Image worship; Celibacy; Mariolatry; Confessional; Purgatory; Transubstantiation, Indulgences; Penance. ¹¹⁷

Constantine's motive for fusion with the church was more political than religious. He wished to weld his Christian and Pagan subjects into one people, and so consolidate his empire...The *Balaam Method* that Constantine employed was to give to the Bishops of the Church a number of imposing buildings called Basilicas for conversion into churches, for whose decoration he was lavish in the gift of money. He also supplied superb vestments for the clergy, and soon the Bishop found himself clad in costly vestments, seated on a lofty throne in the apse of the Basilica, with a marble altar, adorned with gold and gems, on a lower level in front of him. A sensuous form of worship was introduced, the character of the preaching was changed, and the great *Pagan Festivals* were adopted, with but little alteration, to please the Pagan members of the church, and attract Pagans to the church. For illustration, as the Winter Solstice falls on the 21st day of December, which is the shortest day of the year, and it is not until the 25th day that the day begins to lengthen, which day was regarded throughout the Heathen world as the *birthday* of the *Sun-God*, and was a high festival...**they changed the Birthday of the Son of God, from April to December 25th, because as He was the Sun of Righteousness, what more appropriate birthday could He have than the birthday of the Pagan Sun God?**

6) Stupor of the Alive-but-deadites ¹¹⁸

As Jesus spoke to *all* churches and *all* individuals in all churches throughout *all* church history, so He addressed the *Reformers at Sardis*, who, along with the rest, should have heeded. But, they did not. Before reviewing their actions, note who they were. They came from the Catholic church, wherein, they were priests and monks who, indoctrinated by fourteen hundred years of deception, thought their church ¹¹⁹ was a *living institution* established by and representing God on earth, an *institution* with mystical spiritual powers even with authority to bind and loose men's souls. They did not know that that church had been bound in the sin and corruption foretold by Jesus in His letters of Revelation chapters two and three. They did not understand that it had *forsaken* the *first love* and *first works*; *embraced* the *deeds* and *doctrines* of the Nicolaitans; and *considered Balaam's paganism* an acceptable tradeoff for *protection by* and *status in* the Roman state. It fell so far as to take Emperor Constantine ¹²⁰ as *king* in a harlotrous marriage between a *heathen state* and the *alleged* church of God. It did not understand that it was not *God's* church. It did not realize that the Lord had removed its Lampstand long before the reformers appeared on the scene.

¹¹⁷ Larkin, 22-24; and his chart, The Messages to the Seven Churches Compared with Church History.

¹¹⁸ Revelation 3:1-6.

¹¹⁹ The Catholic church.

¹²⁰ At the beginning of his reign.

It did not know that it had been reduced to an *institution of* and *by* man that was ruled by usurping Nicolaitans and married to a heathen state.

It was to the would-be *reformers* of this fallen church that the Lord said,

I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. ¹²¹

Here you see that, as foretold by the Lord almost fifteen hundred years earlier, a *work for God* emerged in the *assembly at Sardis*. There was a stirring; there was hope; they began to discover truth. Cries arose: ***sola scriptura*** (by Scripture alone); ***sola fide*** (justification by faith alone); ***sola gratia*** (by God's favor (*grace*) alone); and the ***priesthood of believers***. Yet, the Lord rebuked them for failing to complete *the work* they started.

1. They proclaimed ***sola scriptura***, but did not understand the very Bible they claimed to know and follow. For instance, they did not understand—***at all***—the Lord's rebuke of the churches concerning forsaking the *first love* and *works*, hating the *deeds of the Nicolaitans*, etc. They did not understand, that ***in Christ***, *believers are new creations*, full of holiness, walking in the fruit and gifts of the Spirit of God. They did not understand or believe that individual members of the body of Christ *could*, or even, *should* overcome the flesh and live holy, overcoming lives, walking in the power, gifts, and fruit of the Holy Spirit. They did not understand that true fellowship in Christ would of necessity mean true *fellowship* with one another. They did not teach believers that *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* ¹²² No, they declared that all the nation, those baptized by the church as infants were somehow mystically kept as Christians. They held that as long as the people obeyed civil authority and submitted to the doctrines and practices of the church-state, they were accepted by God.

¹²¹ Revelation 3:1-5. NASB

¹²² Joshua 1:8.

2. They declared ***sola fide***: *salvation by grace through faith; it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast*, but left out the next verse: *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* ¹²³ They held little hope that their attendees could/would live holy, overcoming lives—or, even that they were required to do so.
3. They claimed to believe in the ***priesthood of believers***, yet, as you will soon see, they ***vigorously denied the priesthood of believers—if it meant anyone other themselves presumed to act as a priest/pastor!***

And, not understanding many things about the living, powerful, sharp Word of God, they followed church tradition more than God’s mighty Word—all the while claiming to rightly divide Scripture. Alas, it was not well with the *reformers*. Jesus said some of them had a *name*, names such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and others. Had these *names* listened to *what the Spirit said to the churches*, this is what they would have heard:

- 1) *I know your works*—the Lord knew them and their works.
- 2) *You have a name*—He knew their *names*.
- 3) *You are alive, but you are dead*—Can you imagine hearing such a rebuke? Yet, the Lord knew their end and told them so.
- 4) *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain*—He warned them to be watchful of the things recorded in the Word of God, and to attend to those things.
- 5) *I have not found your works perfect before God*—The Lord, who is the only One who matters, said: perfection before God is required, empowered, and possible. God’s Word says so; do not let men tell you otherwise.
- 6) *Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent*—Yet, the *Reformers* did not. Like most, they chose *religion of their own making*. Knowing beforehand that they would not repent, He warned...
- 7) *If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you*—But they did not watch for the things of which He spoke. Instead, they propagated their own erroneous doctrines and opinions.

And, as He said, so He shall do...

¹²³ Ephesians 2:10.

You, my friends, ought to cry out in terror lest the same thing happen to you, for what could be worse than having the Lord *blot your name from the Book of Life*? The reformers should have heard Jesus' warning about the seven evils set forth in His letters to the churches, one of which was *specifically tailored* for them. Had they heeded, they would have *returned to the first love and first works; hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans*, instead of being *Nicolaitans* themselves; *stood against Balaam and Jezebel*; and *carried the revival until they were abiding in Christ and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Word*.

Look at the works of the reformers. Their call for reformation started cautiously. Luther published his *Ninety-Five Theses* (at least partly) as an invitation for clerics to consider his concerns about problems in the Catholic Church. His work was looked upon unfavorably by Rome, and Luther was ordered to recant or face excommunication. He subsequently burned that letter from Rome, left the church, and began to cry out for reform in earnest. As the interaction between Luther and the Catholics intensified, more dissenters emerged. While there seemed to be some hope associated with their early efforts, the Lord said of them: *you are dead...be watchful and strengthen those things that are ready to die...I have not found your works perfect before God*.

What an indictment, and that from the Lord Himself! The reformers did not even realize none of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* addressed even one of the evils the Lord set forth in Revelation chapters two and three. Had Luther won all ninety-five of his points, he still would not have attended to the Lord's concerns.

The errant focus of his *Theses* is indicative of how far the *reformers* actually were from understanding and obeying the Bible. In their ignorance (*or rebellion*) they failed to discern the error of (and therefore embraced) the: 1) Deeds and doctrines of the Nicolaitans; 2) Marriage of *church and state*; and 3) Decision-making based on church tradition, not Scripture. It is no wonder the Lord warned them *to remember that which they had received and heard*. Yet, operating within these grievously erroneous biases, they justified (*to themselves*) the horror they poured out upon those *who walked among them wearing garments more holy than their own*. Indeed, the atrocities of the Reformers, the State with which they aligned themselves, and Roman Catholics were some of the worst in the history of the church.¹²⁴ Its brutality is a startling story that roots in the second part of Jesus' message to Sardis. He said that there in the midst of the *reformers at Sardis* dwelt a few *who had not defiled their garments*. These were *true Reformers* whose reformation positively influenced the wrongs that had overrun the church. Yet, their solution had nothing to do with *political intrigue or manipulation of the state*. It centered in simply following their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They were called *Anabaptists*.¹²⁵ Theirs is a powerful story of agony and triumph. Listen for a few minutes as modern historians, Peter Hoover¹²⁶ and William R.

124 If you think this is an overstatement, consider the article on *Luther, Martin (1483-1546)*, in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.

125 Anabaptism: to *baptize again*; baptize upon believing (believer's baptism) as opposed to *infant baptism*.

126 Peter Hoover, *The Secret of the Strength. What Would the Anabaptists Tell this Generation?* (Shippensburg: Benchmark Press, 1991).

Estep¹²⁷ tell about these of whom the Lord said, *and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy*. Would to God that among the reformists, Catholics, and leaders of the state, there had been a voice such as Gamaliel's, who cautioned: *I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God*.¹²⁸ But alas, there was no such voice. In its silence, reprehensible atrocities were unleashed upon the Anabaptists at the hands of reformers who still today, are venerated in Protestant churches *as if they were great men of God*.¹²⁹

Let us look at these Anabaptists, first, at the way they lived and the fruit thereof; and then at the fundamental decisions that guided that conduct.

The Life and Fruit of the Anabaptists¹³⁰

Hoover writes,

When the New Testament fell into their hands at the end of the fifteenth century, many Germans *naively* took it at face value. When they heard Jesus' call to *Follow Me*, they *rightly* thought He was speaking to them...They thought that being a disciple of Jesus meant studying His teachings, putting them to practice, and living with the consequences of following Him...Following Jesus, for the Anabaptists, was much more than obeying His commandments. It was *knowing Him and living like the first disciples in full fellowship with Him*.

The words of Paul in Philippians 3:10 stated the goal of the Anabaptists: *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*...To the Anabaptists, this beautiful word *fellowship* meant both *spiritual communion* and *community of goods*. It was the word used in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 for *all things common*. It was the word they found in 1 John 1:7: *If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have 'fellowship' one with another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin*. *'Fellowship' was the word they used instead of church*.¹³¹

William R. Estep added,

As concerns their outward public life they were irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and

127 William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975).

128 Acts 5:34-35.

129 How sadly error-filled is history as told by men of/about themselves.

130 With appreciation to Peter Hoover, it is noted that he contributed *The Secret of the Strength* to the public domain with *Freedom from Copyright*. Because of his generosity, more of His work is included than otherwise permitted by copyright law.

131 Hoover, 34-35.

drinking, no outward personal display, is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness, in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God.

Of course, this witness was not without its effect upon those who had a yearning for just such an expression of Christianity. The Anabaptists soon gained a large following drawing many sincere souls who had a zeal for God, for they taught nothing but love, faith, and the cross. They showed themselves humble, patient under much suffering; they broke bread with one another as evidence of unity and love. They helped each other faithfully, and called each other brother. They died as martyrs, patiently and humbly enduring all persecution.¹³²

The Fundamental Doctrinal Tenets of the Anabaptists

The first Anabaptists understood that the Bible was God's word to them, and that the center of God's Word was the Lord Jesus Christ. They understood that Jesus spoke directly to them from it. A synopsis of what Hoover reports¹³³ includes the following,

When He said to *Follow Me*, that was what He meant. When He said to *Turn the other cheek*, that is what they practiced. When He said, *Give to them who ask of you*, they did...

But, for Anabaptists, following Jesus was much more than obeying His commands. It was much more than confessing Him publicly or being willing to die for Him. ***It was knowing Jesus, and living like the first disciples in full fellowship with Him...***to the Anabaptists this beautiful word, *fellowship*, meant both spiritual communion and community of goods. This priceless, precious fellowship—first with their Lord Jesus—and then with one another, was the keynote of their walk, from then until today.

At this point you might ask, *What, then, was not to like about the Anabaptists? Why were they hunted down, run from their homes, tortured, murdered, and abused by all authority?* Well, while they followed their Lord in holy, gentle, consecrated living, that was very right and touched the hearts of many—some of their leaders held erroneous doctrines and/or made unseemly decisions; or, even when they were right, seemed to find the worst possible ways to make declarations of faith. Those statements greatly provoked the church-state from which they were withdrawing. Listen to some of the things they said.¹³⁴

¹³² Estep, 72-73.

¹³³ Hoover, 56-57.

¹³⁴ Hoover, 56-59.

By 1527, the Anabaptists had begun to publish books about man's freedom of choice and his duty to obey the voice of Jesus within him. In Augsburg Hans Deneck wrote:

Everyone should know that in matters of faith we should all proceed in a free, voluntary and uncompelled way.

Kilian Auerbacher, from Monrovia, wrote:

Christ's people are a free, unforced and uncompelled people, who receive Christ with desire and a willing heart. What people believe is not to be forced, but is to be accepted as a gift from God.

Menno Simons wrote:

Christ alone is the ruler of the conscience, and besides Him there is no other. Let Him be your Emperor, and His Holy Word your law. You must obey God before the emperor and hold what God says above what the emperor says.

That this teaching rocked the foundations of every establishment in Europe—church, state, and family—can well be understood.

...If what people believed was not the God-ordained authorities business to decide, whatever would become of society? If people were free to believe what they wanted to believe, free to obey what they felt led to obey, and free to follow the voice of conviction within them whenever and however they wanted to follow it...what would become of public order? Of the church? And of the laws of the land?

The protestant Reformers woke up with their eyes round. They roused themselves with a roar. Joining forces with the Catholics and the church of the Dark Ages, they responded to this *heresy* with a tidal wave of persecution, hatred, and *holy* rage the likes of which had not been seen before or since.

Reformers and Catholics considered that they were dealing with treason! *Unauthorized men preaching on the street corners are a sure sign of the devil, wrote Luther...Imagine! Baptizing or celebrating communion without the church's consent! Without properly authorized men in charge! In secret! Not in church buildings but in private homes! This is blasphemy, blasphemy, blasphemy...* After Luther's book *Of the Sneaky Ones and the Corner Preachers*, came numerous books and sermons loaded with bitter invectives against the Anabaptists.

Zwingli and Luther denounced the *stirring-up spirit* of the Anabaptists, especially their *silly* teachings of the *sitter's right*...their literal understanding of 1 Corinthians 14:30-31: *And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.* They called this the *sitter's right* and calmly implied that they, when moved by inner conviction, had as great a right to speak and to act as any pastor, priest, reformer, bishop, or pope.

This audacity, this stirring from the pit of hell, Luther and his friends believed, could be dealt with only by fire, water, and the sword. Even though it is terrible to view, Luther admitted, he gave his blessing to the death sentence upon the Anabaptists, issued by the elector, princes, and landgraves of Protestant Germany on March 31, 1527.

Can you imagine such fury and vindictiveness from, so called, Men of God? Alas, the reformists were first and foremost, Nicolaitans who believed it was their God-appointed right to have preeminence. That wickedness goes all the way back to Diotrephes in 3 John 1:9-11. But, the reformist's position of hate against Anabaptists revealed several things about Luther, et al.

1. They had almost no understanding of the spiritual dimension of the Word of God. For instance, in addition to the things previously stated, the reformists were furious about Anabaptists speaking out when the Holy Spirit gave them a message (in accordance with 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40.) *Why did the Nicolaitan Overlords pick at the Anabaptists in this matter? Why, rather, did they not rail against the Holy Spirit, for He was the source of the so-called disturbance, not the obedient-to-the-Spirit Anabaptists?*
2. They were consumed by the Nicolaitan Usurpation of one-man-rule in the church. They were the boss. They would tell people what to think, and do. And, nobody would be permitted to challenge their preeminence. If anyone strayed too far from their instructions, they would use the state's sword to keep order as defined by the church's iniquitous traditions. This thought is developed more fully in paragraphs 3. and 4. following.
3. Walther Köhler reported of Luther's position: ¹³⁵ *A citizen is obliged to report to the magistrate and to the pastor any case of a corner preacher that might come to him. Should he not do this, he would be acting contrary to his oath of loyalty to the magistrate, and would be acting as a despiser of the pastor, to whom he owes the honor [as if he is some great Nicolaitan Overlord], and would be against God, and would be guilty along with the corner preachers of causing trouble.* Imagine the audacity of such a presumptuous stance. Only one blinded by the darkness of the

135 Walter Köhler, *Luther, Martin (1483-1546)*, in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.

preeminence-seeking Nicolaitans (such as Diotrephes,¹³⁶ and Luther) could go so far.

4. Kohler added a final, penetrating comment. *It is difficult, however, to avoid the feeling that a major cause for the severity was the fear that the Anabaptists might gain sufficient influence to threaten the success of the Reformation by winning too many adherents to their cause and thus breaking the monopoly of the church which Luther and Melancthon were establishing...Later, Luther leaned more and more on the arm of flesh, the ecclesiastical and political power, to guarantee the success of the evangelical movement. At that point, it was safer to call on force than to risk the free contest of ideas.* [After all, Luther was defending the faith, just as the Pharisees and religious rulers were when they murdered the Lord Jesus, right?]

By their actions the *Reformers* chose their lot. They proclaimed themselves rulers at the top of the new religious hierarchy: they ascended unto the office of *Popes of Protestantism*, the very Popery they claimed to hate. Thus, in the midst of the *stupor at Sardis*, the *Nicolaitan cancer* metastasized:

***Instead of one Pope, there are now little popes
at the head of most churches across the world!***

Yet, long before, the Lord warned all men,

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.¹³⁷

The Anabaptists were intent to go through that narrow gate and stay on the road that followed. But, what about the reformers? For the Lord continued,

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ 3 John 1:9-11.

¹³⁷ Matthew 7:13-14.

¹³⁸ Matthew 7:15-20. NASB

Using the Lord's statement as guide, you can choose from the works of the reformers or the Anabaptists, keeping in mind His final words,

Not everyone who says to Me, *Lord, Lord*, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, *Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?* And then I will declare to them, *I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.* ¹³⁹

Remember, Jesus also said,

These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. ¹⁴⁰

Jesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans two thousand years ago; He hates them still today.

7. Folly of the Lukewarmites

Before this final church age, believers feared God enough to be serious about religion. Not the Laodiceans. In this last church, inaction declares faith to be of so little importance as to be neither cold nor hot. They take or leave it. If it is convenient, *go to church*. If an important *golf match* comes up, *do that instead*. After all, they say, *God loves me and wants me to have a good time*. Their *lukewarmness* is an insufferable affront to the God who paid ***the supreme price*** to give those who choose the opportunity to walk with Him eternally.

About their wretched mindset, Jesus avowed,

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁴¹

As individual believers in the age of the church of the Laodiceans, ¹⁴² you should be horrified by this warning, for unless you repent and turn, you, too, will be *vomited out* to take your place in the bitter tribulation to follow. Oh, that you would repent, open your heart, and ask

¹³⁹ Matthew 7:21-23. NASB

¹⁴⁰ John 16:1-4; Isaiah 66:5. NASB

¹⁴¹ Revelation 3:14-21. NASB

¹⁴² The modern (the last, insofar as finite humans can determine) church age, of which you are a part. Where do you stand in these things?

the Lord to come in. ¹⁴³ He will, and He will transform you into an overcomer and grant you to sit with Him on His throne, as He also overcame and sat with His Father on His throne.

But, before that, there is work to do. Therefore, in Part II of *The Oracle*, after chapters two and three of the Revelation ¹⁴⁴ are closed, chapters four through twenty-two are opened to examine the *Events of the End*.

After that, *The Oracles* moves to Part III: *Return to the Beginning*, and takes up the matter of overcoming, walking in victory, and *sitting with your Lord on His throne, as He also overcame and sits with His Father on His throne*. You will marvel as you come to see the glory of such things; and realize that you too, can have a part in such majestic activities.

¹⁴³ Revelation 3:20-21.

¹⁴⁴ The history and rejection of the church.

Part II: The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Chapter 6 End Time Events

Before we turn to chapter four of the Lord's Revelation, let us review what Jesus previously told His disciples, for they had asked about *the sign of His coming, and the end of the age*. His answer is recorded in the Gospels.¹⁴⁵ The Apostle John heard both statements (Gospels and Revelation).

Prelude, as Recorded in the Gospels

Jesus said,

See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, *I am the Christ*, and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, but *that* is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs.

Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time, many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.¹⁴⁶

Think about it: wars, rumors of wars, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom; famine, pestilence, earthquake; believers delivered to tribulation and death, hated by all nations, hating one another; abounding deception and lawlessness—yet, all of these things

¹⁴⁵ Matthew 24:3-25:46; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 21:7-36; Additional information also provided in Revelation 2:1-3:22.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 24:4-14. NASB

will take place even before the beast is manifested or the Great Tribulation begins. And from that point, it gets much worse!

All this you will see as the events of Matthew twenty-four intensify by the proceedings released in the Revelation, when supernatural fury by astounding spirit beings is unleashed by the Lord. The story of these things begins in Revelation chapter four.

After these things ¹⁴⁷ I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, *Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.*

While *end time events* are critically important, they are subordinate to the Great God Who sits on the throne (chapter four) and the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (chapter five). Take time to review chapters four and five. See the extreme regard in which God and Lamb are held by the heavenly creatures privileged to be in Their presence. The honor given Them by these mighty beings should be instructive to all men. However, we respectfully pass these scenes, for what can the words of *created beings* add to the splendor of Scripture on such matters?

Thus, we turn to the terror that begins in Revelation six.

Five of Seven Seals

Here the Lamb, the only One in heaven or earth found worthy to take the scroll out of the hand of Him who sat upon the throne, and proceed to open the seals.

First Seal

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, **Come**. And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. ¹⁴⁸

Second Seal

When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, **Come**. Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. ¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ That is, *after the age of the church*.

¹⁴⁸ Revelation 6:1-2.

¹⁴⁹ Revelation 6:3-4.

Third Seal

When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, **Come**. So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, *A quart of wheat for a denarius [day's wages], and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.* ¹⁵⁰

Fourth Seal

When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, **Come**. So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. ¹⁵¹

For two-thousand-years men have been warned that these five beings ¹⁵² will be loosed to conquer, remove peace, cause rage, hatred, murder, and famine to an unimaginable degree. Even so, the extreme havoc created by the opening of these seals is almost impossible to comprehend. However, different from those at Nineveh who repented at Jonah's prophecy, ¹⁵³ the unrepentant *grapes of wrath* ¹⁵⁴ will obstinately reject God's only provision for sin: the blood of Jesus Christ. Bound by reprobate minds, these hard-hearted ones shall persist in their rebellion against God and thus suffer the terrifying judgment to follow. ¹⁵⁵

Gripped by his words, we listened as he asked...

"What about you? Do you know you are commanded to *pray always that you may be found worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man.*

¹⁵⁶ Do you pray like that? Do you even realize you are instructed to do so? These terrifying things are real. You must not ignore them as if they do not even exist."

He looked at us; I looked at the table. I couldn't even face him. So he moved on...

Fifth Seal

¹⁵⁰ Revelation 6:5-6.

¹⁵¹ Revelation 6:7-8.

¹⁵² They are usually called the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. In actuality, there are four horses and five spirit beings.

¹⁵³ Jonah 3:1-10.

¹⁵⁴ Revelation 14:17-20.

¹⁵⁵ Romans 1:26-32.

¹⁵⁶ Luke 21:36.

Then the Lamb opens the fifth seal. At first it seems the scene changes from the horror on earth. But, it does not, for when the Lamb opens this seal, you see the carnage of the fury of evil men, for there under the altar of God, are history's faithful martyrs—those who lived holy lives—who, for their faith in God were hated, betrayed, tortured, and murdered by jealous, evil, treacherous men throughout the ages.

You can feel the intensity and justice of their plea as they cry out to God,

How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they, was completed.¹⁵⁷

Note the words spoken by the Lord: *they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they, was completed.* You see, there will be *fellow servants and brethren* killed in the terrible days of the tribulation. Think about it: others will follow in the train of these martyrs, and will also become martyrs, that is, *these fellow servants and brethren will be in the tribulation and will die for their faith.*

Do not look at martyrdom as if it is an inexplicable evil. Understand it for what it is: martyrdom is to follow the Lamb who likewise gave His life; win an eternal crown of blessing and honor from God, whose *thoughts are higher than your thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth.*¹⁵⁸

Introduction to Nine Interludes

Careful study of the Word prepares one to understand the magnificence of the revelation that is the central thesis of the Book of the Revelation, which is nothing less than the

Revelation of Jesus Christ In all His Preeminent Glory In His Wondrous Aspects.

For He, God's only Begotten Son, is *the only one found worthy in heaven or earth to take the scroll from God's mighty right hand, break its seals, and activate the end time events* that close the current age and open the time of eternity. It is the unfolding Glory God bestowed upon His Beloved Son that permeates the book of the Revelation with an undergirding, sequential thesis; and that treatise is what this paragraph briefly outlines. (Do not be

¹⁵⁷ Revelation 6:10-11.

¹⁵⁸ Isaiah 55:8-13.

alarmed to discover that certain chapters are not included in the sequence, for this will be explained in a moment.) The thesis begins in chapter one with an introduction and overview of God's purpose for the Book of the Revelation. Chapters two and three foretell the history of the Church. Chapter four initiates the *end time events*, rightly beginning with the splendor of God on His throne and the reverence in which He is held by all heavenly hosts. Chapter five presents the magnificent Lamb of God, shows Him being worshipped, celebrated, and taking of the scroll from God. Chapter six presents the opening of the first six seals; chapter eight shows the seventh seal, and the sounding of the first four trumpets. Chapter nine presents the fifth and sixth trumpets, and chapter eleven, verses fifteen through nineteen, describe the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Chapter fifteen contains the prelude to the Bowl Judgments, and chapter sixteen presents the seven bowls themselves. All of these things build toward *The Day of the Lord* which is highlighted in chapters nineteen¹⁵⁹ and twenty. Chapter twenty-one reports that *All Things Are Made New*, and chapter twenty-two provides a *Postscript* and briefly introduces the nature of *Eternity*.

Companion to, and supporting, this undergirding framework, the rest of the Revelation is depicted by parenthetical inserts (hereinafter called *interludes*) arranged to support the primary thesis. As all God's thoughts are higher than man's, so His presentation of the *Revelation* is higher than our limited, linear logic. Therefore, *The Oracles of God* places the interludes in a time-based model adapted to the needs of men; that is, to the extent Scripture permits.¹⁶⁰ The first instance of *interlude relocation* occurs after the fifth, but before the sixth, seal. The logic supporting this insertion point is as follows: The first four Seals, opened in rapid order, dispatch terror in the form of five riders on four horses, that initiates God's vengeance upon wicked earth.¹⁶¹ The fifth seal quickly follows, for it bears unspoken testimony for the righteousness of God's vengeance. You see, the fifth seal reveals the carnage of earth's evil: for there, under the altar which is before God, are the martyrs who suffered and died for God at the hands of such evil men as now have vengeance poured out upon them.

All of the opening scene of the first five seals flows in rapid succession. But then, between seals five and six, there is a break in the timing of the events. For the sixth seal *jumps* forward in the chronology to the preparatory announcement of the *Wrath of the Lamb*, which is unleashed via the *Trumpet Judgments*. However, as you will come to see, the *Wrath of the Lamb* follows, not precedes, Daniel's seven-year week, the first half of which reflects the ministry of *God's Two Witnesses*, and the last half presents the Great Tribulation under the fury of the *Beast*.¹⁶²

And so, before the opening of the sixth seal, a number of other things were set in motion according to God's time clock, and here in this discussion, those things are called *interludes*. In particular, there are nine things that are underway between seals five and six,

¹⁵⁹ Beginning at verse seven.

¹⁶⁰ Even so, great care has been taken to avoid adding or taking anything away from the Word. Revelation 22:18-19.

¹⁶¹ Romans 12:19; Deuteronomy 32:35; Isaiah 63:4.

¹⁶² Matthew 24:21; Revelation 13:1-18.

including: 1) *The Mighty Angel, Little Book, and John*; 2) *God's Two Witnesses*; 3) *Sealed of Israel*; 4) *Conflict with the Red Dragon*; 5) *Thessalonian Preamble*; 6) *Lamb and the First Fruits*; 7) *Three Heavenly Proclamations*; 8) *Beast's War with the Saints*; and 9) *Multitude from the Great Tribulation*. Together, these interludes unfold an amazing story. Let us look at them one by one. As we do, keep in mind that the Father has not revealed their day nor hour.¹⁶³ He will unfold them when He sees fit. No one can define a timeline He has not set; neither can anyone *correctly* declare anything God has not said. Even so, it is right to carefully search for scriptural insight on all things, trusting the Holy Spirit to reveal that which we are to know.

Interlude 1) Mighty Angel, Little Book, and John

Chapter ten reveals the mighty angel who stands with one foot on the sea and one on the land, cries with a loud voice as when a lion roars,

...and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.¹⁶⁴

Then, in 10:8-11, John is commanded to take the little book from the great angel, eat it, and prophesy about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.

That vision was shown to John between the proceedings of the sixth and seventh trumpets (almost at the end of the *End Time Events*), but is presented as the first interlude in *The Oracles'* narrative because John's prophecies occurred in his own lifetime, some two thousand years (and counting) before the unfolding of the *end time events*. Therefore, it is presented at the first possible break point.

Interlude 2) God's Two Witnesses

Zechariah¹⁶⁵ announced that two anointed ones would stand beside the Lord of the whole earth. Of these anointed ones (sons of the oil) Revelation eleven says,

Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, *Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty-two months.*

¹⁶³ Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32.

¹⁶⁴ Revelation 10:5-7.

¹⁶⁵ Zechariah 4:11-14.

And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, *Come up here*. Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.

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As we look at these witnesses, we see another mighty act by God. They are sent (as promised five hundred years before Christ) to prophesy for God and warn fallen man to repent and turn from death to life. Not only do they *speak* for God, but are also enabled to perform signs, and wonders, and every plague, as often as they like. Never before have men been so empowered.

Perhaps many will respond to their message (for there will be a mighty revival with a large multitude being saved), but for those who do, the challenge will be to stand, for there will be great displays of power from both the forces of *good* and *evil*. The beast (which rises from the bottomless pit) will make war with, and kill, God's two witnesses. All of mankind (whose names are not in the Book of Life) shall follow the beast and worship him saying, *Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?* ¹⁶⁷ *It is granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority is given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.*

166 Revelation 11:1-11. NASB

167 The logic: if the beast can overcome the mighty witnesses of God, who could possibly stand against him.

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. ¹⁶⁸

Here in *The Oracles of God*, the *two witnesses* are placed at the front of the *Interludes* (at the start of the *end times*) for their ministry covers the first three and one half years of the seven-year week of Daniel 9:27. ¹⁶⁹ This is explained as follows: when they finish their testimony (that is, at the end of three and one half years) *the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them*, and then perform his evil work for another three and one half years, ¹⁷⁰ until the end of Daniel's seven-year week. Therefore, we see that the total of the two separate three-and-one-half-year ministries span the entire seven weeks of Daniel's prophecy.

But, let us not get ahead of the story, for other things must occur before the battle between the *two witnesses* and the *beast*. Let us consider those things.

Interlude 3) Thessalonian Preamble

Satan's design is to use the Antichrist/beast, false prophet, and image of the beast to overrun the *rest of the Woman's offspring* and all other men. ¹⁷¹ This we will discuss later, but for now note that that advance is thwarted by an insurmountable obstacle: *The Restrainer*. ¹⁷² Satan's evil cannot be *unleashed* until the *Restrainer* is taken out of the way.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to ***the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him***, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the ***day of the Lord has come***.

Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy ¹⁷³ comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be

¹⁶⁸ Revelation 13:7-8.

¹⁶⁹ Daniel 9:27, *Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.*

¹⁷⁰ Revelation 13:5.

¹⁷¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, and other passages that will be presented herein.

¹⁷² There are different opinions as to who the Restrainer is. For an analysis, see Part V, Supplement 6.

¹⁷³ This *falling away* is not the lukewarm state of the Laodiceans. No, that condition is but a foreshadowing of the great *falling away* of which the Lord speaks in Matthew 24:9-10, where the entire world is enraged with *true believers*. At that time, they will be the only ones left in the faith.

revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹⁷⁴

Thus, you see, the Word is clear: The Day of the Lord *and our gathering together* ¹⁷⁵ to Him, does not/ cannot occur until after the *Restraint is taken out of the way* and the *man of sin* is revealed and does his abominable work. ¹⁷⁶

Yet again then, we have an *Interlude* that must occur early in the beginning of the *end time events*, because it is a necessary key to subsequent things.

Interlude 4) Sealed of Israel

After these things, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, *Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads*. And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousands of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed... ¹⁷⁷

This passage is very instructive (for those *with ears to hear*), for it provides another glimpse into the fall of people *chosen by God*, yet people who disobey, rebel against Him, and bring upon themselves curse after curse from the Lord. Look at the text. If you know biblical history, ¹⁷⁸ and look carefully at the tribes listed in this passage, you will note that *Ephraim* and *Dan* are missing and are replaced by *Joseph* and *Levi*. Every believer should be warned and instructed by this judgment, for Ephraim and Dan were supplanted because of disobedience and rebellion. To turn the pages of Scripture is to find that when idolatrous Ephraim (as part of Israel) chose to war against Judah, God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell

¹⁷⁴ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10. NASB

¹⁷⁵ *Episunagoge*, to *gather together*, so translated in the ASV, ISV, KJV, NKJV, NAS, NIV, ESV, RSV, YLT, Geneva. It appears only in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. It was mistranslated in the Latin Vulgate (late fourth century) as a nonbiblical word, *rapture*. Unfortunately, considerable confusion is caused by this mistranslation, with the effect that the so-called *rapture* is mistakenly considered a different word from the *gathering together*, which therefore (some think) may occur at a different time. But, this is not so. There is but one *gathering together* and it does not happen until the Coming of Lord Jesus in the Day of the Lord as described in Matthew 24:29-52 and 2 Thessalonians 2.

¹⁷⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7.

¹⁷⁷ Revelation 7:1-8.

¹⁷⁸ Context for this passage is found in Genesis 48:1-49:28.

Judah: *It shall not stand...Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people.* ¹⁷⁹ Thus, as explained in the footnote, Ephraim was disbursed among the Assyrian horde and lost its identity as part of the people of God. And yet, nothing is impossible with God, for some hundred years after the prophecy in Isaiah seven, the gripping chapter of Jeremiah thirty-one reports that, having heard Ephraim bemoaning himself—*You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like an untrained bull; restore me, and I will return, for You are the LORD my God. Surely, after my turning, I repented; and after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, because I bore the reproach of my youth*—the Lord God said,

***Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child?
For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still;
Therefore, My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.*** ¹⁸⁰

And so, while Ephraim's iniquity separated him from his blessing, his repentance made possible God's loving restoration.

On the other hand, the tribe of Dan was too sloven and weak in faith to take possession of the territory of its inheritance. God promised He would be with the Israelis and empower them to cast the enemy from their land; but Dan still failed to possess that which was his. Instead, he forsook his inheritance, went beyond the promised land, defeated an un-walled, unprotected village (Laish), and set up foreign idol worship outside of God. ¹⁸¹ Therefore, Dan was excluded from the hundred forty-four thousand sealed Jewish remnants of Revelation 7:1-8.

Contrariwise, concerning *Joseph* and *Levi*, consider: Joseph was given two portions by his father Jacob, and his two portions became Manasseh and Joseph. ¹⁸² Likewise, the tribe of Levi was consecrated to minister to the Lord—and He, the Lord God—was their inheritance. Therefore, it is perfectly right for Levi to be included in the wonderful blessing of Revelation 7:1-8.

This one hundred forty-four thousand constitutes the promised remnant of Israel, as discussed throughout the prophets. Their *sealing* is presented early in the *Interludes* because of the Remnants' role in God's unfolding plan—as, for example, the conflict with the Red Dragon, following.

Interlude 5) Conflict with the Red Dragon ¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Isaiah 7:1-9. See also 2 Kings 15:22-31; 2 Chronicles 28:1-6.

¹⁸⁰ Jeremiah 31:20.

¹⁸¹ You can review this tragic story in Judges 18:1-31.

¹⁸² Instead of Ephraim and Manasseh. Genesis 48:22.

¹⁸³ Revelation 12:1-17.

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads *were* seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.¹⁸⁴

To understand these signs, you need to know the identity of the Woman, Child, and Dragon. Given that the rest of Scripture interprets individual passages, let us see how it works here. Start with the Child. The text says *He is to rule all nations with a rod of iron*. That being so, look to see who in the Word is destined to *rule the nations with a rod of iron*. It turns out that there is a short list. If you search all verses that contain both **rod** and **iron**, you find that there are four.

1. You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a **rod of iron**; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.¹⁸⁵

2. Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called *The Word of God*. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And **He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron**. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.¹⁸⁶

3. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a **rod of iron**. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.¹⁸⁷

184 Revelation 12:1-6. NASB

185 Psalms 2:7-9.

186 Revelation 19:11-15.

187 Revelation 12:5.

4. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—*He shall rule them with a **rod of iron**; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels* – as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. ¹⁸⁸

Passage one is from Psalm 2, which describes the rebellion of the nations against God and His Anointed Son, at the very time of the end; that is, the time that is coming upon the world of which we now speak. And there, in Psalm 2, Almighty God tells His Only Begotten Son that He is to govern the nations with a **rod of iron**.

Passage two describes the actual fulfillment of the prophesy of Psalm 2, for in it you see the mighty Son of God **return to earth** as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (remember, in the text we are considering (12:5) He had been *caught up to God and His throne*). Then, in 19:11-15 He returns to set up His Millennial Kingdom where He will rule the nations with a **rod of iron** for a thousand years.

In these two verses, we find the identity of the Child: He is Jesus Christ the Lord. But there is more.

The third text is very interesting, for the Lord tells overcomers of Thyatira that He will give them power over the nations, and that they shall rule them with a **rod of iron**. This raises an interesting question: how can those who overcome in Thyatira be given rule over the nations, when Jesus, Himself, shall rule the nations. In reality, this is not a paradox at all, for Jesus already explained such duality. He said, *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.* ¹⁸⁹ Just as He rules with His Father, likewise, those who obey and overcome in Thyatira will be granted to sit and rule with Him on His throne in a manner yet to be revealed.

In the final passage, we are told that the Child will rule the nations with a **rod of iron**. While we do not presume to interpret our text from within our text, it is appropriate to note that its simple meaning complies with the understanding of the other passages, and disagrees in no way. This being the case, we are able to move forward with confidence as to the identity of the characters, knowing first, that the Child is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Since we now know who the Child is, we have clear insight into the identity of the Woman, for we already know (under the weight of much Scripture) that the Son of God is to be born through Israel. Therefore, the Woman (His mother) is Israel, and that Mary (Joseph's betrothed wife, who remained a virgin until after the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ) is she through whom the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, came.

¹⁸⁸ Revelation 2:26-27.

¹⁸⁹ Revelation 3:21.

Likewise, there is ample Scripture ¹⁹⁰ identifying Satan as the Red Dragon. Thus, we have a clear understanding of the three individuals.

Following these signs, *Michael and his angels fight with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fight, but they do not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And there was rejoicing in heaven, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*

Yet, while heaven rejoices, it is woe upon woe to those of the earth, for the devil has come down having great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time. Which brings us to the beginning of Satan's last actions before his eternal appointment to the lake of fire.

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent...

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁹¹

Again, we see the Woman, Child, and Dragon. Since we know that the Woman is Israel (the Remnant of Israel), we see here that the Dragon makes war with her. But he is thwarted by God, for the Remnant is *given two wings of a great eagle, that it might fly into the wilderness to its place, where it is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.*

Think about this. In an astounding miracle, the *Remnant* (natural Jews of Abraham's bloodline) will escape to a place prepared where, beyond the reach of Satan, she will be sustained for three and a half years. In other words, after the devil's initial attack, the *Remnant* shall be kept from the abominable work of the **beast** by a mighty miracle. And when you think about it, it seems only right that this long-persecuted people might have a season of rest after more than three thousand years ¹⁹² of cruelty at the hands of the Gentiles and their master, the devil.

¹⁹⁰ Starting here in Revelation 12.

¹⁹¹ Revelation 12:13-17.

¹⁹² Almost consistently from after Joseph until the present.

It may also be concluded that the Red Dragon and his angels have not yet been thrown from heaven, for when that happens, the dragon immediately makes war with the *Remnant*, knowing that he has but a short time. However, this text does set the timing of the Dragon being cast from heaven, for when it occurs the Woman (the Remnant) is *given two wings of a great eagle, that it might fly into the wilderness to its place, where it is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent*. This places the Remnant and the Red Dragon at the middle of the seven years of the tribulation.

*But woe to the rest of her offspring, for the devil was enraged with the woman, but since he could not harm her, he went **to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ***. It is the *rest of her offspring* that shall bear the brunt of the enemy's attack, for these are the believing Gentiles (the Lukewarm Laodiceans vomited out by Jesus, and those who are born again in the Tribulation Revival) who constitute the rest of the body of Christ. Paul was clear.¹⁹³ The Gentiles *who received Jesus as Lord and Savior* were made one with the Jews *who also received Jesus as Lord and Savior*; hence believing Gentiles are the *rest of her offspring*. Of these Daniel prophesied, *some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time*.¹⁹⁴

Interlude 6) The Lamb and First Fruits¹⁹⁵

The ***Lamb and the One Hundred Forty-Four Thousand*** is a blessed revelation, for it shows the reward of these *most-faithful* saints, ***Firstfruits*** redeemed from among men. *These are those who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

This text does not say it is a sign. John actually saw the Lamb and the Firstfruits; in fact, he saw them so clearly he could see the Father's name written on their foreheads. He understood this was a special group. You must be careful not to apologize for, or attempt to spiritualize, this revelation (that is, do not claim these are not virgins, or that the text is really referring to *spiritual adultery*) for that is not what it says. These are, in fact, ***firstfruits to God and to the Lamb***, virgins who followed the Lamb, for they were so consumed with Him and His work during their lives on earth that they neither cared for nor had room for anything else. And their glorious, eternal reward is shown herein.

Do not think that none follow the path of celibacy, for Paul was clear: the celibate life is a higher walk—for as many as have grace to walk in it.

¹⁹³ See Romans 9:1-11:36; Ephesians 1:1-3:21.

¹⁹⁴ Daniel 11:35.

¹⁹⁵ Revelation 14:1-5.

Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am [that is, virgin; celibate]. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I...

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and *his interests* are divided.

The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.¹⁹⁶

Paul is not saying that men and women cannot serve God if they marry. Neither is he saying that it is enough to *just* be celibate. No, he is saying that those of the rank of the *firstfruits* were **consecrated to holiness and to following the Lamb** wherever He goes, **in service to Him and His people**—holiness and service; service and holiness! Theirs was not just physical celibacy in and of itself. However, as the text shows, if you want to please your God, the celibate life is the purest path, if you have been given the grace to walk in it; if not, do not; but, on the other hand, do not covet the reward given to those who do. Be faithful in your own gifts and calling, for God is no man's debtor. Your reward will be appropriate. But, make no mistake: The persons shown here lived continuous, consecrated, holy lives, and that is what it takes to be numbered among the class of the ***Firstfruits***.

Is not this revelation a great story; and does not God give to them a most magnificent reward for their love and obedience to His Son? Oh the wisdom and grace of God. Take heart in, rejoice and persevere in, your calling if you find yourself with Paul upon the path of celibacy. Do not feel deprived or inadequate, for your reward is sweet today in the presence of your Lord; and it will be even sweeter in the next life, and that forever. Celebrate Jesus!

There is little to document the timing of this interlude. The rationale I use here is really only one point: These blessed ones are the *Firstfruits redeemed from among men*. It only makes sense, therefore, that they would precede the Multitude from the Tribulation which follows in *Interlude Nine*.

Interlude 7) Three Heavenly Proclamations¹⁹⁷

The seventh interlude, **Three Heavenly Proclamations**, is another amazing revelation.

¹⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 32-35. NASB

¹⁹⁷ Revelation 14:6-13.

*Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people...**Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.***

Who knows the impact this declaration will have on the men, women, and children of the world, for it will be a trustworthy report to those seeking truth; may many understand, repent from sin, and turn to such a great and merciful God.

The implication of this text is staggering to Bible-believing, Bible-preaching, holy-living Evangelicals whose rallying cry for a hundred and fifty years ¹⁹⁸ was to go forth and preach the Gospel to every nation—so that the end could come! You see, they knew Jesus tied *the preaching of the Kingdom* to the *Coming of the End*, for He said,

1) *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.* ¹⁹⁹

2) *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* ²⁰⁰

They put the two verses together and forged their doctrine. But alas, they missed the third verse, the angelic proclamation,

3) *Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.* ²⁰¹

You see, these beloved ones did not consider the full counsel of the Word, thus failing to realize Jesus was referring to the *end coming **after** the angelic proclamation!* God did not make the **end** contingent upon man, even though this has been a *treasured doctrine* of many devout believers all these years.

I almost gasped when the old man said that. The first thing I did after I heard it was to look at Hoss. He just sat there with his mouth open. And then began to shake his head.

¹⁹⁸ The sixth church age, *the church at Philadelphia*, the great missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹⁹⁹ Matthew 24:14.

²⁰⁰ Matthew 28:19.

²⁰¹ Revelation 14:6-7.

Poka, also watching him, said,

“Are you okay, Harry? Do you want to comment?”

Hoss held up his hand as if to say, *No thank you*. However, after a moment he weakly ventured,

“What you just said is so very shocking. But, do you know what? I think you’re right. As soon as you tied the **three passages** together I saw it; yet, I’ve heard that teaching my entire life; I’ve preached it as you stated. Oh the folly of the *wisdom of man*; the treachery of the origins of his doctrines; the deceptions that we espouse as if they are the *Word of God*. I’m mortified by how often we miss truth.

The old man, too, was grim. We just sat there for a while.

I used the interrupt to look at Skeeter, for I’d never seen him quiet and still for so long. But he seemed deep in thought. He sat there leaning forward with his chin cupped in his long, boney hands. He was brooding about majestic things he’d never *heard* before.

Finally, Poka continued,

“The **second angel** follows, saying,

***Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city,
because she has made all nations drink
of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*** ²⁰²

“Think of the enormity of that proclamation: the great city that held such evil sway over all the nations: fallen at last. The end times shall toll Babylon’s destruction, and great shall be its fall; and abundant shall be the rejoicing among the righteous in heaven. This will be discussed in Revelation eighteen, apart from these interludes.”

“Then the **third angel** follows, saying with a loud voice,

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

202 Revelation 14:8.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. ²⁰³

If ever a warning should have man's full attention, this is it. It is an emphatic imperative from God: ***do not worship the beast or take his mark***. Its significance is amplified by the pronouncement being made by a mighty angel, not a man. Note: this warning resounds before the appearance of the beast, for God gives men a final warning ***before***, not after, they choose to take the mark of the beast.

Interlude 8) The Beast ²⁰⁴

You have heard much about the *son of perdition*. He rises up out of the sea of mankind, is called the *man of sin*, and yet, ends up possessed by the ***beast that ascends from the bottomless pit***, a wicked, powerful, evil creature. This ***man-beast*** is full of ruthless pride, hatred, and rebellion, so much so that it even reviles God. The epitome of evil, it is no one's friend; it is the essence of corruption, hate, and darkest power. Its account is told in three jarring chapters (thirteen, seventeen, eighteen), together, an amazing *sixty-six verses*.

Concerning this dreaded beast, in chapter thirteen, beginning at verse one, the apostle John wrote,

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like *those* of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. ²⁰⁵

There is much to note about the appearance of the beast, but through it all, there are two things to keep in mind: 1) the things the beast does are permitted by God; and 2) the dragon gives the beast ***his power, throne, and great authority***. You will marvel to see the astonishing depth of that power, and shocked at the permissions granted him to wreak destruction upon the earth. Surely, his vile work is part of God's judgment on mankind's disobedience and evil.

I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him? ²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Revelation 14:9-11. NASB

²⁰⁴ Revelation 13:1-18.

²⁰⁵ Revelation 13:1-2. NASB

²⁰⁶ Revelation 13:3-4. NASB

You see, there will be a battle between the *beast*²⁰⁷ and the *two witnesses* at the end of their one thousand two hundred and sixty days of ministry.²⁰⁸ That battle will result in the death of the *witnesses* (and perhaps the mortal wounding of the *beast*²⁰⁹). Yet, in the permissive will of God his deadly wound is healed—for at that point his bloody work is just beginning—and all of mankind (whose names are not found in the Book of Life) will marvel at the *beast* and worship him. All the world had been astonished by the ministry of two witnesses, having seen the power God granted them. If the *beast* could kill them, who could possibly stand against him? And so, they worshipped the *beast*.

There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven. *It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them*, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.²¹⁰

And so, the questions: What is the nature of that warfare? Does Scripture shed any light on it?

He looked at us as he asked. And that look had an astonishing effect on me: it put the question in a different light. I realized I'd been listening to things that I couldn't begin to fathom. It was like I was there, but *sort of* in a trance. I'd pick out a few ideas, but then pass on to the next incomprehensible matter, without realizing how far I was from *actually* understanding. It was strange. The shock of awareness of my actual state of mind was profound.

I must not have been the only one in a stupor, for he had to ask his question again,

“Does Scripture shed any light on the nature of this warfare?”

This time, my mind began to whirl. I knew the *beast* would make war on the saints and prevail. But, it never occurred to me to really think about the nature of those battles...though I'd read a few fanciful books some years before. The battles therein were interesting, but as to biblical accuracy, well, even I knew that they were categorized as fiction. I considered them to be so far from truth as to cause one to simply ignore their assertions. So, I tell you again: when he asked if Scripture sheds any light on the warfare, my brain couldn't even kick in. I didn't know.

Besides, I'd resigned from venturing answers to any questions, especially those so far above my paygrade. Therefore, as soon as I realized he was actually looking for answers,

207 At the beginning of his murderous work, at the mid-point of the seven-year tribulation period.

208 That is, during the first three and one-half years of the seven-year tribulation period.

209 It seems likely that it is in this battle in which the *beast* receives its mortal wound. Where else could it have been?

210 Revelation 13:5-8. NASB

I began, to inspect the top of the table. However, in my deplorable state I lifted my eyes high enough to check on Skeeter. And, sure as the world, he was staring at the table with me.

As you know, Poka could read body language. He didn't embarrass the bumpkins any further.

"Pastor, what do you think?"

Hoss intended to duck the question, too. He shuffled for words and finally said,

"I don't know."

"Oh, but you do, Pastor. You know a great deal more than you realize. Relax. Ask the Holy Spirit to do that which He delights to do. Remember, Jesus said,

These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you...But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore, I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ²¹¹

"Why not do that right now, Harry?" ²¹²

To my surprise, Hoss immediately prayed,

"Father, in the name of Jesus, and in accordance with the provisions of Your Word, I ask that the Holy Spirit bring to my remembrance those things You have revealed about the warfare between the beast and the saints—and *those things which are to come.*"

To that humble prayer, Poka added the single word, *Amen*. Then he said,

"Now Harry, let the Spirit open the Scripture. We will wait. When you are ready, tell us what He gives you. However, remember: you have asked, and He will delight to answer if you will obey that which He reveals. Understand?"

"Yes, Sir, and I agree completely."

²¹¹ John 14:25-26; 16:13-15. NASB See also, John 14:15-18.

²¹² Do not lightly pray such a prayer. You are dealing with God. The Spirit will *bring to remembrance* that which is *in your heart*. If it is not *there* (that is, if you have not meditated in His Word as you should) you are still *in diapers* and have much to learn. Do not play with spiritual matters. However, Poka knew Hoss had been a serious Bible student for many years. He knew the Word, and therefore, he was ready for such a prayer.

“Also keep in mind that He is God. He will answer in His timing, not yours. He may answer over days, or more. You are to wait before Him in the Word with your heart and mind attuned to Him.”

But, we didn’t have to wait. Hoss exclaimed,

“Almost immediately I saw an amalgam of passages from the Gospels, Ephesians, Revelation, and the Prophets. They flashed into my spirit and coalesced in magnificent depiction in a few seconds. It was incredibly wonderful. Let me fashion a framework from which to share some of those thoughts. But in truth, the Lord showed me enough to preach an extended series of sermons.”

I, Daniel, was fascinated. It was like nothing I’d seen before. The time with this mysterious old man opened us to a world far beyond our experience. I’d read the Bible. I’d gone to church. I thought I knew about such things; yet I’d been sleepwalking. I don’t know how else to say it.

Hoss continued excitedly. He picked up his Bible, quickly flipped its pages, and said,

“The first passage was a selection from Daniel,

By smooth *words* he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for *many* days.²¹³

Then Hoss said,

“I’ve always understood Daniel eleven to foretell events that were to occur in ancient history between the Babylonians, Egyptians, Medes, Persians, and Greeks. And they did. But, in addition, I’m more convinced than ever that the text also foreshadows the times of the end. This is easier to see in other passages in Daniel, but I realize that chapter eleven also applies to the warfare between the **beast** and the **saints** in the last days; the warfare we’re presently discussing.”

“In other words, it says that during the tribulation war, saints will do great exploits (or, *great spiritual exploits*) while also instructing many in the ways of God. Many receiving such teaching will be among the great multitude saved in Revelation chapter seven. It’s exciting to consider that, *there in that bitter warfare when the saints are suffering and dying*, through their empowered lives a vast multitude will be saved. That is remarkable! In the natural, one might look at the saints being overcome as a great defeat. And yet, from the true perspective

213 Daniel 11:32-33. NASB

of the plan of God, it is glorious victory. Surely ***God's ways are higher than our ways as the heavens are higher than the earth!***"

Poka smiled and nodded his head as he listened. As for Hoss, he was so excited that he bounced up and paced back and forth in front of the window, from whence he continued,

"At the same time, I understood much more. Paul's teaching in Ephesians six about the armor of God and the spiritual war became very clear to me. It was almost as if I had seen and put on that heavenly armor. I now realize that we are protected by real, and impenetrable, armor in which we can stand against mighty spiritual foes. We are not to fear; we are to boldly proclaim the Word as it is quickened moment by moment, knowing that it, *the Sword of the Spirit*, will slash mightily to accomplish God's purposes. No power can withstand a blow struck in knowledge and faith when that great Sword is wielded. It was to such wrestling Paul referred, *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*" ²¹⁴

"In another passage, I saw the prophet Elijah when, after rebuking the king of Samaria, that king was indignant,

Then *the king* sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, *O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'*" Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, *If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.* Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. ²¹⁵

"This happened twice. Such was the mighty power of God through His Prophet. It was as if I was there to see and feel the power that flashed at that moment. Surely it will be so once again upon the earth."

Hoss couldn't contain himself,

"And, there was more. It was as if I saw the Lord in the days He walked upon earth as a man. I saw Him again and again withstanding Satan; walking untouched, through the midst of the crowd that intended to stone Him; great power operating through Him to heal the multitudes; calm the winds and waves; call Lazarus from the tomb; and to do many other mighty things."

"Then the description of the day of Pentecost flashed before my eyes, and I could feel the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in that outpouring."

²¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:3-6.

²¹⁵ 2 Kings 1:1-17. NASB

He paused to reflect for a moment on those things, then finished with,

“Oh my: there is such power available to those who understand, believe, and obey.” ²¹⁶

“Yet, arrayed against the saints will also be armies of men and weapons devised by them; and those weapons will be turned against the saints, ²¹⁷ who, ultimately, shall be overcome, even as God’s **two witnesses** were overcome. But, it will not signal defeat; rather, it will signal their final victory!”

And, he sat back down.

Skeeter burst out,

“Hoss, that was amazing. It makes you wonder...”

But his voice, too, trailed off.

“The Holy Spirit,” Poka said, “glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, taking that which is His and showing it to His children. ²¹⁸ But you need to understand: the great things of God are not acquired cheaply. His revelation is not **Fast Food America**. Even as you have started, Harry, so you must continue in a life-long practice of seeking Him in the study of and meditation in His Word.” ²¹⁹

We silently waited for him to resume; and we didn’t need to wait long.

To return to Harry’s discourse, I have but one thing to add. It relates directly to the next verses in our text, ²²⁰ which say,

If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The point is that, in believers, there is a desire to *try to do* the work of the kingdom **by natural means**. You poke fun at each other for such *fruitless religious endeavors*, saying something like this: *You know good ol’ Freddie, he’s always trying to help God out.* What you mean is that someone tries *in the flesh* to accomplish work that can only be done *in the Spirit*. That is dangerous. Remember the itinerant Jewish exorcists who took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord over those who had evil spirits, saying, *We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.* And the evil spirit answered and said, *Jesus I know, and Paul I know;*

²¹⁶ Ephesians 1:19; 3:20-21.

²¹⁷ Revelation 19:17-21; 20:7-10.

²¹⁸ John 16:13-15.

²¹⁹ Joshua 1:8. *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

²²⁰ Revelation 13:9-10.

but who are you? Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

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Such is the warning of our verse,

If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity, shall go into
captivity;

if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. ²²²

The weapons of that warfare are spiritual weapons, weapons of the Spirit, not the world. In chapter thirteen, the beast will use his entire arsenal, *miraculous* and *natural*, including: evil signs, wonders, miracles, and lying deceptions; and the arms and weapons of mankind. The carnal nature in believers will try to do the same. But, he who arms himself with, and uses, the weapons of natural man to *take captives and to kill* of the ranks of mankind in the camp of the enemy, must, himself, also be taken captive and killed—for those are ***not the weapons of the saints of God in the war with the beast.***

Remember instead, the way Jesus fought against evil when He walked among men. His interest was only in the kingdom and Word of God. He always, and only, walked in Spirit. He spoke what His Father gave Him to speak; did what He saw His Father doing. He went about full of the Holy Spirit; doing good; healing all manner of diseases; casting out demons; raising the dead; proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. He never picked up a stone to hurl at evil men. And, the way He combated evil is the way the saints will war with the beast. And they will bear fruit even as many of them are cut down by murderous blows from a wicked enemy destined for the lake of fire. But, martyred in death they shall be liberated unto forever into the presence of Almighty God and the Lamb. And, a *great multitude which no one could number* will be saved. Hallelujah!

And that brings us to the wonder of the marvelous last words in the passage,

Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. ²²³

The Greek for *patience* is *hupomonē*, literally, *an abiding under* (*hupo*, ‘under’; *menō*, ‘to abide’). ²²⁴ It is a marvelous thing to grasp the glory of this concept, for it is the very heart of the matter; it is the *abiding* (*menō*) of John fifteen; it is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*; it is the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17, therefore if any man be *in Christ* he is a new creation; it is the *key to the overcoming life*. For you it should start today and go unto eternity. By such abiding, you would *please God*. ²²⁵

221 Acts 19:11-17.

222 Revelation 13:9-10a. NASB

223 Revelation 13:10b. NASB

224 Vine, *patience*, 462.

225 Hebrews 11:6.

It behooves you who would be overcomers to repent of your slovenness and seek the Lord until He fills you with the Holy Spirit, and learn to walk in His fullness, in the gifts and armor of God exactly the way Jesus walked, ²²⁶ for that is what God intends for you. You need to learn while there is relative peace on earth, and unto that end **that walk** is discussed in detail in Part III following. ²²⁷

Finally, let us read the balance of chapter thirteen's report about the beast.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the freemen and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six. ²²⁸

Woe, woe, woe to those who take the dreaded mark of the beast.

Such was an introduction to the beast, his false prophet, the image of him, and his administration. I add no further words at this point. However, as you will see in a moment, chapter seventeen reveals another aspect of the beast. But, we will come to that in due order.

Concerning the overall timing of *Interlude Eight*, you can see that it closes the last half of Daniel's Week, and as such, almost completes the bulk of the linear timeframe of the *End Time Events*. However, there is much more to happen. Let us continue with our study.

²²⁶ And the Apostles who followed Him.

²²⁷ This is discussed in detail in Part III following.

²²⁸ Revelation 13:11-18. NASB

Interlude 9) Multitude from Great Tribulation

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, *Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb*. And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, *Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.*

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, *These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?* I said to him, *My lord, you know.* And he said to me, *These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.* ²²⁹

Such marvel to see God's rich mercy lavished upon a multitude so large that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language—delivered because of their faith in Jesus Christ, even in the midst of the great tribulation. These shall be with and serve God forever, and the Lamb shall be their Shepherd; and God, Himself, shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. Hallelujah!

Sixth Seal

The *Nine Interludes* being examined, let us turn to the Sixth Seal. When the Lamb opens it, Cosmic Disturbances announce the Wrath of the Lamb.

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

229 Revelation 7:9-17. NASB

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks,

**Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne,
and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has
come,
and who is able to stand?** ²³⁰

This cataclysmic description is not rhetoric: *a great earthquake; the sun becomes black; the moon, blood; stars fall to earth; the sky recedes as a scroll; and every mountain and island moves out of its place.* Those who denied their only hope for salvation are terrified—yet, without remorse. Even at this time, rather than yield to the God they denied and despised, rather than cry out for forgiveness, in *the desperation of terror* they plead for *the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.* For they know the **Lamb's wrath** will soon be poured out. The dreaded time has come. They try in vain to disappear; alas, it is too late.

Seventh Seal

The Lamb opens the **seventh** seal: Prelude to the **Wrath of the Lamb**.

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. ²³¹

The Lamb's Wrath—Seven Trumpets

There is silence in heaven as the seventh seal opens. The end has come; all of heaven's hosts watch reverently, simply waiting. ²³² The scene is followed by *seven angels* sounding *seven trumpets*, the first six of which are described in Revelation 8:7-9:21. These events are

²³⁰ Revelation 6:12-17. NASB

²³¹ Revelation 8:1-6. NASB

²³² Likely, the Wrath of the Lamb is a final signal announcing the day of the Lord. (Joel 2:1-11; Revelation 8:7-9:21.)

beyond terrifying. A summary includes: **First Trumpet:** vegetation struck; **Second:** seas struck; **Third:** waters struck; **Fourth:** heavens struck; three woes announced; **Fifth: first woe:** locust from bottomless pit torment men for five months; **Sixth: second woe:** angels from Euphrates with two hundred million mysterious, powerful horsemen destroy one third of mankind.

These are incredibly terrifying days for iniquitous mankind, whose sins have found them out. And then, there is the sounding of the Seventh Trumpet,

And there were loud voices in heaven, saying: ***The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!*** And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: *We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.* Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail. ²³³

The time for judgment and reward has come. The rule of the *prince of this world* is ended. God shall take His own great power and shall reign.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Even so, before that, the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the earth.

God's Wrath—Seven Bowls

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

***Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!
Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?***

²³³ Revelation 11:15-19.

***For You alone are holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested.***

After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.²³⁴

Mere words cannot express the terror associated with His wrath. It is beyond comprehension. Remember the Lord's conversation with the Martyrs (at the fifth seal) when they cried out: *How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?* They were told to rest a little longer. Now comes their vindication, and that by the powerful hand of Almighty God.

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, *Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.*

So the **first** went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Then the **second** angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died.

Then the **third** angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying: *You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due...*

Then the **fourth** angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Then the **fifth** angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of

²³⁴ Revelation 15:1-8.

the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Then the **sixth** angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty...And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

We shall speak of this gathering and battle in a moment. But first, the seventh bowl.

Then the **seventh** angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying,

It is done!

And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations' fell.

And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.²³⁵

Mystery Babylon²³⁶

We shall now pause to ponder the Mystery of Babylon.

Babylon is an intriguing, three-part mystery, including: **1) the *Beast*** upon whom the *Great Harlot* rides; **2) *Mystery, Babylon the Great*** (the *Great Harlot*); and **3) *Babylon the Great***

²³⁵ Revelation 16:1-21.

²³⁶ Revelation 17:1-19:6.

(the *City*). Its circumstances are set forth in Revelation chapters seventeen and eighteen. As we proceed, note that such great mystery defies speculation; yet, cannot be ignored. It is before you and you must overcome its sinister threats. Yet, to do so you must understand the revelation. And, there is good news. You do not have to speculate or undertake this difficult quest alone, for the angel told John,

***I will tell you the mystery of the woman
and of the beast that carries her.***

The answer, therefore, is before you in the text: the angel unfolded the mystery to John, and therefore to you. With that assurance, we proceed with great interest and care. As we undertake the task, I offer two insights concerning the revelation of *Babylon the Great*.

First, it is helpful to realize that ²³⁷ three entities are being described in chapters seventeen and eighteen: *The Beast*; *Mystery*, *Babylon the Great* (not the city); and *Babylon the Great* (the city itself).

Second, Babylon (the city) is destined to fall twice. Since it has fallen once, and lies in rubble, it follows that that dreadful ancient city is to be rebuilt and regain its splendor among the nations. After which, it will fall again, to rise no more.

As I told you to develop your doctrines by Scripture, so we too will look at this amazing revelation in the same way.

He asked me to read chapters seventeen and eighteen, and the first part of nineteen. Here, we look at chapter seventeen.

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

²³⁷ Not including the beast.

And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

And here *is* the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, *and* the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful.

And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.²³⁸

There you have a magnificent presentation that, ***as the angel told John***, reveals the mystery of the woman and the beast that carried her. But, make no mistake: it was great mystery until the moment the angel began to unfold the matter. However, thereafter John had been given the insight he needed to understand the vision. As it was true for John, so it is for us. We, too, can understand this great mystery. Therefore, let us carefully assess the revelation, for in it John received a great deal of material.

The Mystery Unfolded: Part 1, The Beast

²³⁸ Revelation 17:1-18. KJV

Since the angel started with the beast, so shall we. When he is manifested, those who dwell on the earth (whose names are not in the Book of Life) will marvel, for the beast is an astounding creature who had been on the earth before the time of John; was removed to the bottomless pit where he remains until the time appointed by God; and will ultimately ascend from the pit for a season of vileness such as never before seen on earth.²³⁹ His likeness is akin to the red dragon of Revelation twelve, in that he, too, *is fiery red and has seven heads and ten horns*.²⁴⁰ His scarlet color is symbolic of the blood he will shed; his blasphemous names mirror his evil, defiant nature; his seven heads represent seven mountains upon which the woman sits; they also represent seven kings; and his ten horns stand for ten kings yet to emerge to a wicked work they shall share together. We shall pass over his color and his names, but will address the *seven heads* and *ten horns*.

Seven heads, seven kings, seven mountains: you see the pattern, and so it is throughout the Revelation.²⁴¹ Thus we see seven heads, even as there are seven churches. As we concluded that the seven churches represent all churches, so the seven heads reflect a compounding of man's kingships. This amalgamation is more visible when you realize that the beast of Revelation thirteen (*which was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion*)²⁴² embodies the evil of the four beasts of the empires foretold by Daniel, empires that were to emerge and wreak havoc upon the wickedness of man in ancient history. You can see this in Daniel's vision of those four kingdoms²⁴³ and ***the great beasts that empowered and controlled*** men in those days.

About them, Daniel said,

Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and *it had* three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it.

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and *it was* diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the

239 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit...Revelation 17:8.

240 Revelation 12:3. As discussed in the fourth interlude: ***Conflict with the Red Dragon, i.e., Satan***.

241 Seiss, 61.

242 Revelation 13:1-3.

243 Daniel 7:2-8. KJV

horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

When you compare the four beasts of Daniel to the composite beast viewed by John, you see that the *end time* beast embodies the evil nature of all the others.

Hoss interrupted excitedly,

“That’s a complete paradigm shift! We’ve ²⁴⁴ always thought man’s treacheries sprang from his own evil. But you just showed that *spirit beings* participate in the unfolding history of man. We had it backwards! The works of history are not so much outbursts of the flesh as they are the expression of God’s will, and at times He permits the use of evil spirit beings to accomplish His purposes. Think back to the text. It is God Who controls the *four winds of heaven*, winds that stirred the *great sea of humanity*, from which arose four *evil-spirit beasts*, who catapulted men into horrendous wickedness.”

“Once you see this, you realize that it is supported by a great deal of Scripture. On the one hand, the Lord often poured His Spirit upon men to accomplish His purposes. For example, consider David, Moses, Samuel, Samson, and the Apostles. On the other, you see demon possession by the spirit of evil. The devil twists and bends men’s minds to perform all manner of evil. ²⁴⁵ Outrageous cruelties recorded throughout history seemed beyond the nature of man. And they were! They were inflamed by evil spirits. Paul wrote, *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*” ²⁴⁶

“Consider:

1) Daniel 7:3-6—*The first beast was like a lion, and had eagle’s wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and **it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man’s heart was given to it.*** Do you see? That beast started out as an *evil-spirit beast*, but later was given the heart of a man. Until then, it was a ***spirit-beast*** empowering men to murder, violence, and other terrible atrocities against vanquished foes.

2. Daniel 10:1-21—As that first example illustrates evil; this one, good. In 10:1-21 you see that Daniel was in mourning for twenty-one days as he sought revelation from the Lord. Then a marvelous heavenly being was sent to reveal *spiritual truths* to Daniel and to as many as have *ears to hear*. Daniel’s visitor also revealed that he *stood beside Darius the Mead, to confirm and strengthen him* for his work of overthrowing the Babylonians, as prophesied by Jeremiah. Imagine that!

²⁴⁴ We, my teachers and I.

²⁴⁵ That is, those given over by God to evil. See Romans 1:16-32; 2 Corinthians 10:1-11; Ephesians 6:10-20.

²⁴⁶ Ephesians 6:12.

3. Isaiah 44:28-45:7—In example three, Cyrus (Darius' coregent), was called by name more than two hundred years before he was born. And he overthrew the Babylonian empire and released the Jews to rebuild the temple exactly as Isaiah foretold."

Hoss finished with this...

"Are these not incredible insights into God's *behind-the-scenes work* in the affairs of men? There are many other examples. The point is that our understanding was upside down. We attributed initiation and execution of man's madness to the outworking of the *will of man*. We didn't understand that it reflected the spirit war raging between God and devil—including participation (willing and unwilling) on both sides by man, the weakest of all sentient beings."

Poka added,

"Harry, you rightly recognize man's involvement, not as initiator, but participant. However, I point out that **God** does not use men as hapless automatons. He wants men to understand His Word and willingly participate against forces of evil as laborers empowered by His Spirit and schooled and disciplined by His Word. What could be more exciting than being equipped, empowered, and working as God's friend; knowing His will and His business; having the single objective of serving Him? What a glorious opportunity! Who would not seek such relationship with God?"

After a moment, the old man continued,

But, let us return to the *beast*. The Revelation shows that the *man of sin appears* before the beast. He is spoken of by Daniel, Paul, and John.²⁴⁷ He will be manifested as the *son of perdition, the lawless one according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders*.²⁴⁸ When he comes, *he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week* (seven years) but will break the covenant in the middle of the week at which point he will enter the temple of God, speak pompous words against Almighty God, proclaim himself to be **god**, take the seat in the temple as **god**, commit the abominable desolation, and then, begin with great fury to make war against the saints.

But, before the mid-week events can transpire, the *man of sin* must be empowered by Satan, *for the dragon gives him his power, his throne, and great authority that he might perform with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*.²⁴⁹ At the time of this empowerment a mystery regarding the antichrist/beast is resolved. You see,²⁵⁰ *the beast that you saw, was, is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to*

²⁴⁷ Daniel 7:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:6.

²⁴⁸ Daniel 8:11; 9:26; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-9.

²⁴⁹ 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; Revelation 13:2.

²⁵⁰ Revelation 17:8, 10-11.

perdition. This beast will possess (indwell) the *man of sin* and be the agent of Satan's empowering until the *man of sin* actually transforms into a *beast-man*, who will then make war with, overcome, and kill the Two Witnesses (of **Interlude 2**) after they complete their testimony. It is this *beast* who also is one of the kings, for he is *the eighth of seven*, in that he enters the body of the seventh king (the son of perdition, the antichrist) just as Satan entered Judas Iscariot that fateful night.²⁵¹ When the *beast* possesses the *man of sin* and they become *one*, the prophesied, and most terrible, *seventh king* is fashioned into the *eighth*, the *beast*,²⁵² the composite creature who executes the devil's terrible wrath as discussed in chapter thirteen of the Revelation.

As we listened I glanced at my friends. Skeeter just stared at Poka, but what Hoss was doing was fascinating. It was as if he was working down a list of questions. He would nod, grunt, or smile as Poka addressed point after point. I was so intrigued with Hoss that I lost the thread of Poka's argument. When I tuned back in, he was finishing...

Such was the nature of the interlinking mystery between the *man of sin* and the *beast who ascends from the bottomless pit*.

He continued,

The seven heads reflect a composite of man's evil kingdoms; and constitute all the kings of all the empires, just as, for example, all the kings of Babylon, are accounted for by recognizing the king of the Babylonian empire. The ten horns are ten future kings who will receive authority for one hour. These *will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled*. This betrayal and persecution of the harlot will horrify the people of earth, for the abominable fornication of mankind with the *harlot* is not just sexual debasement, but it is also the lusting for mammon. It is the love of the world and the things therein (***instead of loving obedience to God***) that is the fornication of mankind with the *great harlot*.²⁵³ It is these things that the *beast* will stomp out of the fornicators' lives, for the beast will mandate that he (and the mysterious *god of fortresses*²⁵⁴) be worshipped. He will not permit *lusting after the things of the world*. He will ruthlessly burn these things out of man. In his kingdom, there will be no freedom of choice. Every knee will bow to him; every person will take his mark; everyone, that is, except those whose names are written in the Book of Life.

The *one hour* appointed to the ten kings is in the same scale as the seven years of the antichrist. To do the math²⁵⁵ is to discover that *one hour* (for the ten kings) is proportionally

²⁵¹ John 13:26-27.

²⁵² Revelation 17:10-11.

²⁵³ James 4:1-6 adds insight into this adulterous relationship.

²⁵⁴ Daniel 11:48.

²⁵⁵ The seven years of the beast equals 2,520 days in the seven-year period (360 days per year x 7 years); also note that there are 168 hours in a week (24 hours per day x 7 days); therefore, it follows that 2,520 days in seven years is to 168 hours in a week as N is to 1 hour in a week. When you solve that equation ($N = (2520/168)$), $N=15$. The result is 15 days.

equivalent to fifteen days. Realize that the ten kings will arise independent from the machinations of the antichrist. Nevertheless, at the appointed time, these kings will convene in summit with the beast (***care to guess how much time that summit will likely consume?***) and they, with one mind, will give their power and authority to him. After that summit, they will simply be figureheads, even though they join the beast to make war with, and be overcome by, the Lamb, Who is Lord of lords and King of kings.

Finally, the beast and the harlot will control **all** (not just some) of those **who dwell on the earth** (that is, **all** whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life).²⁵⁶ Likewise, the *seven mountains* upon which the harlot sits are the seven continents of the earth (the rationale for which you will see when we discuss the *great harlot*); further, *the waters which you saw, where the harlot sits* are **all** the people of the earth. You will soon understand why **all** of mankind—that is, all but the *relatively* few who are washed by the blood of the Lamb and walking in the Spirit of Christ—are under the harlot's control.

The Mystery Unfolded: Part 2, Mystery, Babylon the Great

We now turn to the ***judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.*** We shall consider the marvel of her name; the reason *the Mystery* is depicted as a woman; the totality of her control; and her terrifying ending.

Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth

What a name: the *great harlot*, the *mother of harlots* and the abominations of the earth—drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs. What a treacherous, detestable, seductive character, especially having once been queen of all humanity. Yet by her treachery, all seven continents are depraved by the wine of her fornication. It is this mysterious *woman* you must come to understand, hate, and shun.

What does her imagery mean, and how did she come to such far-reaching dominion?

To ponder these things before the Lord is to be taken back to the dawn of antiquity, and there, to some of the earliest words in Scripture, where you encounter the *Father of Lies* cunningly casting his evil net; and there you discover the seeds of drunken, abominable rebellion against God, in individual and joint endeavors of commerce and religion.

²⁵⁶ Revelation 13:8.

Look at this somber story. It is most instructive.

It was not by accident that the serpent was talking to Eve. He knew her and her husband. You see, God created and empowered Adam into headship and authority, and then fashioned Eve to be his companion and helper, but not co-ruler; neither did He empower her for authority. She was to obey and support Adam in his obedience to God. And, as long as they lived in that divine order, they were blessed. But when Eve departed from God's command (and Adam permitted her rebellion to stand) they fell; and great was that fall, for it corrupted mankind from that moment until the end of the age of man on earth.

Cunningly, the serpent chose Eve for the nefarious act of usurpation. Had he made a direct attack on Adam, in obedience to God Adam would have withstood, for the *Liar* would have been exposed in his folly. You see, he lied when he talked to Eve, and it was a lie that would not have gotten past Adam. Listen to the conversations and see if you grasp the point.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, *Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, **for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.***²⁵⁷

Sometime after that conversation, God fashioned Eve from Adam's rib. Later, another discussion took place,

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, *Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'? And the woman said to the serpent, *We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said,**

***You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it,
lest you die.***

Then, with ever so much guile the serpent lied to the woman, saying

You surely shall not die.²⁵⁸

The serpent knew that had he tried his *lying hiss* on Adam, Adam would have tested it against what God had told him personally; and the serpent would have failed. Knowing this, the devil cunningly *worked* Eve. He appealed to her presumed *wisdom* and *judgment*. And in her

²⁵⁷ Genesis 2:15-17.

²⁵⁸ Genesis 3:1-4. NASB.

naiveté and rebellion, she usurped Adam's (and God's) authority and chose for herself what she would do.

She should have simply stood on God's command; or, having a question, she should have asked Adam. Instead, *the mother of all mankind*, though lacking authority, took it upon herself to do what she wanted: she chose the serpent's lie instead of God's Word. She disobeyed God (and Adam) and chose to eat the fruit. In this, Eve transcended the boundaries set for her by God.

However, rulership had not yet been lost, for Eve was not in authority. When she offered Adam the fruit, he had not fallen; nor did he have to fall. He could have stopped the folly. He could have told Eve that they were not going to move until he presented his dilemma to God when He came in the evening. Who knows how the Lord would have resolved the matter, but resolve it, He would. And mankind would not have fallen. But sadly, Adam did not give God the chance.

The serpent knew Adam could have withstood his direct challenge, therefore, he tempted Eve, who, instead of following Adam, actually enticed him to also eat the forbidden fruit. It was only after Adam succumbed to Eve's seduction, took the fruit from her hand, disobeyed God and ate it, that rulership passed to the serpent. And Eve is accountable to God for her disobedience.²⁵⁹

As Poka said those words there was a disturbance from Skeeter. When I looked, he squirmed in his seat and his hand flicked up and down a couple of times. He was rankled; yet, this was a different Skeeter than the man who started the meeting. He was perturbed, but he wasn't sure...

The old man noticed, of course, and asked,

"Earnest, did you want to say something?"

Skeet could contain himself no longer.

"I've never heard anyone say such things about Eve. You make her sound like a villain. Wasn't it just the opposite? Wasn't she deceived by the devil and tricked into her folly? Rather than castigate the *mother* of mankind, shouldn't we lament the injustice done her?"

Poka looked at Skeeter,

"Earnest, be careful Who you criticize. God is God! He defined all things according to His Own counsel and His Own pleasure. He loves women as much as He loves men. Eve was His last creation. She wonderfully completes Adam, and they become one flesh. But, they are given different roles, and each is measured by his/her obedience to those requirements.

²⁵⁹ For example, see 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

And not only that, Earnest. In addition, you should consider the magnitude of her transgression, the treachery involved, and its consequences,

God asked Eve, *What is this you have done?* She replied, *The serpent deceived me, and I ate.* And the Lord God said to her: *I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.* ²⁶⁰

“Some four thousand years later the Word further expands this theme,

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to usurp²⁶¹ authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.” ²⁶²

“What had she done?”

“Her disobedience caused the fall of man, and mandated that the Lamb of God die on a cruel cross to redeem as many as will believe. That is her transgression! And not only that. Because of it, women have suffered in childbirth since. And not only that. Part of her judgment earned the terrible result of having men rule over women in the despicable ways recorded in history ever since her sin—ways that certainly do not reflect the gentle headship intended by God for Adam—which relationship is set forth in the Word...

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ²⁶³

“Do you see how shatteringly far-reaching her sin? Yet, after her transgression, Eve tried to duck accountability, and blame the serpent. I tell you a tragic truth: the same ***spirit of rebellion*** in which Eve usurped authority over her husband, and which consumed Jezebel, Ahaz’s wife, and which ruled the self-proclaimed prophetess of Thyatira, is upon her daughters still today in the so *called* church. Women, professing to be believers, claiming to love and obey God, have risen in rebellion against the Word of God. By their actions they say,

²⁶⁰ Genesis 3:13, 16.

²⁶¹ QuickVerse, *Authenteō*, to act of oneself, dominate: usurp authority over.

²⁶² 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

²⁶³ Ephesians 5:25-29.

No, but we will teach and usurp authority over men whenever we choose! ²⁶⁴It is our right, given us by ²⁶⁵the serpent of old; he who urged our mother to use her own good sense and not be suppressed, either by God, or by His Word, or by weak-kneed men, of whom we are both smarter and better.

“And this they do in defiance of Scripture, and the **wimps** in authority (denominational overlords, husbands, pastors, and, others) kowtow to the spirit upon them even as the eight hundred and fifty priests and Ahaz the king kowtowed to the spirit on **Jezebel** of old. But treachery does not change the commandment. Perpetrators will pay, as will the devil who scoffs at God through them.”

With that, Skeeter, whose face was chalk white, leaned back in his seat and muttered softly, mostly to himself,

“I was just asking...”

But Hoss couldn’t contain himself. He blurted out,

“That’s absolutely shocking. I can’t believe my ears. That’s the harshest thing I’ve ever heard.”

The old man eyed Hoss for a moment, then calmly added,

“Harry, remember that, when I rebuked the Nicolaitan overlords, I said that not all pastors are Nicolaitans. Yet, I maintained that the ground upon which *single-point-bosses* stand is high risk and downward sloping. So it is with the Jezebelian usurpation. It may sound good and seem right to the world and to the modern, lukewarm church; but it does not comply with the Lord’s intent for men and women.” ²⁶⁶

With that, we could do nothing but pause. Finally, Poka resumed,

²⁶⁴ Or, as it is said, ***Feel led!***

²⁶⁵ Their actions speak for them, though I doubt that many understand the error they make or risk they take.

²⁶⁶ Even so, Poka added a very interesting caveat: In spite of the error and evil associated with the Jezebelian usurpation, you need to understand that God is not pleased with the Shepherds (the men) who are over His church. Look at Ezekiel thirty-four to see His displeasure. And, that is not the only place you see it. Consider Isaiah chapters one through three, from which I extract a single verse: *As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths. (Isaiah 3:12)* Men have fumbled and bungled their role as priests and heads of their homes and churches so much that it just may be that in the end times God permits room for a woman whose heart and spirit are pure before Him to minister to others (men and women) who love Him, but, shamefully, men who are not mature enough to speak for God as is their right and responsibility. Finally, he added one more verse: *How long will you gad about, O you backsliding daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth—A woman shall encompass a man. (Jeremiah 31:22)*. It may be that, after having had (for all these centuries) to submit to ruinous ineptness, the Lord has granted permission to some women to speak for Him. But, it is shame upon shame for the *hireling shepherds*.

We need to return to Eve, for not only did the serpent gain victory that day, but Adam and Eve died because of their disobedience. Oh, they did not die physically at that moment; rather they sealed their physical deaths. But, their *spirit* died and remained dead until the arrival of *Last Adam* (the *Life Giving Spirit, Jesus Christ Himself*). He, the Holy Seed of God, brought again to earth the *Spirit of Holiness and Innocence*, and from the authority of purity He told Nicodemus,

*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Nicodemus said to Him, *How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?* Jesus answered, *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again.* ²⁶⁷

Unless your spirit is born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. To this, the Word adds,

...Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know, because they are spiritually discerned...But we have the mind of Christ. ²⁶⁸

It is spirit, and for that, you must be *born again*, believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Without that, you shall dwell in darkness with no capability of seeing spiritual light. But, in ***the fatal day of Adam's disobedience***, the carnal nature of man gained ascendancy, took the place of Adam's spirit, and man began to know *good* and *evil*. From that time, he has been governed by his flesh. Only God's mercy prevents the total destruction of man. ²⁶⁹ This is the *spiritual harlotry* fashioned by Eve; it is the origin of the gender of the *Mystery*, it relates directly to Eve's disobedience, and hence the name, *Mother of Harlots*. With it you have the terrifyingly large span of control of the *harlot*, for every human being ever born traces its abominable, carnal nature back to *Eve, Mother of Harlots, and of the Abominations of the Earth*—for all abominations root in her disobedience to God.

He paused and looked at us. Nobody spoke. His was a shocking message. I had to think deeply about what the old man had said. And judging by the silence of my friends, I wasn't alone.

²⁶⁷ John 3:3-7.

²⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:4-16.

²⁶⁹ Remember the flood of Noah's time. Genesis 6:1-9:17.

So he continued,

You will recall that, as we started Revelation seventeen, one objective was to understand the harlot's name: *Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth*. We have addressed the last part, leaving the task of defining the words: *Mystery, Babylon the Great*. Concerning, *Mystery*, some have deduced that the best place to hide a secret is in the most obvious place, that is, the open. For, after all, *who would think to look there?* And so it is: the abominable *mystery* is hidden in the open, for it is hidden ***in the heart of every human being***. Yet, who would think to look there? Man lives within *himself*, empowered by *himself* to be judge and jury of all that goes on outside *himself*. *He* decides what is *right*, and *wrong*; *he* decides what *he* will approve. *He* blesses and curses, according to *his* perception. *He*, down to the most impoverished beggar, reserves the right to judge everything around *him*, even those giving *him* handouts; and *his* bias is that everything is inferior to *his* great understanding. *His* is the selfish, arrogant, proud flesh.

Do you see? Such is the carnal nature. You have always thought that that

***Is just the way you are;
that it is the way you were created;
that it is the way you have always been;
that that is the way you always will be.***

I am talking about ***all*** the descendants of Adam and Eve. But, that was not the way God created man to live. Man was to dwell with Him in holy innocence, living obedient, perfect lives, with hearts full of the glory of the Living God—exactly like Adam and Eve in the beginning. It was nothing more, nothing less. It was from this perfect state that man fell; and in that fall the *mystery of rebellion* (flesh against spirit) entered man's being. And that *mystery* is hidden in the deception of man's own heart. It is no more; no less.

It is about this *mystery* (*this ugly rebellion of the flesh*) that you have been warned; it is against this *mystery* you are given access to God's empowerments that you might overcome; your fate hangs in gaining victory over this *mystery*. You either come out of *Mystery, Babylon the Great* or you perish therein.

Consider,

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the

flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. ²⁷⁰

You are to come out of the ***government of your flesh***. ²⁷¹ You can; you must. You can do what Jesus did: you can walk in the Spirit; you can live the way He lived. This is *the abundant life He came to give*. ²⁷² It is available to as many as will believe, receive, and walk therein.

About this, I shall speak at length in Part III of *The Oracle*. But first, we must complete the task before us. So far we have defined twelve of the fifteen words in the harlot's name. The last three, *Babylon the Great*, are also vital to your understanding, for it was not long after the parents' sin that the children quickly followed, once again over the matter of the *iniquity of disobedience*. Turn back to look at another sorry story,

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to

²⁷⁰ Romans 8:1-17. KJV

²⁷¹ *The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*: 1 John 2:16.

²⁷² John 10:10.

his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain,

Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where *is* Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: *Am* I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now *art* thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.²⁷³

It was clear: Abel brought the acceptable sacrifice, the blood, represented in the sacrifice of the animal—for *without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin*.²⁷⁴ But, instead of submitting to God's requirement,²⁷⁵ Cain brought an offering from the preference of *his own opinion*. Cain should have acknowledged his transgression and offered the appropriate sacrifice. But he did not. He wanted to approach God on his own terms. Instead of repenting and making it right, in the arrogance of assertive flesh, Cain persisted in religion his way. Therefore, he blamed his brother instead of himself, became furious, and murdered Abel.

Cain's rebellion and wickedness spread upon the earth. Even God's judgment of man through Noah was not enough to stem the tide. After the flood, as men began to multiply and expand across the earth, once again they chose their way instead of God's. They reasoned to establish themselves once for all. They built a city and a tower whose top was in the heavens to make a name unto themselves, for themselves, by themselves. They were more interested in lifting their name *before men* than *God*.

Again, *ideas from the flesh of man* offended God. He came down, judged their actions, confused their language, and scattered them over the earth. Therefore, the name of that location in Shinar was called Babel²⁷⁶ (*confusion*) because the Lord confused their language. In spite of God's obvious disapproval of Babel, later, in the treachery of the *flesh*, the wicked city Babylon was built on that very site.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ Genesis 4:1-12. KJV

²⁷⁴ Hebrews 9:1-28.

²⁷⁵ Implicit is the knowledge that the first men knew the mind of God on such matters, having learned them from Adam himself. And even if one debates this point, subsequent events clarify the matter once for all: that is, God made it clear to Cain what the appropriate offering was to be.

²⁷⁶ Babylon.

²⁷⁷ *Babylon* is the Greek; *Babel*, the Hebrew.

And so we close the discussion of **Part 2: Mystery, Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth**. We have seen that that *mystery* has been an atrocity plaguing man since Eve's disobedience. It resulted in the death of man's spirit ²⁷⁸ and the usurpation of rebellious, self-serving *flesh* that stinks in earth and heaven. Yet, except for the few who abide in Jesus in obedience to the Word, **the flesh** governs **all** of man's ideas and actions until today; and so it shall until the final fall of man at the end of the age.

Such *mystery*; such sadness.

And with this we move to **Babylon the Great**, the third part of the mystery. As we do, you will wince to see the ending of the rebellious collusions of the flesh of man.

The Mystery Unfolded: Part 3, Babylon the Great

Chapter eighteen begins with an astounding proclamation...

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities...And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come...Rejoice over her, *thou* heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. ²⁷⁹

Then the old man said,

It remains to differentiate between *Mystery Babylon* (the harlot) and *Babylon the Great* (the city), and to explain the double fall of the city, which clarification must come from the Word, in the context of immediate chapters, as supported by the rest of Scripture. As we undertake

²⁷⁸ Genesis 2:17.

²⁷⁹ Revelation 18, selected KJV verses.

the analysis, note the usage of different descriptors for *Babylon* between chapters seventeen and eighteen. In seventeen, *Babylon* is prefaced by the word, **Mystery**, but not in eighteen, for they are different,

The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, *Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.*

Some speculate that *Babylon* might be Rome, Jerusalem, or New York; but it is not some other city. It is ancient Babylon; and thus it is called. It is that old city whose vileness is so offensive to God that He mandated it be rebuilt, that it might fall again. You might live to see it become the festering center of the world's cesspool of rebellion against God—for its fornication goes all the way back to Nimrod, the mighty hunter of men's souls, who lived just after the flood of Noah's day.²⁸⁰

Note that the mighty angel who proclaims Babylon's double fall is one of such authority that the earth is **illuminated with His glory**. Not even the most magnificent and powerful angels radiate their **own** glory. They are God's servants, created to do His bidding. Yet, in this case, earth—the entire earth—is illuminated with **His** Glory. Who could this be but the Lord Jesus Christ? The judgment of the wicked city of Babylon is so important that God has His Mighty Son proclaim its double fall.²⁸¹ You see, unfulfilled prophecies yet await this cursed city; and not one word of prophecy shall fail, for *God is watching over His Word to perform it.*²⁸²

Look at two of six²⁸³ such prophecies.

Behold, **the Day of the Lord comes**, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. **I will punish the world** for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore, I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger. And **Babylon, the glory of kingdoms**, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. But wild beasts of

280 As expressed by Seiss, 388-9. But here I pause. Babylon of old has been rebuilt, a bit. The *beast* will use it for its throne. I now hold that New York City, USA, is the Babylon to be destroyed as set forth in Revelation 18.

281 This conclusion is not unique. Others, including Seiss, 407, hold the same view.

282 Jeremiah 1:12.

283 Isaiah 13:1-22; 14:3-27; 47:1-15; Jeremiah 25:12-38; 50:1-46; 51:1-64.

the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of owls; ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there. The hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces. ²⁸⁴

Here in Isaiah thirteen you see that the Lord appointed a second destruction of Babylon as part of the **Day of the Lord**, the time when He will punish all the world for its evil. This destruction of Babylon will be absolute, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never again be inhabited by men. Jeremiah warned the Jews over and over to repent and return to their God; but they did not. Therefore, God told them they would be enslaved by the Babylonians for seventy years, after which they would return to their land, and the Lord would punish Babylon. This prophecy carried a double meaning: it referred to ancient Babylon; and it transcended time and foretold *end time events*. Consider the prophet's words,

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the LORD'S hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me: *To wit*, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as *it is* this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; And all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon, And all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which *are* beyond the sea, Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all *that are* in the utmost corners, And all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, And all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which *are* upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. (shall drink **last**) ...

The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread *the grapes*, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come *even* to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh...²⁸⁵

The Lord is in controversy with the inhabitants of the earth. **The Day of the Lord** is an end time event, and the dreaded city of Babylon in the midst of it—singled out as the only city

284 Extractions from Isaiah 13:1-22. KJV

285 Extractions from Jeremiah 25:1-38. KJV

named, the very last to drink of the wine of the wrath of God. To fully appreciate the magnitude of Babylon's abominations, sins that are *the debased antithesis of holiness*, you must consider Heaven's closing perspective of God's judgment of Babylon's fornication, ²⁸⁶

And after these things [including the destruction of Babylon] I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, *Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.* And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

There will be great rejoicing in heaven when ***Babylon the Great*** receives its just punishment! Yet, the Word of God rings out,

Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

286 Revelation 19:1-6. KJV

The Day of the Lord

This is the grand finale of the *End Time Events*. And rightly, its focus is on the Glorious Son of God, for...

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

²⁸⁷

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. ²⁸⁸

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in *all things* he might have the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. ²⁸⁹

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the

²⁸⁷ Philippians 2:9-11. KJV

²⁸⁸ 2 Peter 3:8-14. KJV

²⁸⁹ Colossians 1:15-20. KJV

body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. ²⁹⁰

Seven events occur during the Day of the Lord.

Seven Events

1) Earth Reaped

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, *Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.* ²⁹¹

2) Grapes of Wrath Reaped

Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, *Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.* So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs. ²⁹²

3) Marriage Supper of the Lamb

After heaven exults because God *judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and avenges on her the blood of His servants shed by her*, the celebration is followed by the long-desired, marvelously anticipated hope of the ages for all the saints of God: The **Blessed Marriage Supper of Lamb**. No words can capture the glorious joy of that occasion. It will be a time of gentleness, love, and restoration. The wonderful, conquering Savior serves His beloved bride and they rejoice together. The labors and trials are ended;

²⁹⁰ Colossians 2:9-15. KJV

²⁹¹ Revelation 14:14-16. KJV

²⁹² Revelation 14:17-20. KJV

and begins eternal peace, love, and joy for the bride—it begins with this marvelous banquet. Scripture does not embellish it; nor shall I. The Word simply says,

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

And he saith unto me, Write, *Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.*

And he saith unto me, *These are the true sayings of God.* ²⁹³

And so, that glory belongs to those blessed ones called unto such honor.

4)The Millennial Reign

The Mighty Son of God is depicted in His Glory as He, accompanied by the armies of heaven, prepares to begin His Millennial Reign. Only divine revelation is adequate to describe His majesty...

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

293 Revelation 19:7-9. KJV

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which *sword* proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.²⁹⁴

Aspects of the Millennial Reign

The destruction of the rebellious armies is followed by considerable activity.²⁹⁵

The first regards Satan,

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

That a single angel could bind and cast the dragon into the bottomless pit speaks of the power of God. He commanded it to be done; and it was done by the power of His Word. There in the bottomless pit the devil remains for a thousand years, his evil influence removed from earth until the conclusion of the Millennial Reign.

And then,

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.²⁹⁶

There will be thrones, and those who sit upon the thrones in judgement. The passage does not say who they are who will sit on the thrones, except that they will be *those who had been given authority to judge*. But, you can observe that *those who sit upon the thrones* were

294 Revelation 19:11-21. KJV

295 Revelation 20:1-6. KJV

296 Revelation 20:4-6. KJV

seated thereupon, and then saw *the souls of those who had been beheaded...before they came back to life to reign with Christ*. But, those beheaded in the tribulation have a marvelous testimony. Observe who they are and where they come from. They were *in* the Great Tribulation; and within it, they were faithful witnesses to Jesus and to the Word of God; they were beheaded because they would not worship the beast or his image, nor receive his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. That *is* who they are. And, because these *Saints* are faithful until death, they are highly honored by the Lord, and assigned to *Reign with Him during the Millennial Reign*.

What is not explained *here* is why these saints are in the tribulation.²⁹⁷ When we discussed the opening of the fifth seal, we noted that the Lord told the fifth-seal martyrs *that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, would be killed as they were*. How wonderful and wise is God. He knew that more of His children were to suffer; and He also knew that they would reap eternal rewards for their suffering.

Not only does the passage say that those martyrs will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years, but it also defines that *theirs* is the **first resurrection**. But, the passage is silent about the other martyrs who died for their faith in the annals of history, believers who lived and died before the tribulation period, those to whom the Lord spoke at the opening of the fifth seal. It may be that they are included in those reigning during the Millennial period, but if so, that point is not revealed in this passage.²⁹⁸

These Martyrs (also called *priests of God and of Christ*) will not only reign with Him, but they are also beyond the reach of the second death.²⁹⁹ The rest of the dead (all of the rest of the dead, good or evil) do not live again until the end of the Millennial reign.

5) Satanic Rebellion Crushed

After the thousand years of the Millennial Reign, an amazing spectacle follows: Satan is released from the bottomless pit and **deceives all nations**, nations which had been under the personal rule of the Mighty Son of God for a thousand years. Yet, once again they join the devil in his folly, and surround (with the intent of destroying) the camp of the saints and the beloved city. But fire comes down from God and devours them. Then the devil is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet are, and together, they will be tormented forever.³⁰⁰

And so, we come to the last two events of the Day of the Lord.

²⁹⁷ But, Daniel provides additional information. Daniel 11:35; 12:10.

²⁹⁸ And, there are those who are mentioned as overcomers as set forth in Revelation 2:26-28.

²⁹⁹ Revelation 20:1-6.

³⁰⁰ Revelation 20:7-10.

6) The Great White Throne Judgment ³⁰¹

The good and evil of mankind are gathered from death in preparation for the Great White Throne Judgment, where they will stand before the Majestic One Who sits upon the throne. Before we look at the judgment scene itself, we ought to first recognize and honor Him *from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away*. This is another amazing event in the *Day of the Lord*, and the Great One Who sits on the throne is Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Consider,

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. ³⁰²

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. ³⁰³

Thus, Scripture reports: *God has appointed a day when He will judge the world by the Man whom He ordained; and He gave assurance of it by raising this Man (Jesus Christ) from the dead.* He did this so that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

³⁰¹ Many will flinch when they read this section, for it is not what they have been taught. But, if they read it for what it says, they will understand that *it means what it says, not what they have been taught.*

³⁰² John 5:19-30. KJV

³⁰³ Acts 17:30-31. KJV

This affirmation of the Lord Jesus being the Majestic Judge sitting on the Great White Throne, also explains another passage, one that is often referred to as the *Bema Seat Judgment* of Christ.

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...³⁰⁴

Here then, at the Great White Throne, we have the fulfillment of Paul's teaching of the Corinthians, for it is there, in great terror, every man will receive his reward, whether good or bad, depending on what he has done. There are not two judgment seats; there is but one; and upon that throne sits the One God has highly exalted and given a name above every other name—because He is worthy.

With this background, let us now turn to the Great White Throne Judgment.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, ³⁰⁵ from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, ³⁰⁶ stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. ³⁰⁷

All the dead will stand before the White Throne, and the books will be opened and the *dead will be judged according to their works by the things written in the books*. And the *Book of Life* will be there, and anyone not found written in it will be cast into the lake of fire. *And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord. And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.* ³⁰⁸ The lake of fire, and in it the corpses of those who transgressed against God, can be seen from outside

304 2 Corinthians 5:9-11. KJV

305; Acts 17:30-31.

306 Revelation 20:4-6.

307 Revelation 20:11-15. KJV

308 Isaiah 66:23-24; Revelation 22:14-15.

the gates—a somber, eternal reminder: such is the fate of all who rebel against God. Do not do so, in whatever age or however long you may live.

7) First Heavens and Earth Destroyed

The final act performed by the Great Lord Jesus on His Day, the *Day of the Lord*, is the destruction of the existing heavens (universe) and earth, for they will have served their purpose.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Seeing then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.³⁰⁹

And so it shall be.

All Things Made New³¹⁰

Next, John saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. He saw New Jerusalem coming from heaven as *the tabernacle of God, and God Himself will be with them and be their God*. But John saw no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple... and the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Eternity Begins³¹¹

After these things, you see a pure river of *water of life, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb*, and the *tree of life* that, among other things, provides leaves *for the healing of the nations*. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him, see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. And they shall reign forever and

³⁰⁹ 2 Peter 3:10-13. KJV

³¹⁰ Revelation 21:1-27.

³¹¹ Extracted from Revelation 22:1-21.

ever. Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

The old man paused, then said,

The goal is to understand these things that you might obey them. Hopefully, by now you realize God's Word says what it means and means what it says. Carefully read its words, sentences, and paragraphs; think about what they say; believe and obey them; know that the Holy Spirit will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that Jesus said to you.³¹² If you do these things, you will learn to obey and please your Lord, and then, be able to teach others.³¹³

He stopped. There was nothing left to say.

If ever there was a warning to heed what the Spirit says to the churches, we'd just heard it.

Then Poka said,

Such is an overview of the *Things of the End*, things you must understand and obey. But, there is only one way to do that: His Way. That way, the ***Lost Way of the Word***, and that is discussed in **Part III, *Return to the Beginning***.

³¹² John 14:26; 7:16-17; 8:31-32.

³¹³ Matthew 5:17-20; Revelation 1:3.

Part III: Return to the Beginning

God created heaven, earth, and all things. In His wisdom, He proclaimed those of His thoughts He chose to share with mankind, saying

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. ³¹⁴

He also revealed that His Word is

...quick, [living] and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ³¹⁵

Study His majestic Word (in the presence of the Holy Spirit); understand it (by the Spirit's help); believe it (by the faith that comes ³¹⁶ from meditating in the Word); and obey it (unto pleasing God).

Within the brilliance of God's Word is His purpose for creating man: from *the many* ³¹⁷ who are called He will choose *the few* to constitute His eternal family. These He empowers to: overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil; walk in perfection before Him, abiding in Christ, being full of, and walking in, the Holy Spirit; and in obedience to His Word, bearing much fruit.

Chapter seven identifies God's empowerments and discusses the Spirit World in which they operate. Chapter eight focuses them in all-important victorious living in God's Spirit and power.

I urge you to apply maximum effort to understand and do these things.

³¹⁴ Isaiah 55:8-11. KJV

³¹⁵ Hebrews 4:12. KJV Further description of God's Marvelous Word is provided in Part V, Supplement 2.

³¹⁶ Faith comes by hearing, and hearing, by the Word of God. Romans 10:17.

³¹⁷ Matthew 22:1-14. The who are chosen will be the ones who hear and obey His Word.

Chapter 7

Spirit Life

Christ in You

Spirit Life includes *Rebirth*; *Abiding in Christ*; *Walking in the Spirit*; and *Bearing Fruit*.³¹⁸ Study these marvelous things which begin with the revelation of a mystery that had been *hidden through all the ages and generations of men, until, in the fullness of time, revealed to God's apostles*.³¹⁹ That mystery is **Christ in You**. In Christ, *mystery* becomes *reality*. For the first time since the fall,³²⁰ the consummate closure of life—oneness with God—can be attained. It is being home, finally, in the heart and love and nurture of Father God; it is being filled with all His fullness; it is being transformed into eternal spiritual state while living still in transient mortality; it is the greatest privilege ever given mortal man. It is

Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Jesus' blood atones for sin and unites the believer (*via rebirth*) with God, for in His sacrifice sinners are saved, and by His blood they are continually restored.³²¹ At forgiveness and restoration, the great mystery becomes certainty. Believers receive the Spirit of Christ: their spirits³²² are reborn in the power of life *in Jesus*.³²³ They are new creations as He permeates their being: *old things pass away; behold, all things become new, and all things are of God...*³²⁴ Such magnificent indwelling is **the** wonder of wonders: The Living God, in glory and power, takes residence in new believers! They discover the exhilaration of life **in** (within) **Christ**: the joy of being in Him, and He in them. They delight to do the things that please Him,³²⁵ for His Word is not only their command, it is their joy.³²⁶

318 John 3:1-21; 15:1-8; Romans 8:1-17.

319 Colossians 1:26-27.

320 Genesis 2:4-3:24.

321 1 John 1:8-9.

322 Man's spirit died in Adam's transgression. It was reborn in Jesus' victory.

323 John 14:6, I am the way, the truth, and the life (*the power of eternal life!*) He is the Restorer of life to man's spirit.

324 2 Corinthians 5:17.

325 Ephesians 4:8-10; Colossians 1:9-11.

326 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:4; Hebrews 11:6; 1 John 4:2-3.

Jesus said a man must be *born* naturally and *reborn* (his *spirit* must be re-birthed back into life from the dead ³²⁷) to see the kingdom of God. ³²⁸ The Bible teaches the only way for *rebirth* is to believe in Jesus as Savior, for it is in the confession of His Name that power flows into man and he is *born again* by the power of God. ³²⁹ This is vital, for Jesus said ³³⁰ His Father seeks *true worshipers to worship Him in spirit and truth, for God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*. Imagine the blessing: **Father God** seeks men and women to worship Him! How wonderful! Imagine coming into God's presence to venerate Him, for He *is great, and greatly to be praised!* ³³¹

Thus, Jesus transforms repentant ones into quickened *spirits*. *Christ in you* initiates *Spirit Life*, which is followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To this end, before He returned to His Father, the Lord told His disciples *one thing* remained. We shall now look at that *one thing*. Before Jesus departed from His disciples, He said

***Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you;
but tarry in the city until you are endued with power from on high.*** ^{332, 333}

Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

You see, they were incomplete. They had to be *endued with power from on high*, for without spiritual power they could not be victorious in the *Spirit World*. Astonishingly, as this was true for His disciples, and all men, so it was for the Lord Jesus during the brief time He lived as *man*. ³³⁴ This is demonstrated in the astounding verse: *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, Who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.* ³³⁵ To understand this text is to realize that Jesus did those marvelous things *because* God was *with* and *anointed* Him in the Holy Spirit and power. To utter the unthinkable: Jesus *had to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and power* to do the things He did because—for a *thirty-three-and-one-half-year blip in eternity*—the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself, Eternal Creator and Son of God, was **just a man!** He *emptied Himself of all but love*, ³³⁶ *made Himself of no reputation, took the form of a bondservant, and came in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled*

³²⁷ God said if Adam disobeyed, he would die: Adam disobeyed, hence something died. And since his body lived on, it was his spirit that died. (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-19) Jesus affirmed this when He said, *You must be reborn*; that is, your spirit must be born again.

³²⁸ John 3:3-8.

³²⁹ John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 3:20-21.

³³⁰ In the progression of the Gospel of John, John 4:21-24, immediately follows His conversation with Nicodemus.

³³¹ 1 Chronicles 16:25; Psalm 48:1; 96:4; 145:3.

³³² Luke 24:49.

³³³ In doing so, He fulfilled the ancient promise of Joel 2:28-29.

³³⁴ Luke 3:21-22; 4:1.

³³⁵ Acts 10:38.

³³⁶ This truth was expressed in the song, *And Can It Be that I should Gain?* by Charles Wesley (*Psalms and Hymns*, published in 1738). In the third verse, the following wonderful words reflect Wesley's understanding of the matter: *He left His Father's throne above so free, so infinite His grace—Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race: 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me! 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me!*

Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ³³⁷ His was a complete emptying:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on *him the nature of angels*; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted. ³³⁸

He became the *Son of Man*! For thirty-three years He was a man. Yes, He sprung from God, ³³⁹ not Adam; yes, He was the Son of God; even so, He was a man. He *had* to be *a man* to overcome sin *as a man* and to offer Himself as a holy, innocent, living sacrifice *as a man*. Thus, when the devil murdered that *innocent man*, he transgressed the Law, and *salvation* and *eternal life* were won back *for man* by the Mighty Lamb of God. ³⁴⁰

However, during that period, He Who had laid down His Godhood ***had to receive power from His God and Father***, for as a man, ***He did not have supernatural power!*** It had to be given by God, and it came in the anointing of the Spirit as John preached in the wilderness. ³⁴¹ It was not until after His baptism in the Spirit ³⁴² that His ministry began; and what a ministry it was. Never before had men seen such signs and wonders. It was marvelous.

His disciples walked with, watched, and talked with Him through it all, and, from time to time, even healed the sick and cast out demons themselves. ³⁴³ Yet, Jesus said they needed one thing more: they needed ***power from on high***. They needed the power of the Holy Spirit exactly as Jesus did. For that reason, He commanded them to *Tarry in the city until they were endued with power from on high... for they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them; and then they would be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* ³⁴⁴

Thus, the first disciples tarried *in one accord in prayer and supplication until the Holy Spirit came.* ³⁴⁵ And when He, the Holy Spirit, came, ***He changed everything!*** He was with, and in, them. Their hearts overflowed with *His love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness,*

³³⁷ Philippians 2:7-8.

³³⁸ Hebrews 2:14-18. KJV

³³⁹ Luke 1:26-38.

³⁴⁰ Hebrews 2:9-18.

³⁴¹ Matthew 3:1, 13-17.

³⁴² And the temptation in the wilderness. Matthew 4:1-11.

³⁴³ Matthew 10:1-15; Luke 10:1-20.

³⁴⁴ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5-8.

³⁴⁵ Luke 24:49.

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. ³⁴⁶ They shared joy beyond anything the world had ever seen. They were changed by the power of His presence with, and in, them. The book of Acts documents that marvelous outpouring.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. ³⁴⁷

They did not live that way before He came; they could not, for the power that engenders that kind of love transcends the capability of man. From time to time throughout the history of the church, *some* have come to understand that *what the first believers did was the first works*. Accordingly, *these* decided to emulate them (*the first church*). It seemed to be a *good idea*, but it was quickly abandoned by the *enthusiasts*, who concluded that such living was impossible. And they were partially right. It was/is impossible to duplicate the *first works* by the efforts of the *natural man*. *They* failed, not because *they* tried to *keep the traditions* (*they* were right to try) but because *they* did not go all the way back to the starting point. *They* did not begin where the *first believers* began. The only way to walk this walk is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, for He is the only way to live in the harmony of *first love* and *first works*—exactly as it was (for a season) in the *first church*, for in the beginning they were *of a different Spirit*. They were of the Spirit of God. He had come. He was in them! There was no doubt about it. They found themselves to be as He was, and in His mighty presence they loved and served one another with love beyond human capability: they loved with the heart of God. How could they not? As He is a selfless, giving God, so they could not help but be selfless and giving. He, the Spirit of God, made all the difference—for He *is all the difference*. He was the love and power of God dwelling in the midst of His children.

In Him, there was a period of great joy and growth. Thousands witnessed the changes, saw the mighty miracles flowing through the apostles, realized their own desperate need for right-standing with God, and were added to the church daily. Others watched in amazement and approval as *The Way of the God of the Word* transitioned into a loving, caring, giving, protected-by-God society, which turned out (in all of history) to be man's greatest demonstration of the future kingdom of God. They were reborn into a renewed, regenerated environment not experienced on earth since the fall from righteousness in the garden four thousand years before. Their spirits were reborn and they were empowered to become

³⁴⁶ Galatians 5:22-23.

³⁴⁷ Acts 2:42-47. NASB

children of God and live victoriously *in the spirit* in which they finally gained admittance. They were no longer hopelessly, haplessly bound by sin and destined to defeat and darkness, for *Life* and *Light* appeared in their midst, walked among them, and was *in them*.³⁴⁸ His fragrance and power were beautiful to behold, and marvelous to receive.

The essence of these spiritual activities was/is³⁴⁹ that *...it is to your advantage that Jesus went back to His Father, for then the Holy Spirit will dwell with and be in you... teach you all things... bring to your remembrance all things Jesus said to you... guide you into all truth... tell you things to come... glorify Jesus... bring power... fill you... give gifts of the Spirit... empower prophesy, visions, dreams, boldness... activate signs and wonders in the name of Jesus*. But, these things only occur **after** the Holy Spirit is poured out, for it is only *in the Spirit* that saints can live in *spirit life*. True two thousand years ago, so it is today. However, *Spirit Life* is *less than a whisper* **unless** believers are filled with and walking in the Holy Spirit. However, when He is poured out there is life and power, signs and wonders, love and works. If these are not abundant, you have not the Spirit; without whom there is but a *form of godliness, yet a denying of the power thereof*.³⁵⁰

Unto this point, we have seen that *Spirit Life* begins with rebirth, which is followed by the indwelling Christ, which is followed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which is followed by the *First Love and First Works* that characterize *Walking in the Spirit*.

We are now ready to look in more detail at what it means to *Walk in the Spirit*, or perhaps, a broader term, *Spirit Life*. As we turn to these things, you will see that there are seven elements to *Spirit Life*.

Seven Elements of Spirit Life

While these elements are seamlessly integrated when *walking in the Spirit*, they can be broken out for study. They include: 1) Filled with the Spirit; 2) Spirit-revealed Word; 3) Gifts of the Spirit; 4) Pray/Sing in the Spirit; 5) Fruit of the Spirit; 6) Armor of God; and 7) Spirit Warfare.

1) Filled with Spirit and Power—Not only did the Holy Spirit hover over the *waters at Creation*,³⁵¹ He also moved upon men throughout history. Scripture records many such events. Numerous passages³⁵² provide OT examples of Spirit-empowered leaders, artisans, prophets, judges, and men and women accomplished many feats, including mighty

³⁴⁸ John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-10.

³⁴⁹ And others, including: John 14:16-18, 26; 16:5-15; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:1-7; 2:1-4, 14-21; 4:23-35; Romans 5:5; 15:13-21; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 6:19; 12:1-14:40; 2 Corinthians 13:11-14; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 1:13-23; 2:22; 3:5, 14-21; 4:4, 17-32; 5:1-21; 6:10-20; Philippians 2:1; 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 4:8; Colossians 1:8; and, there are others.

³⁵⁰ 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

³⁵¹ Genesis 1:2.

³⁵² See Exodus 31:3; 36:1-39:43; Numbers 11:17, 25; 27:18; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 14:5-6, 19; 1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Samuel 23:1-2; 2 Kings 2:9; 1 Chronicles 28:12; 2 Chronicles 21:16; Nehemiah 9:20, 30; Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10-12; Ezekiel 2:2; 11:1-25; 36:26-7; 37:14; Joel 2:28-9; Micah 3:8; Haggai 2:5; Zechariah 4:6; 7:12.

miracles. Hebrews eleven lists some of their works. Yet, ...*all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided **something better for us**, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*³⁵³

That *something better*, was ...*going about in the power of the Spirit, doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*³⁵⁴ Jesus' mighty acts were followed by those of the apostles who received power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they went about in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God to fully preach the gospel of Christ.³⁵⁵ Their speech and preaching was not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.³⁵⁶ For their gospel did not come in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.³⁵⁷ And before the apostles passed on, they exhorted the next generation to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.³⁵⁸

2) Spirit-revealed Word—The Word and wisdom of God is a mystery to fallen man, for no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God...*for the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*³⁵⁹ Therefore, Jesus told His disciples,

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you...I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.³⁶⁰

353 Hebrews 11:1-40, sel.

354 Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38.

355 Romans 15:18-9.

356 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

357 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

358 2 Timothy 1:7.

359 1 Corinthians 1:6-16.

360 John 14:16-18, 26; 16:5-15. NASB

Hence the imperative to receive the *fullness of the Spirit*, for He alone is the Revealer of the truth of God. Embrace Him with great joy for the gifts He gives and the power He brings; with great resolve, walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the very thing we now address.

3) Gifts of the Spirit—Gifts given by the Holy Spirit are as delightful as *eyes to a blind man*, for they open the *spirit realm*. First Corinthians chapters twelve through fourteen summarize the *nine spiritual gifts* as they appear in the life of the church throughout Acts and the Epistles. Keep in mind that the gifts of the Spirit are indeed **gifts of the Spirit** that operate *above* the capabilities (and talents) of natural man. They do not originate from training; they cannot be *studied up*. They are *supernatural revelation/power* from the Holy Spirit that is otherwise inaccessible. Consider: *But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.*³⁶¹ Do you see? God alone knows the unknowable; yet by gifts of the Spirit He reveals such matters as He deems appropriate for the church. The Spirit's gifts are vital for victorious, overcoming life, and the church is instructed two separate times to earnestly desire (covet) them.³⁶²

Chapter twelve of 1 Corinthians describes the background for spiritual gifts.³⁶³ Note that while Father, Son, and Spirit all have active roles in the work, it is the Holy Spirit Who distributes His gifts *as He chooses*. The chapter emphasizes that every member of the body is important, is to be recognized as such *by all*, and has gifts distributed to him/her as the Spirit desires. The chapter identifies nine gifts, including: 1) word of wisdom; 2) word of knowledge; 3) faith; 4) gifts of healings; 5) working of miracles; 6) prophecy; 7) discerning of spirits; 8) different kinds of tongues; and 9) interpretation of tongues. These gifts operate in the *spirit realm* and are above the physical world and the abilities/ perceptions of natural man. That is, you cannot know/do the things encompassed by these nine gifts except by the power of the Holy Spirit.

At the end of chapter twelve Paul adds,

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

³⁶² 1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1.

³⁶³ 1 Corinthians 12:1-26.

³⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:27-31. NASB

Paul is discussing the body of Christ, and reviewing the gifts and ministries given to it. To promote recognition and acceptance *for each member of the body*, the Spirit distributes gifts to each one as He sees fit. Paul reiterates that not every believer receives the **gift** of *healings*, or the **gift** of *speaking a message in tongues*, or the **gift** of *interpreting the message*. No, the **gifts** are distributed to the body as determined by the Holy Spirit.

Chapter thirteen explains that the *government of love* is the framework for life in God. In the chapter, Paul restrained and guided over-zealous Corinthians (and those who follow in their train) in their pursuit of spiritual gifts, especially a misplaced emphasis on *tongues*. The chapter is clear: love is foremost, for it is the governing principle. Even so, chapter thirteen does not demean any of the nine gifts (How could it, for they are all from God?). While the text points out that *prophecies, tongues, knowledge of all mysteries* (and, by implication, all other gifts) will ultimately cease, the timing of their cessation is very clear in the text: the gifts will cease *when that which is perfect has come; when men no longer see dimly as in a mirror; when believers see their blessed Lord face to face; when they know Jesus just as they are known*—in other words, as Paul explained,

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.³⁶⁵

It is ***then***—when we *know as we are known*—that we shall not need gifts of the Spirit. But ***until that moment***, we desperately need gifts of healings, miracles, discernment of spirits, knowledge, prophecy, and messages in tongues and the interpretation of those messages.

Again, in chapter fourteen, the church is exhorted to *earnestly desire* and *walk in* the gifts.³⁶⁶ Indeed, the message is clear: edify the body in love (through prophecy); yet, also earnestly desire the other eight, for they, too, are given by the Holy Spirit for the common good, without which there is a dearth of spiritual insight and spiritual power.

Paul also addresses the order of conduct in meetings, but as you see, those early meetings were robust and alive with the ministry of the Spirit through His giftings to the entire body.

What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

³⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. NASB

³⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.³⁶⁷

They were urged to seek the gifts and to participate in sharing them with the body, that they might all learn and be exhorted. You might ask what things were they to learn? Surely it included: 1) the content of the various revelations; 2) the discipline of utilization and sharing of the gifts in peace and order in the church; and, perhaps most importantly; 3) how to recognize the presence, anointing, and voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to and through them. What a blessed thing it is to know the voice of God. Keep in mind, Jesus said,

To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. "A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."³⁶⁸

So it was in those early days: the church walked in the gifts of the Spirit; as, indeed, it should today.

4) Pray/Sing in the Spirit—*Praying/singing* in the Spirit is similar to the gift of *speaking a message in tongues*, with a different, important purpose of its own. Paul explained this in chapter fourteen, saying,

Therefore, let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I **pray** in a tongue, my **spirit** prays, but my mind [understanding] is unfruitful. What is *the outcome* then? I will **pray** with the spirit and I will **pray** with the mind also; I will **sing** with the spirit and I will **sing** with the mind also.³⁶⁹

He:

1. Distinguishes usage between *speaking* in a tongue and *praying* in a tongue—wherein *speaking* conveys a message (either to God or, if interpreted, to man), while *praying* is intercession;
2. Also, note his synonymic use of *praying in a tongue* and *praying in the Spirit*—for they are one and the same. In other words, when Scripture uses the expression *praying in the Spirit*, it is saying the same thing as *praying in tongues*; and finally,

³⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:23-33. NASB

³⁶⁸ John 10:3-5. NASB

³⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:13-15. NASB

3. Note the difference between *praying with the understanding* (the mind) and *praying with the Spirit*. Praying with *understanding* is praying to God in the natural mind; *praying in the Spirit* is praying to God in *tongues*. Both are vital and are to be practiced by all believers.

Comprehending these things is critical to understanding the counsel of the Word on *spiritual praying*, which you will see is so vital to *Spirit Warfare* as discussed in element seven.³⁷⁰ Grasp that, to Paul, *praying (and singing) in a tongue* is synonymous with *praying (and singing) in the Spirit*; and *praying in the Spirit* is different than *praying with understanding*.

Further, Paul practiced these different types of prayer and praise himself, and exhorted the church to do the same. It is so important that Paul thanked God he *spoke in tongues more than all*, for he knew that to *pray in tongues* was to *pray* directly to God with *Spirit-empowered praying* more direct and powerful than man's efforts to pray with understanding. Such was the manner of the apostles and the early church,³⁷¹ with numerous references in the epistles—which you are commanded to emulate.³⁷²

Paul revealed a final truth about praying in the Spirit: the *Spirit also helps in our weaknesses*. *For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings*³⁷³ *which cannot be uttered*. *Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God*. Do you see? Not only do we *pray in in the spirit* by the unction of the Holy Spirit, but there are times when He Himself prays *Spirit prayers* for/through us when matters are too grave for us to overcome due to our weaknesses.

This wonderful battery of spiritual power must be understood, earnestly sought, and applied in the warfare against a ferocious enemy! This *spiritual phenomenon* was common in the early churches.³⁷⁴

370 See, for example, Ephesians 6:18, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...

371 Galatians 2:1-10. Paul conferred with the other apostles about the *Gospel he preached*. They added/deleted nothing; asked only that he remember the poor; and gave him the right hand of fellowship: *Paul to the Gentiles; Peter to the Jews*. Also see Acts 10:1-48, and especially verses 44-48, where these things happened in Peter's ongoing ministry.

372 For example, Ephesians 6:17-20; Jude 20; Romans 8:12-27; Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16.

373 Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence, The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994) 575-586. Fee offers insight on this passage, in which he concludes this reference is, in fact, *praying in the Spirit*, which, according to Fee, *was the common, everyday experience of the early churches*.

374 Fee, 585, makes a striking point. Countering those who argued that *speaking, praying, and singing in the Spirit* were not common (*because of silence about it in other Pauline letters*), Fee pointed out that, using that logic, one could equally say that the early churches had abandoned the *Lord's Table*, because there was no discussion of it in the epistles (except for 1 Corinthians eleven) where it was included because of mistakes being made by the Corinthians. But, of course, that was untrue. All the churches celebrated the *Lord's Table*. It was so much a part of their faith that there was no need to mention it in the letters. And so it was, Fee reasoned, concerning *tongues*.

5) Fruit of the Spirit—Thus we come to the fifth partition of *Spirit Life*, the *Fruit of the Spirit*. A beloved text has it that,

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ³⁷⁵

To walk in the Spirit in these nine fruits, is to walk as Jesus walked. But, understand: these are the **fruit** of the **Spirit**. That is, they are the *Spirit's fruit*, not the fruit of the will/self-discipline of man. No! Every believer must *be in Spirit*, not the *natural man*! This is what Jesus means in John fifteen when He says,

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ³⁷⁶ You must be *in Jesus in Spirit* before you can manifest the fruit of the Spirit, for there is no other way to reflect the nature of Jesus. After all:

1) Who can **Love** God and man in the fullness of *agape love of God* except *in the Spirit*;

2) Who can manifest **joy** in the midst of torment and suffering unless in his spirit he is *strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy*; ³⁷⁷

3) Who can live in **peace** in the midst of the storms of life lest he be *in the Spirit*;

4) Who is **longsuffering**, full of **kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness**, and **self-control**—unless he is *full of and walking in the Spirit*?

Indeed, you must be *in the Spirit* to **be** these things!

6) Armor of God—Elements six and seven of *Spirit Life* include the *Armor of God* and *Spirit Warfare*. These are seamlessly integrated in the words: *be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; put on the whole armor of God; stand therein; take the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God; wrestle with all perseverance and supplication* (for saints and kingdom) *in praying in the Spirit* (tongues). ³⁷⁸ This tightly woven argument summons believers to war against *spiritual powers in high places*. Do not think it unfair that weak saints are called to such *high conflict*, for the weapons of wickedness cannot prevail against the *armor of God*.

³⁷⁵ Galatians 5:22-26.

³⁷⁶ John 15:4-5. NASB

³⁷⁷ Colossians 1:10-12.

³⁷⁸ See Fee's marvelous analysis, 726-733.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. ³⁷⁹

Even so, do not misunderstand: mighty spirit beings, with real weapons of destruction, are in the enemy camp. It is just that their weapons cannot penetrate God's armor, unless there is a breach. ³⁸⁰ But, therein, is the weakness. The enemy's arsenal includes weapons such as you might not suppose. You see, with subtleties and lies the ancient adversary has cunningly exploited man's weakness from the initial deception of Eve until this day. All saints are tempted, even as the Lord, Himself, was tempted, ³⁸¹ yet, He, without sin. You, too, can be filled with and led by the same Holy Spirit as Jesus was; you, too, can understand and obey the same Scripture; you, too, can be victorious. However, to be an overcomer, you must walk above fleshly lusts and worldly allurements. Those things must be put (and kept) beneath your feet! Doing that is a choice you can, and must, make.

...Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

³⁷⁹ Ephesians 6:10-20. NASB

³⁸⁰ Here you may recognize the *Hedge of Righteousness*. (See Part V: Supplement 5).

³⁸¹ Matthew 4:1-11.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ³⁸²

In addressing the *Armor of God*, be mindful of: The marvel of God's creative power in forging such magnificent weaponry; His generosity in giving believers the ***right*** to choose to arm themselves therewith; and the somber accountability upon each believer to ***obey and walk*** in these things. For, who but God could have foreseen the need for such marvelous weaponry; who but He could have fashioned its design and glory. Contemplate His generosity as He gives saints the freedom to choose to arm themselves with such priceless armor. But, know this: without His armor, no one overcomes; without overcoming, one is excluded from God's promises to overcomers! Reread Revelation chapters two and three to see that every believer and every church in history is tasked to overcome those things recorded therein.

Note the pitfalls; avoid them; seek your portion of the seven rewards itemized therein (and set forth here for your convenience),

1) I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. ³⁸³

2) He shall not be hurt by the second death. ³⁸⁴

3) I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. ³⁸⁵

4) ...and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; THEY SHALL BE DASHED TO PIECES LIKE THE POTTER'S VESSELS—as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. ³⁸⁶

5) He shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. ³⁸⁷

6) I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the

382 Galatians 5:16-25. NASB

383 Revelation 2:7.

384 Revelation 2:11.

385 Revelation 2:17.

386 Revelation 2:26-28.

387 Revelation 3:5.

New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. ³⁸⁸

7) I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ³⁸⁹

The Lord outlined the trials to befall the church, and the rewards for those who overcome the trials. All churches and all saints throughout the history of the church ³⁹⁰ will be tested in the crucible of those challenges. No *apologist* can excuse himself or anyone else. All works will be tested therein. ³⁹¹ Each one chooses victory, or not.

With that introduction, let us turn to the armor of God: 1) Loins Girt in Truth; 2) Breastplate of Righteousness; 3) Helmet of Salvation; 4) Gospel of Peace; 5) Sword of the Spirit; 6) Shield of Faith; 7) Praying in the Spirit. These are the very characteristics of God. Jesus is *Truth*; ³⁹² *Righteousness*; ³⁹³ *Salvation*; ³⁹⁴ *Peace*; ³⁹⁵ *Sword*; ³⁹⁶ and *Shield*. ³⁹⁷ Remember, the Holy Spirit is the source and power of *Praying in the Spirit*. ³⁹⁸ Indeed, the weaponry is, in fact, the *might of God* empowering mortal men with armor greater than that possessed by the devil. Do you see? Jesus, ***being these things Himself***, brings them with Him into those *who hear His voice and open the door of their hearts unto Him*. ³⁹⁹ He comes into believers, one by one, in the glorious power and majesty that He is—and they become *new creations*! Thus, Under the *Shadow of His Wings* ⁴⁰⁰ God's covering is provided to His beloved saints. They need only to understand, obey, and walk in these things in the Spirit of Christ.

Further, the Lord raises up and appoints apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers, and elders/overseers ⁴⁰¹ to shepherd His sheep in these things. Yet, even though He is the Head of the church, and even though (in a biblical church) plural elders tenderly shepherd the lambs in the things of the Spirit, one thing remains. And it is an overriding constraint. The individual is responsible for himself in this matter. It is the privilege and responsibility of each person to choose the *Armor of God*. Each is responsible for his part in the partnership. No matter what God has put in place, no matter how effectively the

³⁸⁸ Revelation 3:12.

³⁸⁹ Revelation 3:19-21.

³⁹⁰ Discussed in the *Fall of the Church*.

³⁹¹ Revelation 20:11-12.

³⁹² Jesus is Truth: John 14:6.

³⁹³ Jesus is Righteousness: Hebrews 1:8; 7:2.

³⁹⁴ Jesus is the Horn of Salvation: Luke 1:69.

³⁹⁵ Jesus is Peace: John 14:27; Acts 10:36; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14.

³⁹⁶ Jesus is the Sword, in that He is the Word of God; the Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit; therefore, He is the Sword. John 1:1. The power of that Sword is demonstrated when He destroys with *the Sword of His mouth* all the armies of earth gathered by the Beast to make war against Him (Revelation 19:11-21, especially 21).

³⁹⁷ Jesus is the Shield: Psalm 91:4; Romans 10:17; Galatians 2:16, 20; 3:22; Revelation 14:12.

³⁹⁸ As shown in Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 6, etcetera.

³⁹⁹ Revelation 3:20.

⁴⁰⁰ Psalm 91:1-16.

⁴⁰¹ The Lord Jesus raises these up to protect, teach, and nurture the church. Ephesians 4:11-12; Acts 20:17-32.

overseers minister, if any man decides to live according to the flesh, he removes himself from the blessing of these things. If he chooses to shun God's call to holiness, if he chooses, rather, to wallow in sin, he takes himself out from under the *hedge of righteousness* and there is nothing that will be done for him until (and unless) he repents and returns to seek the Lord with all his heart. It is a choice. God has done his part. What will men do?

7) Spirit Warfare—This brings us to *Spirit Warfare*. During this dispensation ⁴⁰² men are constrained to the physical realm. ⁴⁰³ Therefore, God provides spiritual insight and empowerment to know His Word, enter His army, and participate in Him in the *warfare*. Before looking at man's role in the *conflict*, take a look at the nature of the participants in the war itself, ⁴⁰⁴ for they are fearsome heavenly beings. One example is the mighty angel that struck Israel when God was angry with them and through Satan moved David to number the people. ⁴⁰⁵ David and others saw the angel standing between earth and heaven, having his sword drawn to destroy those who lived in Jerusalem. And David was terrified by that mighty sword.

Another wondrous instance is depicted in Daniel chapters ten through twelve, wherein a mighty angel appeared to Daniel and told him of end time events. He also provided insight into the spirit realm. He told Daniel that he was sent at the beginning of Daniel's twenty-one day fast, but that he was withstood by the princes of Persia, powerful beings that war against the will of God. Those beings were so mighty that they prevented his passage until Michael, the great Archangel had to come to his assistance. Further, he reported that he was going to return to fight against the prince of Persia, and after that, the prince of Greece. Finally, he said two other things: 1) No one upheld him in these things except Michael; and 2) that this great visitor had also been assigned, in the first year of Darius the Mede, to be an encouragement and a protection for Darius.

We see in Daniel's testimony a visitor of such magnificence that Daniel's companions fled in terror; and Daniel passed out in fear. Yet, he was but another of the mighty beings revealed in the discourse. You also read about *kings of Persia*, the *prince of Greece*, and *Michael*, the great prince of Israel.

Consider a final picture,

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and

⁴⁰² This dispensation, that is, this time in the unfolding of the plan of God as reported in the Bible.

⁴⁰³ In and of themselves, that is, which the gifts of the Spirit are so essential.

⁴⁰⁴ Our insight comes from the only acceptable source: The Word of God.

⁴⁰⁵ 2 Samuel 24:1-25; 1 Chronicles 21:1-30.

Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ⁴⁰⁶

War raged in those days, and still rages today. Everyone is on the battlefield. The question is whether they are hapless cannon fodder or walking with Jesus, Paul, and the apostles who wrestled against the forces of evil. But to win, holiness must be embraced. It is impossible to survive in the war blighted by sin. Unless you are covered with *Truth* and *Righteousness*; unless you carry the *Shield of Faith* in the *Knowledge of Salvation*; unless you wield the *Sword of the Spirit*; unless you *pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*; ⁴⁰⁷ unless you do these things, you will not *stand against* the onslaught of the enemy or *prevail* for the kingdom of God. Paul said it: *though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.* ⁴⁰⁸

The Conclusion

God gives every person and assembly the right to choose to *hear and heed* His voice. Those who do, learn to abide in Jesus and walk in the Holy Spirit. However, most are unwilling to do things God's way, and their obstinance prohibits their victory. ⁴⁰⁹ As in the latter days of the church at Ephesus, so it is in these days of the Laodiceans. But, what the Lukewarmites do not realize—in spite of the Lord's direct rebuke—is that without the Spirit they can accomplish nothing for the kingdom. Yet, they cannot have God's Spirit unless they obey Him. And since they will not do that, as at the demise of the *first church*, so the Lord removed His Spirit from the *modern church*. ⁴¹⁰

But, hope remains. You are not constrained to live without the Spirit just because others reject Him. Jesus told every believer of every church of every age: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. You can come to the wedding feast. You can Abide in Jesus and Walk in the Holy Spirit. You can abide in Spirit Life as discussed herein. And in the power of these provisions, you can Bear Much Fruit.* But, you must do it His way.

And that is what chapter eight, *The Time for Power*, has been written to tell.

406 Revelation 12:7-9. NASB

407 ...*being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak:* Paul.

408 2 Corinthians 10: 3-6.

409 Matthew 22:1-14.

410 As He did when He removed the Lampstand so very long ago. (Revelation 2:1-7.)

Chapter 8

The Time for Power

And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. ⁴¹¹

Jesus' disciples walked with Him, believed in Him, loved Him, watched Him perform many miracles, and, at His command, even worked miracles themselves. Yet, at His departure they lacked one thing: *tarry in the city until the Promise of His Father was poured out upon them*, ⁴¹² for only in the power of the Holy Spirit could they fulfill their commission. As it was, so it is: victorious living is only in the Holy Spirit. It should not be surprising that Pentecost flamed from time to time throughout the two-thousand-year history of the church as men and women banded together, sought God with all their hearts, and understood, believed, and obeyed Him in His Word. ⁴¹³

The blessed news is that the Holy Spirit is still available today. Personal Pentecost can, must, happen, for you cannot overcome evil without God's power. This chapter is written for those seeking such relationship. It sets forth, in four mandatory initiatives, how to have what the *first church* had:

1. Be Born Again. ⁴¹⁴ The mandatory first step is: you must be born again. Without rebirth you cannot see or enter the kingdom, ⁴¹⁵ for *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*. The path into spirit life begins with the rebirth of your spirit.

⁴¹⁶

2. Be Baptized with the Holy Spirit. ⁴¹⁷ Jesus said, *Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city until you are endued with power from on high...John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My*

⁴¹¹ Luke 24:49. NASB

⁴¹² Joel 2:28-32.

⁴¹³ *For He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.* (Hebrews 13:8). You need but study the history of church revivals to see the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit from time to time.

⁴¹⁴ Spiritual rebirth.

⁴¹⁵ John 3:3, 5; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14.

⁴¹⁶ John 3:1-21; 4:24.

⁴¹⁷ Acts 1:4-5, 8; Romans 8:1-17. This takes you into *Spirit life*, as discussed in Chapter 9: *Spirit Life*.

witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.⁴¹⁸

Therefore, the disciples⁴¹⁹ returned to Jerusalem...went up to the upper room...continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.⁴²⁰ When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house...Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.⁴²¹ And, they were changed. God's love flowed into them. They loved Him and each other as never seen before in history. How could they not? God's Spirit was poured out upon them; their hearts were as His own heart. Thus, they loved each other even as God loves.

Those who witnessed these things⁴²² cried out, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

Peter responded,

Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself...

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls...they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.⁴²³

The Father promised to pour out His Spirit;⁴²⁴ it happened in their day; and it will happen today for as many as obey His Word. For those who do, glorious *Spirit Life* begins, as is characterized below...

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having

418 Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8.

419 The disciples, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

420 Acts 1:12-14.

421 Acts 2:1-4.

422 Including the signs and wonders at Pentecost's outpouring, as well as those manifested through the apostles.

423 Acts 2:37-43. NASB

424 Joel 2:28-32, about 840 years BC.

favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. ⁴²⁵

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. ⁴²⁶

Such living is possible—after infilling! ⁴²⁷ Be not deterred by those who say baptism with the Spirit is no longer necessary or possible. ⁴²⁸ ***To do what the first church did, you must have what it had.*** If Nay Sayers had such blessing, they would be doing what the *first church* did instead of *trying to pull truth down to the level of their impoverished knowledge*. As for you, obey Jesus: ***Tarry until you are endued with power from on high!*** If you have not yet been changed into a new person (if old fears, attitudes, sins, and habits are not gone; if out of your inmost being rivers of living water are not flowing) then you have not yet been filled with the Spirit. But, you can be. Now can be your time. You need only ***do what they did!*** Tarry before the Lord until the Holy Spirit is poured upon you. Persist! Do not be denied. The *first church* tarried ten days. If it takes longer, be not alarmed. Forget the calendar. Rather, know this: if you seek Him according to His Word, you will be filled. *Ask, (keep on asking)* ⁴²⁹ *and it will be given to you; seek, (keep on seeking) and you will find; knock, (keep on knocking) and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (continue to ask) Him!* ⁴³⁰

⁴²⁵ Acts 2:44-47. NASB

⁴²⁶ Ephesians 4:11-16. NASB

⁴²⁷ We are talking about believers. Salvation must come first, as Jesus said in John three.

⁴²⁸ Neither believe when they say, *If you believe in Jesus, you already have the Holy Spirit*. Search the Scripture; you will find over and over again that they are separate actions.

⁴²⁹ *The idea of continuing action is often carried by the present imperative and present participles in Greek.* (The Amplified Bible, footnote d, regarding Luke 11:9-13). The same textual reading is supported by Charles B. Williams, *The New Testament: A Translation*; and Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*.

⁴³⁰ Luke 11:9-13.

3. Abide in Jesus. It is only *in-Him-with-Him* that you overcome evil.⁴³¹ He explained, *I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*⁴³²

4. Keep the Traditions. *Keeping the Traditions* is perhaps the most ignored (and disobeyed) of all commands. Yet, the *traditions* are not optional guidelines to be whimsically followed, or ignored. They are not archaic mannerisms of uneducated fishermen. They are the Word of God. They are to be closely obeyed, for believers are, first and foremost, disciples (*learners, pupils*).

NOTE: WHEN I TELL YOU THAT YOU MUST KEEP THE TRADITIONS, I AM NOT TALKING ABOUT SOME FORM OF LEGALISM. AFTER ALL, THE TRADITIONS BEGIN WITH BEING FILLED WITH AND WALKING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. I ASSURE YOU THAT WHEN YOU DO KEEP THAT TRADITION, YOU WILL NOT BE OPERATING IN LEGALISM.

To return to the teaching then is to note that the distinguishing feature of *disciples* is that they emulate their teachers. Remember, the Lord chose and taught His first disciples; then He filled them with the Holy Spirit; then, the Spirit-empowered apostles walked in Him in victory over evil, and as part of that, in His knowledge and power, they preached the Gospel, birthed the church, and fellowshiped with and taught it. Then they commanded the new believers to follow them and do what they did—because ***the way*** they lived and walked was in the Holy Spirit as revealed by the Spirit Himself. And that is ***still the way*** to walk in the Spirit today.

We heard what he was saying, and thought, ‘Of course.’ But, then it dawned on us: We’d seen the words, but we never really *understood* that we were to *obey* them! In fact, we didn’t even know what it meant to *Keep the Traditions*.

Hoss exclaimed for us all,

“I’ve never heard this! I mean, we all know the Lord said, *take up the cross and follow Me*, but what is this about *keeping the traditions*? It’s strange that you say *it’s a direct command*.”

⁴³¹ Matthew 11:28-30.

⁴³² John 15:1-8. NASB

“Pastor, you are to obey all of the Word. But, since you ask, I will take you through some twenty passages that command you to *keep the traditions*. When I finish, you will be mortified by your ignorance and disobedience of this much Scripture.”

He took three hours to expound the passages. What he proved, again, was that we—who sort of thought we were good Christians—didn’t have a clue about many, many things.

As far as this story goes, I was just going to admit our failure as a warning to others, but leave it to them to *search out the matter for themselves*. However, feeling constrained to relate Poka’s teaching in more detail, I added an article as Supplement 5—*Keep the Traditions*, to tell you what he said. I urge you to read it before you put this book down for good.

For now, here’s a summary of what he said...

As with all the Bible, the command to *keep the traditions* is to be obeyed. A study of pertinent passages makes clear that being a *disciple* requires *total commitment*. Jesus told His apostles: *make disciples, teaching them to observe **all things** that I have commanded you*. Real believers hurry to obey, that they may please their Lord and bear much fruit.⁴³³ Such action adheres to the book of Acts, where the *first church* continued *steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers, gathering daily in the temple and from house to house*.⁴³⁴ The epistles were built upon this pattern. For example, consider: *What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints*.⁴³⁵

To look at the church throughout the book of Acts, and examine it in the rest of the NT, is to see that the traditions they kept were *in Jesus in the Holy Spirit **under** plural elders*⁴³⁶ *and the five-fold ministries;*⁴³⁷ ***operating** in the gifts of the Spirit; **wearing** the armor of God; **pulling down** strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought** into captivity to the obedience of*

⁴³³ Acts 10:38.

⁴³⁴ Acts 2:42-47.

⁴³⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:26-33. NASB. Neither should you skip the last seven verses of the chapter. Everything we have said is based on the fact that *The Word says what it means; means what it says; and is to be obeyed completely*. To ignore it is lawlessness—the precise meaning of iniquity, a sin which separates believers from God. The command for women to not teach or have authority over men in the church is virtually ignored today. Be not found in that disobedient number! (This is discussed at length in Dyal, *Limpy*, 82-107.)

⁴³⁶ See Part V, Supplement 4, *Keep the Traditions*.

⁴³⁷ Ephesians 4:11.

Christ; and **having** the gifts and fruit of the Spirit manifested daily. They loved God and each other, and lived in *The Way* ⁴³⁸ for decades, until finally, they forsook the *first love* and *first works* and began to develop a religion of their own making. It was only then that they fell. ⁴³⁹

Do you find yourself in an impoverished church? Are you impoverished, yourself? If so, you do not need to remain in that state. You can do what they did *at first*. It can become *the way* of your church. You can be quickened with spiritual fire, and therein, overcome evil and love God and each other. You could be the next *assembly* in church history to do so. Believe God. Step out in faith. Obey the Word. Let not man or devil keep you from *pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God*. ⁴⁴⁰ You owe it to your Lord. You owe it to your church. You owe it to your soul. Take control. Do not be denied. It is time!

COURSE OF ACTION

The *Course of Action* is straightforward: 1) Know What to Do; 2) Agree Together to Do It; 3) Engage in It with All Your Heart and Soul and Mind and Strength. ⁴⁴¹

Let us examine these three things, one at a time.

1. Know What to Do—You must know what the Lord did; and you must imitate Him in doing those things, whether you are a *shepherd* or a *sheep*.

Here is the pattern: God sent His Son, who *emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. ⁴⁴² This Jesus chose, taught, and anointed with Spirit and power twelve apostles, to proclaim the Gospel with signs and wonders, and to shepherd (*fellowship with, pray for, protect, teach, and disciple*) the body of Christ.

Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, is still the Head of His body, and therefore He still gives the ministering gifts of *apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the*

⁴³⁸ **The Way** disappeared from the church as forewarned by Revelation 2:4-5: *Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.* And with its loss went the capability to please God, for to please Him is to *have, believe, and keep* His Word unto the overcoming of evil. And for that, you must be filled with the Spirit. Recover and live in the apostolic tradition; hold one another accountable to it. It is ***The Way!***

⁴³⁹ As warned in Revelation 2:1-5, and as discussed in Chapter 5, herein.

⁴⁴⁰ 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

⁴⁴¹ Mark 12:30.

⁴⁴² Philippians 2:7-11. NASB

body of Christ, and will continue to do so until the close of church ⁴⁴³ history—that is, He will for any group submitting to Him according to His Word.

2. Agree Together to Do It—Agree together that, different from the *religion-of-man* that ended with the fall of the *first church*, you will change every practice the Holy Spirit shows that is contrary to God’s Word. If you will do that, the rest will be easy, for the Lord has not changed.

3. Do It with All Your Heart—He was the Head of *His Church*; He is the Head of *His Church*. He *will do* what He *did before*. Welcome and embrace Him in His Headship.

Note that the precedent of His Word concerning His church, reflects that His first actions have to do with selecting and empowering His leaders. As He chose twelve to become apostles to the first church; so, from within your assembly, He will choose, raise up, teach, and anoint plural men (elders) to shepherd (protect, teach, and disciple) His flock.

These elders (and the rest of you⁴⁴⁴) must cry out to God for forgiveness from waywardness and disobedience. Lay everything on the altar; study and obey His Word; persist in prayer until the Spirit begins to move in your midst, after which your elders must begin to walk as the apostles before them walked, ⁴⁴⁵ for they, too, can prevail against the enemy.

Prevailing power is so vital that we must pause to look at how Paul understood and walked in it. He said to the church, *Finally, my brethren, **be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*** ⁴⁴⁶ You must not hurry past these words: Paul said, *Finally, my brethren*, that is, after all the things that precede the verse in the rich and deep epistle, *Finally, church, **be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might!*** Can you imagine the power of prayer that would permeate the outreach of a church that understood, believed, and acted in the full authority of the Word of God, being strong in the Lord?

Do you see? Do you see how this could, yea, should be the way of the church; the way of your very own church? What a blessing this is; or maybe, what a blessing it **should** be. Paul explained: his preaching was not *with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.* ⁴⁴⁷ that *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but **mighty in God** for pulling*

⁴⁴³ That is, until the last church age, the lukewarm Laodiceans are vomited out to await the soon-coming Tribulation.

⁴⁴⁴ As did the first apostles, plus the other hundred or so faithful men and women who were with them.

⁴⁴⁵ They walked with authority and power. Study Acts 6:1-7; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21, and Ephesians 6:10-20, to begin to see how your elders should conduct themselves, spend their time, and overcome the enemy.

⁴⁴⁶ Ephesians 6:10.

⁴⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:1-5. NASB

down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. ⁴⁴⁸

That is what the apostles understood and practiced. Thus, Paul *bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God...according to the power that works in us...* ⁴⁴⁹ It was all-out, victorious spiritual warfare in which Jesus and the apostles walked. And so it must be in the church today. If your elders learn to *Keep the Traditions*, walking in the power of the Spirit, you will begin to have *church* as it was fashioned to be, and, you will abound in *first love* and *first works*. Do not be denied such majestic living. Be detracted by nothing, for this is what the overcoming life is about. It is the starting point, and a good beginning it is.

But, there is more.

Next is the activation, one by one, of a self-disciplined walk in the Spirit. This is joy, not burden; Spirit, not Law. It is the chance to personally enter into fellowship with Jesus. It begins with an unwavering commitment to *gather Heavenly Manna morning by morning*. God gave manna to Israel in the wilderness, saying, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.* ^{450, 451} Jesus translates the significance...*My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world...I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.* ⁴⁵² Every morning every believer has the **responsibility** and **opportunity** to turn from the cares of the world and partake of the *Bread of Life Himself*. Jesus is *spiritual nourishment*. Your spirit thrives in Him, the Heavenly Manna; it weakens to death without Him.

Seeking, as a lifelong commitment, His presence in the early morning is the vital key to the overcoming life!

You can hardly imagine the glory when the individual members of the Body begin to walk in this path. You see, the magnificence of God's holy presence is often experienced by those who come near Him. For example, when Israel carried the Ark of God to its place, ⁴⁵³ King David, *the man after God's own heart*, ⁴⁵⁴ was so filled with God's Spirit that he *whirled, and leapt, and danced with all his might before the Lord*. The Spirit on David overflowed to the

⁴⁴⁸ 2 Corinthians 10:1-6. NASB

⁴⁴⁹ Ephesians 3:14-21.

⁴⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 8:1-3.

⁴⁵¹ Throughout Scripture, NT doctrine is foreshadowed in the OT. So it is in this instance.

⁴⁵² John 6:31-36.

⁴⁵³ 2 Samuel 6:1-23.

⁴⁵⁴ 1 Samuel 13:14; Psalm 89:20; Acts 13:22.

people, and consequently, they brought the Ark up with **great shouting and trumpets**. Another time, Zechariah prophesied: **Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.** ⁴⁵⁵ When this prophecy was fulfilled, the people threw their own clothes on the colt, and set Jesus on him. And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road. Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples **began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice** for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: *Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!* ⁴⁵⁶ Had they not sounded forth mighty shouts of praise, Jesus said that the stones themselves would have *immediately cried out*.

But, such entrance into the presence of God is not just for *corporate assemblies*. Equally important are the glorious, daily, personal meetings with the Great Shepherd as each one presents him/herself to the Lord in the mornings. God provides manna to His people, but every household must gather that manna before it melts in the sun. **This is the critical issue!** Doing it (or not) demonstrates the priority of your heart. God will not do for you what He tasked you to do for yourself. ⁴⁵⁷ You are responsible—day by day—to partake of the Heavenly Manna. Weekly corporate worship will suffice no more than eating once a week will meet the body’s nutritional requirements. You must enter daily into your Lord’s kingdom and presence.

This is so important I shall break it down even further. The setting for the morning meeting with God is this: you must be born again; filled with the Holy Spirit; abide in Jesus; and He in you. If these things are true, you are vastly different than you were. (If not, see...⁴⁵⁸) However, you are responsible to present yourself before God, and unashamedly enter His kingdom and presence. The goal is not to squeak out little *now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep* prayers through countless distractions of a wandering mind.

No! Realize that you are before the Throne of Father God! He waits for you to speak. Imagine how different you would conduct yourself if—just one time—He would open your eyes to see Him on His throne and you before Him: He, in resplendent power, glory, and majesty, His heavenly host surrounding and worshipping Him; and you...would you dare appear in the tattered rags of a distracted man, furtively glancing at your watch, fretting that what should be a precious time before God might make you late for work?

⁴⁵⁵ Zechariah 9:9.

⁴⁵⁶ Luke 19:30-40.

⁴⁵⁷ John 1:12 says...*as many as received Him, He gave power to become children of God*. The verse does not say, He *made them* children of God. No, He left to each believer the responsibility (and accountability) to use (or not use) that power.

⁴⁵⁸ If these things are not so, you are missing the glorious gift the Lord has for you. For your sake, do not try to bluff your way through this vital matter. You are either *in Him* as a new creation, or you are not *in Him* as you can be. Be honest with yourself! If these things are not yet yours, you need to find a group that *actually* understands God’s business and can help you. Find such a body; do not be denied.

And remember, you are permitted into that glorious place, not because you are worthy, but because Jesus Christ paid for your sins and purchased your right to enter the presence of His Father. Humbly, yet boldly, pray for *God's kingdom to come and His will to be done on the earth, as it is in heaven*. Pour out rivers of living water from a heart overflowing with love for Him and concern for His kingdom and His will. Understand that *this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.* ⁴⁵⁹ When you pray this way, because you know you pray according to His will, then, on the authority of His Word you know that *He hears you, and if He hears, you know He grants your petition*. Pray, *knowing* that such prayers are answered. As they are, you will bear much fruit for your Lord. ⁴⁶⁰

But, instead of power, have you but a little head-knowledge about these things? Instead of victorious prayer, do you flounder for words, fail to sense the Lord's presence, and have so many distractions that you can barely pray? Is the best you can muster a hasty little *now I lay me down to sleep* prayer, or a sad little *Our Father* as you run out the door to do the world's bidding? If that is your lot, there is still good news. Instead of being defeated by your failure, take courage: you have at least made it to the battlefield. You have already met the enemy. Perhaps you have lost the initial skirmish, but you have gained experience. You have begun to see *what does not work*. You are ready for the deeper lessons of the overcoming life. It is time to believe the Word of God; it is time for wisdom, empowerment, and victory—which, after all, should be *the heart cry of every believer*.

The book of Psalms provides the key for breaking through evil strongholds, for, after all, the psalms are full of the overflowing joy of God's people as they see Him for who He is. His glory elicits a deep response from those who thankfully call Him Father: and that response is **overflowing exuberance**, in keeping with the oft-repeated command, ⁴⁶¹

Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth.

This recurring command *calls not for the squeaking out of a little noise*, but rather, it summons thunderous shouts of praise and admiration, for **God is Great and Greatly to be Praised!** It calls for continuous, joyful shouts of adoration and praise to the Great God. It stirs you to abandon restraint and fear; it challenges you to praise God with all your being. After all, He alone is worthy to be praised.

Listen to the voices of the heavenly multitudes, those privileged to see Father God's glory. Listen with spiritual ears. You can almost hear them today, even in the darkness of this age. Listen...

⁴⁵⁹ 1 John 5:14-15.

⁴⁶⁰ Mark 11:23-24.

⁴⁶¹ Psalm 47:1,5; 66:1; 81:1; 95:1; 98:4; 100:1.

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, *HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME*. And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, *Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.* ⁴⁶²

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing*. And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, *To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever*. And the four living creatures kept saying, *Amen*. And the elders fell down and worshiped. ⁴⁶³

After these things, I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, *Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER*. Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, ***Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.*** ⁴⁶⁴

How much more, then, should you (who have the great privilege of potential adoption into God's family) join that heavenly chorus and ***Shout out praises unto Him Who is worthy to be praised!***

Not only that. Feel the thrill of the power of praise in Psalm 150 as it builds upward to loud, clashing, resounding cymbals. Read the words...

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!

462 Revelation 4:8-11. NASB

463 Revelation 5:11-14. NASB

464 Revelation 19:1-2, 6. NASB

Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD! ⁴⁶⁵

Imagine the entire church, from those on the platform, to everyone in the pews, becoming fully engaged—as David and Israel were engaged in celebrating the glory of their God. Then read it again! And again! Let the words ring in your soul, for as they do you begin to enter into the very presence of the Great God and Creator, Who knows you by name, and loves you with a love deeper and purer than you can imagine. The psalms are full of such exaltation of God with dance and song and music and shouts. Take charge of yourself. Abandon childish inhibitions and silly fears that enslave you to *what people might think*. For shame. Consider the heathen—how those in the world system shout out at games and concerts. They are unashamedly, fully engaged—and they express it with their entire being. And yet, you, O man, are you ashamed to shout out for Almighty God, He who is alive forevermore? What kind of madness is it that possesses you to kowtow to such weakness and folly?

Understand the glory of God; realize the marvelous privilege He grants for you to enter His Very Presence. Repudiate your sloven complacency. It is time for you to be ***ALL IN!*** It is time for exuberant *whirling, and leaping, and dancing before Him with all of your might!* Shout joyfully unto Him! And, not just once. Think of His glory and majesty, and then **shout, shout, shout!**

He is a great God and greatly to be praised!

When you get serious about becoming an overcomer, about pressing into God's rest, ⁴⁶⁶ about entering into the kingdom of God, then you will shatter the fetters of flesh and devil, and enter God's presence. You will take His kingdom by force, because ***you simply will not be denied!*** And, when you finally do that, you will never be the same!

Celebrate the days when you easily enter Father God's awesome presence. But, there will be times when the gates of hell have been raised against you. It matters not. Remember, your admission price was paid by the blood of the Lamb. What you must, can, do is press in;

⁴⁶⁵ Psalm 150:1-6. NASB

⁴⁶⁶ Hebrews 3:7-4:11.

enter boldly before the throne. Remember, you *are empowered* for victory! ⁴⁶⁷ Believe it! Grasp it! *Ferociously determine* that nothing will deter you from entering *into* and *abiding in* God's *rest*. ⁴⁶⁸ Overcome the distractions of the world, flesh, and devil by *focus, understanding, resolve, and obedience* until you rout them. Then, before God's throne, worship Him; make your petitions known, remembering to forge your prayers according to His Word and will, exactly as Jesus did. Acquit yourself valiantly for God's kingdom. Stand up for the church. Win much fruit and prove thereby that you are a disciple of Christ; please His Father. Remember, the

**Kingdom of God suffers [permits] violence, and [if/as necessary]
the violent [will expend the effort to] take it by force.** ⁴⁶⁹

This verse is no-nonsense recognition of the raging spiritual war. Your destiny depends on victory. If you are wise, you will associate with like-minded believers who are willing to disengage from the cares of this life and enter into the warfare as soldiers of Jesus Christ, obeying His commands and overcoming evil. ⁴⁷⁰ Those who do inherit majestic promises,

***To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me on My throne,
as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.***

⁴⁷¹

***He who overcomes shall inherit all things,
and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.*** ⁴⁷²

The Lord sends His anointed ones out to preach the Gospel, but commands them... *tarry until ye be endued with power from on high*. Go, but go ***in the power*** of the Lord. Scripture is full of promises for those who do. Jesus says, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* He gives power to do His work; seek Him until you receive that power. Then, go forth, pull down strongholds, bear much fruit, bring glory to Father God.

If this is your desire, *The Oracles of God* was written for you. If after reading it, you agree—that is, you want to seek the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength; and you want to obey the Word, willing to change attitudes and practices as He gives clarity—

⁴⁶⁷ John 1:12.

⁴⁶⁸ Hebrews 4:9-11 (The background for the text is Hebrews 3:1-4:16).

⁴⁶⁹ Matthew 11:12.

⁴⁷⁰ 2 Timothy 2:3-4, *You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

⁴⁷¹ Revelation 3:20-22.

⁴⁷² Revelation 21:7.

but are still uncertain how to proceed into the overcoming life, if you think I might be able to help, just ask. I will try to make myself available, for as a teacher, my desire is to *commit these things to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* ⁴⁷³

**Just send a note, tell me what you want, and I'll see what can be done.
It is time to get to work!**

darelldyal@gmail.com

⁴⁷³ 2 Timothy 2:2.

Part IV:

The Rest of Their Story

It is now time to tell the rest of the characters' story, for, after all, readers have the right to expect satisfactory closure to *their lives*.

In Chapter 9: *Mary's Party*, and an *Anecdote: Dinner with Mother*, you will learn a great deal more about them. Then, in Chapter 10: *Postscript*, You will discover how their lives unfold up to the point we leave them; and, you will catch a flit of what might happen in their future.

I think you will be pleased with what you find.

So, let us turn to *The Rest of Their Story*.

Chapter 9

Mary's Party

That week seemed to be a blur, and then, Friday was upon us. Mary's annual *Welcome Home* party is about as formal as it gets in Okeechobee. The ladies go all out with their hair and wear lovely dresses, and we local boys (fortunate enough to receive invitations) squeeze our fat necks into the shrinking collars of white, long-sleeved dress shirts. Once we add a tie and sport coat, nobody much cares that we probably can't button it, or that we wear jeans and cowboy boots below. We're recognized for having done our best.

The social hour starts at 6:00 o'clock, followed by dinner at 7:30. Skeet, always Mary's Emcee, convenes the formal party at 7:00. He delights her in that role, because, not only is he truly debonair in his black tux, complete with cummerbund, black bow tie, and magnificent black Stetson and spit-shined black cowboy boots, but his light-hearted banter and wit charm one and all. He is a great Master of ceremonies; and the thing that is double icing on their cake, is how much they enjoy pleasing each other in their roles. You can see Mary glow just listening to him; and all you have to do is look at his smile as he watches her busily orchestrating her magnificent party to see that he is still enthralled by her beauty. They are two people who are truly in love. What a good thing that is.

Mother and I were on time, a habit of preference for us both. As we walked into the receiving room annex to the banquet hall, and we began shaking hands, hugging necks, laughing, and talking with the early arrivals. Most of the regular winter guests were becoming old friends, not only with each other, but also with us town folks. There was a table for punch, and Sassy's husband, Billy, served at the bar that was in the corner toward dining hall. After I got Mother a glass of punch and seeing that she was settling into her own circuit, I branched out for myself.

After talking to Billy for a minute (before he got busy), I went into the hall to see how large the party would be. I noted Mary had set twelve six-person circular tables, so she was entertaining about seventy guests. The semicircular stage was decorated, and mikes, chairs, and music stands were already assembled. The piano looked freshly polished and *ready for music*. As I was looking things over, Betty Ann, Sandra, (another of Sassy's⁴⁷⁴ waitresses) and a lad I didn't recognize, began crossing the dining room headed in my direction from the kitchen out to the receiving room with hors d'oeuvres. The first to reach me was the boy. He was wearing slacks, a long-sleeved white shirt and bow tie, and

474 I failed to mention before that Mary Alice and Sassy have been close friends their entire lives. They grew up as little girls together, and they both loved to cook back in the days they were in FHA. It's interesting that both went on with life-long interest in cooking. Sassy's Diner is known around the lake as *The Place* for great home cooking at reasonable prices. Since she gets up so early to prepare for the breakfast and lunch meals, for the most part she keeps her evenings free. However, once in a while, she will cater a party; and she always helps Mary Alice on her Dinner Parties, usually bringing most of her staff to help with set-up, serving, and clean-up.

carried a tray of Swedish meatballs. He also wore a big, friendly smile. I took one, thanked him, and asked who he was. He laughed and said,

“I’m Roy Wade, Mr. Lego. Here’s my Mom.”

Betty Ann came up with a tray of stuffed mushrooms, and also had a camera around her neck. Sandra passed on by, knowing that we were friends and might chat for a minute. Sandra had what looked like cornbread muffins, butter patties, and little plastic knives. (You can’t eat cornbread without butter, you know!).

Betty Ann said,

“Hi, Danny. I see you’ve met my pride and joy.”

“Betty Ann, he’s grown so much I didn’t even recognize him.”

I think he was smart enough to realize that that conversation was going to *get mushy*, so he politely smiled and excused himself, saying,

“I’d better keep moving. I don’t want that mother of mine to get after me for goofing off. Nice to see you again, Mr. Lego.”

I was dumbfounded. I just looked at Betty Ann, whose face radiated pleasure as she watched him move out of the room.

“Betty Ann,” I exclaimed! “Roy’s such a fine boy. I’m so pleased. Wow. It’s been awhile since I’ve seen him. He’s so big. It won’t be long before he is taller than his mother. How old is he?”

“He’s twelve, Danny. I know it’s hard to believe.”

“It is. You’ve done a great job. I can tell he’s sensitive and smart. He’s going to be quite a man.”

“Thank you, Dan. I certainly hope so; but, you know we still have our moments...” and she laughed.

“And what about Paulette, where’s she. She must be ten, now. Right?”

“Yes, Danny, she just had her birthday. She’s in the kitchen with Sassy and Mary. For some time now her goal has been to become a chef in a fancy restaurant, or with her own TV program. She already does a lot of the cooking around our house. And, it’s quite good, I might add. But, she doesn’t care so much about cleaning up her mess.”

At that we both laughed. Then Betty Ann said,

“I better circulate myself, or my son might have to scold me.”

I laughed again, and said,

“Of course. It’s really nice to see you, Betty Ann.”

She smiled and moved on into the growing crowd, which had begun to flow into the dining room. And, it really was nice to see her. She looked stunning! She was wearing touch of makeup, with lipstick that matched the color of her light purple skirt and a short-sleeved jacket. Underneath the jacket she wore a white blouse. I admit that I probably watched her walk away longer than necessary. She and Sandra (and, I discovered later, Mary, Sassy and the rest of the ladies on Sassy’s staff) were all wearing fluffy, long white aprons with red lettering that said, *Welcome Home, Friends*.

On my part, I, too, headed back into the annex to check on Mother and get something to drink myself. As I re-entered the room, I saw Hoss and Barbara come in. They had Steve Berkshire and I presumed, his wife, with them, and also, the little old man I’d come to love and admire. But, Poka was the surprise of surprises: He was wearing a stunning gray tux and a matching gray Stetson, if you can imagine that, and, get this, cowboy boots! Even his boots seemed to have a tint of gray to them. He looked like a Great Prince or something. I burst out with a roar of laughter and hurried over to greet them, especially that clever old man. I shook his hand, as his eyes danced at me with the grandest twinkle ever. He was truly full of surprises. Hoss quickly made the introductions, and so I met Sally Berkshire for the first time. She was a small, strikingly pretty blond. And she had the most radiant smile I think I’d ever seen. She looked like she was bubbling over with joy.

In fact, the entire group looked like they had a grand secret they weren’t about to share with me. I raised my eyebrows at Hoss, but he just smiled and shook his head. I figured I’d have to wait until I could corner him later to pump for information. But, while I was thinking that, Skeeter came up. Hoss repeated the introductions and as he did, Betty Ann, who put down her tray, came over, and then explained the camera. She said Mary had asked her to circulate and snap pictures of the festivities. She, too, was intrigued with Poka’s outfit, and began herding Skeeter and Poka into position for a pose or two. I even moved a chair over and lifted Poka up on it. With that, he and Skeet were barely the same height. And they stood there, arms on each other’s shoulders, smiling to beat the band. What a grand picture. I now have a copy on my mantel at home.

It was a great start to the evening. After a moment, I slipped away to check up on Mother, and she was truly having a good time. So, it seemed that before I knew it, the lights in the hall dimmed, and the flood lights on the stage were turned on. And, up strode Earnest Skeeter Wiggins regally attired, king of his domain. And, in his unique style, he started talking before he even reached the spotlight in center circle.

He was saying,

“Friends and family, on behalf of Mary Alice, Queen of my heart, and Queen of this night, we most heartily welcome you home, those who’ve been traveling, and, if you haven’t been out

for a while, we also welcome you. If you would, please make your way to the tables. And, while you do, I'll chat for a bit. Note that places have been pre-assigned by the sweet lady who knows everything: six to a table, except for Mr. Musterion's, which has seven."

I think most of us had spotted our tables during the meet-and-greet session, and so getting there and seated was a quick, and relatively quiet, process.

Meanwhile, Skeeter kept talking.

"It's our intent to share an evening of music and dining, and laughing, and, after dinner, we shall convene for some good old fashioned singing, during which time I think you are going to be surprised and delighted to hear some spiritual things that've been going in our sleepy little town. However, before I turn the stage over to our special friends, William and Sherry Tyson and Family," (and he said as an aside, "and I know them all, down to the grandchildren, I just haven't had a chance to talk to Bill to see who will be playing tonight...")

And there he bowed, blew Sherry a kiss, and extended his hand toward those seated behind him on the platform. The guests, knowing what was in store by way of music, applauded warmly.

The Tyson's waved, and Skeet continued,

"Certainly these special people need no introduction to us who have enjoyed their music through the years. But, before they take over, I'd like to get Mary Alice up here long enough to greet you and describe the source of the fantastic smells that are starting to seep into the room. Would somebody over there by the kitchen tell Mary that she's being paged."

In a moment she appeared. She stepped into the room, and stopped, hands on her hips with a mock glare at Skeeter for disturbing her when he knew she was busy. But then, she laughed and started blowing kisses to the tables as she quickly ascended the stage.

He handed her a mic, and Mary said,

"Thank you, one and all for being here. Each one of you is special to us. We only hope that everything is perfect for you tonight. These *Welcome Home Dinners* are one of our favorite things of the entire year. And, for that reason, the Master of Ceremonies wanted me to tell you...

And there she paused just long enough to string it out, then started again,

"I'm going to do something special tonight, henceforth, I'm simply going to refer to him not just as Master of Ceremonies, but for tonight, only, simply as **Master...**

And, she turned and curtsied to Skeet. Everybody roared.

But, not to be out done, Skeeter walked over and brazenly gave her a big kiss, to which, everybody burst out with applause and whistling.

She shooed him away with the flick of her hand, but, then coyly turned, and with her backed to Skeeter, fanned her face as if to cool down. At this, everybody laughed again.

It was clear: we all loved our host and hostess.

So Mary cleared her throat, ‘Ahem,’ and resumed,

“Now that we’ve got the fun and games behind us, let’s talk about the serious business of eating. Would you please call Sassy and Paulette out of the kitchen?

They came out and politely curtsied. Everybody laughed and cheered.

“I’d love for those two ladies to come up here with me, but somebody’s got to make sure all you folks get to eat tonight. So,” and she looked directly at them, “I’ll get back to you girls as quickly as I can, but, for now,” and she imposed a bossy *‘tude*,’ “get yourselves back into the kitchen and get to work.”

And Sassy and Paulette curtsied once again, and ducked back into the kitchen.

Then, Mary Alice continued,

“I do want to tell you about your dinner tonight, and how we’ll go about it, but first, I’d like to tell you a little story about the *boys* in our lives.

And she cut her eyes over to Skeeter, and smiled in a most condescending way.

On his part, Skeet backed up a couple of steps, eyes darting around to find the fastest retreat.

I assure you, we were enjoying the banter.

So, Mary resumed,

“The story has to do with the menu Sassy, Paulette, and I almost cooked. It included such delicacies as, for starters: Rustic Rosemary Tarts (made with three ounces of Bucheron goat cheese, three tablespoons of heavy cream, a sheet of frozen puff pastry, a lemon, three tablespoons of fresh rosemary leaves, and topped off with freshly ground black pepper); cucumber rounds with hummus and yogurt; and Boston lettuce wedges served with a Mimosa Vinaigrette. Umm! Yum, yum, right Sweetie?”

And she turned her sweet little angelic face up to long, tall Skeeter for his approval.

Skeeter jumped right in.

“Oh yes, Darling. Just think, we could have had those delicacies instead of the pedestrian Swedish meatballs, stuffed mushrooms, and buttered cornbread muffins.” And then, he found me in the audience and said as an aside, “Just think how much more room we’d a’ had for the main dish, right Danny?”

Everybody laughed. Thus it was that Skeeter made a tiny point in the banter. But, Mary quickly regained the initiative.

“And that is exactly my point, ladies. Because our lives are filled with loving and taking care of these *big boys*, *boys* who think they need meat and potatoes at least twice a day, Sassy and I decided to take the *low road* on the dinner menu. Instead of having country style dining with a most attractive, delicious, adventurous cuisine (which I’m not going to bother to describe), we decided to have a good old country style buffet. Your *boys* will find prime rib, meat loaf, fried chicken, and fish. There will be at least two or three kinds of potatoes, and several of Sassy’s most excellent vegetables. And, of course, you can’t have a meal if Sassy’s in town, without having piles of her great biscuits. You will also find some excellent desserts, and if you particularly like the Chocolate Ripple Coffee cake, or the Bourbon-glazed Brown Sugar Pecan Pound cake, for goodness sake, make a fuss over them, for they are the work of Betty Ann’s darling daughter, Paulette, who is a true delight to be around in the kitchen, and any other time, for that matter.”

Then, and I’m sure Mary planned it, she acted like she was going to give the mic back to Skeeter. However, the drama queen acted as if she had had *one final thought*, so she lifted the mic back up to her *sweet little mouth* and delivered the *dagger blow*...

“And, ladies, there was one other overbearing consideration in *the changing of the menu*: neither Sassy nor I could stand the embarrassing thought of our *boys* (Billy, Skeeter, Hoss, and Danny) sneaking out to MacDonald’s for hamburgers and fries after they thought we were asleep. No ladies, we just couldn’t suffer such humiliation.”

Then she handed the mic back to Skeet, tiptoed up and gave a peck on the cheek, and hurried off toward the kitchen.

Everybody stood and applauded her wit and charm. She had silenced the long, tall one like nobody but Poka had ever been able to do.

Even so, while she was still in the room, he recovered enough to say,

“There she goes ladies and gentlemen, Mistress of Mystery, Queen of my heart. Give her another round of applause.”

And she turned and waved at her guests and blew her husband a kiss, good sport that he was.

On his part, Skeet turned to the Tysons and said,

“We *boys* don’t stand a chance, huh, William.”

And William Tyson, a happily married man for almost fifty years, stood and said,

“Skeeter, I’m old enough to realize that I don’t know as much as I used to think I did, but I do know this: we’d be wiser to keep our mouths shut, humble ourselves, and make pretty music with, and for, these mysterious creatures the Lord God gave us.”

Everybody laughed, and Skeeter said,

“Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the Tyson Family.”

He turned and warmly applauded for a moment, and then quietly left the stage.

And William Tyson, still standing, gestured to each his family one by one, who stood as he introduced them, saying,

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to introduce the only part of our musical family that could be here tonight. On behalf of my better half, Sherry, daughter-in-law, Cindy, son, Robert, and their beautiful thirteen-year-old twins, Terri and Sami (by the way, Sami and I have a deal: I’m the only one who can call her, *Samantha*, and that, only in the privacy of family), I want to say for all of us, we are totally delighted to be able to share in Mary Alice’ *Dinner Moments*, and to be able to play the great music we love. On our part, we do not look at this as a performance, but rather, as a family jam session. We’re going to mix and match, and have a great time. Sherry and Terri will alternate on the piano according to a scheme they’ve worked out. Cindy and Sami will be playing violins, sometimes one or the other, and sometimes both, while Robert and I will do the same on Cellos.”

“For the music tonight, we’ve selected three offerings from Ludwig Van Beethoven’s wonderful Piano Trios. The first is his ***Trio for Piano, Violin, and Violoncello in B-flat major, Op. 11***. This selection will take about twenty minutes, and at that point we will take a short break while Mary and her staff get you something to eat. Once you are all seated and enjoying your dinner, we will provide background music to dine by, and for that, we’ve chosen Beethoven’s ***Variations for Piano, Violin and Violoncello, on “Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu” in G major, Op. 121a***, and his ***Trio for Piano, Violin and Violoncello in D major, Op. 70 No. 1 “Ghost.”***

“It will take us about forty minutes to complete these two pieces, after which we will help ourselves to something to eat, and join the festivities as spectators.”

William turned and assembled his team, and then the Tysons took us to a land far beyond Lake Okeechobee. It was a moving concert. While they played, Mary Alice, Sassy, Betty

Ann, Sandra, Paulette, Roy, Skeeter, and Billy quietly moved among our tables making sure we had everything we could possibly want by way of food or drink.

What a meal; and what music. It was marvelous. And yet, before 9:00 o'clock the tables had been cleared, except that most of us lingered over our beverages.

Then the lights came back on the stage, and Skeeter quickly returned to the spot light. The first thing he said was to the Tysons.

"Tysons, don't trouble yourselves to stand, but thank you again for a wonderful concert."

And Skeeter led the applause. The Tysons waved and smiled.

"And what about Mary Alice?" Skeeter said. "There she is standing in the corner by the kitchen, making sure everybody has whatever they might want. Has she not done a magnificent job? You can only imagine the work she gladly puts into this occasion. And what an evening she has provided for us all."

We were delighted to give her a standing ovation. And we repeated the procedure for Sassy and her staff. And finally, in an act of real class, Skeet called for Paulette to join him on the stage. After she shyly arrived, tall and thin like her mom, he bragged about how good both her cakes were, explained that he couldn't decide which was best, and therefore had to eat two pieces of each. We freely applauded her efforts.

After that, you could see that she was ready to flee, but Skeeter said,

"Wait darling. We are about to sing some of the great old Gospel songs, so you stay right here until we get your mother and brother, and you three can start the singing."

He called for Betty Ann and Roy, and while they were coming, Paulette took her seat at the piano and Skeeter placed a mic so that she could sing with them. After Betty Ann and Roy were set, Skeeter said, ladies and gentlemen, I give you the *Wade Family Singers*.

And then a twelve-year-old boy began to speak for his family, almost as if he were the head of the home. He said in a resonate voice that belied nervousness,

"Mother, Paulette, and I wish to sing one of our favorite hymns,

Then he turned to Paulette, nodded, and she began to play that old favorite, *The Old Rugged Cross*. And they began to sing: Roy the melody, Paulette soprano, and Betty Ann, alto. Their blend was marvelous. The children sang out in full voices, as did their mother. It was wonderful. Betty Ann's investment in the lives of her children was obvious. She had overcome the wounds of a broken home; and had empowered her children to overcome the fear and shyness of youth. It was obvious that this family spent a lot of time together, and had grown very close in the process.

When they finished, they were awarded a loud ovation.

From his seat in the background, Skeeter called for Roy to sing another. You could almost see Roy stand taller, being recognized by Skeeter, and so you could see him whisper to his partners. Then he said, we would also like to sing one of Fanny Crosby's great hymns, entitled, *Blessed Assurance*, which is another all-time church favorite. The girls nodded and smiled, and Paulette played through a refrain, and they began to sing again. It was equally blessed, and we were all deeply touched.

They gathered in a line, held hands for a moment—and you could see Betty Ann giving each a warm, approving smile—then Roy bowed, and the girls curtsied, and they exited the stage.

Skeeter stood back up, thanked the Wades again, and then said, the next singers are a team that isn't new to us. I want to ask Pastor Harry (Hoss) Hanks and his lovely wife Barbara to come up and bring with them a delightful, mysterious visitor, Poka Musterion. You probably won't know Poka because he spent most of the week up at Danny's, along with Hoss and me. He brought a freshness to us about the Lord Jesus that has our heads whirling. And, he can really sing, too.

When they arrived on stage, Barbara went to the piano, and Hoss and Poka picked up mics. Hoss looked out and said,

"First, we want to thank Betty Ann and her brilliant children, Paulette and Roy, for those wonderful songs. Thank you, *Wade Family Singers*.

And he waved to each. Then he turned to us in the audience and said,

"Now, the three of us will sing a short medley of touching songs. Barbara will sing melody, Poka tenor, and I, bass."

Then, turning to his team, he added,

"Darling we'll start with Clara Williams' touching song, *Satisfied*, which has the chorus,

*Hallelujah! I have found Him, whom my soul so long has craved!
Jesus satisfies my longings, by His blood I now am saved.*

After that, we'll do, William Booth-Clibborn's *Down from His Glory*, which ends with the marvelous love response,

*O how I love Him, how I adore Him! My breath, my sunshine, my all in all!
The great Creator became my Savior, and all God's fullness dwelleth in Him!*

And then we'll finish with Bill Gaither's wonderful song, *He Touched Me*, which ends with the words,

*He touched me, O He touched me, and O the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I know He touched me and made me whole.”*

As they sang, it was as if heaven came down and filled our souls. It was a marvelous experience.

And then it happened. Sally Berkshire, holding Steve’s hand, came up on the stage. She was crying, but wiped her eyes and said,

“Pastor Hanks, may I say a few words?”

Hoss handed her the mic, and he and Poka stepped back toward the chairs.

And she began,

“Most of you don’t know us, even though we’ve been in Okeechobee almost a year, because we smugly isolated ourselves in our own little world. Steve works for the EPA. We’ve been here for a project he’s about to finish. We knew nothing at all about these marvelous things that you share together in the Lord. You see, we knew nothing about Him, about His mercy, kindness, and power. We’d no idea what it was like to worship Him in song with all your hearts as we have just heard with the Wade’s, and now, this trio. Our lives have been forever changed by this night.”

“But, there is more. Last night Pastor Hanks and Mr. Musterion were at our home until very late telling us about the wonders of the Living God. Our eyes, and our hearts, were opened. It was as if we could see Him. And then they prayed for my healing (I was very sick with an aggressive breast cancer that we were about to return to Seattle so that I could receive Medical treatment.) But, Pastor Hanks put his hands on my head and prayed, and I felt the power of God surge through my body. I was instantly healed. I felt the glory and power of God! It was the most amazing thing imaginable.”

“I wanted to publicly thank this blessed Jesus for saving us, and healing my body. We long to get to know Him better and better as we worship with you in the church in the coming months.”

And by that time, she began to weep with joy and thanksgiving. And Steve held her and they cried together.

Barbara played softly in the background. After a moment, Steve took the mic and added,

“We are going to our local doctor to let him affirm that which we already know: as a testimony to this Glorious Jesus we’ve just met. But, we know the healing is real. Sally is completely whole; better than ever!!! And we thank the Lord our God!”

Then they made their way back to their table.

When they left, Skeet returned to center stage. He took Poka's mic, and said,

"Wow! What a wonderful blessing, Sally and Steve. We rejoice with you for this healing, and for your new faith."

Everybody stood as a sense of awe began to fill the room.

We stood in that holy reverence for a little, and then Skeeter said,

"Thank you so much for sharing this evening with us. Mary wanted me to tell you that she didn't want any of this food left over, and that she has a bunch of doggie boxes for your use. Please, help yourselves. She and her team will be at the serving line to help you with any need. I think you would all agree that it would be appropriate to ask Pastor Hanks to dismiss us with a prayer."

As he turned to Hoss, Skeeter bowed his head and waited. And Hoss prayed a short, moving prayer, and then dismissed us.

As the party began to break up, Mother went over to help at the serving table, and I stepped outside to ponder these amazing events. I found a quiet place on the edge of the parking lot, and stood, looking out. To my surprise, I sensed someone nearby and turned to see Poka. He put his hand on my shoulder and said,

"It has been a good time, Daniel. You need to write about the things of this week."

Then looking up at the stars he said,

"It is a great view you have here by the lake, Daniel. Remember, *The heavens declare the glory of God!*"

I turned my eyes up to look at the stars, and after a minute, when I looked back, the mysterious old man who had said his name was of Greek extraction, was *simply* gone. It was as if he disappeared. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I felt the loss of a friend; but, at the same time, felt the joy of his *majestic revelation*. It was then that I realized the four-letters of his nickname, *Poka*, were simply extracted from the word, *A-poka-lupsis*, and then I understood: *Apokalupsis* means *Revelation*, and *Musterion*, means *Mystery*. The old, ah, *man*, had come to *reveal* the mystery of *The Oracles of God* to us in Okeechobee City. And, that revelation brought with it *life*, and *burden*. It was a story I was commissioned to tell.

I walked back inside to tell Hoss and Skeeter that *Apokalupsis Musterion* was gone, to thank Mary Alice and her staff, and to get Mother so we could go home.

But, what a week it had been, thanks to a visit by a mysterious *old man*.

Anecdote: Dinner with Mother

To round out the nature of our lives in Okeechobee, I decided to add a little story about the dinner Poka and I attended with Mother on Monday night after his arrival at my place.

And so, we went to dinner at Mother's. It was one of those times when I was just happy to be there even though I contributed but little. When we arrived, I made the introductions and knew they'd quickly become friends.

"Mother, this is Poka Musterion; Poka, this is my mother, Hannah Lego."

"I am delighted to know you, Hannah. I have enjoyed spending time with your son."

She smiled a most wonderful smile and said,

"Sunday afternoon Daniel told me about your visit, Poka, and immediately I knew I had to meet you. That's an interesting name. Is it a nickname?"

"Yes, in a way," and he chuckled as he said, "It is of Greek extraction."

But he quickly changed the subject,

"Hannah, you cannot imagine how much I think of your son. You will be pleased to know that he has a great opportunity to serve God in his day."

Not knowing what to make of this, I said,

"Mother! What smells so good?"

She said,

"Poka, if you will forgive my presumption, when Daniel told me you were, well, older, I thought you might enjoy one of my dear Mother's favorite recipes. So, I made chicken and dumplings. I haven't had them in years. Daniel, young as he is, has no real appreciation for dumplings, and I rarely cook such a big meal for myself. But I just thought in your honor..."

Poka burst out in a big, friendly smile.

"Hannah, that is delightful. Neither have I had chicken and dumplings in a long time. What a pleasant surprise."

"As you can tell by the smell, it's ready. Why don't y'all come in and let's eat. Daniel, show Poka where he can wash his hands, while I finish up."

“Yes ma’am,” I said, and escorted Poka to the downstairs bathroom. When he joined us in the dining room, she had the food on the table. It was country cooking at its finest; it smelled and looked scrumptious. Along with the chicken and dumplings, she had a huge bowl of turnip greens and a basket of cornbread, wrapped in a linen cloth. I also spotted a bottle of vinegar, for the greens, if you don’t know about such things. This time, it was Mother who had a twinkle in her eyes.

Poka said something I hadn’t heard in a long time,

“They used to say, *The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach*. I see where that expression originates.”

We laughed. She said,

“Please be seated. Poka, if you’d sit there,” pointing to her right, “and Daniel, your spot over there, we’ll get started. Mr. Musterion, would you thank the Lord for our meal.”

He smiled and said,

“It will be my honor.”

We passed the bowls, filled the plates, and dug in. It was really good. I have to say it: even the dumplings tasted good.

They talked a lot. Mother was telling Poka about me as a little boy. He was full of questions, and she answered them all. I didn’t say anything; it was kind of embarrassing except I did enjoy the fact that they seemed to be having such a good time. I finished my plate long before they did and just kind of sat there laughing at a mother’s perception of her son’s youth. But really, I wasn’t paying much attention to their prattle.

When they finished, Mother asked if we were ready for coffee and apple pie à la mode. She got no immediate takers for the pie, and so she suggested that we retire to the family room where, she said, it would be more comfortable, and after we talked a while, she would serve the pie. She said we were not getting out of there without helping her eat the dessert.

After we settled in, they resumed their conversation. I was with them but saying little; just glad they were having a good time and that I didn’t have to speak. (I finally was beginning to recover from the mental overload of the day, and, for the first time, began to reconstruct that conversation in my mind.) But, as they began to talk about the church when I was a boy there was a change in tenor. The lightheartedness of their chatting lifted. Mother was saying how much those days meant to her and how she missed them so very much. She spoke hesitantly and began to look out the window, as if lost in memory. At that point I tuned back in.

She looked at Poka, then me, and said,

“Danny, there are some things I’ve never shared with you. I couldn’t while your Daddy lived, and since he died we’ve never had the right time. But I’m going to tell you something now. Will that be okay?” Then she added, “Of course, it isn’t demeaning of his memory.”

“Mother, I’m sure of that. But say whatever you wish.”

“Honey, I just didn’t want to startle you.”

“Mother, you know I trust you.”

She turned back to Poka, who’d waited quietly, and resumed,

“I was saying how much joy those wonderful days at church brought me. They reminded me of my own childhood. I was the youngest of five children born to Abigail and Ezra Zithri. I had two brothers and two sisters. We lived on the south end of the Lake, in Clewiston. My Papa, like most down there, worked for *Big Sugar*, that’s what we called the US Sugar Corp. If ever I’ve known holy people, it was Mama and Papa. They were poor, but knew the Lord and loved their church. Their greatest delight was to worship in the congregation surrounded by their own children singing the songs of Zion with tears in their eyes. I can remember some kids used to make fun of Papa because there were times he’d be so full of joy that he would tear around the church running and leaping and praising God. But that didn’t bother me; I knew Papa’s heart. His love was real. I was proud of him; he was my hero!”

Neither Poka nor I spoke. We just waited as she took a tissue and dabbed tears from her eyes.

“Sorry,” she said. “Those are precious memories.”

The truth is she wasn’t the only one with tears in her eyes. I’d been trying to blink mine away without much success. So I got up, pulled a tissue from the box she kept on the end table near her place on the couch, and walked over and offered one to Poka.

She continued,

“Those beautiful years flew by and before I knew it I was in my senior year of high school. It was then that I met a hard working young man from Okeechobee who had graduated two years before. He used to buy gas and get something to eat at the US 27 Truck Stop on the West side of town where I worked after school and on Saturdays. He would sit on a stool at the counter and eat, and we would sometimes chat as I waited on customers. He was respectful and kind of shy. He was a big guy, but thin. He looked strong, and in truth, quite handsome. It turned out that he and his father owned a successful catfish company in Okeechobee. It had grown so much that it employed fishermen around the Lake. Sometimes

he (Brandon Lego was his name) would make the daily run to collect fish. He did it either to train new drivers or talk to his fishermen.”

“That was all there was to our friendship. He never asked me out or anything, but I began to notice he seemed to be coming in a lot more often.”

“One day I had exciting news. I was part of our Church Trio and we were going to sing at a revival for our sister church in Okeechobee. I invited him to come, and he did. It turns out it was one of the first times he’d been to church, which seemed strange to me, since church was where I grew up. He liked it a lot and from then on was in Clewiston more and more. He often spent Saturday night in town somewhere. He would pick me up after work and we would go to dinner and to a picture show (*that’s really what we called the movies in those days*) she confided as an aside to me. Then he would meet me at church Sunday morning and have lunch with Mama and Papa and me at home. (My older brothers and sisters had flown the coop by that time). As our friendship intensified Brandon began to tell me he loved me, and wanted to marry and take care of me for the rest of my life. By that time, he had won my heart. I loved him, too.”

“But that’s where the heartbreak begins. When he asked Papa if he could marry me, Papa told Brandon he liked and respected him and that it wasn’t personal, but he could not give him permission. You see, Brandon didn’t know the Lord. Papa told him there was no way he could possibly be the priest and spiritual head of his own home without knowing either the Lord or His Word.”

“Brandon was devastated, and infuriated; and so was I. I cried and cried; I begged Mama and Papa to relent. But they wouldn’t; they couldn’t. The only thing they loved more than their children was their Lord. And they had chosen long ago to honor His Word no matter what the cost, and the Bible says *do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?*”⁴⁷⁵

“So I left home. We were married in Okeechobee a couple of months later. My parents did not come to the wedding, and I never saw Papa again while he lived. But I know that until his last day he loved me as the little *sugar plum* he used to tuck into bed at night with prayers. Brandon spent his life being a faithful husband and father, but he never went to church again. Neither could we talk about it; nor could we pray or read the Bible together. He supported my decisions on spiritual things, like taking you to church or giving money, but he never came to the Lord. And he blamed it on Papa.”

“Danny, I wept in the night for my darling parents. I admired and honored their faith and obedience. I was so very sorry for the pain I caused them. Oh, I love you and thank the Lord

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for lending me you, but it was passion and rebellion that drove me from my father's house. Brandon was a man of industry and integrity but we never had the spiritual oneness I saw in my parents, though I desperately longed for it. Papa had tried to warn me: Brandon couldn't be the spiritual head of our home without, himself, walking in the Spirit of Jesus. And he simply wouldn't do that."

She finished by saying,

"The only time I had relief from my grief was those few years when you were a boy and there was a stirring of the Holy Spirit at church."

With that she could speak no more. We cried together, the three of us. After a while, Poka and I got up, hugged Mother, and went home. There was no more conversation, and no dessert that night.

Chapter 10

Postscript

On the next Monday, the one after Mary's Party, Hoss met with Skeeter and me to tell us what happened at the Thursday night meeting with Steve and Sally. This Postscript provides that amazing report; after which, it describes our intentions pursuant to Poka's visit.

First, the Thursday Night Meeting.

Concerning the amazing things Hoss told us, let me begin by saying that I realize you've already heard the punch line: Steve and Sally found the Lord; and Sally was healed. But now you'll get to hear how that story unfolded when that happened.

As Skeeter and I waited for Hoss to begin, we watched as wonder spread over his features as his thoughts returned to the Thursday meeting. After several moments, he began.

I'm about to tell an amazing story. But, what is almost as incredible as the tale itself, is the fact that I can remember it. You will see what I mean when you discover the depth of the scientific information I shall outline. You know there's no way I could even know, let alone remember, such things except by a miracle from God. Anyway, here goes.

Poka and I met Steve at church at 6:30. I introduced them, after which, as you might imagine, about the only thing I did was sit back and pray silently as they talked. Neither will you be surprised that Poka did most of the talking. What he said was enlightening beyond words, which shouldn't have surprised me; but, even so, it was simply more than I could possibly have expected.

Here's what happened.

As I made the introductions, I watched Steve's face. On his part, he took a quick look at Poka and, sizing the old man up, said,

"Thank you for meeting with me, Sir."

"You are very welcome, Stephen. What can I do for you?"

Steve's head snapped over to me when Poka called him *Stephen*, as if to ask, *Did you tell him to call him that?* But, even before I could decide what to say, he said to Poka...

“Nobody ever calls me Stephen, except that my father used to on special occasions, as far back as when I was a little boy and had done something that really pleased him—like hitting a home run or having a good report card, or something like that. Other than that, I’ve been called *Steve* all my life.”

“Excuse me, Stephen. Would you prefer that I use, *Steve*?”

“Oh, no Sir. Not at all. I really like *Stephen*. It was a special thing between my dad and me. I was always pleased when he used the term. I might’ve even changed it with my friends, except that it was too meaningful to just us.”

Then as a soft PS, he added,

“Dad died four years ago. I’d just turned thirty.”

“That must have been very difficult.”

“It was. I still miss him; and, even more in these days. He was my anchor. I had a lot of confidence in his judgment. I suppose I’ll never really outgrow the loss.”

“Stephen, I feel your hurt. And, Harry told me that Sally is sick and needs to return to Seattle for treatment. That must be almost unbearable.”

It was obvious that Steve was touched by Poka’s concern.

“It’s very frightening. Sally and I are so close. In fact, we’re like best friends. And here in Okeechobee, we’re almost alone. We don’t fit in, and are looking forward to going home in six months, at the end of this assignment.”

“But she got sick. We are flying back to Seattle to get her settled with her folks, and established at the medical facility. We’ve already made the appointments and they will see her immediately. After their preliminary assessment, if possible, I’ll return long enough to finish the job. But, it all depends on what the doctors say...”

There he paused, then changed the subject.

“Since we’ve been here, Pastor Hanks has reached out to me, and, I’m sorry to say, he had to put up with a lot of snootiness. I guess he might have mentioned my, ah, *counter-cultural* atheistic outlook?”

“He told me a little about you, Stephen. He likes you and wondered whether the perspective of an old man might be useful. So, I asked Harry to mention a few things to you, and if you had any interest, I told him I would be glad to meet you.”

“He did what you asked, and I have to say, your logic was different than anything I’d ever heard. I could only wish your implications were true, but your opinion is far from what I’ve concluded in my own studies; not to mention the continuous harangue I’ve heard in our societies—which I decided must be right, because so many *intelligent* people couldn’t be *that* wrong. But, actually I left most of that squabbling behind to get on with making a life with Sally, and providing for the family we hope to someday have.”

“But,” and he smiled at Poka, “would you mind restating your *questions*? If nothing else, they were refreshing to think about.”

Poka smiled back, then said...

“I told Harry to ask what your opinion might be if God took you up into the third heaven like He did Paul and John, and revealed His magnificence to you like He did to them; or if He appeared to you in His majestic splendor as He did Isaiah and Ezekiel; or if you saw the waters of Red Sea change to dry land under Moses’ outstretched staff; and then rush back to cover the entire Egyptian army; or if you felt Mt. Sinai quake as God settled upon it to talk to Moses, even while Israel trembled in the valley? I wondered, would your perspective change if you saw such things?”

“I wondered what you will think (when you discover you have been betrayed by those you emphatically trusted to report *scientific information* honestly) when you realize that they continue (until this day) to misrepresent (in the school text books of this nation) scientific evidence, *so called*, even when they know that those theories have been summarily disproven by their colleagues and/or by the advances of scientific knowledge. I also wonder what you think when you come to discover that some (many?) of them do this because the truth is that they cannot/will not admit the alternative: that God is Creator; that His Word is true; and that, therefore, they are sinners who must either embrace Jesus Christ and live a holy life according to His commandments, or be doomed to the Lake of Fire for eternity.”

“And finally, Stephen, I asked Pastor Hanks what you would do if God extended His mighty hand and healed your wife?”

It took Steve a minute to process all of that. Then, he said...

“Concerning dishonesty and deceit, if that proves to be true, I’d be furious. But as to the rest, I think my answer would be, ***I’d be delighted beyond measure!*** What could be better than discovering that God is real; that the Bible is actually His Word to mankind; that it is true. It almost makes me laugh with pleasure just to think about it. But, is it really possible? I’ve heard so much to the contrary.”

“I am delighted you are willing to consider these things. I assure you: every word of what I have said (or alluded to) is absolutely true. God is real; He is the Great God and Creator. He fashioned mankind to become His children, as many as will believe and obey Him. And, to

those who do, He manifests Himself in the closest, most personal ways; and will do so forever.”

At that point Stephen said...

“The possibility of these things being true is too good to enjoy alone. I can’t let Sally miss it. Please, let’s go over to our condo. It’s just a couple of minutes away. In fact, Harry, why don’t you pick up Barbara, and the three of you come over to our place as soon as you can get there? I’ll go home and let Sally know so she can get ready.”

Steve looked at us with imploring eyes and winning smile, so, that’s what we did. We were sitting in their cozy living room by 7:00 o’clock. We had a great time. Poka talked for hours. When he started, he said he wanted to talk about some important personal matters, but before that, he wanted to tell us some wonderful things about God that could be seen in His acts of creation. His narrative began with two amazing things from antiquity, the first originating in creation; the second going back over four thousand years to before Abraham’s day. Then, after that, he said he was going to outline the most recent advances in modern science, including works in Cosmology, Physics, Astronomy, Biochemistry, and Biology. He said the interlinking discoveries of those five disciplines confirm beyond doubt that there was *Intelligent Design* by a Super-Intelligent Designer, even God Himself.⁴⁷⁶ Lastly, he said he wanted to introduce a final topic: The advances in modern science over the last thirty years concerning nutrition. He said that we would be able to see the mighty wisdom of God in His design of the human body and the nutritional system He provided for its sustenance and protection. He closed by telling us that we’d be mystified by our ignorance of these matters.

Then Poka began by quoting Psalm 19:1-4,

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.⁴⁷⁷

Then he said: those words are not poetic fancy. They are truth. He told us what the heavens declare about the Glory of God.⁴⁷⁸ It was as if we were transported back six thousand years and seated on a fallen log at the edge of a forest looking up into the starlit heavens, even as

⁴⁷⁶ Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004). For a marvelous presentation read Strobel’s book. Note: his work is not the only testimony of these amazing things. It is but an introduction to the literature. In *Case for the Creator*, Strobel references over three hundred collaborating books, articles, and/or technical symposiums across an array of scientific disciplines and authors. The individual aspects are astounding, and are documented at the highest level of credibility. Taken together, it is a most argument.

⁴⁷⁷ Psalms 19:1-4.

⁴⁷⁸ Joseph A. Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1972). For wonderful detail, read this rather short book.

Seth or Enoch might have sat with God Himself in the long years of their lives. As he began to discuss the constellations, it was as if we could see the Lord God pointing from star to star and the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac connect and illuminate at the end of His skyward-pointing finger.⁴⁷⁹ We could almost fathom the twelve constellations as they manifest themselves along the Sun's annual circuit. Poka described all Twelve, from Virgo, the Virgin; to Leo, the Lion. Not only did he point them out, but he also explained the Three Decans for each, a total of thirty-six decans, or forty-eight signs in total.

It was an incredible journey we took through the heavens that night. As he talked, Poka unfolded the Gospel Story the heavens declare, the same story that is told in Scripture much later, starting with the *Virgin* conceiving and bringing forth the *Desire of the Nations* until *that same Lion* destroys the *Serpent* that flees through the star system. And, not only did he tell the story, he also described the historic documentation that certifies that these things were known from antiquity, even before the flood of Noah's day, long before the Holy Writ was given by God to man, and even longer before it took shape in written form, and even longer still before it was (and is yet being) lived out in the midst of mankind.

Thus, he demonstrated that the Gospel was *in fact* written in the Heavens by God Himself at the time of creation so long ago. He also showed that that heavenly message was known as far back as the antediluvians (men such as Enoch or Seth) who personally walked with God.

However, before we left the witness of antiquity, Poka told us about another voice calling out to those *who have ears to hear what the Spirit says to man*. He was referring to the *Miracle in Stone*, the Great Pyramid of Egypt, which is so amazing it is even recognized in Scripture...

In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt...⁴⁸⁰

He prefaced his remarks by saying: I am going to give you a brief overview of this great pyramid, for it is a testimony of God's willingness to manifest Himself to man. You see, the more it is studied, the more scientists and savants discover that it is full of mysteries never before known to man, especially four thousand years ago.

He paused to let that sink in, and to prepare us for his next thought, which was...But, not only does this great *altar unto God* provide a glimpse of His magnificence, it also reveals something else, something that is incredibly important. It shows God's willingness, yea, His intent, to accomplish His marvelous works on earth through the companionship of men,

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., Chapter Two, *The Sacred Constellations*: 1. Virgo, the Virgin; 2. Libra, the Scales; 3. Scorpio, the Scorpion; 4. Sagittarius, the Bowman; 5. Capricornus, the Goat; 6. Aquarius, the Waterman; 7. Pisces, the Fishes; 8. Aries, the Ram; 9. Taurus, the Bull; 10. Gemini, the Twins; 11. Cancer, the Crab; and 12. Leo, the Lion.

⁴⁸⁰ Isaiah 19:19-20.

those who love, obey, and walk with Him. For God empowers such with supernatural knowledge and ability—above and beyond anything they could know or do in and of themselves—so that they might do that which He commands. Scripture is replete with examples, a few of which include not only the design and building of this great pyramid, but also such other things as: Noah’s great ark that even today has been discovered and is being marveled at in the mountains of Ararat; the elevation of shepherd boy, Joseph, to understand dreams and have the wisdom to govern Egypt and save the world from famine; the empowering of Moses to call on God to perform mighty miracles and to lead the horde of stubborn Hebrew slaves into the wilderness to become a mighty nation unto God; of the artisans and craftsmen whom God raised up to understand and fabricate the articles for both the tabernacle and the temple; the raising up of the shepherd boy, David, to become King and to establish the religious, military, and administrative duties at the apex of the nation’s history; and many other such examples. And, He has done it throughout the history of mankind until this day, and He will continue to do so as long as man is on this earth. He does these things because He can; He does these things because He wants to; He does these things because man desperately needs His empowering to do good. And, there is one more reason, perhaps the most touching of all: He does these things because both He and His servants (those fortunate enough to have hearts and ears for Him) delight in the pleasure of the fellowship they share, for you see, God enjoys working with/in His children.

What follows, then, is what world-renown scientists, astronomers, and pious men conclude to be a summary of God’s *mysteries* discovered in the pyramid. All of these things, and many more, are discussed in detail in the book itself. In the summary, they argue as follows...

If primeval man was nothing but a gorilla or a troglodyte, how could they have known what our profoundest *savants*, after scores of centuries of observation and experiment, have been able to find out only imperfectly... How could they know the spherity, rotation, diameter, density, latitudes, poles, land distribution, and temperature of the earth, or its astronomic relations? How could they solve the problem of the squaring of the circle, calculate the π proportion, or determine the four cardinal points...How could they know of the grand precessional cycle, the length of its duration, the number of days in the true year, the mean distance of the sun from the earth, and the exact positions of the stars at the time the Great Pyramid was built...And how could they know to put all these things on record in one single piece of masonry, without one verbal or pictorial inscription, yet proof against all the ravages and changes of time, and capable of being read and understood down to the very end of the world? ⁴⁸¹

The Great Pyramid inscribes these things in stone. The great monument *is for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt*. The Great Pyramid is the most important, majestic monument ever constructed on earth. *As just an architectural achievement, this*

⁴⁸¹ Seiss, *A Miracle in Stone*, 228.

mysterious pillar, from the time of Alexander the Great, has held its place at the head of the list of The Seven Wonders of the World. ⁴⁸²

Seiss, et al, concluded that the Great Pyramid was designed and erected under the special guidance and direction of God.

The architects of this edifice were not Egyptians, but men of quite another faith and branch of the human family, who, by an impulse and commission from heaven, and by the special aid of the Most High, induced and superintended the erection of that mighty structure, as a memorial for long after times, to serve as a witness of inspiration, and of the truth and purposes of God, over against the falsities and corruptions of a degenerate and ever-degenerating world. ⁴⁸³

In making this presentation, Poka demonstrated to such clear thinkers as Steve and Sally that this glorious legacy was not myth, but rather, was divine revelation from God to man; and that He was reaching out to mankind through the revelation of the heavens and the great monument in stone.

Then, leaving the witness of antiquity, Poka said that before he summarized the latest advances in modern science, ⁴⁸⁴ he thought it important to summarize Lee Strobel's personal testimony. When Strobel began to review the formidable advances in modern science that disputed Darwin's *Theory of Evolution*, he decided to revisit the reasons he became an atheist in the first place, reasons that persuaded him that Christianity could not stand up to scientific evidence. His is a gripping story of how he barely averted personal tragedy. It is both informative and shocking.

Listen to Strobel...

In my quest to determine if contemporary science points toward or away from God, I knew I had to first examine the claims of evolution in order to conclude whether Darwinism creates a reasonable foundation for atheism. That's because if the materialism of Darwinian evolution is a fact, then the atheistic conclusions I reached as a student might still be valid. Only after resolving this issue could I move ahead to assessing whether there is persuasive affirmative evidence for a Creator.

I decided to return to my days as a student by reexamining those images of evolution—***the Miller experiment, Darwin's tree of life, Haeckel's embryos, and the archaeopteryx missing link***—which had convinced me

⁴⁸² Ibid., 3.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁸⁴ As reported in Strobel's work.

that undirected and purposeless evolutionary processes accounted for the origin and complexity of life.

Those symbols are hardly outdated. In fact, to this day those very same icons are still featured in many biology textbooks and are being seared into the minds of students around the country. But are they accurate in what they convey? What do they really tell us about the trustworthiness of Darwinism?

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What Strobel discovered was that the *Icons of Evolution* that persuaded him to abandon his faith **were false!** The only question that remained after his rigorous investigation, was whether the Darwinists' misrepresentations were erroneous conjecture (as in the case of Miller's experiment, where the assumed atmosphere was later totally discounted by scientists, and where a more realistic atmosphere resulted in the creation of formaldehyde and cyanide—both of which kill proteins and embryos rather than create them—and even so, the experiment is still presented in text books as the explanation for the source of life) or blatant fraud and misrepresentation of scientific evidence, as was also the case in Haeckel's Embryos.

Concerning Haeckel, it was proved ⁴⁸⁶ that he:

1) Faked the similarities in that he doctored the drawings to make them look more similar that they really were.

2) Cherry-picked his examples. He showed four of six mammals, the ones that more closely resembled one another, but did not even show the other two, which did not.

3) Misrepresented his work, for what he presented as the early stage of development of the embryos was nothing of the sort. What he presented was actually the midpoint of development. If you go back to the earlier stages, the embryos look far more different from each other. But, apparently not liking data that would not support the conclusion he sought, he deliberately omitted the earlier stage data all together.

The most damning part of Haeckel's fraud (which was quickly discovered and exposed by his colleagues in the late 1860's, wherein they summarily denounced his work) was the conspiracy that followed: ***For even with this horrendous fraud exposed, his drawings are still used today in text books more than one hundred and fifty years later!*** Can you imagine such a thing? What can possibly explain it other than either: 1) atheistic materialistic philosophy *masquerading* as empirical science; or 2) blatant lies perpetuated

485 Strobel, 35-80.

486 Ibid., 58-59.

by men and/or the devil, whom Jesus called the Father of Lies; or 3) by people so rebellious to God that He has given them over to a reprobate mind, so that they can no longer understand truth.⁴⁸⁷

Likewise, Strobel's other concerns were also summarily dismissed. And, with that he was free to look into the advances in Cosmology, Physics, Astronomy, Biochemistry, and Biology with an open, honest, inquisitive mind. **And when he did, it became clear that the advances in modern science overwhelmingly affirm Intelligent Design!**

With that, Poka took us on an incredible journey through those advances. It was a great adventure, but there is not time to try to recap what he said. Rather, we should all do what Poka advised: read Strobel's excellent book.

At that point, since it was late, the old man smiled asked, *"I know it is late, but may I take a moment to introduce a final topic? I shall only announce it and tell you where you can find much more information."*

We were enthralled with things we'd never heard, and urged him to continue. So, he took a breath and launched out again, smiling ever so kindly at Sally and Steve as he did.

"To introduce this topic, let me summarize a touching story reported in Joel Fuhrman, M.D.'s, book, *The End of Heart Disease*.⁴⁸⁸ It is told by Charlene in her own words."⁴⁸⁹

It would be easy to blame my health problems on heredity because I've been heavy since childhood. I have history of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes on both sides of my family. Over the years, I tried many diets, but they didn't work well, or for long. I reached a top weight of 263 pounds on my 5-foot-4 inch frame and resigned myself to forever being a plus-sized woman. I avoided seeing doctors because, although they lectured me about my weight, the only solution they offered was a calorie-restricted version of the Standard American Diet, which made me feel always hungry and miserable.

At age 56, I had a stroke. After almost a month in the hospital and a rehab center, I returned home diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, arteries that were about 65 percent blocked, and a low thyroid level. To control all of these ills I was given a bunch of prescription medications, which I was expected to take for the rest of my life...

My husband...found Dr. Fuhrman's web site...I quickly shed pounds, and my lab tests improved. Although my diabetes was controlled to the satisfaction

⁴⁸⁷ Romans 1:18-32.

⁴⁸⁸ This story is from Joel Fuhrman, M.D., *The End of Heart Disease*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers). Readers are urged to read Fuhrman's book for themselves.

⁴⁸⁹ Fuhrman, 132-133.

of my doctors, Dr. Fuhrman said that the first priority was to get rid of it completely with nutritional excellence...About a year and a half later, I was no longer diabetic and had no further heart problems. My current weight is around 130...As hard as it is to imagine, the last time I was this weight, I was younger than twelve.

It has now been many years since I started the Nutritarian diet, and I have maintained my weight loss and have had no diet-related medical problems...I owe all these positive changes to Dr. Fuhrman's program.

"This life (and an expanding wave of many thousands of others) was revitalized and restored because of the discoveries made by nutritional scientists, doctors, and researchers. And, while they do not actually recognize or give God credit, what they have discovered is that His hand is just as apparent in physical health as it is in the other things we have discussed. God designed the human body; and developed a perfect system of nutrients to sustain it. All you need to do is to turn aside from the allurements of *Fast Food America*, pick up Fuhrman's work, and sit before the Lord to let Him unfold the truth of these discoveries—for after all, scientists are only discovering what the Lord God put in place long ago."⁴⁹⁰

As Poka began to finish, the *silent praying* I'd been doing all night changed. A burden for Sally's healing came upon me so strongly that I could hardly keep from crying out. A verse welled up in my spirit...

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

⁴⁹¹

And I saw it! Sally was oppressed by a cancerous demon. I was enflamed with passion and power. I knew if I could put my hands on her head, God would provide the anointing and power to cast it out. Sally would be healed by the power of the Holy Spirit, exactly as so many were in NT days. You will not be surprised that Poka was aware of the entire matter. He turned immediately to Steve and Sally and asked if they would like to meet the living God. He looked directly at Sally. Tears began to well up in her eyes. She nodded 'Yes', and began to weep. Poka turned to me, but I was already on my feet. I put my hands on her head, and commanded the demon of cancer to come out in the name of Jesus. A jolt of power flowed through my being, out my hands, and into Sally's body. She jumped to her feet, let out a

⁴⁹⁰ He pointed out that Fuhrman goes into great technical and medical detail down to the cellular level, showing how plant nutrients nurture and empower the body to defend itself against invaders of all types. He cites hundreds of scientific studies in the last thirty years that corroborate his own findings as a practicing MD and Nutritionist for more than twenty-five years. He also points out that *Fast Food America* and the *Pharmaceutical lobby* have corrupted medical practice. Read his book; see these things for yourself.

⁴⁹¹ Acts 10:38.

shriek, and then began to dance. I didn't know that she was an accomplished ballerina, but she danced wonderfully. During that time, her color returned to normal, and she exclaimed,

“Steve, my darling, I AM HEALED. I FEEL IT; I KNOW IT! I FELT THE POWER AND LOVE OF A WONDERFUL GOD. I KNOW HE IS REAL; I KNOW IT FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART! IT IS MOST MARVELOUS!!!”

And they began to weep, and to laugh and to bounce up and down with joy. And we did, too. It was a stupendous moment. The Savior had come in great power. We talked more, and I told them the wonderful story of Jesus and His love. And they were born again that very night. They had met the Living God Who died for them; and Who loves them with His most wonderful love.

That's why I called Mary Alice the next morning to ask permission to bring them with us to the party. And God had gone before my call. Mary was delighted; and most gracious. And, before we hung up, I told her that we had a wonderful surprise to share that night.

What a glorious night that Thursday evening turned out to be!

* * * * *

Well, that's what Hoss told us that Monday morning. And, as you already read, we had a blessed time at Mary's party the Friday night before.

The Final Thing

The last thing I wanted to tell you concerns our intentions pursuant to Poka's visit. Hoss, Skeeter, and I, along with their wives, my mother, Betty Ann (I did invite her as Poka suggested, and she was delighted to join us) and—get this, Steve and Sally Berkshire—and some others from church, have already started to meet at 6:00 o'clock each morning. And Hoss has begun to teach us about biblical fasting and praying.

We plan to rediscover the *Lost Way of the Bible*, and walk in it the rest of our lives. We've confessed the iniquity of *religion our own way*. We've asked our Lord to reveal His Father's Word to us once again. It is our desire to understand so that we might obey, and to continue to do so more and more as the years go by. We desire that His Word *become a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path*.⁴⁹² Folks come to our times of prayer when they can and leave when they must. But while there, there is a crying out to God at the altar until *we be endued with Power from on high*.⁴⁹³ We intend to keep on crying out until we learn how to *abide in Christ Jesus*. And we are going to keep on crying out until the Lord raises up from our number—as He chooses—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers, until...

⁴⁹² Psalm 119:105.

⁴⁹³ Luke 24:49.

we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. ⁴⁹⁴

We are not sure what will follow. But we have great hope, for we have tasted (once again) and seen that the Lord Jesus Christ is very good indeed. We cannot imagine life without the fullness of His presence in the power of His Holy Spirit. We think we are willing to seek Him, and to change as He tells (and empowers) us to change. And, filled with His Spirit, we intend to walk together in love in the grace and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

If you are as touched by the challenge of *The Oracles of God* as we are, and, if you'd like to drop me a note, I'd be glad to hear from you. Send it to my email address, and if you'd like a response, I'll try to get back to you. Thank you for spending time with me in this book.

darelldyal@gmail.com

494 Ephesians 4:13-16. NASB

Part V

Supplementing Studies

Part V discusses nine topics that occurred in the chronicle, but, while important, were relocated to the back to streamline the narrative. However, since they occurred as part of the old man's teaching, to the extent practical, the *formatting* has been left as it occurred. You will observe that—for convenience of readers—numerous biblical references are included in the narration.

The first study, *The Two Accounts of Creation*, demonstrates that a straightforward reading of Genesis chapters one and two shows that there is not, and never should have been, a conflict between science and the Bible on the matter of the age of the earth or Adam's race. Many will rejoice to see this truth explained in the simplicity of its resolution.

Studies two and three, *The Word of God* and *The Commandments of Christ*, work in concert to emphasize the all-important role of Scripture in the life of humanity, especially those seeking to please God.

The fourth, the way *Paul Prayed for the Church*, reveals God's perspective of the needs of the church, and shows how to pray for it. This study is a marvelous teaching on prayer. It is to be emulated as part of *Keeping the Traditions*, as set forth in supplement five, following.

The fifth, a treatise on *Keeping the Traditions*, is of paramount importance. Its inclusion in this book is mandatory, for this command is poorly understood and virtually ignored and disobeyed by today's church, with catastrophic implications to its welfare.

The sixth is a teaching about the *Hedge of Righteousness* as it pertains to spiritual warfare. To understand it is to gain valuable insight into the wiles of the devil and how to overcome them.

The seventh is a discussion about the Restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2, who keeps *the heinous day* from occurring until God's appointed time.⁴⁹⁵ It offers insight to those who wish to know more about *End Time Events*.

The eighth eliminates the confusion about the so-called *Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church*. It is an in-depth analysis of pertinent biblical passages. To carefully read it is to realize that much error is being taught in these days.

⁴⁹⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

The ninth is a final warning underscoring the frequency of disobedience of God. It shows by a straightforward example, *I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting...*⁴⁹⁶ that the Word of God is simply ignored by a modern church that, in spite of its continuous disobedience, considers itself to be spiritually rich.⁴⁹⁷

Together, these supplementing studies add great wealth and insight to the work.

496 1 Timothy 2:8.

497 Revelation 3:14-22.

Study 1: *The Two Accounts of Creation*

In chapter three of *The Oracles of God*, Poka demonstrated that we were unable to read the Bible for what it says because we impose our opinions about the verses onto the text itself, rather than asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to us what the words *actually* say. At first, we couldn't grasp his point, but we began to understand when the old man asked Skeet what he saw in the words...

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Skeeter said he pictured the blueness and beauty of the earth as portrayed via satellite imagery. When asked how he got that understanding from the words—*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*—Skeet realized he was doing exactly what the old man said: he was *projecting his own idea onto the passage*, instead of meditating on its words to discover its real meaning. Poka built upon that first glimmer of understanding throughout the week, until finally we realized that what he said about us was true—we don't read the words for what they say.

The debate with Skeet in Genesis concluded, Poka continued to teach in that book because he said there was something very important we needed to learn from chapters one and two. However, during the rest of that discussion, he directed his comments to Hoss.

So, let us listen to what the old man told Hoss about the *Two Accounts of Creation*.

"Pastor, I am glad you begin to see that you superimpose your opinions onto the intent of the verses, thereby blocking their true meaning. But, let me expand upon that thought to demonstrate that others in the church do the same thing. You shall see how devastating such folly can be."

Hoss looked at Poka expectantly, and waited silently,

"I suppose you agree with those who teach that the *Two Accounts of Creation* both describe the same creation event, but from different perspectives, right?"

"Yes Sir. That's one of the things in Bible school we were taught was *fait accompli*.⁴⁹⁸ It's so clear that it's neither necessary nor appropriate to recognize or reconcile the conflicting statements between the accounts. After all, *true faith believes the Bible*, no matter what men say contrary to its teaching. That's what I was taught; it makes sense to me; and, that's what I teach."

⁴⁹⁸ It is considered to be *so irreversibly established* that it need not be questioned, examined, or defended.

“I thought so, Harry. Therefore, you will be startled to discover that, once again, you have let the opinions of men tell you what the Word means, instead of letting the Holy Spirit open it to you. For, if you will read the two accounts for what they actually say, you will see that they do not describe one creation event, but rather, two. For a few moments, Pastor, pry your mind open to consider that the words in Genesis chapters one and two actually mean what they say, not what men have told you they mean. If you do this, you will see that everything in both accounts makes perfect sense. Once you understand that, you will see that the so-called differences between the *advances of science* and the *Bible’s truths* evaporate. For God’s Word has never changed. It provides, as it has always provided, a framework broad and deep enough to accommodate *all truth*. Look with me and see that this is so. But, remember: Read the words for what they **actually** say; not what somebody says they say; not what you, yourselves, think they say.”

He paused, looked deep into Hoss’ eyes, and asked,

“Will you try to do this?”

“Yes, Sir. I will.”

Well, you can imagine that, once again, the old man had our attention. We almost held our breath as he began...

The First Account of Creation ⁴⁹⁹

Earnest and I partially addressed the *First Account of Creation*. We saw God’s amazing handiwork unfold before our eyes. In the thirty-one verses of chapter one, and the first three of chapter two, ⁵⁰⁰ we heard God’s testimony of His Creation. To contemplate that *first*

⁴⁹⁹ Genesis 1:1-2:3.

⁵⁰⁰ You may be aware that *chapters* and *verses* do not appear in the early manuscripts. They were added during the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries *by men* trying to make the Bible more usable. But, in spite of *best efforts*, errors were made, two of which appear in our text in Genesis. The first is the location of the break between chapters one and two. A more appropriate ending for chapter one would be after the first three verses of chapter two. Had this location been set, the *First Account* would have closed at the end of the *seventh day* of Creation, and the *Second* would have started cleanly as chapter two, with the benefit of having a clearer separation between the *two creation accounts*.

The second mistake quickly follows. It is the confusing break between verses *four* and *five* of chapter two. This, too, is troublesome. Look at the way the verses are separated in your Bible. Note that the punctuation in the NKJV makes the reading so very clear.

4 *This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,*

5 *before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground;*

If you read verse four and five without the verse numbers, you see that *five* is a continuation and completion of the thought started in *four*, without which *four* can hardly be understood. Then remember, verse numbers were inserted by *well-intended, yet, fallible* men. Do you begin to see how these rather arbitrary divisions mislead and cause problems?

account is to note its precise sequence, one that was accomplished in seven days. The first day God created heaven, earth, and light, and named light, *Day*, and dark, *Night*. The second, He created a vast expanse in the midst of the waters of earth's initial configuration. He called that expanse, Heaven.⁵⁰¹ The third, He commanded the *waters to gather together into one place* and *dry land to appear*. He named dry land, *Earth*; and the waters, *Seas*. He commanded grass, seed bearing herbs, and trees to grow. The fourth, He called for lights in the firmament, and created the sun, moon, and stars. The fifth, He commanded the waters to abound with living creatures, and birds to fly above the earth. The sixth, He told the earth to bring forth living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and beast of the earth, according to its kind. Finally, God created man (male and female) in His own image. He blessed them, and told them to *be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*. Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. On the seventh day God ended His work and rested. He blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

The Second Account of Creation⁵⁰²

As you will see in a moment, the *Second Account* is quite different. Let us identify those differences and examine their significance. Again, *Read the words for what they say; not what somebody says they say; not what you, yourselves, think they say*. (Note how much clearer the following text reads with chapter and verse indicators removed.⁵⁰³) The reading begins at Genesis 2:4.

This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God⁵⁰⁴ planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had

To contemplate the impact of these compounded *mistakes* is to see that they obscure the meaning of the *Two Accounts of Creation*. Do not lightly dismiss these problems as *just mistakes*. Keep in mind that the *Liar, the Father of Lies* (John 8:44) was doing his evil work as early as Genesis chapter three. He is the Liar and deceiver, constantly assaulting the body of Christ. 501 In 2 Corinthians 12:2, Paul was caught up to the third heaven. The first two heavens are likely: the atmosphere of earth as the first heaven; the space of the universe (the vast firmament God created in Genesis 1:6-8) as the second.

502 Genesis 2:4-25.

503 As is done, for example, by Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961.)

504 I insert this footnote where it occurred to highlight a decision made by the Committee on Bible Translation for the New International Version, (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984. That decision authorized the NIV translators *to add words to God's Text* when they felt it necessary. And they did. But alas, in doing so, they bumped against God's grievous warning. (See Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6; and Revelation 22:18-19). This is discussed at the end of Poka's teaching here in study number one.

formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, *Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*

And the LORD God said, *It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.* Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: *This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.* Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

To look at the two accounts is to observe that there are:

1. Differences in timing and content. In the *First Account*, Creation occurred ***in the beginning***, and therein, God created ***everything that was created***. The *Second Account* does not specify that ***Creation*** was in the beginning; neither does it say that ***all things*** were created during the timeframe of the second account. To contrast the two accounts is to see the obvious: some things were changed upon the earth by circumstances not revealed at this point in the Word.
2. Differences in the sequence of the events of creation. That is, man was created last in the *First Account*, but first in the *Second*.⁵⁰⁵ Also, the Heavens and the Earth were in existence at the time the *Second* is related, but *no plant or herb had grown in the field; for God had not caused it to rain on the earth*. Therefore, in the second account, some of God's Creative Work was done again.⁵⁰⁶ This is very different from the *First Account*, where the grass, herbs, and trees were created in the *Third Day*, but man

⁵⁰⁵ This will be expanded further during Point 5.

⁵⁰⁶ Hence the reference to His creative activities in the opening sentence.

was not created until the end of the *Sixth Day*. And, there was a sequential progression until all things were created in their turn.

3. Differences in the creation of man and woman. In the *First Account* God created *man in His own image, male and female created He them*. But, it does not say God breathed the breath of Life into them; nor does it say that they became *Living Beings*. Whereas, in the *Second Account*, God created the man first; breathed into him the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Also, different from the *First Account*, in the *Second*, the woman was not made until later.
4. Differences in the sequence of Creation. Here in Point 4. is an expansion on the thought introduced in 2. above. Adam was formed from the dust of the ground before any other living thing was on the earth, either plant, herb, tree, or animal. In other words, God created Adam first; *then* He created a garden (and all other plant life) into which to put him. *Later still*, God said, *It is not good for man to be alone. And, out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.* Do you understand this point? God created the animals after He created Adam; and He created them to see if, within the animal kingdom, there could be found a helper comparable to the man. Yet, the NIV, by adding a word, ***had***, would have you believe that the LORD God had already created the animals—and this, in spite of the clear meaning in the text. Read the words again. See if this is not so: *It is not good for man to be alone. And, out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.*
5. Differences between the *First* and *Second Accounts* regarding the tasks given to man. In the *First*, man was instructed to *be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*. In the *Second*, the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to tend and keep it*. In this account, Eve was created to be Adam's helper and completion. Different from the *First Account*, she was not assigned to be co-regent; nor was Adam specifically assigned rulership of the Earth, for no dominion or rulership of the earth is mentioned in the *Second Account*, though there are things you might conclude about rulership from within the text, as well as elsewhere in the counsel of the Word of God.

6. Differences about the *tree of life* and the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. These trees do not appear in the first account, at all; yet, play a prominent role in the second.

Explanation of the Differences between The Two Accounts

Both the *First and Second Accounts* are, of course, totally accurate and say what God chose to say, for He is God, and His Word reports what He said and did. Given that understanding, it is easy to see that the accounts address two different events. The *first* took place ***In the Beginning***, perhaps eons before the recreation events of the *second*. The *first creation* has the breadth of time and scope to accommodate all advances in scientific discovery, including the Big Bang theory, the age and size of the universe, the discovery of prehistoric life, and all the other marvels yet to be uncovered by the advances of technology derived from the intellect God imparted to man. It also allows for *a form of humans* to live on the earth before Adam.

The *Second Creation Account* depicts the history of Adam and his posterity, which chronology is clearly traceable for six thousand years, and counting. It is this *second account* that the bulk of the pages of the Word of God addresses, for these things are the things that occupy the heart and work of God Himself, which activities are wonderfully described in the Bible, and are far too complex to try to summarize here in a few words.

Note, however, that the *Two Accounts* do not reveal what happened between the *Total First Creation* and the *Partial Second Recreation* that so drastically changed the earth from a life-giving world to one that was lifeless and dormant. But, there is enough biblical information to suggest that wickedness emerged after the *first creation* that was so despicable that God judged and dealt with it, after which the earth was without life until the LORD God began His recreation activities with Adam. Think not that such *wickedness and consequent judgment* is not possible, or that God will not pronounce such judgment, for there are four such accounts in the Word that show that it has happened before/will happen again.

Consider:

- 1) There is the account of Noah and the flood that destroyed all life on the earth, except for Noah and those with him in the ark. ⁵⁰⁷
- 2) There is God's conversation with Moses on Mount Saini wherein the Lord said to Moses, *I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.* But, Moses interceded for the people, and God relented from the harm He was going to do to them... ⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ Genesis 6:1-9:29

⁵⁰⁸ Exodus 32:1-35.

- 3) Later, God's anger was again aroused against this same group of rebels.⁵⁰⁹ In that account, you will see that, once again, He was prepared to destroy all of them, this time for refusing to believe Him and enter the Promised Land. Again, Moses interceded. Even so, the entire generation (except for Caleb and Joshua) numbered in the Census, died in the wilderness without entering the Promised Land; and finally,
- 4) The account at the end of the age, described by OT Prophets and the Revelation, wherein the Lord shall judge all the dead, from Adam forward. Those found in the Book of Life will be with God and the Lamb forever; all others shall be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity. Then the entire universe shall be consumed with intense heat so hot that the elements themselves will melt into nothingness. Then, God shall make new heavens and a new earth, and the New Jerusalem shall descend from heaven and settle upon the New Earth, and God and the Lamb shall dwell therein with the saints forever.⁵¹⁰

God does what He will; He is God. But, He is not capricious. His Word tells what He did; what you must do; and what you will receive, *blessing* or *cursing*, depending upon obedience or not. Read it for what it says. Meditate in it day and night; obey it. To do so is to make your way prosperous.⁵¹¹

* * * * *

Before we close this study, we must look at one dreadful thing more that Poka showed us. He started by quoting two crucial verses...

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.⁵¹²

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.⁵¹³

Then he said,

509 Numbers 14:1-45.

510 Revelation 20:11-15.

511 Joshua 1:8-9.

512 Deuteronomy 4:2.

513 Revelation 22:18-19.

“This, now, is a true *fait accompli*, for it was decided before those affected heard it, leaving no option but to obey. You must not *add to* or *take away from* God’s Word. Pastor, is that not as clear as it can be?”

“Yes, Sir, it is. And so I was taught; and so I teach.”

Yet, Accuracy of Translation is a Continuous Challenge

Translators face the difficulty of obeying God’s command to *not add to or take from His Word*, on the one hand, and to *provide words that the original texts do not contain but which English requires for clarity* ⁵¹⁴ on the other. Some translations ⁵¹⁵ set forth such *clarifying words* in italic type, so that the reader can see the additions. Others do not. Concerning this delicate matter, translators must take great care, lest they cross the line and begin adding or omitting words ***that change the meaning of the text.***

You will be shocked and disappointed by the following example, where the translators of the decades-long highest-selling Bible translation, the New International Version (NIV), drifted into error and added words that, to them, must have seemed implicit (but not present) in the original language. ⁵¹⁶ Consider the example in our immediate text. We already saw in *The Second Account of Creation*, that the LORD God created Adam first.

This *is* the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and *there was* no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ⁵¹⁷

Is not this clearly written and easy to understand? *The Lord God formed man and then planted a garden in which to put the man.* Yet, for their own reasons, the NIV translators added ***one little word!*** The word they chose to add was the verb, ***had***. Look at the passage in their version,

⁵¹⁴ The Holy Bible, New King James Version, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers), Preface, page x.

⁵¹⁵ Such as the KJV, NKJV, NAS.

⁵¹⁶ The Holy Bible, *New International Version*, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers), Preface, page ix.

⁵¹⁷ Genesis 2:4-9.

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God **had** planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Do you see how the word, **had**, obscures the meaning? It suggests that the referenced action by the LORD (that of planting a garden after He created Adam) may have taken place before the LORD created Adam, which is clearly not what the text says. Perhaps the NIV translators adhered to the opinion that the two accounts describe one creation event? It certainly seems that, by adding the word, **had**, they attempt to support that point. Only they can say what they were actually trying to do, but the fact is, they added a word to His Word after being specifically commanded by Him not to do so. But, you will be stunned to see that their added word, **had**, does not appear in ancient manuscripts, **at all**, as substantiated by the fact that it is not in prominent translations, including the Geneva Bible, English Standard Version, Jerusalem Bible, King James Version, New American Standard Bible, New King James Version, Revised Version, or Young's Literal Translation. But there it is in the NIV.

Further, the NIV translators ignored their own stipulation that *if there was uncertainty about the material, it is enclosed in brackets*. Do you think the well-read NIV translators were unaware that they, alone,—of all translators—added the word, **had**? Of course not! They were scholars; they knew what the other translators had written. Yet, the NIV is the only version to make this addition. Therefore, by their own rule, they should have at least put the, **had**, in brackets (and maybe even included a footnote) to alert modern readers that the NIV had taken a different path from all other translations!

And, there is another grievous thing they did in this same chapter. Not only did they add **had** in verse eight, but they also added it in verse nineteen. Look:

Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. (NKJV)

Now the LORD God **had** formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.
(NIV)⁵¹⁸

Is it not clear that, once again, they presumed to change the clear meaning of God's Word to *shape it to their own opinion*, in that they imply that the animals were created before

518 The ESV, alone, followed them in this madness concerning verse nineteen.

Adam, when the second account clearly states that *God created the animals after He had created Adam*. And, they did this in spite of the fact that God said,

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. ⁵¹⁹

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. ⁵²⁰

Woe to those who try to fit God's Word into their doctrines. Remove yourself from such influence, for no one knows how many other words they add to fashion a *version* of their own image. Alas, that is a high-risk path before the God who watches over His Word to perform it. ⁵²¹ However, if you insist on reading the NIV, at least study it in parallel with solid translations whose goal is to provide *complete equivalence* ⁵²² with the original manuscripts.

⁵¹⁹ Deuteronomy 4:2.

⁵²⁰ Revelation 22:18-19.

⁵²¹ Jeremiah 1:11-12. (NAS)

⁵²² "*Complete Equivalence* seeks to preserve all the information in the text while presenting it in good literary form. Whereas, *Dynamic Equivalence*, a recent procedure in Bible translation, commonly results in paraphrasing where *a more literal rendering is needed to reflect a specific and vital sense*. For example, a *complete equivalent* rendering of 1 Samuel 15:33 would read, *and Samuel hacked [or hewed] Agag in pieces...* However, one contemporary translation needlessly softens the statement, *And Samuel put Agag to death*. The latter rendering does not accurately translate the language of the text, following the principle of dynamic equivalence, the procedure rather widely followed throughout that version." The Holy Bible, New King James Version, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers), Preface, i.

Note that the NKJV editors did not name the translation. But, that version is the NIV. Check it out for yourself.

Study 2: *The Word of God*

Poka said,

God empowers victorious living *in Christ, in the Spirit, in obedience to His Word*,⁵²³ for...

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.⁵²⁴

It is not like man's word. God says,

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.⁵²⁵

Then the old man turned to me and asked,

“Daniel, do you understand these words?”

You know that by that point, I didn't want to speak at all. But, I couldn't let Skeeter take all the licks, so I took a deep breath and said...

“Those are astonishing words. They must mean what they say, right? That is, God's words are alive somehow, though I can't imagine how. And, He sends them forth to accomplish His bidding. They will not fail, and will return to Him when they finish the task. Now, that's amazing.”

I looked at him and hoped that that was enough answer. But he just smiled and waited. So I tried again.

523 Darell B. Dyal, *For Such a Time as This...We Must Walk in the Power of the Holy Spirit*, (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 53-80. The concept of *Abiding in Christ, Walking in the Holy Spirit, in Obedience to the Word of God*, is discussed at length herein.

524 Hebrews 4:12-13. KJV

525 Isaiah 55:1-13. KJV

“If you’d asked me that yesterday, I’d have said I reckoned it was sort of a figure of speech, because, after all, **those verses can’t mean what they say**. We all know that words aren’t alive; neither do they have power capable of destruction. It’s not possible. They’re only words. Right?”

But, as I made that foolish statement, a wondrous thing happened! It was as if, in an instant, a marvelous two-part vision unfolded before my eyes. ⁵²⁶ **The first was of the prophet Elijah. Ahab had sent a captain and his fifty soldiers to bring Elijah to him. I saw them talk; and heard what they said. This is how it’s described in Scripture...**

Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I *be* a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I *be* a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight.

And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. ⁵²⁷

I tell you, when I saw fire *flame down* from heaven, I felt a tremor of the power of the Word of God even as it must have been when it was upon the prophet. It was awesome! He spoke the word from God, and fire fell; and not just a candle’s worth: it was a crackling, all-consuming fire, for God’s *Word is like a fire. And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.* ⁵²⁸

Then, even as that vision lifted, I saw another.

In it, I was with an old man of God. We’d gone to visit the Lord. When we arrived, Jesus and the old prophet had a lively conversation, the way good friends do. But don’t misunderstand: it was clear to me, as it was to both of them: they weren’t speaking as

⁵²⁶ This is not fiction. It happened to me. I’d been waiting before the Lord that I might better understand that magnificent topic, *The Word of God*.

⁵²⁷ 2 Kings 1:9-15. KJV

⁵²⁸ Jeremiah 23:29.

equals. The old prophet knew he was but a man, and a servant at that; and the Lord, He is God. Of course the Lord also knew. However, with that firmly established in both their minds, they conversed as the good friends they were. As for me, I remained silently in the background, my heart overflowing with joy. I rejoiced to see my friends enjoy such fellowship. I was thankful just to be there and see that glorious sight.

Yet, as their conversation closed, the Lord turned, and from behind Him picked up a marvelous sword, which He then held in front with both hands, its blade pointed up at a forty-five-degree angle. I was amazed. The sword was shimmering, or maybe, simmering, in the radiance of power. An enlivened golden color, it was about three feet long; its blade, four inches wide. As He swung it in a slow arc in His mighty right hand, it sizzled with crackling energy. I was transfixed by the magnificence of the weapon. And as I stared I knew that it was the Sword of the Spirit, the very Word of God; I knew it was marvelously sharp, able to slice through anything, anything at all.

As the Lord held the sword in front of Him, He looked intently at me for a moment, as if considering whether I might be ready to wield the marvelous sword. But, to my shame He returned it to its place behind Him. He spoke not a word; neither dared I, for what could I say to One such as He?

And that was the end of the vision.

Even still today I marvel as I ponder the magnificence of that revelation... But that is another matter. For our story, the thing is this: after I had that revelation

I knew that I knew

that the Word of God is *living, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword*. I understood that It is far more than *ink-on-paper*. It is alive; it is like an electrically charged, super high-voltage power matrix, an incredibly complex network of united oneness, the illuminating truth of God. It shall accomplish God's purposes across the ages, and then it will return to Him Who sent it.

Therefore, I proclaimed,

"The Word is Alive, and Powerful, and very Sharp! It is to be studied, understood, and obeyed. ***It is higher than our thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth.***"

I could tell by the huge smile on Poka's face that he knew the Lord had revealed a most precious thing to me. And he rejoiced accordingly. Then, he asked me to tell them what the Lord had showed me. And so I did.

When I finished, Skeeter exclaimed,

"I see it, too! It's as if a veil has been lifted from my eyes! The Word of God is **alive!** It's not dusty paragraphs in an old book. This is amazing!"

Poka's concluding remark was...

“Here then, you have come to know the unknowable. This is a merciful act of Almighty God: He has opened your eyes. Let us thank Him.”

Then he began to sing out in spontaneous praise and worship. And for the first time in our lives, both Skeeter and I entered in. It was as if the Holy Spirit fell upon us as at Pentecost. There were exclamations of gladness and praise from all. We sang and praised God with all our hearts. Skeeter and I proclaimed glories of the Lord we knew not before. It was a glorious thing.

Study 3: *Commandments of Christ*

Poka continued.

You will soon realize that the Commandments of Christ include all of the Word of God. And why would they not? For the Lord Jesus is the *Word of God*.⁵²⁹ But, let us look together to test this assertion. I think you will find the analysis full of refreshing insight.

Jesus said,

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.⁵³⁰

He also said,

If ye love me, keep my commandments...He that hath my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him...If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.⁵³¹

The first text includes the terms *Law* and *Prophets*. And, Jesus interchanges the words *Law* and *commandments*. He fulfilled the Law, and tasked believers to keep and teach the commandments. In the second passage He reiterates the requirement in straightforward language. Therefore, the Bible's test as to whether a believer knows, loves, and abides in Jesus is one thing: *Does he have and keep Jesus' commandments?* For when you stop and ponder what that means, you will see that it includes everything you are to know, do, and be. By interchanging the terms *Law* and *commandments*, and telling you to keep them, the Lord clearly placed upon believers the responsibility to know *What His commandments are*. This is of paramount importance, for by *having* and *keeping* God's commandments all of His requirements are met. If you claim to be serious about your love for Jesus, you will keep His

⁵²⁹ John 1:1; Revelation 19:13.

⁵³⁰ Matthew 5:17-20. KJV

⁵³¹ John 14:15-24. KJV

commandments.⁵³² In order to do that, you must *have* them, and to *have* them you must be willing obey them, for it is to the obedient heart that revelation is made, for Jesus said, *My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*⁵³³ He also said, *If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*⁵³⁴

The all-important question is: *What are His commandments?* To answer that, we shall: Do a word study on the term *commandments*, in the Bible; Look at how Jesus and the apostles understood and reacted to the Word; Show that the OT is the foundation for the New; and Demonstrate that the OT and the NT form an integrated whole, the Word of God, the very Commandments of Christ.

Consider the following medley of verses,⁵³⁵

If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments...If you love Me, you will keep My commandments...If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love... And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments; the one who says, I have come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, the love of God has truly been perfected.

What Poka did next was to select fourteen passages containing commandment-related words;⁵³⁶ examine each selection to develop a list of pertinent Hebrew and Greek words.

⁵³⁷ The resultant twenty-three words span the Old and New Testaments, melding them into one. This, when combined with the following analysis, shows that Jesus' Commandments include the entire Bible. But, let's not rush that conclusion.

The Lord understood, of course, that the OT was the foundation for the NT; and that, together, the two form an integrated whole, the Word of God. He based His entire philosophy and conduct on that Word. Look at His temptation: *Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, If You are the Son of*

532 This is not new. Jesus was clear in the beginning: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...* Matthew 28:19-20

533 John 7:16-17.

534 John 8:31-31.

535 Matthew 19:17; John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 2:3-5.

536 The fourteen passages include: Deuteronomy 11:18-28; Josh 1:5-8; Psalm 119:8-17; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Matthew 4:1-11; John 1:1-5; 7:14-20; 8:28-32; 10:34-36; 12:44-50; 13:31-35; 14:15-31; 15:1-17; 1 John 2:3-8.

537 The twenty-three words include: 1. *dabar*, speech, word; 2. *mitsvah*, commandment; 3. *torah*, direction, instruction, law, Law; 4. *cepher*, a missive, document, writing, book; 5. *kathab*, write; 6. *choq*, something prescribed, a statute; 7. *mishpat*, judgment; 8. *eduth*, testimony; 9. *piqqud*, precepts; 10. *orach*, a way, path; 11. *hieros*, a sacred thing, a temple; 12. *gramma*, that which is written; 13. *graphie*, a writing, scripture; 14. *grapho*, to write; 15. *rhema*, a word; 16. *logos*, a word; 17. *didasko*, to teach; 18. *didache*, doctrine, teaching; 19. *laleo*, to talk; 20. *nomos*, that which is assigned, hence law; 21. *entole*, injunction, command; 22. *epo*, to say; 23. *entellomai*, to enjoin, charge, command.

God throw Yourself down; for it is written, HE WILL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE CONCERNING YOU; ON THEIR HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, LEST YOU STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE. *Jesus said to him, 'On the other hand, it is written, YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST'.* ⁵³⁸

Thus, it was. Throughout the NT, Jesus submitted to, quoted, and relied on Scripture. In response to the temptations, He told the devil, *Behold it is written:* then quoted the Word: *Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God; You shall not put the Lord your God to the test; You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.* ⁵³⁹ You, too, need to learn to overcome temptation by standing on God's Word.

Matthew four is the supreme teaching on the importance of knowing the Word, for, while the devil misquoted Scripture, Jesus accurately quoted and stood upon it against him—and won the victory by so doing! He quoted the OT more than one hundred thirty times in the NT. In essence, He, and the apostles who followed Him, fashioned the NT from the OT. Look at a few instances...

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name, perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' Matt 7:21-23; (Psalm 6:8) ⁵⁴⁰

This compelling text is built on a quote from Psalm 6.

In another instance, He said,

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. (Mic 7:6) He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. ⁵⁴¹

Here at the heart of this vital doctrine is a direct quote from the prophets.

⁵³⁸ Matthew 4:5-7.

⁵³⁹ Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16; 6:13.

⁵⁴⁰ Vine, page 357. In particular, "In 1 John 3:4, the RSV adheres to the real meaning of the word, *every one that does sin (a practice not just a committal of an act) doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.* This definition of sin sets forth its essential character as the rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self."

⁵⁴¹ Matthew 10:34-39

And again,

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and WILL THEN RECOMPENSE EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. Matthew 16: 24-27 (Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12)

He also used this reference in the Revelation,

*Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*⁵⁴²

In the next passage, He interweaves the OT into the New, yet making the Law even more stringent,

You have heard that it was said, AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH. (Exodus 21:24) But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, (Leviticus 19:18) and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38-48)

What more can be said? He not only used the Law, but He elevated its requirement for righteousness from *letter* to *intent* (or, Spirit).

That Jesus used the OT as fabric for the New, is clearly substantiated in the NT, but for the sake of time, we will not look at additional instances. But Jesus' actions are just one proof,

⁵⁴² Revelation 22:10-12

not, that we need any further testimony. Yet, in God's mercy, we also have the witness of the Apostles and other NT writers, who directly quoted the OT more than 500 times; and referenced it an amazing 2,400 times. In other words, the NT is built on over 3,000 references to the Old, or about 10 references per NT page. Imagine, such intense integration.

Look at how NT writers used the OT as *outline* and *nucleus* for construct of the New. For instance, the vital matter of salvation by faith in Christ, the heart of the NT, is based on numerous OT references. In Romans 10:8-13, Paul builds his entire *teaching of salvation* from the OT, citing both the Law and the Prophets. Consider,

But what does it say? THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART, (Deuteronomy 30:14) that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED. (Isaiah 28:16) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED. (Joel 2:32).

In the case of God's workmen, Paul said,

For it is written in the Law of Moses, YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.⁵⁴³ God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?⁵⁴⁴

There again, the NT is based directly on the Old.

Even when unfolding the mystery of the New Covenant and the Body of Christ, Paul built upon the Old, saying,

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE

⁵⁴³ Deuteronomy 25:4.

⁵⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:9-10.

TO YOU WHO WERE FARAWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;⁵⁴⁵ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:13-18)

This happens not just with Paul. Peter and the other writers did the same.

Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY. And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth... (Pet 1:13-17)

NT saints are called to forsake the former lusts and be holy because the OT says YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.⁵⁴⁶ The OT is the core of the paragraph. Nothing in it does away with the OT requirement for holiness. Rather, OT holiness is the foundation for NT holiness. Also, the text points out that the Father will impartially judge according to each man's work. There is nothing different from the OT. Jesus, Paul and the rest said: believers must keep God's commandments.⁵⁴⁷

Consider a final example. In this passage, nine separate OT references form the basic structure of the argument. A review these references shows them to be the essence of the NT teaching. If it were not for capital letters indicating the OT quotes, you would not be able to separate Peter's original inspired thoughts from the OT writings.

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. For, ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDES FOREVER. (Isaiah 40:6-8) ⁽¹⁾ And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: BEHOLD I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE, AND HE

545 Isaiah 57:19.

546 Leviticus 11:45.

547 Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13.

WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED. (Isaiah 28:16) ⁽²⁾ This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER STONE, (Psalm 118:22) ⁽³⁾ and, A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE; (Isaiah 8:4) ⁽⁴⁾ for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are A CHOSEN RACE, (Deuteronomy 10:15) ⁽⁵⁾ A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, (Isaiah 61:6, 66:21) ^(6,7) A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, (Exodus 19:6,) ⁽⁸⁾ that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. (Hosea 1:10) ⁽⁹⁾ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. (1 Pet 1:22-2:11)

This should not surprise, for God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Past truth is future truth. Jesus said, *for truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.* ⁵⁴⁸ NT writers often quoted the OT. For brevity, I've have reviewed but a few. But, I am sure you get the point. The goal was to show that the Bible is an integrated whole, the Word of God, that Jesus kept and taught, and we are instructed us to do the same. We have seen that the Lord stood on the Word, that the OT was the foundation for the New, and that the two combine to become the **Commandments of Christ**. For, you see, *Having* and *keeping* the commandments is our ultimate obligation to God, for they embrace all of His requirements, from loving Him, to abiding in Him to walking in His Spirit, to serving Him and His people.

Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, not to abolish them. He told us that whoever keeps and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. This seemingly impossible task can be done in Jesus in the Holy Spirit. ⁵⁴⁹ It is a concise doctrine that is easy to apprehend: *Walk in the Spirit and fulfill the requirements of the Law.* ⁵⁵⁰ That's how it is done; it is the only way, and it is enough!

⁵⁴⁸ Matthew 5:18.

⁵⁴⁹ See Romans 3:21-27 and 8:1-14

⁵⁵⁰ This statement summarizes several important passages: Matthew 19:17; Luke 8:21; John 14:15; John 15:10; 1 John 2:3-5; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:24; Galatians 3 and 5.

Study 4: *Paul's Teaching on Prayer*

The old man was speaking,

“Daniel, read Paul’s prayer report in Ephesians. It is recorded in two separate chapters, beginning in chapter one, verse seventeen.”

I picked up Hoss’ Bible, thumbed through the NT heading for Ephesians, happily found it rather quickly, and nodded to Poka, and began to read,

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the Spirit ⁵⁵¹ of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power...

“Now turn to chapter three and read verses fifteen through nineteen.”

...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ⁵⁵²

Then he began to teach once again,

First, Paul prayed that believers be given

Knowledge about God!

For **if** the body of Christ could understand once for all the **glory** and **power** and **majesty** of God; **if** His people could comprehend God’s longing to gather them unto Himself to be with Him in the magnificence of His glorious splendor; **if** they could really understand the extent of His love, love so wondrously deep and strong that He suffered great sorrow and pain to pay the price for their reconciliation; **if** they could truly grasp these things, **then...**

⁵⁵¹ Fee, 674-676. That is, the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁵² Ephesians 1:17-19; 3:14-19.

it would be impossible to allure them from the narrow way of holiness unto the evil of the flesh, the world, and the devil. Their enthralled eyes would be fixed on their Savior. Life would be a blessed, triumphant pilgrimage unto eternity to be with the Glorious Heavenly Father and His Most Marvelous Holy Son.”

To that end, Paul travailed in prayer that they might *know that they know* the Father. And, since Paul’s request transcended the ability of natural man,⁵⁵³ he appealed to the only One great enough to effect it: he asked that the Holy Spirit reveal to the beloved church the magnificent splendor of God.

I blinked at that marvelous statement.

After Paul prayed that believers *know God*, then he asked for **seven magnificent things**. The first three address the *gifting of knowledge* about things saints should understand; the last four embrace the *putting on of power* released by knowledge. Look at these things. Paul prayed that believers know...

1. The hope of His calling—Oh that believers understood, really understood, they are predestined to adoption as sons of God forever, *that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward them in Christ Jesus.*⁵⁵⁴ Imagine the impact such knowledge would have if they knew, *really knew*, this was true: they are to be sons of God, forever.

How blessed it would be if they could—by faith—actually see the future and witness the magnitude of this blessing. If they could, neither temptation, nor persecution, nor wickedness, nor any other thing could disturb them; for they would be securely anchored to God’s eternal promise: adoption into His family, forever.

Oh that God’s children *knew that they knew* the **hope of His calling**.

2. The riches of God’s inheritance in the saints—This touching revelation shows the heart of Father God. One glorious day He will gather His beloved children unto Himself: they will know Him as they are known; they will see His infinite glory and splendor; they will worship Him with great joy; they will comprehend His suffering for their rescue, understand the mighty power expended for their deliverance, and their hearts will melt at the magnitude of His sacrifice; they will offer unceasing adoration, worship, love, praise, and thanksgiving to Him for His marvelous kindness; and they will rejoice before, and with, Him forever.

⁵⁵³ 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

⁵⁵⁴ Ephesians 1:5; 2:7.

The greatest thing of all is that God, Himself, will be comforted by the presence, joy, laughter, songs, and worship of His children. It is beyond imagination to consider the pleasure Father God will have because He will have gathered His beloved family to be with, to worship, and to love Him forever.

Thus Paul prayed that the church understands **God's inheritance in the saints**. Imagine the blessing if such knowledge were actually comprehended.

3. The exceeding greatness of His power toward believers—To have and walk in the midst of God's power is to enter the fearless, victorious life of Jesus; it is to dwell in the authority and might of God Himself; it is to do the works Jesus did, and even greater works than those He did.⁵⁵⁵

To be outside His power is to live in fear or regret or dread: fear of the devil, of sickness, of disease, of death, of men, of nature, of poverty. It is to be haunted by doubt; it is to worry incessantly about worldly things, things destined to perish in fire so hot that even the elements themselves will be dissolved.⁵⁵⁶ Paul prayed that the church might recognize the exceeding greatness of God's power, power that raised the Christ from the grave—

Power that has already been released to believers.

Oh that faith might work mightily to know and believe the ***power available to the saints.***"

He rapidly plunged on,

The last four aspects forge *knowledge* into *power*, power inherent in the fullness of God...

4. Strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man—Paul prayed that God grant believers to be strengthened with might (*dunamis*, miraculous power⁵⁵⁷) in the inner man, that Christ dwell in their hearts **by faith**; for only by such mighty empowering can faith rise up unto continuous victory.

Think about this stunning implication...

The words imply that without such strengthening of power by the Spirit, Christ does not continually dwell in the heart, as when fear, anxiety, sin, etc. paralyze the individual.

⁵⁵⁵ John 14:12-14.

⁵⁵⁶ 2 Peter 3:10-13.

⁵⁵⁷ Parsons Technology, QuickVerse for Windows 2009, Software, Strong's Concordance, G1410, *power*.

The old man turned aside to underscore this again.

“Pastor, do you understand? Paul prayed that believers be strengthened by miraculous power in the inner man; and then, *because they were so strengthened*, they could be full of faith; and if they were full of faith, then Christ could, in actuality, dwell in them; and then, in the reality of Him really being *in them*, then they could actually be the new creations God longs for them to be.”

Hoss replied,

“I confess, I didn’t understand. But now, I see. I marvel that I’ve never prayed this way. Nor have I been taught this passage. What you say is truly incredible.”

Realizing that he’d dented our darkness, Poka resumed,

So, you begin to understand biblical praying. It is blessed news, for, if the Spirit of Christ is not within you, you cannot be a new creation; old things cannot pass away; all things cannot become new! Without such change, your religion is as impotent as any others.

Then he burst out,

DO YOUR LEADERS TRAVAIL THIS WAY; DO THEY CRY OUT THAT THE BODY OF CHRIST BE STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT THROUGH *HIS SPIRIT IN THE INNER MAN*—UNTIL CHRIST DWELL THERE BY FAITH? DO THEY PRAY THAT PRAYER UNTIL THE ANSWER IS MANIFESTED?

DO THEY?

Then he calmed down, and concluded,

I doubt it, because, if they prayed like that the church would be changed and walking in victory!

Yet, there is more. Paul was not content to *just* pray that the inner man in believers be strengthened with *dunamis*. Oh no! He knew God’s magnanimity; he knew God would permit, yea, desire, that the church be strengthened with power in the inner man even **to the riches of God’s glory!** Stretch your minds to absorb those words: Paul prayed that believers be strengthened with power according to, or if you will, **in the measure of God’s glory**; that is, **according to the amount of the riches of God’s glory**. How much is that? Well, it is beyond the highest reaches of imagination. That is what Paul sought for the beloved Body of Christ, because he knew that God gives the Spirit without measure.⁵⁵⁸ There are no limits on His glorious generosity.

⁵⁵⁸ John 3:34.

Paul also prayed,

5. That Christ dwell in their hearts through faith—Christ in you ***is*** the hope of glory; He ***is*** the great mystery of God.⁵⁵⁹ He ***is*** marvelous power. He ***is*** eternal life. He ***is*** eternal power; He ***is*** eternal truth. To glimpse the power of an erupting volcano, is to begin to understand the power John saw in the flaming eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ...

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks *one* like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and *his* hairs *were* white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes *were* as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.⁵⁶⁰

It was He Who said, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me.*⁵⁶¹ Jesus is the great power, and in His magnificence, He comes into all who hear His voice and invite Him in. No wonder believers who are ***in Christ*** are new creations: once Jesus, the living, eternal power, enters, everything about the saints changes. It is all new; it is all from God.⁵⁶²

Think about it: Jesus, the ***power of eternal life***, comes in and quickens the spirit of man. He empowers all goodness, and from the Spirit of Jesus *flows rivers of living water*.⁵⁶³ This is not rhetoric. In the power of Jesus believers ***are*** a new creation; old things ***are*** passed away; all things ***are*** new. Literally—for those who are in, really in, Jesus—fear, weakness, despair, sin, and on and on, ***are*** gone. Life is transformed into glorious victory, the way Jesus lived it; the way you are called to live it. ***He came that you might have life, life more abundant.***⁵⁶⁴

559 Colossians 1:25-29.

560 Revelation 1:11-17. KJV

561 Revelation 3:20.

562 2 Corinthians 5:17.

563 John 7:37-39.

564 John 10:10.

The supreme imperative—***the imperative of imperatives***—is to abide ⁵⁶⁵ in Jesus. Thus Paul prayed that you be strengthened with *dunamis* (power) through God's Spirit in the inner man, that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**.

Even now, Paul is not finished. To the first five points, he added,

6. That you might know the love of Christ which passes knowledge—When Jesus abides in believers they begin to really know Him. The power of the Spirit reveals His magnificence. In such abiding, believers begin to comprehend the width and length and depth and height, and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

And to know the heart of such love is to be drawn into it with all your being;

and you are changed into love yourselves.

Oh, the glory of such things!

In the magnificence of that understanding...

7. Believers are filled with all the fullness of God—This, the grand climax of Paul's prayer, is the very apex of life; it is to be

filled with all the fullness of God!

The old man's face seemed to radiate the very presence of the Lord.

If you have ever gathered where worship and singing seemed to reflect the glory of God, then you have had a foretaste of being *filled with all the fullness of God*.

When you are filled with *all His fullness*, there is no fear, dread, jealousy, sin, or any such thing. Instead, there is love, joy, and peace; there is energized might unto deliverance from darkness and transference into Jesus' kingdom. ⁵⁶⁶ The Gospel is unleashed in life-changing power: salvation flows; sin-patterns are broken; life abounds; love of, and sharing with, the brethren is great joy. This is the precise expression of the phrase, ***if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation...***

The fullness of God is marvelous beyond imagination. That, and nothing less than that, is what Paul sought in fervent prayer and spiritual warfare for the Body of Christ, because such prayer—offered in prevailing faith—is the *sine qua non* ⁵⁶⁷ of spiritual victory.

⁵⁶⁵ Parsons, G3316, *abide, menō*, continue, dwell, remain in.

⁵⁶⁶ Colossians 1:11-14.

⁵⁶⁷ An indispensable condition; an absolute prerequisite.

Skeeter exclaimed,

“That’s the most glorious thing I’ve ever heard! I couldn’t have said it in a hundred years, but now that I’ve heard the words, that is exactly what I want.”

Looking at the tears flowing down Hoss’ face, I knew he couldn’t speak. But his smile said more than words. Poka had described what Hoss sought; the very thing for which he had been fasting and praying before the old man was sent to Hoss.

Indeed, what he described in this teaching was the very thing we all craved: the holy presence of God, who alone is the completion of the spirit of man. I think if Poka had disappeared at that moment, our lives would’ve still been enriched. But, the glorious thing was, he didn’t. He was with us for several days.

We basked in the anointing of those words, but then, he pressed on. He spoke to Hoss,

“Pastor, these things being so,

Should you not pray like Paul prayed?

“Do you understand that Paul’s instruction *to follow him* was command? Were you not taught to pray like this in Bible School?”

Hoss said,

“I’ve never heard this before. Neither, to my shame, have I ever taught it.”

“Why?”

A smile began to break across Hoss’ face.

“Poka, the light is finally dawning. There are three reasons. As you told us early on,

1. I treated this injunction as if it was **suggestion**, not **commandment**;
2. I didn’t/can’t read the Word for what it actually says; and
3. Biblical praying is so important that evil fights against it, weaving deception to keep us from understanding and obeying God’s Word.”

“There you have it,” the old man exclaimed! “You are correct.”

Study 5: *Keep the Traditions*

Believers are commanded to *Keep the Traditions*.⁵⁶⁸ This does not mean to rotely copy *religious practices*. No. It means to *understand* and *walk* in the knowledge and spirit in which Jesus and the apostles walked, for the *Traditions* embrace holiness as defined by the Word of God. To say, *Keep the Traditions*, is another way to say, *Obey the Bible*. Details concerning the Traditions can be examined in the NT epistles. A thorough study of those precious books is mandatory for all who set their hearts to obey, and thus, please God.

This study is written as an aid to that end. It highlights: 1) The *Traditions* as they address the *body of Christ*; 2) The *Traditions* as they encompass both *practices* and *doctrines* of the Word; 3) The *Traditions* as they provide *instruction* to Christian workers; and 4) The *Traditions* as they recognize *offices of oversight* appointed by the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Let us consider these things, for they address *The Way* to walk in the Spirit in *Spirit Life*.

1) The *Traditions* as they address the *body of Christ*

Therefore, I urge you, *imitate me*. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of *my ways in Christ*, as I teach everywhere in every church.⁵⁶⁹

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.⁵⁷⁰

It is vital to obey what the apostles said and emulate what they did, for they, in turn, said and did what they were commanded. In a real sense, they were the conduit of God's instructions to the church. You see, the Word was not just written on paper; it was also written in the hearts of God's people, and especially the apostles. The Spirit dwelt in them, showed them (and, through them, us) what we are to know, do, and be.

But, as the following passage points out, it is not just the apostles we are to learn from.

568 Consider some twenty passages: **A) Direct commands to follow the apostles:** 1 Corinthians 4:16-17; 10:11; 11:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:1-2; Hebrews 12:1-2; 13:7; James 1:21-27; John 14: 15, 23-24; and **B) General Counsel of the Word:** 1 Corinthians 5:1-6:11; 10:1-11:2; Ephesians 4:11-32; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:15; 1 Timothy 6:1-21; Hebrews 12:1-13:25; 1 Peter 1:1-2:25; 1 John 3:1-24; John 15:1-17.

569 1 Corinthians 4:16-17.

570 1 Corinthians 11:1-2.

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. ⁵⁷¹

Do you see? Even the mistakes of God's people are to be carefully studied. Learn from all the lives in the Bible, good and bad. Emulate the good; avoid the bad. Do not ignore them as if they have nothing to do with you.

You can see in the final example that the Thessalonians also embraced the teachings and traditions.

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come...Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. ⁵⁷²

And, because they understood and obeyed the traditions and doctrines, the *Word of the Lord* sounded forth through them mightily, *not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place*. And so it is in the epistles. There are numerous other such exhortations which you are to discover, examine, and obey—that is if you are truly a disciple of Christ.

2) The *Traditions* as they encompass not only *practices* but also *doctrines* of the Word

We read Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians for their obedience and fruitful works. But, we did not specifically look at the nature of those *good works*. It is vital that you clearly understand these matters. Therefore, in the following passages we shall look in more detail at the lifestyle of the *Traditions*.

⁵⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 10:1-11. KJV

⁵⁷² 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:15. KJV

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one do not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person.⁵⁷³

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.⁵⁷⁴

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness,

573 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. KJV

574 Ephesians 4:17-32. KJV

lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ⁵⁷⁵

Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

...And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know *them*, and be established in the present truth. ⁵⁷⁶

It is clear: ***the traditions*** encompass all aspects of believers' lives, and exhort them to turn from sin and walk in holiness in the Holy Spirit. The theme permeates the NT. ⁵⁷⁷

3) The *Traditions* instruct Christian workers

You can see throughout the book of Acts and the epistles that the apostles were constantly instructing the young men (such as Timothy, Titus, Tychicus, and others ⁵⁷⁸) who were being trained and discipled to lead the next generation of the church. Here is just one of several apostolic exhortations to these young men.

⁵⁷⁵ Galatians 5:13-25. KJV

⁵⁷⁶ 2 Peter 1:1-12. KJV

⁵⁷⁷ For further examples, see Colossians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and, of course, the Gospels themselves.

⁵⁷⁸ Acts 20:4.

*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*⁵⁷⁹

Timothy was a second-generation believer. Paul was instructing him to teach the entire Gospel to the third generation that they, in turn, might teach the fourth, and on and on through the ages. Such is the importance of emulating genuine men of God. It is the way disciples (pupils, learners) are to mature into the faith.

4) The *Traditions* recognize the *offices of oversight*

Consider four passages documenting the *offices of oversight*.

He Himself gave some to be *apostles*, some *prophets*, some *evangelists*, and some *shepherds* and *teachers*, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...⁵⁸⁰

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church...*Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*⁵⁸¹

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.⁵⁸²

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

⁵⁷⁹ 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

⁵⁸⁰ Ephesians 4:11-13.

⁵⁸¹ Acts 20:17-31.

⁵⁸² Hebrews 13:7-8.

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, *God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble*. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁵⁸³

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, *It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.* ⁵⁸⁴

Would to God that all modern churches were governed by plural elders who gave themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. ⁵⁸⁵ You see in these passages that Jesus raised up, appointed, and trained men to teach and lead by example in the way of the Word of God, the way to walk in the Spirit in the light of Christ. This was necessary, for the contrast between the government of the flesh and the way of the Spirit was as different as *bright light* and *total darkness*. The Lord set up *plural leadership* then, and intends it still today. As plural leadership was the *tradition* in the *first church* so it is to be in the *last*.

⁵⁸³ 1 Peter 5:1-6.

⁵⁸⁴ Acts 6:1-4.

⁵⁸⁵ One man rule is totally outside God's provision for the church: It is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

Study 6: Hedge of Righteousness

The concept roots in antiquity, and, as with all doctrine, is developed in Scripture through the lives of the men and women recorded therein. It begins with a conversation between God and Satan,

Then the Lord said to Satan, *Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?*

So Satan answered the Lord and said, *Does Job fear God for nothing? **Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?** You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.*⁵⁸⁶

The devil's lament was clear: he knew about Job, but he could not touch him for God had placed a hedge around him—because Job was a righteous man, fearing God and shunning evil. Thus, here at the beginning is a truth to understand: as long as the hedge is intact the only way the devil can get past it is for God to give him permission. And if the Lord does that, be sure that He has a purpose. Rest upon, have faith in, and rejoice in this knowledge.

The teaching is presented, not only in the story of Job, but also in the lives of Noah, Daniel, and Jesus. It is also illustrated in chapter five of Isaiah concerning the story of *God's Disappointing Vineyard*. There you will see that the Lord, displeased with the lack of a good harvest, enters into judgment with *the inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah (His Vineyard)*, takes down its protective hedge, breaks down its wall, and thrusts His people into captivity.⁵⁸⁷ In addition, the principle is clearly articulated by Psalm 91 (Dwelling in the secret place of the Most High), and Ephesians six (the Armor of God).

However, for brevity we will review just one more example, the story of Daniel. In your own studies, I urge you to meditate in all the passages until you are certain this is true. Then, live in that truth. Even so, as you will see in a moment, the principles are clearly set forth in just the story of Daniel.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to

⁵⁸⁶ Job 1:8-10.

⁵⁸⁷ Isaiah 5:1-30.

set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he *was* faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find *it* against him concerning the law of his God.⁵⁸⁸

They maneuvered the king to pass a law that Daniel would disobey, because they knew he would only worship God; and not the king. As a result of their trickery, Daniel was ultimately thrown to the lions. Look at what happened...

Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast *him* into the den of lions. *Now* the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast *them* into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.⁵⁸⁹

Thus, you have an overview of the *hedge of righteousness*. It is the same as that great psalm, Psalm 91.

588 Daniel 6:1-5. KJV
589 Daniel 6:16-24. KJV

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.

Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.

Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.

Study 7: The Restrainer

It is not wrong to ponder the identity of the *Restrainer*. After all, it was not a mystery to Paul. He wrote to the church at Thessalonica, *Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time*. Yet, while Paul and those to whom he wrote knew the *Restrainer's* identity, in the providence of God, Paul did not restate it in his epistles. Therefore, the Word does not identify the *Restrainer*; and if it does not, you must beware if you think you *know for certain*. Even so, it is good to study to *rightly divide* Scripture, for you please the Lord to inquire earnestly into His Word: *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter*.⁵⁹⁰ It is not wrong to search for truth on all points, exactly as Daniel was doing in chapter seven.⁵⁹¹ If God shows you how Scripture combines to answer your question, it is good; if He does not, it is good. He is God; He does all things well. But, unless He tells you He is not going to reveal the matter to you, He will not be offended if you continue to enquire about it.

Therefore, let us take a moment to seek the identity of the Restrainer, knowing there will be instruction from God if we can understand. The Greek, *katechō*, means to hold down, withhold, restrain.⁵⁹² The word appears only twice in the NT, both in Second Thessalonians. It is also used five times⁵⁹³ in the OT to show that God restrained Himself (twice), an angel (twice), and a prophet (once).⁵⁹⁴ At this *level of power* the OT uses of *restraint* have to do with *God controlling matters*. While just an observation, this factor contributes to our understanding regarding the Lord's position in the matter of restraint, both for others and for Himself. The lesson: *He controls that which He chooses to control*.

But this is not the only indicator that it is God who controls the *mystery of lawlessness*, for it is good to realize that immense power is required to effect such restraint. After all, the devil is *the mighty Red Dragon*, the one who can *only be contended with*, not destroyed, even by Michael, the mighty archangel.

Tempered by these factors, let us consider the range of possibilities. Keep in mind that the only powers interested in restraining the devil are aligned with God. This leaves four possibilities: 1) the *Universal Church*, operating by and within itself; 2) a mighty angel; 3) the Holy Spirit; or 4) the Holy Spirit, working through the *true church*.

Given this range of alternatives, is it possible, knowing the things we know, to reduce the choices? Take them in order. First, the *Church*. When you mention the word *church*, you must define the term, for its current usage ranges from any person claiming to be a Christian

⁵⁹⁰ Proverbs 25:2.

⁵⁹¹ Daniel 7:1-15.

⁵⁹² QuickVerse, *Restrainer*.

⁵⁹³ It is also used a few times where men either restrain themselves or others.

⁵⁹⁴ Isaiah 48:9; 64:12; 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:15; Ezekiel 4:8.

to only the *true church*, the few who *really know and serve* the Lord in obedience and faith. There is biblical precedent for both definitions. Just be clear on the *meaning used in your discussion*. In our dialogue, I use *church* as Jesus did in all seven of His letters to the *assemblies*, and when you consider the range of *believers* therein, you see it included the entire spectrum, most *devout* to those He *totally rejects*. And, since that is the way the Lord uses the term, it is the way I, too, use it.

The Restrainer: First Candidate

With that understanding, let us discuss the first candidate: the *church*, functioning in and of its own strength. What should make this unnerving to *modernists*, is that when you contrast the accomplishments of the first church age (at Ephesus) and the last (Laodicea), it is clear that the first church was far superior. Even so, being found wanting, they were no longer a *church*, and He removed His Spirit from their midst. About this fearsome position, Scripture is clear, *if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His*.⁵⁹⁵ Therefore, being outside the Spirit of God, they were left with a form of religion, but without the power thereof.⁵⁹⁶ As the Ephesians fell, so the *modernists* Laodiceans, having fallen unto hapless impotency, shall be *vomited out* by the Lord.

Such a powerless church cannot conduct spiritual warfare, for it cannot even discern the presence of a demon, let alone cast it out; or, worse, does not even know whether demons are real. Neither does it understand or practice *pulling down strongholds*; neither does it understand or have use of the spiritual insight borne from the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Alas, the *modern church* is so poor, blind, and ignorant of these things that it cannot even overcome the lusts of its own flesh; let alone spirit beings of such astounding forces of evil that they even battle with the hosts of God.

Clearly, you can scratch the universal church of the Laodiceans from the list.

The Restrainer: Second Candidate

Some conclude that the Restrainer is a mighty ***archangel*** such as Michael or Gabriel, who, from time to time, have been commanded to perform magnificent exploits. They appear throughout Scripture doing the Lord's bidding. You also know that Michael (with his angels) makes war with the Red Dragon (and his angels) and casts them out of heaven and down to earth.⁵⁹⁷ So, if God so commanded, a mighty angel should not be ruled out.

However, this course seems unlikely because—on earth—God usually works by His Spirit through His saints to accomplish His will on earth.

⁵⁹⁵ Romans 8:6-9.

⁵⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:5.

⁵⁹⁷ Revelation 12:7-9.

The Restrainer: Third and Fourth Candidates

While only Paul (and those he told) knew the Restrainer's identity, it is noted that **One** on earth has the power to restrain such evil, and He is the **Holy Spirit**. Also, throughout history God has chosen to empower and use feeble man in the struggle against evil on earth—that is, when that man obeyed and believed God. While much Scripture documents this relationship, still, one might ask, *Why would God use man in such critical warfare? Why would He simply not destroy the devil Himself?*

Such thinking fails to grasp the heart of the matter: Father God seeks men and women of valor who, though weakest of all sentient beings (in their constraints as humans), dare to believe Him, strap on the armor of God, and, empowered by the Lord Jesus Himself in His Spirit—and in His Name—stand against a vastly superior enemy; being willing, if necessary, to die in their obedience: but therein, proving faith, love, and hearts to Him. These God will one day adopt as His very own children: members of His royal family, forever to have the Magnificent Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, as their Elder Brother.

Therefore, these things being true, if you feel that the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit, empowering those who abide in Jesus, you have an argument that is well reasoned, full of truth, and sensitive to the heart of God. And in reaching such position—even if not completely accurate—you will not displease God.

Study 8: Pre-Tribulation Rapture: *A Quandary (?)*

The old man is speaking.

“Confusion and speculation surround *Pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church*, a doctrine which holds that the Lord will rapture the church prior to the Great Tribulation. While the thesis is not critical to the core elements of the faith, I mention it: 1) Because there are key principles about developing (and testing) doctrine that can be reviewed by using this example; and 2) To clear up inordinate confusion surrounding it.”

He looked at us, and especially Hoss, as he said those things.

Hoss smiled broadly, and piped up,

“Let me tell you, Poka: finally, we’ve come to a topic I know quite a bit about. In particular, I know that the rapture: ***is*** going to happen; that it can take place at any time; and that, when it does, Christians will depart from the earth. I was taught these things in Bible school, and I know them for certain. Skeet and Danny can tell you: I believe them; I’ve preached them; and I’m preaching them more and more in these sin-filled days.”

Poka’s response was interesting.

“Harry, a lot of honest preachers feel the same way. Even so, we have said (have we not?) that **all** doctrine must agree with **all** biblical passages and disagree with **none**, so the question is:

***Does the Pre-Tribulation doctrine agree
with all passages and disagree with none?***

So Poka asked Hoss,

“Can you say, beyond any doubt, that it meets this test?”

Hoss opened his mouth to answer, but, after thinking about the question, shut it again. He just shook his head; then finally muttered,

“Truth is, in the light of that filter, I’m not sure I can prove it’s true. But, I certainly think it is; and,” and he smiled sheepishly, “I certainly hope so.”

The old man smiled,

“Let us test it against the Word. As you know, there are varying opinions about who will be raptured, ranging from ***all*** who claim to be Christians, irrespective of the lives they live, to ***only*** the most earnest believers, who live holy, obedient lives, watch for the Lord’s return, and pray that they be found worthy.”

“The dogma has three primary tenets:

- 1) The church will be raptured before the *Great Tribulation* begins.⁵⁹⁸
- 2) The rapture can come at any moment, *as a thief in the night*,⁵⁹⁹; and
- 3) The *rapture* is different from the *gathering together* on the Day of the Lord.⁶⁰⁰

“Pastor, let us start with the first tenet, *the church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation begins*. That is what you hear being taught, and, what you teach yourself, right?”

“Yes Sir, it is.”

“I suppose you would agree that if we find any verse that says something different, you might suspect your doctrine, right Harry?”

With a look of suspicion, Hoss replied,

“Well, yes, Sir, I suppose so. But, that would be shocking.”

“I thought you would feel that way. So, let us see what the Word says. We can test these statements by ***seven passages*** applicable to the theme. The texts are from the OT, the Gospels, and the Epistles. We shall take them one at a time, and then discuss whether the doctrine might need to be revised, or even, abandoned. Okay?”

“By all means.”

“Consider passage one, then...”

Text One: (Daniel 7:21-27)

⁵⁹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10.

⁵⁹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:2. And therefore, by inference, all precedent biblical requirements had to have been accomplished.

⁶⁰⁰ Since it is asserted that the *rapture* precedes the Tribulation, and since the Day of the Lord (when the *gathering* takes place) does not occur until the Millennial Reign, they conclude (of necessity) that the *rapture* and the *gathering* must be two separate events. Just keep this point in mind, and you will see when we look at 5:2, that they have put themselves into a tight box, for their position reflects a *fabrication-to-fit-doctrine* rather than the forming doctrine based on *all-pertinent-biblical-passages*.

I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; Until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom *are* ten kings *that* shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak *great* words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy *it* unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. ⁶⁰¹

Then, looking at us, and especially Hoss, he said,

Comment One: ⁶⁰²

“Harry, four things can be noted about Text One:

- 1) A final king, one different from the others, shall arise from the ten. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High and be permitted to persecute the *saints of the Most High*, and they shall be given into his hand for three and a half years;
- 2) The events occur toward the time of the end, as final judgment looms; and
- 3) *Saints* will therefore be on earth during the war, will be in it, will be overcome by the beast; and
- 4) The meaning seems straightforward and understandable.

Hoss was almost imperceptibly shaking his head. Still, he offered,

“Those four points can’t be denied: they say that the ***saints*** are there at the end and that the beast makes war with and overcomes them. **This is clear, cannot be refuted...**”

⁶⁰¹ Daniel 7:21-27. KJV

⁶⁰² The essence of this passage is reiterated as it occurs in history (see Revelation chapter thirteen).

“Does it not then,” Harry, “pose unanswered questions about the *hypothesis* that says all believers are to be *raptured* before these things take place on the earth?”

Hoss was quiet for a minute, then his eyes brightened and he said,

“The confusion must have to do with the identity of the *saints* who’re involved. They’re probably not part of the church as we think of it.”

He stopped for a moment, as if to get an old idea back into focus, then resumed,

“Now that we’re talking about it, I remember hearing something about this in Bible school. As I recall, it was a side discussion after class. A professor was explaining why *the saints* in Daniel were not a part of the church. It was something about them being OT saints, not NT saints: still, I didn’t pay much attention, because I already knew that the Pre-tribulation Rapture was true.”

The old man burst out laughing. I mean, he really laughed. In fact, he laughed and laughed.

Finally, when he recovered, he said,

“Harry, that is funny; sad, but funny. First, do you, did the professor, not understand that Daniel spoke as a prophet, foretelling events that were to occur both after his own life but still in OT days (that is, in OT days after he, himself, died) and also, since Daniel was looking through the lens of the prophet into the far distant future, he saw all the way to the Great Tribulation. Just because he lived in OT days does not mean the *saints* (or, at least, all the saints) in his vision did! For certainly, the saints in this passage are at the very end of the age. How then can they possibly be called OT Saints?”

Hoss was jolted by Poka’s comment, but, since he said nothing, the old man continued,

“But, that is not even the main point that that argument fails to overcome. The second is far worse. It is the fact that its proponents use a *trumped-up* definition of the word, *saint* to try to validate their argument. To expand this thought for a moment, some of them say there are as many as five kinds of saints: 1) OT-Saints; 2) NT-Jewish Saints (like the Apostles, for example); 3) NT-Israeli *Saints* (these are Jews who reject the Messiah, if you can imagine calling such as those, *saints*; 4) NT-Gentile Saints (the, so called, church: these, only these, are *their* raptured ones); and lastly, 5) Tribulation Saints (Gentiles who do not take the mark of the beast). You see, they *create* category 3) to *try to explain away* the Lord’s Word in Matthew twenty-four and twenty-five, which clearly places *saints* in the tribulation. That is, some of them say the Lord is only talking to Jews in chapters twenty-four and five, if you can imagine such a disturbingly lame and profane teaching.⁶⁰³); Rather, if these *teachers* would

603 Finis J. Dake, *God’s Plan for Man*, (Dake Bible Sales, Inc.: Lawrenceville, Ga.) p. 854.

only look at how the word *saint* is used in each occurrence in Scripture, they would have discovered that it always, and only, refers to *the beloved people of God*.”⁶⁰⁴

“If you look carefully at their argument, you will recognize the same thing I have been telling you about yourselves: you, and they, see the Word **through biasing-filters of your own choosing**. That is, **your biases keep you from realizing what the Word actually says**, because, you read to **hear** what you already **think** you know. Then you lazily translate, simplify, and reshape *what you please to hear*, and stuff it into your little thimbles. In this way, since, *ahem*, you already *understand* everything, you *think* you need to change nothing. In your world, you have religion that both pleases your denominational (Nicolaitan) overlords and soothes your own conscience; with the result that every-body is happy; ah, that is, everybody is happy but God, Who, on His part, holds such folly in derision.”

Then he added,

“Your anecdote about the professor explaining (or rather, attempting to *explain away*) the term *saint* in Daniel chapter seven highlights a vital point. We have already said you must read *to understand* the words for what they actually *say*, not what you *want* them to *say*, not what somebody *tells* you they *say*. If you understand the simple words as presented in verse, chapter, and book, and if you carefully consider the passage (or word) in its overall scriptural context, you are well on your way to rightly dividing the Word of God.”

“What you must do in this instance (and every instance) is to look at all the appearances of the *word in question* in the Bible. In our case, we are looking at *saint*. To do that is to discover that *saint* appears ninety-five times,⁶⁰⁵ thirty-three in the OT and sixty-two in the NT. In the OT, four Hebrew words (with virtually identical meanings) are translated *saint*. The Hebrew means *holy, holiness, saint, godly*, and is **always** used in the context of *saints of the Most High*. That is to say, **every** usage (whether OT or NT) refers to **God’s people**, His true *saints*; there is no change or deviation from this theme; there is no case where *saint* refers to anyone other than *God’s beloved people*. This, by the way, also includes the passages in Daniel, irrespective of the professor’s implication that it means something else. And why should they not all be God’s people, for He is the same yesterday, today, and forever? That is, if they met His conditions in whatever age they lived, they shall be His forever.”⁶⁰⁶

“Now let us take the analysis into the NT, where you will find that the Greek word has the same meaning as the Hebrew in the OT, that is, *holy, set apart, saint*. As in the OT, a look at all sixty-two appearances in the NT shows that the *saints* are the *set apart, holy, children of God*. This is the clear meaning in each of the ninety-five appearances. There is no deviation. So, for anyone to assert otherwise, especially in support of some *theory*, is at best, reckless and risky; at worst, deceptive, or maybe even unscrupulous. About such, Scripture warns, *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter*

604 I will actually do this for you in a moment.

605 In the NKJV.

606 Hebrews 13:8.

judgment; and even more forcefully, I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. ⁶⁰⁷

“Do you understand the severity of these warnings, Harry?”

Begrudgingly, Hoss said,

“I see what you mean. But I assure you, I’m going to check every one of those examples.”

“Excellent, Pastor! That is exactly what you should do.”

And so, Poka concluded,

“The main point I am driving at is the importance of using Scripture to test all doctrine. This practice helps keep you from taking a word (or passage) out of context. As you see, when we did this, we found a huge amount of evidence that saints will be on the earth during the Great Tribulation. So, the obvious question is, *How could anyone teach that all the church (all the saints) will be raptured before the tribulation when the Word says that (at least some) saints will be in it?*”

“But, let us move to the next passage. Daniel, please read Matthew twenty-four, verses four through twenty-four. And, while you are at it, see if you can accentuate the *personal pronouns*.”

So, I did that the best I could,

Text Two: (Matthew 24:4-24, 29-31)

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive **you**. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And **ye** shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that **ye** be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.

⁶⁰⁷ James 3:1; Galatians 1:6-9.

Then shall they deliver **you** up to be afflicted, and shall kill **you**: and **ye** shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But **he** that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

When **ye** therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let **them** which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let **him** which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of **his** house: Neither let **him** which is in the field return back to take **his** clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the **elect's** sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto **you**, Lo, here *is* Christ, or there; believe *it* not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very **elect**.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And **then** shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and **then** shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together **His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ⁶⁰⁸

When I finished reading, Poka said,

“I want to make a couple of comments about this passage, and then ask a question. Notice that the Lord said His return and the *gathering together* (Gk., *episunagō*, *collect upon* the same place, *gather together*) of His elect would occur *after the end of the Great Tribulation*, not before. You will see that this gathering together and its timing is discussed in more detail in the next passage. The other thing I wanted to point out is that it seems clear (does it not?)

608 Matthew 24:4-24; 29-31. KJV

that here is another passage saying that (at least) some of the Lord's people will be in the tribulation."

He turned to Skeet, and said,

"Earnest, to whom did the Lord speak in this passage?"

Skeeter wisely said,

"Danny, would you pass me the Bible?"

And when I did he said,

"Poka, do you mind if I look at the passage for a minute?"

"Not at all, Earnest. Good idea. Take your time."

We waited while Skeeter reviewed the text. As I watched, it seemed that he was actually counting words, or something. We must've waited four or five minutes.

Finally, he said,

"I think I'm ready."

Poka replied, "What did you decide?"

"I think verse three is the key. It says,"

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the **disciples** came to Him privately, saying, *Tell **us**, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?* And Jesus answered and said to **them**...

"So," and Skeeter took a deep breath, "Jesus was speaking to His disciples; and, based on what Pastor showed us earlier, He was also speaking to all believers, including those who believe based on their words, and actually, anyone else who heard Him at that time, and all the way until today, and even to the end of the age."

"Excellent! You are right, Earnest!"

And Skeeter flashed that big smile once again. He seemed very pleased indeed.

Then the old man continued.

"So, since Jesus was talking to His disciples—all of them, from then even until today—then who is it that those personal pronouns stand for?"

“Why, His disciples, of course!”

“Well if that is true, and we agree that it is, then, does that not mean that the disciples, the Body of Christ, the *saints* will be in the *tribulation of those days*?”

Skeet said emphatically,

“Why certainly!” Then he thought for a minute and then exclaimed, “So how is it that they say that all the saints are *raptured* before the tribulation, when the Word of God says they will be in it?

Then Skeeter’s voice flashed,

“They’re flat wrong! How can they get by with teaching such error?”

“It is part of what I came to tell you: concerning such *teachers*, it is either ignorance, or bias, or worse, for to assure anyone of salvation and pre-tribulation rapture who is *half-heartedly claiming to be a Christian* while living an unchanged life bound in the sins of the flesh and devil, is to preach what Paul called *another gospel*, and that is to fall under Paul’s warning in Galatians. And, on the other hand, as regards the *Sheep*, it is ignorance or (more dreadful by far), a complete lack of concern for the things of God that compels them to put up with such poor, ear-tickling teachers. You see, having a *rightly divided* Word of God seems not to matter to them. Instead, they demand teachers who parrot pleasing assurances.”

“Did you notice anything else, Earnest?”

“Not so much about the teaching. But I do have a question: I realize that the pronouns stood for the disciples (of that time, and still today), but who are the *elect* mentioned in the passage? If I counted right, *elect* is used three times, including once in verse thirty-one. These must be very special, for:

- 1) The terrible days are shortened because of them; and
- 2) They will not be deceived by the false christs and false prophets; and
- 3) At the end, they will be gathered from one end of heaven to the other.”

“That is a good question, Earnest. The short answer is that they are the same as the *saints* we saw earlier. But, I quickly hasten to caution you: you must not seek *short answers*; for you are to *study* ⁶⁰⁹ *to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not be*

609 Spoudazō, to *make effort, be prompt* or *earnest*: give diligence, be diligent, endeavor, labor, study.

ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. ⁶¹⁰ You must be able to resolve such questions yourself, else, where will you turn when I am gone?”

Skeeter didn't say anything else. He just gulped.

So Poka asked,

“With that in mind, Earnest, how do you suggest we proceed?”

“If we had a concordance, we could do a word search on *elect*, and look at all the verses in which the word appears.”

“Right,” Poka said. “You are getting the hang of this! That is what should be done. But, since we do not have time to actually do that, I will tell you what you will find when you perform the study. You will see that *elect* appears eighteen times in the NT. The Greek, *eklektos*, is translated *select*, *chosen*, *elect*. It is a precious word, especially considering that the Lord said, *many are called, but few are chosen*. Let us define the word by its context in a few of the verses. But, by all means, make it a point to ponder all appearances in your own study.”

“So, Daniel, if you please...

And as he ticked off citations, I turned and read. Between each he added a few words.

And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the **elect's** sake those days will be shortened. Then if anyone says to you, *Look, here is the Christ!* or *There!* do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the **elect**. ⁶¹¹

“We already discussed this passage. But, you will gain further insight about the *elect* as they are characterized in other verses.”

What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's **elect**? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ⁶¹²

⁶¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:15.

⁶¹¹ Matthew 24:22-24.

⁶¹² Romans 8:31-33. KJV

“Look at the marvelous words: *Who shall bring a charge against **God’s elect***? These are not second class believers; they belong to God! *Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword shall be able to separate these **elect** from the love of Christ.* Are they not special in God’s eyes? Yet, some of them find themselves in the tribulation of which Jesus warned. It cannot be denied. Beware, you who teach that this is not so, lest you, yourself, be found guilty of *adding to or deleting from the Word of God.*” ⁶¹³

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **elect** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls. ⁶¹⁴

“I remind you: these *pilgrims of the Dispersion* suffered intense persecution for their faith. They were tortured and murdered by furious evil, with the wicked aim of forcing them renounce the Lord Jesus and return to pagan gods. For certain, they were **elect** and **beloved**; and they considered the price they paid to be small in the light of the *inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for those kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*”

“These passages (and the rest) about the *elect* make it clear that they are *saints*; they are **believers**; they are of the **one new man**; they are of the **Body of Christ**. ⁶¹⁵ They seek to please God; they are beloved by Him; and He calls them unto Himself, where they shall be with Him forever.”

“Even so, some of them are appointed to live during the time of the end. But I tell you: do not grieve for their calling; nor think it strange. Rather, abide in faith and trust, for the Word of God says... *My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. For as the*

613 Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18-19.

614 1 Peter 1:2. KJV

615 Ephesians 2:1-22.

heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

“Do not attempt to force the Lord’s majestic thoughts into your tiny thimbles. His ways, His requirements, will not fit therein. Do not say, *if I live a holy life I shall escape pain: I shall not suffer for my faith*. Re-read Hebrews eleven; look at the persecution of God’s people in the decades and centuries that preceded and followed Pentecost; look at the increasing hatred and murder of believers around the world today; remember that Jesus said **the time is coming when all the world will hate—and kill—true believers**; remember the path walked by the Master, for alas, it was grievous. Even so, it bore the greatness of the riches of eternal life for as many as believe. Look at what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians,

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: *Which* is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁶¹⁶

“Also, the church of Smyrna was told by the Lord Himself,

I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and

616 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12. KJV

you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ⁶¹⁷

“These all lived at their appointed time; and they believed, obeyed, and were faithful unto death—and for their obedience, they won crowns of eternal life.”

“Why then, *O modern slacker*, do you cower in fear and clamor to escape? Why do you presume to be better than those who have gone before? Why would you attempt to substitute a crown born in the ***folly of your opinion***, rather than the ***crown of the martyr***, forged by the eternal wisdom of God Himself? Why do you simply not have faith to obey and pray this prayer: *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*? Why do you not say, *Lord, have Thy way, not only on the entire earth, but also in this feeble life of mine*?”

Then he moved forward with his argument,

“Text three addresses tenet one (*The church will be raptured before the tribulation*) and two, (*The rapture can come at any moment*). You will see that the passage confutes both. It says that the Lord will not return until after the Great Tribulation; likewise, it also identifies things that must occur before He returns, like, for example the manifesting of the man of sin—which means He cannot appear *at any moment before that* (as they teach) but rather, only after the man of sin is manifested. Look at the passage and see if these things are not so.”

Text Three: (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night;

⁶¹⁷ Revelation 2:8-10.

and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. ⁶¹⁸

“Note two things about Text Three: **First**, it agrees with Text Two. Yet, as Scripture often does, Text Three provides complementing information. For instance, in Matthew 24:31 (Text Two) the Lord says that at His coming, *He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*. But, that passage does not say whether those elect are living or dead, or in what order they are gathered. However, in Text Three those answers are provided, for it says when the Lord returns (after the Tribulation, as established in Text Two) *the dead in Christ will rise first, then those who are alive and remain will also be gathered together*.”

He studied us for a moment, then asked,

“My friends, did you grasp the significance of what 1 Thessalonians says here? I refer to where it says the saints (the elect) who are still alive will not precede those saints who have already died; and that the gathering of both the living and the dead will not occur until after the Great Tribulation ends, not before it begins. Now I ask you, since that is what both passages clearly say, how is it that some teach that the rapture of the church (that is, the gathering of the *living*) can possibly precede the gathering of the dead; and that, *before* the Great Tribulation, not *after*, as Jesus so clearly stated will be when the Second Coming, and the gathering together of the dead first, and then the living *shall be caught up together with them* (the Lord and the dead) *in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*.”

“**Second**, pre-tribulation rapturists take as a **proof text** the statement that says, *the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night*. They translate this to mean that He can come at any time, with no one knowing when. But, look for yourselves. That is not what the passage says at all, that is, when you read its complete context. And, after all, is that not what you are supposed to do? How can you take just a few words that can be twisted to fit your idea, but omit others that flatly dispute your position? But, that is exactly what they do in this case. Look and see...

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. **For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night**. For when they say, *Peace and safety!* then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. ⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. KJV

⁶¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3.

“Thus, based on these first words, they develop their opinion that *the Lord can come at any moment*. They make much *to do* over this verse. But, in so doing, they make several mistakes. The first is that they take the verse out of its overall context. That is, for reasons only *they* can explain, they extract their *proof text* from only a portion of the passage. But, in doing so, they omit the following information,

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

“It is here, in the context of the same immediate text that you find the absolute rebuttal of their assertion: for the passage says **only** those who are lost in darkness and rebellion will not know the time of His return, for these can see no more than the wicked could of Noah’s day. However, the text clearly states that **the brethren**, who are **not in darkness** but who are watching for their Lord, will **not** be overtaken by **that Day as a thief in the night**. For they shall watch, remain sober, and be looking for salvation in their Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Do you not see that these *teachers* are at grave risk in their error? But, I tell you something even more shocking: it is that many of the Lord’s people can be easily duped by such faulty teaching because they do not read and understand their Bibles for themselves.”

Again, he turned his enquiring face to us. On my part, I just looked at Hoss, who neither moved or spoke. But, I felt his tremors as he obviously thought deeply about what Poka was saying.

“Text Four reiterates that the Lord will not come until certain future events occur.

Text Four:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by our gathering together unto him*, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the

temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶²⁰

“Here then we see again that Paul was clear: *the Coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him will not come until the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed*. Is that not as plain as can be stated?”

The weight of the old man’s words bore down on Hoss, who just sat there, his face pale.

“Next is Text Five. This passage adds clarity about the *Day of the Lord that comes as a thief in the night*. You will find it to be most interesting.”

Text Five:

But the **day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night**; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. ⁶²¹

“Here Peter reports that the *Day of the Lord, which comes as a thief in the night, **is at the very end of the age***, just before the heavens and the earth are consumed, down to and including the very elements themselves. And then, after total destruction of the existing heavens and earth, the Lord God will create a new heaven and a new earth. But note: this *coming as a thief in the night* is at the end; it is not before the tribulation.”

“The Sixth text is another marvelous revelation.

Text Six:

And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man *child*. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth

⁶²⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5. KJV

⁶²¹ 2 Peter 3:10-13. KJV

helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, *which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.* ⁶²²

“Here you see that, during the time of the Tribulation, ⁶²³ the dragon makes war with the rest of the Woman’s ⁶²⁴ offspring, those *who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*. Once again, the Pre-Tribulation Rapturists are faced with a question their dogma cannot answer: *How can the devil make war with the saints who have the testimony of Jesus Christ, if they are already raptured and safe in heaven?*”

“Finally, we shall look at Text Seven.

Text Seven:

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as *the feet* of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who *is* like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty *and* two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. **And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them:** and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. ⁶²⁵

“Here, once again, saints are found in the Great Tribulation, this time being overcome by the beast. Certainly they have to be there for that to happen; and they cannot have been raptured.”

“Do you see? Separately, and taken together, these seven texts refute the conclusions reached by the Pre-tribulation doctrinists. Is it not true that these *teachers* would be well served to adopt a study template similar to the one we, ourselves, are using: that is, **our**

⁶²² Revelation 12:13-17. KJV

⁶²³ This text will be amplified and made even more clear, when it is read in concert with text seven to follow.

⁶²⁴ Israel’s other offspring, that is, Gentiles who believe in Jesus. This was discussed in Chapter 6: *End Time Events, as part of Interlude 5, Conflict with the Red Dragon.*

⁶²⁵ Revelation 13:1-7. KJV

doctrines (working hypotheses) must be tested for agreement with all Bible passages; and disagreement with none?

There he stopped and looked at us again. But, his eyes focused on Hoss. And he said,

“So I ask you again, Pastor, do you think the Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine meet this condition?”

After a moment, Hoss responded,

“I hate to admit it, but it doesn’t even come close to passing the test. I’m embarrassed that I’ve been a primary advocate.”

He was quiet for a moment, but since no one else spoke, Hoss continued,

“Further, I agree that such biblical testing of doctrine should be an imperative for all who claim to be Bible teachers. But, even as I say that, I tell you something that is really scary: if you had asked me if I practiced such rigor, I would’ve said Yes. Or at least, *I try to*. Because I thought I did. But, it can’t be so, for I hadn’t checked the word *saint* (or, hardly anything else you’ve introduced in this dialogue) even though it would’ve been the right thing to do.”

At that point Hoss paused, as if deliberating with himself, then added,

“Actually, when I do such research, it is probably only to examine words if I’m not *sure* what they mean. But, to my shame, in the course of this discussion you’ve made it clear: my level of ***certainty*** about the things I ***thought*** I knew, isn’t nearly as ***certain*** as I ***thought*** it was.”

Poka seemed to approve of Hoss’ analysis, so he just waited.

Realizing the old man wasn’t going to interrupt, Hoss continued his rumination,

“In truth, I didn’t understand the need for such rigor. But, when you combine carelessness with the deceit and lies of the enemy, the resultant confusion is dangerous error, is it not?”

“It is, Pastor. In fact, it was to provoke such self-realization that I labored long on this head. Now, thanks to the Lord, you are becoming aware of your part in the problem; and that is the right place to start: for you cannot fix a problem if you do not know you have a problem to fix.”

Then he transitioned to his summary.

“With final regards to this analysis, I shall recap the doctrine’s major flaws; and then briefly address the doctrine’s third, and most elusive, tenet which asserts that: *The rapture is different from the Gathering together*. The recap of the flaws will be included in comments

First through **Sixth**, following; then the third tenet will be discussed in comment **Seventh**.

“**First**, the Word disproved the assertion that the *saints* (at least all of them) are raptured before the tribulation begins. You now realize this cannot be, for we have seen in the Prophets, Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation, that *saints* and *elect* are in the tribulation and are overcome by the beast.”

“**Second**, some assert that, since *God did not appoint us to wrath*,⁶²⁶ pre-tribulation rapture is valid. Their error is in presuming that the **great tribulation** is synonymous with the **wrath of the Lamb** and the **wrath of God**. But I assure you, **tribulation** from/by man (or beast) is not the same thing as the **wrath of God**; they are distinct and separate events, which was made clear as we looked at the *signs of the end*. All you need to do is review the awesomely terrifying report of the wrath of the Lamb and the wrath of God in Revelation chapters eight, nine, and sixteen to understand this point.”

“**Third**, as there is confusion in our day about these things, so there was in Paul’s. In fact, he wrote his second epistle to the Thessalonians to resolve misunderstandings about the first. In the second letter, he addressed disturbances caused by evil, slick-tongued men. He chided the Thessalonians for believing the alarmists who misstated truth, and explained again what he had told them when he was in Thessalonica, *Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*. Paul was clear: His **coming** and our **gathering together** was a single event that was to happen only once, and it was to include the gathering of both the dead and the living. Paul was alarmed that the Thessalonians permitted themselves to be troubled by some who were saying that the Lord had already come, and that they had missed Him somehow. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he had already told them **that there were some things that preceded the Lord’s return and the gathering together**; and then he restated those events that must happen first.⁶²⁷

“Here, as plainly as words can be written, Paul clarified that **that Day** will not happen secretly, mysteriously as is asserted by their *thief in the night theory*. Rather, clear signs (the falling away and the manifesting of the man of sin, the son of perdition) will precede **that Day**; and those of God’s children who are watching, will see these signs, and will not be surprised when the events occur.”

“**Forth**, and before Paul said those things, he made this even more powerful statement, *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your*

626 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10.

627 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5.

*persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels**, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, **when He comes, in that Day**, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.* ⁶²⁸

“There will be nothing secret about it!”

“**Fifth**, to further strengthen the rebuttal (even though it requires no additional support) Jesus’ teaching is added to Paul’s. The Lord explained that that Day does not come at the beginning of the ministry of the *man of sin*. No, He said it was ...**after the tribulation of those days** the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” ⁶²⁹

“Jesus was very clear: the **elect** will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air **after** the tribulation of those days, not at the beginning, not at the appearing of the man of sin (antichrist), but **after** his brutal work.”

“**Sixth**, the Apostle Peter also brought additional revelation about the Day of the Lord. He said it would come *as a thief in the night*, and went on to explain that there would be unimaginable signs accompanying the event that occurs almost at the end of time. Once again, there will be nothing secret about it.” ⁶³⁰

“**Seventh**, as you have probably heard, the word, *rapture*, does not even appear in the KJV, or other English translations. It first appeared in the Latin Vulgate (A.D. 383) as a replacement word for the *gathering together*. They are not two Greek words that appear in two different places in the Word. All so called theologians and Bible teachers are at grave risk using such careless scholarship.

Then he paused, took a deep breath, and said,

⁶²⁸ 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10.

⁶²⁹ Matthew 24:29-30.

⁶³⁰ 2 Peter 3:10-13.

“Finally, there are various shadows and gradations around this idea; but to spend any more time trying to clearly define and then wrestle the false teachers down to *truth*, would be an endless burden with diminishing returns. Rather, let us simply read what the Word says, believe it, and live it. For, after all, you already know the two most important things: 1) The Lord is Coming Again; and 2) You need to be ready all the time, exactly like the Five Wise Virgins. If you are busy abiding in your Lord, working for Him, and praying that you might be found worthy to escape, you will be doing the right things.”

Then he looked at us. You could tell he was going to ask a question; and, honestly, I was glad he wasn't going to ask me. And I was right on both counts: he did ask; and he did not ask me. We all knew poor Hoss was in line for the question that had to come...

“Pastor, are not these passages clear?”

I could tell Hoss didn't want to respond; but, he is an honorable man, so he was compelled to stand tall,

“Mostly, I'm at a loss for words. But then, I think you knew that didn't you?”

The old man chuckled,

“It must be time to go. You guys are getting to know me too well.”

At this we all laughed a little, which was a good thing. This conversation was so very heavy. I think we all longed for a mountain top, fresh air, and a place to sit and admire the God of heaven for a few centuries...

Hoss summarized my feelings, almost poetically,

“Today I've come to a better understanding of how the Prophets of old felt as they personally encountered the Great and Awesome God. I feel a much closer kinship with Job,

***Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You?
I lay my hand over my mouth.
Once I have spoken, but I will not answer;
Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further...***

***I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees Thee.
Therefore I abhor myself,
And repent in dust and ashes.***⁶³¹

and with Isaiah...

⁶³¹ Job 40:4-5; 42:5-6.

***Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*** ⁶³²

And the old man said,

“Amen.”

At this point it was Hoss who spoke for us all,

“Poka, it is with great dread I must ask: Do you mean that no believer who will be living at the onset of the tribulation will be *raptured*? That just can’t be, can it?”

On my part, I almost didn’t want to hear his answer, because if he said there would be none, I don’t know what I would’ve thought, or done.

He looked at us carefully, then slowly began to speak,

“Many who presume that they are *good to go*, will be vomited out of Jesus mouth and left for the tribulation which is to come upon the earth. And, from that perspective, it would have been better for them if the pre-tribulation rapture *theory* had never been fantasized by the *hireling shepherds* who tickle their ears with the promise *that their ticket is punched and ready*.”

“But there is hope that **some will escape, if they meet the conditions set forth in the Word. Let me give you seven passages that say this. You will find them full of promise—for those who meet their conditions.”**

As a special note: while some will chide me for actually including these passages in the printed matter, the fact is that they are so meaningful, instructive, and short, I could not convince myself to only refer to them as textual references. I hope those who are reading in a mobile format will appreciate my standing up for you in this moment.

At that point, once again, Poka did the extraordinary. Rather than asking me to read, he quoted the following selections as if he was reading from the Book.

1. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the

632 Isaiah 6:5.

earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.⁶³³

2. Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, *before* the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger.⁶³⁴

3. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, *Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*

Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, *Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. **And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.***

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.⁶³⁵

4. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.**⁶³⁶

5. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and

633 Isaiah 26:20-21. KJV

634 Zephaniah 2:1-3. KJV

635 Matt. 25:1-13. KJV

636 Luke 21:29-36.

turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds;) the **Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished...** ⁶³⁷

6. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ⁶³⁸

7. And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty *and* four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. **These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.** And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God. ⁶³⁹

“These passages say: **hide** yourselves in the pavilion of His presence, **abide** in Jesus; **seek** the Lord and His ways, that you may be hidden in the day of His wrath; **those who were ready**, went in with the Bridegroom to the wedding; **watch** and **pray** always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass; the Lord knows how to deliver the **godly** out of trials; because you have **kept My command** to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial; these are the ones who **follow the Lamb** wherever He goes.”

“They do not say, specifically, that they will be raptured, *so called*. Rather, they say they will be hidden, kept, delivered, by the Lord. Whether on the earth, or not, it does not say. But you can be sure, He will do it however/wherever/whenever He deems fit—for those who are ready.”

“Will that include you?”

⁶³⁷ 2 Peter 2:4-11. KJV

⁶³⁸ Revelation 3:10-11.

⁶³⁹ Revelation 14:1-5. KJV

He looked at us, smiled softly, opened his hands, and said,

“Go thou, and do likewise, with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength. If you will do that, the Lord will do the rest.”

Somehow that was too pristine for me. But, I couldn’t figure out how to ask Him to say it differently.

Obviously, I wasn’t the only one who felt that way. Hoss, who has a way of keeping things simple, said,

“Sir, would you expand on that idea a little more?”

So, he said,

“Most—and I am talking about genuine believers—unable to keep spiritual truth in perspective, continue to drift into and out of the *abiding posture*. While it does not have to be this way, it is. The truth is that few will actually be chosen. The more typical pattern was foretold long ago in Daniel, ⁶⁴⁰ where Scripture says, *And some of those of understanding shall fall, **to refine them, purify them, and make them white**, until the time of the end.* Remember, Job, of whom the Lord said, *there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil.* ⁶⁴¹ Yet even Job was tested, refined, and purified even more.”

Hoss was persistent,

“Poka, surely you’re not saying we should simply wait until the refining process of the tribulation, are you?”

“Absolutely not! Your Lord forewarned, *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.* ⁶⁴² No one should willingly desire to postpone abiding in Jesus and living a holy life—or the pleasure of sin for a season, saying, *I’ll make it right in the tribulation.* I tell you again, Jesus said the tribulation will be the most terrible time ever in the history of mankind upon earth. In it, and in great fear, many will succumb to the power and deception of the beast and the false prophet, and will take the mark that will doom them forever to lake of fire and brimstone.”

“DO NOT TAKE SUCH RISK!”

⁶⁴⁰ Daniel 11:35.

⁶⁴¹ Job 1:8.

⁶⁴² Matthew 24:21.

After which, he said no more. But I remind you, he said some other things when he talked about the *Restrainer*. You might want to refer back to Supplement Seven.

Study 9: *Lifting Holy Hands*

“Daniel, please read 1 Timothy 2:8.”

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;⁶⁴³

Then, he asked,

“What do these words mean? Do you comply with them? Do you *lift holy hands to God, and pray without wrath or doubting?*”

I hesitated, so he asked again,

“What do you say, Daniel?”

“I’m not sure what they mean; neither do I do what they say I should do.”

“Why not?”

“I’m not sure.”

Noting the agitation on my face, Poka said,

“I understand your frustration, Daniel. Let me pass this over to the pastor.”

So Hoss said,

“It’s actually not Danny’s fault. I’m the preacher; I regret to say that I’ve never once taught this text.”

Poka countered,

“You do realize, Harry, that each man is responsible to study and obey Scripture for himself? In *that Day* blaming others will not be permitted.”

“I know,” Hoss conceded, “But, I, too, am accountable.”

“Yes, Pastor, but let us turn our attention to the verse. Like all God’s commands, it is very important. Why have you never taught it?”

Hoss’ reply was disarmingly candid.

⁶⁴³ 1 Timothy 2:8.

“I’m not sure. It just never crossed my mind. It wasn’t a theme in Bible School; neither, as far as I can remember, was it ever mentioned by any of my teachers in church. I’m not blaming them, it just seems the verse was never taken for what it is, a direct command from God. Looking at it now, I’ve no explanation for the omission. Clearly it must be understood, obeyed, and taught to others.”

“You are right, Harry, more than you can imagine. But the reality is that even you do not understand the significance of these few words. Which is the point I am trying to make: you *think you know so much*; but, actually, your knowledge is impoverished at best.”

I wish you’d seen Hoss’ face as Poka said that, for I know my limitations in trying to express the impact his words had on us, especially Hoss, whose knowledge was far deeper than Skeeter’s or mine. All I can say is that Hoss’ face was ashen. He was somber. He swallowed but said nothing, moved not a muscle, and was sweating.

Poka continued,

“You will soon see how little you understand, and the ultra-importance of this text. Hopefully, by the time we finish you will realize that your blindness has diverted you from God’s plan and set you on a path devoid of His heart, intent, and power. So, look at the text. **Men** are told that when they pray they are to do four things: 1) *lift up*; 2) *holy hands*; 3) *without wrath*; or 4) *without doubting*. Once you grasp the incredible importance of these four things, your prayer life should never be the same.”

“To begin, consider the background of the text. The verse addresses men, as other verses in Timothy singularly apply to women. This should do more than pique your interest. It should stir your innermost being, for it flows from, and reflects the heart of Father God. It recognizes He created men and women differently, and gave them different personalities, mannerisms, and empowerments for the work He had for them to do (together and separately) as men and as women in the life they are to live before, and in, the Lord—for God saw everything He had made, and indeed it was very good.”⁶⁴⁴

“Since these differences reflect God’s creative design, men and women must understand the differences, and cheerfully, obediently walk before Him in the *configuration* and duties they have been given. Remember, just as Abraham is the father of the children of faith, so Sarah is the mother, for just as Abraham has a place of honor before God, so does Sarah—each standing because of their individual obedience to God in the role they were assigned by God by the nature of their birth: male and female.”

“The point is this: if you are a **man**, be a **man of God**, walking humbly in the Holy Spirit in Jesus, doing the things He assigns you to do in His Word; if you are a **woman**, be a **woman**

⁶⁴⁴ Genesis 1:31.

of God, walking humbly in the Holy Spirit in Jesus, doing the things He assigned in His Word for you to do. If you are a **man**, do not try to be a **woman** nor try to take her role; if you are a **woman**, do not try to be a **man** nor try to take his role. The roles of *headship* and *helper* have been assigned, *And God said it was good*. If God said it was good; it is good; and it is to be obeyed. Rejoice in it; thrive in it; walk in Jesus in it—and you will be blessed forever for your faith and obedience.”

“It is a straightforward matter to note the applicable principles. But as I provide a summary, remember: that which I shall describe reflects the lives of men and women **who love God and who seek to please Him by obeying Him in all that they are, think, and do**. This is very important, for it is only those who are given to selfless *agape* love for God and man who will find the grace and power to walk in the ways He specifies in His Word.”

“Now, to the point: when a young child has a need, he or she raises his/her hands and cries primarily the *mother*, for she is the caregiver, comforter, nurturer, nurse, bather of dirty bodies, provider of clean clothes, lover of souls. She is soft and warm and clean and cuddly; she is the essence of comfort. She is comfort of comfort; love of loves. For these duties, God has gifted her with a compassionate, tender, merciful, loving heart. By her nature she gives, and gives, and gives. She is endless love, and possesses all other things necessary and good to be and do so. Furthermore, she joys in giving, and loving, and protecting these blessed little ones. She is in the child’s corner all its life, and every child ever born to a mother who walks with God, knows it, and is comforted and instructed by the life lived by such a dear one.”

“But, not only does she bless her children. Even before she bore them, she was (and is still) the source of continuous admiration, respect, and honor for her husband. She is also the source of loving responsiveness to nurture his needs: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Beyond description are her contributions to his welfare in the life and love they share in Jesus. Her love, support, and trust in him empowers him to be the man he ought to be in standing against the giants of the land, spiritual and natural. He will, he does, *run through walls* rather than fail to protect her and provide that which she needs, and he does so for all the days of his natural life.”

“But, there is one criteria that must be met to illuminate the beauty and perfection God implanted in her at the day of her creation—it is something that **must** be provided to her by her husband, and it...

**Must be provided FIRST, before
any man should expected *anything* from his wife!”**

“It is this: he must release and empower her to fulfill all the beautiful glory God put within her. And, the way—**the only way**—husbands can do this is described in the majesty of following passage. Read it for yourselves, but I tell you it is a fool of a duncical husband that

does not understand and obey the following command given him by none other than the Word of God itself concerning his wife:

Husbands, love your wives, as (in the same way as) Jesus loved His church and gave Himself for her that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord the church. ⁶⁴⁵

“Look at those beautiful words. If a man will lay down his life for his wife, and if he will demonstrate to her the fidelity and depth of his love (over and over until she knows that she knows that she knows it is true) his marriage will be heaven on earth, and he will be most blessed among men.”

“But, in order for him to put her needs first, he must understand what her needs are. Hence the injunction,

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. ⁶⁴⁶

“Keep in mind that the Lord does not command that which cannot be done. So, if a man will ask, God will empower him along these lines. It is a fool who fails to meet the need his wife has for **his love, devotion, appreciation, understanding, and sacrifice**. When she is perplexed, or needing to be loved, or held, or comforted, or protected, or provided for, or listened to, or taken somewhere; when she raises her arms and her heart to her husband—unless he is a donkey of a man, he will stop whatever he is doing and minister to her until her cup is full.”

“But I tell you a marvelous secret: when her cup is full she will purr like a contented kitten. And she will spread love and grace in the family as only she has been empowered to do.”

“Would to God that husbands understood their wives as no one else understands them; that husbands would know their wives needs, and fears, and thoughts; that they would love them **most** and **before** all others—**as they are, because they are**. Would that they hold them gently, powerfully, loving them thoroughly and at the point of their deepest needs—because God gives husbands insight into the very being of their wives; yea, would to God that men would receive His empowering of understanding hearts, enabling them to honor their wives as the glorious persons God created them to be.”

⁶⁴⁵ Ephesians 5:25-29.

⁶⁴⁶ 1 Peter 3:7.

“As husbands do this, wives become brides without spot or wrinkle. Hallelujah!”

But Skeeter popped back in,

“I don’t mean to be quarrelsome because I think that was amazing. But, what does it have to do with the verse? I don’t see the connection.”

“Earnest, that is a good comment. The point is (and the reason I gave all that background) that this passage is talking to **men** about their role as spiritual head and protector of the home. It was the Lord God who told the woman that her husband would rule over her.⁶⁴⁷ She was to be by his side as his helper and extension of him; but he was/is responsible to govern. And that is where the lifting of holy hands and taking spiritual authority and pulling down strongholds comes into the picture. With such important matters in the balance, let us look at the four injunctions in the verse.”

(1) *Lifting up*—the terms *lift up* or *lifting up* appear more than a hundred times in the Bible. To examine all appearances is to make two important observations: first, the process of *lifting up* is *lifting up a petition* to the Giver, Provider, Sustainer, and Succorer Himself, Almighty God; and second, the timing of the *lifting up* of a need almost always accompanies a matter of importance and urgency. Often the life of an individual or nation hangs in the balance.”

“In Exodus there are two examples⁶⁴⁸ where Israel’s very survival was at risk. In the first, the Egyptian army had hopelessly pinned (that is, *hopeless* in the eyes of man) the Israelis against the Red Sea and were closing in for the kill. In the second, the Amalekites attacked (to exterminate!) Israel shortly after their escape from the Egyptian army. This attack by Esau’s grandson (Amalek) occurred long before Israel was forged into an obedient, and therefore, mighty army of the Living God. The Amalekites would have destroyed Israel in that battle. Every time Moses dropped his *raised* (in prayer) *hands*, the Amalekites gained ground; when his hands were up, Israel prevailed. And so, Aaron and Hur helped Moses intercede all day with his hands *lifted up* to God.”

“Therefore, as regards the battles with the Egyptians and Amalekites, Moses *lifted up* holy objects (the *consecrated rod of God*, and his own *holy hands*) unto God; and, in both cases, God honored Moses’ obedience and fervor of intercession, and granted victory to Israel.”

“That is the essence of *lifting up* a heart cry to God. It is always the seeking of His help; it is the crying out for a blessing to the only One with the power, right, and authority to bless. And when the *crying out* is done in accordance with the conditions of His Word, He delights to

⁶⁴⁷ Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Peter 3:1-6.

⁶⁴⁸ Exodus 14:8; 17:8-16.

comply, and will to deliver His children when they call. Do not misunderstand: *lifting hands* in prayer is not optional. Moses had to do it, and if mandatory for Moses, so for you.”

“As we move to the second matter, *holy hands*, I tell you up front: you will have a difficult time comprehending the totality of its importance.”

(2) *Holy hands*—This is the encapsulation of holiness in the saint. Consider its description,
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Four Greek nouns, two adjectives, an adverb, and a verb are used to characterize the expression, *holiness*. It signifies separation unto God, or, the resultant state, that is *the conduct befitting those so separated*. Sanctification is thus the state predetermined by God for believers, into which in grace He calls them, and in which they begin their Christian course and so pursue it.

Hence they are called *saints*.

It also denotes the manifestation of the quality of *holiness* in personal conduct. *Believers are to be perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*⁶⁵⁰ They are called to sanctify themselves consistently because of their calling, cleansing themselves from all defilement, forsaking sin, living a holy manner of life, experiencing fellowship with God in His holiness.

“There is nothing passive about *holy living*. It requires active, vigilant participation on the part of believers. Its practice is the precise meaning of the passage, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and do of His own good pleasure.*⁶⁵¹ Holiness is ultra-important, for no man can approach God laden with sin, for *sin separates His people from God*. Holiness is the purpose for our examination of 1 Timothy 2:8, lifting up *holy hands* in prayer.

He studied us carefully as he said these words. I could almost read his thoughts. It was obvious that he knew we were having trouble with at least part of his comment. So, he brought the challenge directly to us,

“You do not believe sin separates believers from God, do you?”

Skeet blurted out again,

“You’re right. I don’t. I know God loves us, and I know He knows we’re just poor, weak sinners. But He loves us anyway. You’re probably aware of the expression, *God loves the sinner, but hates the sin*. I think that’s right, don’t you?”

649 Vine, *Holiness*, 307-308.

650 2 Corinthians 7:1.

651 Philippians 2:12-13.

Poka looked at Skeeter, sadly shook his head, but without answering directly, said,

“Daniel, would you read Isaiah 59:1-4.”

So I turned and read,

Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. ***But...***

Your iniquities have separated **you** from **your** God; and **your sins** have hidden His face from **you**, so that He will not hear.

For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. ⁶⁵²

“And it is not just the first few verses of Isaiah fifty-nine that report the treachery of sin and God’s finality in dealing with it. The entire chapter is more of the same. And, if that is not enough, look at Hebrews twelve,

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. ⁶⁵³

“Finally, then,” and he quoted from the fifth chapter of Ephesians,

Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Then he inserted a Galatian quote into the Ephesian text he’d been reciting,

⁶⁵² Isaiah 59:1-4.

⁶⁵³ Hebrews 12:14-17.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, **and the like**; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**⁶⁵⁴⁾

Then his voice thundered as he finished the passage from Ephesians,

**Let no one deceive you with empty words:
because of these things the wrath of God comes
upon the sons of disobedience.**⁶⁵⁵

“Do you understand? Those who do such things, whether inside, or outside, of the church—**it makes no difference**—will **not** inherit the kingdom of God. **Holiness is required!** It does not matter if everybody in the world says that the debauchery of sin is okay. Take just one example from the list: fornication. You must understand: Scripture’s definition of *fornication* is **sex outside of marriage**. It is not okay to *sleep* with boyfriend or girlfriend—or fiancé—as *if* you are married. If you are not married, **it is not okay!** If you cannot wait...

get married!”

“Living in Jesus is not a game. Those who practice such sins (and the many others like them) will not be in the kingdom of Christ and God. God will not wink at sin just because—the world, or you, or your favorite preacher, or the modern church—say it is okay.

It is not okay, ever! Period!”

“To such overwhelming evidence, I add this: the expression **without blemish** (which applies to the sacrifices God requires) appears forty-one times in the Bible, beginning with the inauguration of the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:5) and the grand finale...

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of **a lamb without blemish** and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was

654 Galatians 5:19-21.

655 Ephesians 5:1-6.

manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. ⁶⁵⁶

These occurrences address every aspect of living life before God. It includes the nation of Israel, the church, the priests, sin, festivals, and everything else. All is to be without blemish!”

“If you need more evidence, turn to James, or to the third chapter Philippians, or the first eight chapters of Romans, or the sixth chapter of 1 Corinthians, and on and on. All such sin defiles the person (and, therefore, the hands). That is, if you are not living a *holy life* you do not have *holy hands* to lift to God. And if you do not have *holy hands*, you cannot obey this command; that is, you cannot lift *holy hands* because your iniquity has separated you from God. That means, until you turn and repent, you have no right/authority to approach Father God; neither will He answer your prayer.”

“These things being true, the head of the family, the man, cannot present his prayers, even the direst needs of family and church, to God under the cover of His Holy Word—without clean hands. And that being the case, he and they (those counting on him as leader, protector, and priest of the home) are left to wallow in the wages of sin until consumed by those wages—and know for absolute fact that *the wages of sin is death*.” ⁶⁵⁷

“But, praise God, there is one blessed provision: if a man will humbly present himself to Holy God and confess his sins, repent, and turnabout from them, and return to holiness, God will restore the repentant one to holiness. For the Word says, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. ⁶⁵⁸ This is God’s provision; it is your only hope. For God will not wink at your sin. Neither will He bless you in the midst of it. But, if you confess and turn from it, He will forgive and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Then He will hear and answer *the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man!*” ⁶⁵⁹

His blazing eyes bored into us,

“Pastor, do you understand: holiness is fundamental to obedience of the Word of God?”

On my part I just looked at the table. I don’t even know what Hoss or Skeet did.

After a moment Hoss ventured,

⁶⁵⁶ 1 Peter 1:17-21.

⁶⁵⁷ Romans 6:23.

⁶⁵⁸ 1 John 1:8-10.

⁶⁵⁹ James 5:16.

“Those are heavy words. But, yes, now that you put it so directly, I do understand.”

Hoss looked at us, and said,

“Danny, Skeeter, what Poka says is straight-up truth. It’s the way I should’ve been preaching all these years. But I have certainly not emphasized it appropriately. Oh my.”

By that time, I’d managed to pry my eyes up from the table to look at Hoss. He was pale. He seemed to want to say more; but he didn’t; and, maybe he couldn’t.

Therefore, the old man resumed,

“You have seen that *lifting up holy hands* is the heart of the text. Yet, two other aspects are also to be understood and obeyed. So, I shall take a moment to tell you about them.”

(3) *Without wrath*—The third item is *without wrath*. But what is this word, *wrath*? Why are men commanded to not come before Him with wrath permeating their attitude?

These were rhetorical questions which he answered as he quickly moved by.

“Scholars point out that there are two primary NT nouns for *wrath*. The first, G3709, *orgē*, is violent passion with the intent aimed toward punishment/vengeance; the second, G2372, *thumos*, is less meditatively schemed. It is a reaction to hot passion, fierceness, wrath.⁶⁶⁰ While neither is acceptable, the worst is the first—calculated, premeditative vengeance. And that is the word used in our text. Such attitude has no place in your heart if you seek to be like Jesus; neither does it belong in your soul as you seek God’s mercy and blessing, for God will forgive you in the same manner you forgive others. Jesus was emphatic: if you do not forgive others, God will not forgive you.⁶⁶¹ God said, *Vengeance is Mine; I will repay*. He, and He alone, has the right, knowledge, and power to extract vengeance.⁶⁶² There is to be no place in your heart for wrath, especially when you appear before God to pray for mercy for yourselves and others.”

“And that brings us to the final instruction.”

(4) *Doubting*—*Doubting*, G1261, *dialogismos*, expresses reasoning or questioning hesitation.⁶⁶³ When you come before God to pray, do not hesitate. Remember, James wrote, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive*

660 Vine, *Wrath* (and, *Anger*) 688; 26-27.

661 Matthew 18:21-35.

662 Romans 12:17-21.

663 Vine, *Doubting*, 182.

anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. ⁶⁶⁴ When you pray, you should know what you seek and whether or not there is authority for your petition. If you know these two things, and, therefore, if you pray aright, you have every reason to have faith that the Great God and Father will pour out His blessings upon your need *abundantly beyond all that you can ask or think.* ⁶⁶⁵

And then he drew his net...

“And thus you have the second example: a verse that, on the surface, is easy to understand, and therefore, should be easy to obey. So, let me simply ask: *Pastor, should this verse not be obeyed every time men pray?*”

“Yes, Sir, we should. And yet, you have demonstrated that its truth is incredibly deep and laced with meaning. Surely it’s a fundamental tenet of the Faith and a miscible part of holiness. I agree that it should be taught and obeyed. But I am overwhelmed by that challenge now that I see the magnitude of information that must be established in the hearts of men before it can even be comprehended, let alone, obeyed. Just imagine the difficulty of educating the church to the extent that every man is able to discern whether or not his hands are holy; and if not, what he must do to cleanse them.”

At that point Hoss drifted off into his own thoughts. However, sensing that he wasn’t through, we waited. And, after a bit, he made this startling confession...

“Poka, you’ve been saying that we live in stark ignorance, yet all the while thinking we know so much. I have to tell you: at first, I was offended and thought you were completely wrong. But, looking at just the examples you’ve provided, I’m embarrassed to admit—our ignorance is upon us as stink is upon a decaying body in the field. It is more than I can bear!”

“Pastor, remorse is a good place to start. For you cannot fix a problem you do not know you have. However, this is too important to stop at the first breaking of light. We must persist until it is fully exposed.”

The old man took a deep breath and asked the inevitable question,

“Since you understand the importance of the verse, Pastor, why do you not obeyed it?”

“As embarrassing as it is, there is only one answer: ***my disobedience is driven by my ignorance!*** Which is exactly what you’re saying, huh?”

Poka nodded, but didn’t smile. And so we sat, our ignorance exposed.

⁶⁶⁴ James 1:5-8.

⁶⁶⁵ Ephesians 3:20.

However, having boldly, forcefully made his point, we saw the other side of the old man. He didn't flaunt his superiority. It was obviously that he took no pleasure—at all—in *winning* the debate. He loved us; we could feel it. And in the mercy of that love, we realized that our dignity as men was unblemished in his eyes.

In fact, after Hoss' answer, the only thing the old man did was to look deep into our eyes, one by one. When it was my turn, I wanted to look back at *my* table (my new-found retreat) but somehow, my eyes were frozen to his. Then I felt his compassionate heart burning into mine. And finally, I understood: he came, not to judge or hurt, but to help. And my embarrassment, resentment, and anger began to melt in the flood of empathy that poured through his understanding eyes and into my very soul.

After that, Poka returned to the conversation, and responded to Hoss' statement.

"You are correct, Harry. I am saying that ignorance drives your disobedience. You have put your finger on the pulse of the argument. Well done."

Then he continued,

"I would like to pause to assess with you what you have heard. This is far too important to presume I know what you are thinking. So, let me ask: *How would you rate your performance on Lifting Holy Hands?*"

"Earnest, what about you?"

"Well, I'd say I fail the test. In truth, I'm not even sure I knew that verse was in the Bible; let alone, what it meant. Therefore, I've never even attempted to obey it."

"That is tragic, Earnest, is it not?"

"Yes."

"But thank you for your candor. But, would you answer three more questions for me?"

"Yes, Sir."

"How do you feel about the passage now?"

"It's full of information I didn't know or obey. In fact, there's so much in those few words that even if I'd studied them, I would've only realized a small part. I'm afraid it's as you said: I'm guilty of not being able to read; and of **not** knowing **and** not obeying. About that, there's no debate."

Long, tall Skeet looked at Poka and asked,

“Can you really show this about us again and again?”

“Yes, Earnest, I can.”

“That’s bad, isn’t it.”

“It is; it certainly is.”

But, the old man pressed on,

“The second question is: *What will you do about this verse going forward?*”

“That’s more difficult. Now, at least, I understand what it says. But honestly, somehow in my heart I’m not sure it applies to me; or, maybe, that I actually have to obey it. And worse, even if I told you I intend to change starting now, I doubt that my good intention would last more than a few days.”

Poka winced, and started to reply; but seemed to check himself. He went on to the third, and most difficult, question.

“Why do you simply ignore (**as if it is not even there!**) a direct command from God? Or, in your case, Earnest, why do you ignore command after command; many commandments?”

Skeeter was squirming; as was I. How had it come to this?

Skeeter said,

“I don’t know. I honestly don’t know how to answer that. I just never thought of it in that light. Am I really doing that?”

“You are, Earnest, and that is why I am here. I came to expose your blindness and tell you what you must do about it. And, you are not alone. This rebelliousness is a disastrous, church-wide malady. Most *so-called* believers are equally guilty.”

I heard the old man speaking; I understood the words he used; but, somehow I just couldn’t get my mind wrapped around the idea that he might actually be right. He had to be wrong; it just couldn’t be true.

I was clearly in denial, and he knew it.

“Before we leave the example of *lifting holy hands*, let me tell you what, in your disobedience, you forfeit. And, if you ever reach a level of maturity enough to be able to understand the glorious items on this list, you will weep bitterly, for they carry unimaginable blessings. I hope (for your sakes and the many whom you could otherwise help) that you wake up while there is time, for the consequences of your folly include the following:

- 1) You will miss the blessed joy of learning to understand, believe, and stand upon the mighty Word of God.
- 2) Your disobedience (and, therefore, sin) separates you from God.
- 3) You miss the blessed fellowship with Father, Son, and Spirit that you would otherwise share if you labored with/in them for the kingdom of God.
- 4) Untold needs go unanswered for want of obedience on your part. And finally,
- 5) Your brethren are deprived of the example you could exude if you understood, obeyed, and walked in the Spirit.”

“Your sin grieves me deeply. I cry out: ***Wake up bewitched slumberers! Repent, for the day comes quickly when your opportunity to live the overcoming life shall have passed.***”

There were tears in his eyes as he said those things.

However, at that time, had you asked what I thought about these things we were learning, I’m afraid all I probably would’ve said was, *I don’t like the process at all!* Yet, one thing was certain: the old man was making an irrefutably argument. And that was becoming more than scary.

After talking to Earnest, Poka turned to Hoss.

“There you have it, Harry. Is that not disturbing? Even so, keep in mind that my goal in this unremitting *hammering* is to help you **recognize** the danger, and to remind you that if you humbly ask the Lord to show you truth, He will—that is, if you are willing to repent of your sin, turn from it, and obey God in His Word. It is imperative that each of you be absolutely convinced of the truth of these things. Would you agree?”

Hoss glanced at his watch,

“When you started your dialogue, we didn’t believe our ears when you said you could demonstrate such things. But now we’re concerned, very concerned. It’s not just the examples you’ve given (which are disturbing in and of themselves) but even more, your assertion that there’re many, many others. Because we know that must be true, we’re experiencing an encroaching, unnerving apprehension.”

And the old man added,

“May that apprehension continue to press upon you until it bears the fruit of repentance and turning back to the Lord Jesus Christ. For in Him, and only in Him, is found the power and life of God.”