

Seeds for Good Soil

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Chapter 1

Dimensions of Love

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole **family** in heaven and earth is named, 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.*

(Eph 3:14-19)

I've been a woodworker for much of my life, so dimensions are a big deal. I mean, measure twice, cut once – I get that. But the dimensions that Paul presented in this passage are not measurable. That word, “comprehend” is not a bad translation, but in this case, it doesn't really imply “understand”. Rather, it's “to lay hold of so as to make one's own, to obtain, attain to, to make one's own, to take into oneself” or “to seize upon, take possession of”. That's because his desire is for us to “**know**” and to “**be filled**”.

Now, God clearly has a reason for dimensions. He gave Moses and Bezalel the exact measurements for the tabernacle, and He gave Noah the same for the ark and Ezekiel the same for the millennial temple. He even informed John of the dimensions of the heavenly city in Revelation. Jesus was a woodworker too, so He probably shares my understanding of “measure twice, cut once” (I say that respectfully).

Here's another clue – “that Christ may **dwell** in your hearts”. That word, “dwell” is not like staying in a motel. It does not indicate something transitory but rather “to house permanently”. And it reminds me of:

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We **will come to him** and make Our **home** with him.*

(John 14:23)

And this is where the "fullness" comes in, literally. When He comes in, He brings His "fullness" – infinite love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and so forth. **His presence is His fullness.** Filled with His fullness means filled with God's presence and thus all that He is. It's a **spiritual union:**

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

*"For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become **one** flesh."*

*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning **Christ and the church.***

(Eph 5:30-32)

So, when the Triune Lord makes your heart His home, there's likely going to be some 'renovations'. I mean, 'This Ole House' won't do. It simply cannot contain the infinite. The "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17) is far more than just a new way of thinking. You are a new being – you do not have to understand God – you **know** God and you **trust** Him.

When He says, "**to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge**" – that is, to know that which passes knowing, you're not hung up on figuring that out because you can't. It's not a mental exercise. And when God says, (through Paul) "**that you may be filled with all the fullness of God,**" you're not 'puffed up' because God and His fullness is greater than the entire cosmos and you know your heart is simply not that big.

So, "**to lay hold of so as to make your own**" (comprehend) the infinite manifold dimensions of God's Love **doesn't happen because of you** – it is only by the **grace** of our Almighty Lord. That is, the prayer of Paul will indeed be accomplished in you, but **not by you**, not by obeying your moral code, not by how much you know or what you've done. If you love and trust (and of course obey) Him this wondrous transformation, miraculous transformation, will occur in God's way, in Jesus.

So why the dimensions? I think it is simply to convey that He, that is His love, His fullness, is indeed expansive in every direction or dimension. There is no height or depth or width or length He doesn't cover. Why then is He specific with the tabernacle or the temple or the ark, etc.? That's because each and every spec has a meaning and purpose which if you ponder, the Spirit will reveal something beautiful. You can refer to the devotional entitled, "Fabric-ated" for an example.

Chapter 2

Fabric-ated

*For we are His **workmanship** created **in** Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Eph 2:10

I think the ‘plain sense’ meaning of this verse is that God intends for us to go about doing good under His guidance. There is, however, another aspect to this that I think adds to the ‘tapestry’ of His creative will.

As some of you know, workmanship here is the Greek word pronounced “poiema” from which we derive our word “poem” and “poetry”. The word literally means something made or fabricated, like fabric. It got me to thinking, ‘God loves to create beauty’ and then it occurred to me that He used some men anointed by His Holy Spirit to create something beautiful and full of symbolic importance to foreshadow His plan of redemption.

One man in particular was Bezalel. God told Moses:

*"And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding,
in knowledge, and in all [manner of] workmanship, to design artistic
works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting,
in carving wood, and to work in all [manner of] workmanship."*

(Ex 31:3-5)

He was chosen to fabricate the tabernacle, top to bottom, end to end. And the design, given by God is a fantastic illustration of His redemption plan. Virtually every detail of the tabernacle points to Jesus Christ. And it also speaks of His people, all of His people:

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (literally, **tabernacled**) among
us...*

(John1:14)

The Apostle Paul told us concerning redemption:

*Therefore, it is of faith that it might be according to **grace**, so that the promise might be sure to **all the seed**, not only to **those who are of the law**, but **also** to **those who are of the faith of Abraham**, who is the father of us all.*

(Romans 4:16)

Yes, God always intended to united Jew and Gentile in a common redemption through Jesus Christ:

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,... that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity... For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

(Eph 2:14,16,18)

With that in mind, let's consider the design of the tabernacle. God's instructions were:

*“Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with **ten curtains of fine woven linen**, and blue, purple, and scarlet thread; **with artistic designs of cherubim** you shall **weave** them.*

“The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. And every one of the curtains shall have the same measurements.

*“**Five curtains** shall be **coupled to one another**, and the **other five curtains** shall be **coupled to one another**.*

*“And you shall make **loops of blue yarn on the edge** of the curtain on the selvedge of one set, and likewise you shall do on the outer edge of the other curtain of the second set.*

*“**Fifty loops** you shall make in the one curtain, and **fifty loops** you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is on the end of the second set, that the loops **may be clasped to one another**.*

*“And you shall make **fifty clasps of gold**, and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be **one tabernacle**.*

(Ex 26:1-6)

So, God's intent was for this 'fabrication' of fabric to be **beautiful** with colors of blue, purple, scarlet and gold, intricately **woven** with pictures of cherubim (angels). There were to be a total of ten curtains grouped into two sets of five. Recall, **five** is the number of **grace** in the scriptures; thus, both these groupings pictured grace. And they were joined together, one to the other by **50** clasps of gold with **50** loops of blue yarn. Some of you know that 50 is the number of Jubilee – a wonderful 'generational' celebration that pictured, yep, you guessed it, Jesus Christ. Blue is the color of heaven.

Here we have pictured two groups picturing grace, beautifully (artistically) woven and joined together in the blessed celebration of Jesus Christ in heaven! These are God's children observed by cherubim, the heavenly host. But there's more:

*"You shall also make curtains of **goats' hair**, to be a **tent over the tabernacle.**"*

(Ex 26:7)

Similar curtains of coarse, comparatively plain goats' hair were to cover over the beautiful inner tabernacle. This reminds me of the verse:

*For **He** shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is **no beauty** that we should desire Him.*

(Isa 53:2)

They were also joined together with clasps but rather than gold clasps which symbolize faith (see 1 Pet 1:7) they were made of **bronze** (brass) which is the metal of judgement.

- **The Bronze Altar (Exodus 27:1-6):** The altar where sin sacrifices were burned was made of bronze, acting as a place where sin was judged and atonement made.
- **The Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:9):** Moses made a bronze serpent to heal the Israelites from snake bites, which is interpreted as a symbol of sin being judged and, later, a type of Christ bearing that judgment (John 3:14-15).
- **The Feet of Jesus (Revelation 1:15):** Christ's feet are described as "like polished bronze refined in a furnace," which signifies his righteous and pure judgment.
- **Judgment upon Disobedience (Leviticus 26:19):** "I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze" (NKJV),

symbolizing that a disobedient land would become unproductive and under judgment.

- **The Bronze Sky (Deuteronomy 28:23):** "And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze..." signifies a lack of rain or blessing, representing a judgment of drought.
- **Judgment on Israel (Ezekiel 22:18-20):** Ezekiel refers to the gathering of metal (including bronze) into the furnace, symbolizing the gathering of sinners for the fire of divine judgment.

I hope you can see that this pictures vividly that the flesh, the ordinary appearing man, the Son of Man (goats' hair) covered His people (the tabernacle curtains) and received God's righteous judgment (bronze). This 'plain' covering protected the inner beauty.

And there's so much more we could consider but when I meditated on:

*For we are His **workmanship** created **in** Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

(Eph 2:10)

I realized afresh that the judgement He received made His children new and beautifully and intricately **woven together in Him:**

*"At that day **you** will know that I am **in** My Father, and **you in Me**, and **I in you.**"*

(John 14:20)

And just as He made us, He made the works that we are to walk in!

Chapter 3

The Echo

One of the fundamental truths of scripture is that God is omniscient – He knows all things. Here are a few verses to consider. There are many more:

*"O LORD, You have searched me and known me... You discern my thoughts from afar... Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, **You know it altogether**".*

(Psa 139:1-4)

*"...for God is greater than our heart, and **He knows everything**".*

(1 John 3:20)

*"Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; **His understanding is beyond measure**".*

(Psa 147:5)

*"**Declaring the end from the beginning** and from ancient times things not yet done...".*

(Isa 46:10)

*"The **eyes of the LORD are in every place**, keeping watch on the evil and the good".*

(Pro 15:3)

Thus, the way God dealt with Abraham at the pinnacle of his faith can pose a seeming contradiction to this fundamental until we consider the entirety of the Bible's **message** from Genesis forward – the **message of redemption**, yes. But more than that – the message of **God's perfect and everlasting Love**. Let me explain...

At the beginning of the Bible's story, God saw that the earth was chaotic and formless – it was so bad that His Spirit brooded over it. The scripture says that He did not make it that way. Thus began His 'display' for all the cosmos, all His created order, seen and unseen, of redemption. In six days, He brought into being a new world order, literally, and on the seventh day He pictured for us the perfect outcome of His redemption – Rest. A graphic foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, our Rest and our Peace with God Almighty.

In the course of that creative burst, He made something new, brand new to the cosmos, a being specifically made in His image and likeness – mankind. Now, God knew mankind would listen to Satan, doubt God's character and fall. He knows all things.

But contrary to the character described by the evil one, God clothed them, cursed the serpent and the ground (FOR man's sake) and sent them out of the garden TO PROTECT THEM from becoming eternally evil like Satan. That is, He began the process of redemption for mankind, a process that would take time and sacrifice.

The evil that man had opened the door to had to play out, for God intended to use mankind as a visual demonstration to the entire cosmos – the consequences of terrible choices, the nature of evil and the evil one, the pain of separation from God, and ultimately the compassionate, love and goodness of our Creator.

God showed the cosmos that it was vain to think that anyone could 'be like God' – Satan wanted to and couldn't; mankind wanted to and couldn't. He also showed that it was/is vain to create religions with 'self-improvement', even righteous 'do's and don'ts' because mankind cannot simply improve his way out of death and darkness. Sin imbedded in the heart of man prevents that.

God had told man in the garden of Eden:

*“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.**”*

(Gen 1:28)

In other words, He put man in charge of the earth. But Adam's rebellion and Eve's deception changed that. By subjugating us to sin, Satan took over. In fact, he told Jesus as much when:

*...the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for **this has been delivered to me**, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.”*

(Luk 4:5-7)

Jesus did not dispute the validity of his claim but simply quoted scripture and refused the offer.

This subjugation/slavery and turning over of their God-given authority to Satan created a debt that only one thing could redeem. Because of his choice, Adam sold himself and all his seed to the evil one. God, being just, determined that only one thing could pay this debt and free mankind. Adam was originally spotless, sinless; thus the price was the death – a substitutional death of another likewise spotless, sinless man.

Of course, this presented a dilemma for mankind because sin was written into our DNA so to speak. All men carried the ‘sin gene’ and were thus unacceptable for settling the debt. But God’s plan continued.

Now, Satan thought he could thwart the redemption plan by polluting the ‘gene pool’ of mankind spiritually and then physically but God cleansed the earth, and in the process preserved one man and his family, Noah and, yep, continued with His plan.

Then several generations later, God again found His man, a man He knew could believe God, that is receive His gift of faith, and trust Him radically and best of all, he would provide the most powerful visual aid of God’s redemption second only to the cross of Calvary.

So, it seems that Abraham didn’t start out with great faith but began with enough trust to follow God’s directions, leaving his home and family in Haran for the Lord told him:

*“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

(Gen 12:1-3)

His life was filled with blessing and tragedy. Sarah, his wife, could not bear a child and they both grew old, too old they thought to expect one. Most of you know there is **a lot**

more to this story but finally God told him that Sarah would have a child, a son. And, exactly as God said, Isaac was born.

Then some years later, God presented Abraham with a choice to obey a command that required enormous faith:

Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

(Gen 22:2)

I'm convinced that the entire host of heaven was watching this as Abraham simply obeyed. With a broken heart, he still believed that God could raise his son from the dead. He journeyed with Isaac to Moriah, to the mount we call Calvary. Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice. He willingly submitted to his father and allowed him to lay him on the sacrificial pyre. Then, Abraham took his knife and was about to plunge it into his only son and at the last moment:

...the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So, he said, "Here I am."

*And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for **now I know** that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."*

(Gen 22:11,12)

This was the pinnacle foreshadowing of the sacrificial gift of Christ on Calvary. Did God not know that Abraham would follow through? Yes, God knew. Keep in mind that the scripture tells us specifically that the speaker is an Angel.

Also, keep in mind that the original language does not capitalize so the "A" is the translator's interpretation of the Spirit's intent as is the "M" in Me. The capitalization shows that the translators think this is a Christophany – a revealing of Christ before His earthly ministry. In any event, the speaker is not explicitly identified as God Himself.

Now, Christ, being God the Son is all-knowing just as the Father, so perhaps this was one of God's primary angels like Gabriel or Michael. However, that's just speculation. What's important is the **picture**, the lesson, the visual aid for all of us. After all, there are several scriptures that indicate the heavenly host are observant of what God is doing with His children on earth:

- Luke 15:10: Jesus states there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents, implying active observation of human spiritual turning points.

- 1 Corinthians 4:9: The Apostle Paul describes the apostles as a "spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings."
- Ephesians 3:10: Mentions that God's manifold wisdom is being made known to the "*rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms*" through the church.
- 1 Peter 1:12: Regarding the gospel and the work of salvation, Peter notes that these are "things into which angels long to look."
- Hebrews 12:1: While often interpreted as departed saints, the "great cloud of witnesses" suggests a heavenly audience surrounding and watching the "race" set before believers.

But the most wonderful thing for us is that, yes, God knows and His redemption plan resulted in a two-fold outcome:

- The cancelling of the debt of sin, the liberation of the slaves, the judgement of the evil one, the many other blessings to humanity plus...
- The '**echo**' to the Angel's statement which can be said by all of God's creation about God:
 - **"Now I know that You love Your children, since you have not withheld your Son, your only Son to redeem your creation."**

This is what David said when he praised God:

***Now I know that the LORD saves His **anointed** (Messiah);
He will answer **him** ("Father, forgive them...") from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of **His right
hand.*****

(Psa 20:6)

Consider the infinite love of God, consider Who He is. Meditate on His goodness and you will find yourself also saying, "**Now I know...**"

Chapter 4

Lord of the Sabbath

Part One

Jesus did lots of miracles – at least 37 but actually many times that number because there were occasions when the scripture simply says, ‘He healed them all’ or some such phrase. But though the people were amazed and glorified God for them, the religious scribes, Pharisees and lawyers were angered and sought to kill Him. In particular, they were obsessed and incensed by Christ doing such things as giving sight to the blind, healing the lame, the lepers and so forth on THE SABBATH.

In fact, you almost get the impression that He did them on the sabbath to make a point and draw our attention to it. Therefore, I want to explore ‘that point’ with you all.

We can count precisely seven miracles that the Bible specifies as being **on the sabbath**:

1. **Healing a man with an unclean spirit in Capernaum** (Mark 1:21-28).
2. **Healing Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever** (Matthew 8:14-15).
3. **Healing a man with a withered hand** (Matthew 12:9-13).
4. **Healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda** (John 5:1-18).
5. **Healing the blind man born blind** (John 9:1-7).
6. **Healing the crippled woman** (Luke 13:10-17).
7. **Healing the man with dropsy** (Luke 14:1-6).

There’s a point behind the number seven as well and I’ll come back to that. First, let’s look at another ‘sabbath incident’ that wasn’t miraculous but reveals a wonderful lesson for us:

*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry and began to **pluck heads of grain** and to eat.*

*And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is **not lawful to do on the Sabbath!**"*

But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:

"how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

"Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?"

*"Yet I say to you that **in this place there is One greater than the temple.***

"But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

*"For **the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**"*

(Mat 12:1-8)

This last sentence explodes with meaning but usually we simply read it and move on. Most all of the traditional sources say, "Lord of the Sabbath" means that He had authority to say what was 'legal' and 'illegal' to do on the sabbath and I don't disagree but that is, at least to my mind, superficial.

He's Lord of the Sabbath because back in Genesis He created the seventh day of rest, the Sabbath, (See Gen 2:2,3) and more than that, He is the Sabbath. More accurately, He is **our Sabbath**. You see, sabbath is all about **rest** and **peace**. Because of this, it is also about **trust** for you cannot truly have rest or peace unless you have trust, trust in the Almighty. Jesus embodies this rest, peace and trust.

He is **Lord** of it. Not governor, not boss, not promoter or fan. LORD.

Now, recall that the number seven in the Bible symbolizes completion so with seven sabbath miracles all associated with healing, clearly God's message to us points to **complete healing** but there's much more...

In fact, this concept of **sabbath** is/was so important that God put it into the law not only for the people but also for the land:

*“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a **sabbath** to the LORD.*

*‘Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; ‘but in **the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest** for the land, a sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.*

(Lev 25:2-4)

But they failed to keep that sabbath, that is they failed to **trust God** that He would provide for them during that time. Indeed, they ignored that command for some 490 years. That’s **seventy times seven**. This is a special number for at least a couple reasons...

When they were conquered as a nation by Babylon and carried away as slaves, the prophet Jeremiah told them that it would be for seventy years in order to give the land its seventy years of rest which they had ignored:

*And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him (the king of Babylon) and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate, she kept Sabbath, to **fulfill seventy years**.*

(2 Chron 36:20,21)

It was when the prophet Daniel read Jeremiah’s words and came to understand this divine discipline, that he prayed to the Lord and the Lord forgave them:

*In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans--in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish **seventy years** in the desolations of Jerusalem.*

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

*And I **prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession**, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His*

commandments, "we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.

"As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.

(Dan 9:1-5)

*"To the Lord our God belong **mercy** and **forgiveness**, though we have rebelled against Him."*

(Dan 9:9)

*"As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might **turn from our iniquities** and **understand Your truth.**"*

(Dan 9:13)

Now, notice that Daniel admitted the nation's sin and iniquities, as well as their responsibility to turn away from them (i.e. **repent**) and to **understand God's truth**. Also, keep in mind that seventy times seven number – you'll see how important it is.

Israel's sin during this 490 years was distrusting God which led them to commit many iniquities, and at the same time their need included "to understand the truth" – I submit, the **truth** of the **Sabbath**. And to underscore this, the Lord then gave Daniel perhaps the most powerful and specific prophecy in the Bible – verses 9:24 – 27.

As many of you know, this prophecy detailed the specific mission and day of arrival of the Messiah in Jerusalem. And as many of you also know, Jesus Christ fulfilled it perfectly. Remember, He is our Sabbath. When He rode into Jerusalem, hailed as King, it was the exact day prophesied by Daniel 483 years after the start date. And this leaves just seven more years for the "time of Jacob's trouble" (see Jer 30:7) which we call the Tribulation. The total is again 490 years.

And therein we see another seventy sevens:

*"Seventy weeks (literally, sevens) are determined
For your people and for your holy city,
To **finish** the **transgression**,
To make an **end of sins**,
To make **reconciliation for iniquity**,
To **bring in everlasting righteousness**,*

*To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to **anoint the Most Holy.***

(Dan 9:24)

Of course, we see that these things were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And there is yet another **seventy times seven** that is important. Jesus, Himself mentioned it:

*Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I **forgive** him? Up to seven times?"*

*Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to **seventy times seven.***

(Mat 18:21,22)

As with our other examples, seven speaks of completion while seventy speaks of the Jewish nation. For example:

Jacob brought seventy people (inclusive of Joseph) into Egypt. That was the whole 'Jewish nation' at the time (Gen 46:27).

Jesus sent seventy disciples out to all over Israel to preach the kingdom of God (Luke 10:1).

God told Moses to bring **seventy** of the elders representing all of Israel to worship Him at the mountain. In another instance:

*So, the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me **seventy men of the elders of Israel**, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you.*

(Num 11:16)

*So, Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the **seventy men of the elders** of the people and placed them around the tabernacle.*

Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.

(Num 11:24,25)

There are several other examples but suffice it to say that when Jesus told Peter to forgive seventy times seven, He was creating a picture of God's own willingness to forgive all Israel (seventy) completely (seven).

In summary, a study of the "Lord of the Sabbath" leads us to God's plans for complete **healing**, complete **forgiveness** and of course, complete **rest and peace** – all of which simply requires us to have complete **trust in our Lord**.

Chapter 5

Lord of the Sabbath

Part Two

Jesus declared Himself to be Lord of the Sabbath when the Pharisees challenged Him for allowing His disciples to break sabbath laws. Our previous devotion explored this claim, and it led us to the revelation of God's plans for complete **healing**, complete **forgiveness** and of course, complete **rest and peace** – all of which simply requires us to have complete **trust in our Lord**. I submit that this is the message of the Sabbath.

But there's even more to this dramatic claim because Jesus **didn't** say, "For the Son of God is Lord even of the Sabbath." Rather, He said, "the **Son of Man** is Lord even of the Sabbath". So, let's look at this term, Son of Man, and see if we can learn what He meant by using it.

Now, the New Testament used it to describe Jesus some 70+ times and each time it includes the definite article "the" which shows uniqueness - it indicates there is **only one** of something. In the Old Testament, **son of man** is used over 100 times but in all but five there is **no article** or there is **an indefinite article**. Those five times all speak of the **Messiah**.

The one book in the Bible where "son of man" is used far more than any other is Ezekiel; he is referred to or called by God "Son of Man" 93 times. However, **none** of these times includes the definite article, "the".

From the beginning, from Genesis onward. Men were known as the 'son of so-and-so'. And, "Man" is the name "Adam". So, the term is really, **Son of Adam**. Jesus could claim this 'ID' for the scripture also calls Him "the last Adam":

*And so, it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The **last Adam** became a life-giving spirit.*

(1 Cor 15:45)

And if there was any doubt about Who this was referring to, he followed with:

*The first man was **of the earth**, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord **from heaven**.*

(1 Cor 15:47)

Where they were/are from is what distinguishes the Adams. The first **man** or the first **Adam** was “**of the earth**” while the last **Adam**, the second **Man** is “**from heaven**”. The first man was **mortal** while the last Man is **immortal**.

In God’s plan, the Son of God could not bring the perfect healing or perfect peace. A son of man couldn’t do it either (sorry, Ezekiel). It had to be **the** Son of Man, the **incarnate** Son of God, the **perfect sinless man**. Only He could be Lord of the Sabbath. That’s because for the Sabbath to be ‘fulfilled’, sin had to be permanently and perfectly dealt with. Only **the** Son of Man could do that. You see, the only other sinless man to walk the earth, Adam, sold/submitted himself (and all mankind) into slavery to sin (i.e. distrusting God). Thus, freedom could only come from a likewise sinless man paying ‘the price’ of liberation.

Why is this important for us? That’s explained by Paul later in the same chapter:

*And as we have **borne the image** of the man of dust, we shall also **bear the image** of the **heavenly Man**.*

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 incorruptible, and we **shall be changed**.*

*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this **mortal** must put on **immortality**.*

(1 Cor 15:49-53)

Many of us understand that this speaks wonderfully of a coming transformation of every believer at the moment of the rapture. But there’s a transformation that takes place even before this, not in the flesh but in the spirit, when a human heart is born again, yielded to the Holy Spirit:

*And because you are sons, God has sent forth
the **Spirit of His Son into your hearts**, crying out, “**Abba, Father!**”*

(Gal 4:6)

This glorious gift of grace means that with His Spirit in you, you are no longer “of the earth” like the first Adam. Rather, you are from that point forward “of heaven” like the “last Adam”. In fact, you are then a member of the family of God – your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. And because you’re family:

*In Him also we have obtained an **inheritance**, being predestined
according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the
counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the
praise of His glory.*

***In Him you also trusted**, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of
your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were **sealed** with
the **Holy Spirit of promise**, who is the guarantee of our inheritance
until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His
glory.*

(Eph 1:11-14)

We should all never cease to praise God for the Son of Man, the Son of God incarnate and for His ‘gift of Sabbath’ - complete **healing**, complete **forgiveness** and of course, complete **rest and peace**. The gift of **completeness**:

*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and **you are
complete in Him**, who is the head of all principality and power.*

(Col 2:9,10)

Chapter 6

Go On to Perfection

*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ,
let us go on to **perfection***

(Heb 6:1a)

*... not laying again the foundation of **repentance** from dead works and
of **faith** toward God, of the doctrine of **baptisms**, of **laying on** of
hands, of **resurrection** of the dead, and of eternal **judgment**.*

(Heb 6:1b,2)

The writer of Hebrews, in chapter five of that book, raised concern that the believers were spiritually **immature** and so started the next chapter stating that it was time to move on rather than to lay again the foundational teachings of repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and God's judgement. Of course, he was NOT asserting leaving those things but rather that it was time to build upon them, to address the next, very important lesson or principle and that's indeed what we will consider herein.

God simply does not do anything part-way. Nothing He says or does is incomplete. But having said that, remember He is not constrained or bound in any way, not by impotence, not by lack of knowledge or awareness, not by time, not by the 'failures' of others, not by anything.

And thus, we do not (usually) have the ability to witness the fulfillment of His words and/or deeds and/or thoughts.

And of course, we nevertheless pridefully make judgements on what our puny selves, our meager minds perceive within the confines of time and space.

As usual, the disciples were an example of this. Huddled together in fear after the crucifixion, none of them remembered Christ's words. Even when the women who beheld the risen Savior brought testimony, they did not believe them. In fact, Thomas asserted that he had to touch Jesus' scars in order to believe.

The very ones who had been taught 'the basics' of our faith for some three years by Jesus Himself were prisoners to their own sin-warped thoughts and perceptions. But Jesus took care of that as only He could.

Before the cross, He had taught them:

*"Therefore, **you shall be perfect** (wanting nothing necessary to completeness), just as your Father in heaven is **perfect***

(Mat 5:48)

In that same upper room, **post**-Calvary, this is what happened:

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So, Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

*And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**"*

(John 20:19-22)

Later, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians:

*For **in Him** dwells **all the fullness of the Godhead** bodily; and **you are** (note the present tense) **complete in Him**, who is the head of all principality and power.*

(Col 2:8-10)

These people who could not believe despite the obvious, empowered by the presence of God's Spirit in them were transformed inwardly. They **then** had the power to embrace 'the basics' **and** the power to trust the next lesson – perfection.

This word in the Hebrew means completeness. So, to "go on to perfection" means to "go on to completeness". With this, the Holy Spirit Who has taught us all about the

'basics' is encouraging us to move on to an understanding of our perfection. Our perfection??

Yes, you see you **are** "complete in Him" or "perfect in Him". That is, it's not you on your own or by your own works or efforts that's the perfection, but it's **Him**. God is in you and you are in God. That's what John said and Jesus prayed for:

*By this we know that we **abide in Him**, and He **in us**, because He has given us of His Spirit.*

*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, **God abides in him, and he in God.***

(1 John 4:13,15)

"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.*

*"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be **one just as We are one**:*

*"**I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one**, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."*

(John 17:20-23)

This is the perfection. This is the completeness. This is the blessed unity of God in us and us in God. This is our testimony to the world – We Are Loved!!

The 'basics' set the stage. They prepare us for the final act – the submitted demonstration of the wonderful love of God. And it's all God's doing.

Chapter 7

The Nature of Faith

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

(Luke 17:5)

We had spent about eight years in ministry together with her and her husband, so when she called us and asked for us to go with her to this church, we wanted to support her and so we agreed even though we weren't eager because this place had the reputation for what I'll call hyper-faith drama.

So, we welcomed her and hubby to our home and then drove with them several hours to the church where a healing meeting was already on-going. It was what I expected- we'd seen it all before. The speaker exhorted the attendees to receive the healing and told us of the hundreds of others who already had – none of whom was present, btw. Then he and his associates asked us to form a circle, and they began to work their way around it praying louder and louder. Some people wept, some collapsed, some claimed instant relief.

They came to where our friend stood and as I looked into the eyes of the 'healer' I saw deadness and darkness. He glanced at me and jerked away mid prayer. Needless to say, none of the attendees could show any real healing and our friend was likewise disappointed.

A few days later, she called us again and explained that the church had 'followed-up' with her and claimed that she wasn't healed from her cancer because she didn't have or work up enough faith. Of course, I explained the reality of what I witnessed and the truth about their excuse.

Now, I'm a strong believer in miraculous healing and I've been involved in several wonderful experiences of the same. But, as believers in Christ, we all need to understand something about faith.

The word "faith" occurs 245 times in 229 verses in the NKJV but only 2 times in the OT so clearly it is really a 'New Testament' focus. "Belief" has about 223 occurrences in the NT and 30 or so mentions in the OT as well but it's pretty obvious that with the coming of Jesus, the Holy Spirit began to increase mankind's attention to faith (and trust). In fact, it seems to be the main impetus for the Gospel of John.

Jesus spoke of "great faith" and "little faith" and a couple times of "no faith". But in Luke chapter seventeen, after exhorting His disciples about forgiveness:

*"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you **seven times in a day**, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' **you shall forgive him.**"*

(Luke 17:3,4)

At this point, they knew they needed help. They may have thought forgiving this much could be challenging; thus, His exhortation seems to have prompted them to ask for Him to "increase" their faith. In response to their request, He answered:

*"If you have faith **as** a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."*

(Luke 17:6)

Pay attention here. He didn't say "as **small or as great** as a mustard seed", He said "**as**" a mustard seed. The implication is clear. Although the mustard seed is indeed small, it has or pictures faith and that faith can do the miraculous. Now, Jesus also compared the mustard seed to the kingdom of heaven in another situation and there used its growth into the greatest of herbs as a metaphor for His **kingdom's** growth.

But then He followed with a valuable lesson linked to such faith:

"And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'?"

"But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'?"

"Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

"So likewise, you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' "

(Luke 17:7-10)

The lesson – if you want **faith**, walk **humbly** in God's **service**.

This is even today a misconception about faith – in an individual, **it can be big but it doesn't grow bigger by your efforts**.

Now, you may wonder, 'Why then did Paul write to the Thessalonians:'

*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,*

(2 Thes 1:3)

And in another place:

*that as your **faith is increased**, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere,*

(2 Cor 10:15)

Of the **243 times** faith is mentioned in the New Testament, these are the **only two** times it is described as growing. In fact, in the first example, the word in the Greek is unusual and is used only **once** in the Bible. It means to grow greatly.

So, is Paul saying that the Thessalonians' faith was growing **bigger or growing by their efforts??** No. You see, he follows with:

*so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith **in all your persecutions and tribulations** that you **endure**,*

(2 Thes 1:4)

Paul was applauding them in that their faith in the midst of persecutions and tribulations was growing **deeper**, more unshakable. If you know anything about crops, you know that it's when plants experience distress, their roots go deeper.

And to the Corinthians, he was speaking of his ministry sphere or scope indicating that as their church grew in numbers and spiritual maturity, other churches would be birthed – i.e. more believers. So, both of these increases were not speaking to individuals getting 'bigger' faith.

Faith can and does 'grow' in two ways – as in the first example, it can go **deeper** like roots, and as in the second example, it can get '**riper**' or more **mature** as with fruit. After all, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. (Gal 5:22)

So please hear me on this – faith (belief, trust) is **not optional**, not for the Christian. How then do we have it? It's a **gift**. It's a **GIFT**. Whether 'great' or 'full' or not:

*God has dealt to each one **a measure of faith***

(Rom 12:3)

And it comes through 'hearing' the voice of the Holy Spirit – that is, **hearing** His Word in your heart:

*So, then faith comes by **hearing**, and **hearing** by the **word** of God.*

(Rom 10:17)

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

(John 20:30,31)

Yes, there are different degrees of faith (great, small) and faith specific to certain things, but it is always a gift of God. You don't earn it, work on it, pump it up, etc. :

*For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and that **not** of yourselves; it is the **gift of God**, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

(Eph 2:8,9)

And note, as Jesus indicated, greater faith comes as you humbly serve the Lord.

Chapter 8

Forgotten

Many people suffer with the awareness or sense of being forgotten or forsaken. Not simply a missed meeting but being put completely out of mind by those who at some previous time were dear and loving. It's common among the elderly, the divorced, those in grief, but not limited to them.

It's increasingly common within families where alienation undergirded by hurt or pride or anger or disappointment results in forgottenness. Forgottenness is a deep pain that aches in the deepest part of us. On the other hand, forgetting can be something innocent or a means of coping with a sense of abandonment or the myriad pains of the past.

Being forgotten is a deadening experience – emotionally, spiritually, even physically. When we're forgotten by those we know and love, we begin to lose our sense of belonging and purpose and, eventually, hope. When I forget someone, it means that, in some way, there wasn't space for that person in my life. This happens to all of us in all kinds of way. We're forgotten by our friends, families, neighbors, co-workers, even our church. – Joe D.

On either side of it, feeling forgotten or forgetting is tragic because it means fundamentally that there's a lack of love involved or a lack of forgiveness or mercy or hope or trust or...

Unfortunately, the world is filled with this sentiment. But because it is, in essence, the result of sin, the world has no solution. Its answer is simply distraction – more work or more play or more self-destructive behavior, thus we have Hollywood and Disney and 'news' and all sorts of activities designed solely for distraction.

But Christ brought the remedy. He demonstrated for us the immense **love** of God. He revealed the true heart of God:

*“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And **not one of them is forgotten** before God.”*

(Luke 12:6)

No matter how small or insignificant you think you are you can look to God and know that even the smallest creature is not forgotten.

“Remember these, O Jacob, And Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!”

(Isaiah 44:21)

God doesn't forget those who serve Him. Nevertheless, the enemy of your soul, Satan, does all he can to convince you otherwise, but remember – he's a liar.

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely, they may forget, Yet I will not forget you.”

(Isaiah 49:15)

When all others forsake and or forget you, God never will. His love for you is perfect and eternal. And you may think, 'God doesn't understand my hurt', but actually He does. You see the pain of forgottenness is synonymous with the pain of forsakenness. And on the cross, God the Son cried out to God the Father:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

(Mat 27:46)

Yes, God knows that pain. He put on Himself and took it to the grave where He left it, along with all sin and now, we who believe, knowing that He rose from the dead, can also know that He will never forsake or forget us. By faith, He's in our heart and we are in His.

Chapter 9

Nothing But Grace

Jesus had just spent time on the mount conferring with Moses and Elijah while being transfigured in glorious radiance. They discussed His departure, that is His coming passion – the torture, the crucifixion and presumably His resurrection.

Meanwhile, Peter, James and John were present but seemingly had no clue, no understanding. In fact, Peter just blurted out that they could set up three tents:

*While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were **fearful** as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"*

(Luke 9:34,35)

Did Jesus shake His head? We don't know. But it seems like the Father was saying, "Use your ears, not your mouth."

We know that Jesus loved His disciples immensely but the enormity of what lay before Him spiritually and physically must have weighed on Him. The next day(s), several additional incidents happened almost like Satan trying to throw challenges His way:

Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him.

Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child.

"And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him.

*"So, I implored **Your disciples** to cast it out, but they could not."*

Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."

And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father.

(Luke 9:37-42)

Apparently, **none of the disciples**, including those who were on the mount with Jesus, could believe sufficiently to remedy the situation:

And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men."

*But **they did not understand** this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and **they were afraid to ask** Him about this saying.*

(Luke 9:43-45)

Next incident:

Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest.

(Luke 9:46)

Here, all the disciples, presumably including **Peter, James and John**, are disputing over their desired personal power.

Next incident:

*Now **John** answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us."*

(Luke 9:49)

Next incident:

First, the set up - they all continued on their journey towards Jerusalem and passed through Samaria. We need to understand that at this point Jesus is fully focused on accomplishing His mission:

Because Jesus was going to Jerusalem these particular Samaritans did not welcome Jesus. They didn't have good relations with the Jews and were prejudiced against them. We may also see this as the opposition (knowing or not) that comes the way of all who set their face steadfastly to do God's will. – Guzik

Now, the incident. As noted, the Samaritans did not receive His messengers –

*And when His disciples **James and John** saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to **command fire to come down** from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"*

*But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "**You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.**"*

*"For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."
And they went to another village.*

(Luke 9:54-56)

Did you notice? It looks like all these six incidents involved one or more of the three 'inner circle' disciples who witnessed Christ's transfiguration. What amazing patience from Jesus as He faced the coming sacrifice!

Of course, there were many more incidents, but these seem to amplify the fact that witnessing the transfiguration did not make these fellows any 'sharper'. They continued to bumble and fumble. Even when they meant well, they just couldn't 'help' Jesus accomplish the cross. They didn't understand it at all. The simple fact was that only Christ Himself could accomplish it.

And there is an application to us that is critical. If you are saved, honestly born again, you have also experienced the transfigured Christ in that you have believed He is the risen Lord of Lords and King of Kings. You may not have seen physically but you have known spiritually. Though He is in your heart, you are also probably nonetheless 'clueless' on how to accomplish His will.

And that's how it should be, for it is **not you** who is supposed to accomplish it, it's Him. Whether pastor or pewster, on our own or in our own power, we will always bumble and fumble just like Peter, James and John did. But Christ is longsuffering, immensely patient and ever-loving.

After the cross, these same three guys, filled with and dependent upon the Holy Spirit, preached wildly impactful messages, healed the sick, even raised the dead. They followed Christ even unto death. They followed step by step.

Don't waste your time trying to build Him a 'tent'. You can't 'help' Him save you. As Paul wrote:

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

(Rom 7:19)

Like the Father said to the 'boys', "**Hear Him!**" (emphasis mine) **Trust** Him. **Believe** and **obey** His Word. Your salvation, it's nothing but grace.

Chapter 10

Scandalized!

'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'

(Luke 7:20)

A great man. Jesus said he was the greatest prophet of all but with this question, this great man who previously pronounced publicly that He was the Son of God (John 1:35,36) showed that he was dabbling with doubt.

Now, John was in prison, soon to be beheaded but he was also a man toughened by years of living in the Judean wilderness. How Jesus answered the messengers carrying his question was telling:

And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. (See Isa 29:18)

*"And blessed is he who is **not offended** because of Me."*

(Luke 7:21-23)

"Not offended" is literally not **scandalized** or tripped up or enticed to sin (i.e. doubt). So how in the world could Jesus doing such wonderful miracles cause a "great man" like John to be scandalized or tripped up?

To answer this, let's step back and consider John's preaching. What did he say?

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*

(Mat 3:1-2)

*"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with **the Holy Spirit and fire.***

*"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He **will thoroughly clean out** His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He **will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**"*

(Mat 3:11,12)

John was what we would call a 'firebrand'. He was not afraid to confront anyone with his truth – even Herod the king. It seems like he had an expectation that the Messiah would bring even more 'fire'. A loving, kind, healer willing to take on all of our sins was not at all the One he was looking for. John was indeed the last and, according to Jesus, the greatest of the prophets but Jesus also said:

*"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; **but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**"*

(Mat 11:11, Luk 7:28)

Greatness in this world, even religious greatness, does not equate to greatness in the kingdom of heaven. Greatness in this world is all about domination or acclamation whereas greatness in God's kingdom is all about submission – to Him.

John was clearly confused so Jesus told him not to be 'scandalized' or 'tripped up' or to doubt. John's message was indeed pure and true, but he needed to trust God's way more than his own expectations. And this leads us to a powerful spiritual lesson:

Religion, past and present, is all cart with no horse. You see, a cart is powerless on its own. It's just 'boards and big wheels' so to speak. But a horse is led by its master. Religions produce 'greatness' in the form of 'superstars' but God is not impressed with the pomp or numbers or oratory. He looks on the heart.

Like John the Baptist, we all **tend** to look for the wrong things from God. When God doesn't do what we expect or how we expect or when we expect, we can be 'scandalized' or 'tripped up' or doubtful. We set our eyes upon men, even 'spiritual' men, even men in ministry and when they fail our expectation (and they always will), we can be like John.

But Jesus didn't slam John. He answered him perfectly and lovingly. You see, the good news is that He knows us. He tells us that we will be "perfect" in Him, (Mat 5:48) but that perfection (completeness) is **His work**, not ours. I'm confident we'll see John in

heaven. Jesus, turning his attention to what the scripture said was probably exactly what he needed to be reminded of.

Don't "get religion", get saved. Get a whole new life by the power of the Spirit of God. Submit in trust to the way God wants to do things:

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

(Col 3:2)

Chapter 11

Escaping Fear

Part One

*So, Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.
When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." And he called the
name of that place Mahanaim.*

(Gen 32:1,2)

Two verses just tucked into the recording of Jacob's journey leaving Laban and making his way back home. They don't seem to connect until you step back from the narrative and rehearse the course of Jacob's life.

As a young man, his mother 'coaxed' him into deceiving his father, obtaining the family blessing and consequently so angering his older brother that he had to escape to Haran or die. He was **terrified** of Esau. There he learned the true meaning of deception living with and working for his uncle who tricked him into 'hooking up' with his older daughter, Leah and over the course of some twenty years of service, changed his wages ten times (NOT raises).

So, when Jacob finally left Laban, together with his family, it was another **escape**. When his uncle chased him down and demanded to know why he had fled, the Bible says:

*Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was **afraid**, for I said,
'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.'*

(Gen 31:31)

Well, God had warned Laban in a dream to 'play nice' but clearly, he wasn't happy so they parted with a truce of sorts and next Jacob, moving on through the hills of Gilead towards home got news that really shook him. He sent messengers ahead to advise his alienated brother that he was coming back home. But to his dismay, word came back that when Esau had learned of his approach he responded by coming with 400 of his men.

Jacob thought that his payback had come, that Esau was going to do him in. As a consequence, he desperately prayed for God's deliverance but then his Jacob-brain began scheming again. He sent presents of sheep, goats, camels and cattle forward to appease Esau and then split his company up thinking that if one was captured, that the other could **escape**. Then, with his weary mind tired from all the fear, turmoil and scheming, he separated himself to try to get some peace, but...

A 'Man' showed up and wrestled, yes, literally wrestled with him all night. And Jacob wouldn't quit. He just wouldn't stop. So much so that the 'Man' told him:

"Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

So, He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob."

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed."

(Gen 32:26-28)

A very significant event for whereas Jacob means "supplanter" or "heel snatcher" (thus deceiver), Israel means "God prevails" or "governed by God" or "God governs". It signified a complete change of character.

And what happened besides this was also very important:

Now when He (the 'Man') saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.

(Gen 32:25)

You see, Jacob had always been all about **escaping trouble, escaping fear** and you can bet that as a last resort, that plan was always on his mind. But with a broken hip? That won't happen. For Jacob to be Israel, to be the one in whom "God prevails", he couldn't run anymore. He had to trust God.

I suggest that that is why those two verses were tucked in to the narrative of this event. God had told Jacob to make the trek back home. God knew he was afraid. And God also wanted him to know of His **presence**, His **angels**, His **'Man'** (probably His Son) – that is, His **faithfulness**.

God blessed Him with a new name which indicated a new nature and a new 'walk' – a **limp**:

So, Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

*Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he **limped** on his hip.*

(Gen 32:30,31)

Perhaps counter intuitive, but it caused him to face his fear rather than escape again. Oh, Jacob continued at times to act like his old 'nature' but increasingly he also learned to trust and submit to God – to act like Israel.

We all deal with fear. All the way back to Eden, sin made it a part of our DNA if you would. And God's remedy is still a new creature (2 Cor 5:17), a new walk (Isa 40:31)– trusting and submitting to Him in love:

*There is no fear in love; but **perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*

(1 John 4:18)

Chapter 12

Escaping Fear

Part Two

Fear is so important for us to understand. It is one of the key topics in the Bible. In fact, it is mentioned nearly 700 times (including -ed, -ful, -ing) compared to 460 times for love or 455 for faith and trust. It is shown to be a part of the character of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David (and many others).

And it is indeed the very first problem that came between God and man:

*So, he (Adam) said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was **afraid** because I was naked; and I hid myself."*

(Gen 3:10)

Actually, you could say disobedience on Adam's part led to sin and sin led to fear. And ever since, it has been hard-wired into the human race. Now, the Bible clearly instructs us to fear the Lord (more than 30 times) but let me clarify something. When the scriptures talk about the fear of the Lord, they are referring to **reverence** – to **revere** Him. You see, in both Hebrew and Greek, the languages of the Old and New Testaments, the word for fear and reverence is the same.

Adam was created in God's image and likeness to **revere** God but became **afraid** of God because he **sinned** and everyone who feels the weight of sin views the Lord the same way. However, when **sin is cleansed by the blood of the Lamb**, the "new creature" saved by grace views the Creator with reverence again, holy awesome reverence.

I think sin immediately changed Adam's perception of God from awesome Creator with whom he fellowshiped to threat – that is, he took on, or rather was infected with, Satan's mindset. The perception of a threat is indeed what spawns fear versus reverence.

Reverence in the Bible is a profound, respectful, and submissive disposition toward God, often described as the "fear of the Lord". It combines awe and admiration for God's character, authority, and presence with practical obedience, worship, and love. It is a deep sense of awareness of God's holiness. – Bible Cyclopedia

Let's consider some of the mentions of fear versus reverence in the Bible:

*"If you do not carefully **observe all the words of this law** that are written in this book, that you may **fear** (reverence) this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, "then the LORD will bring upon you...all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were **afraid**...Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall **fear** day and night, and have no assurance of life.*

*"In the morning you shall say, 'Oh, that it were evening!' And at evening you shall say, 'Oh, that it were morning!' because of the **fear** which **terrifies your heart**, and because of the sight which your eyes see."*

(Deut 28:58,59a,60,66,67)

Herein, Moses warned Israel that they had to observe (obey) **all the law** in order to **revere** the Lord and that the consequences of not doing so were terrible. In other words, the Law of God, though holy, reenforced the sin-generated idea that God was a threat **because no one** was able **to keep all the Law**. Therefore, **under the Law, everyone** was **guilty**.

Under the Law, we were all like Adam after he sinned – whether we recognized it or not, we are afraid of God, afraid of the 'exposure' and judgement.

*"Yes, **all** Israel has transgressed Your **law** and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore, the **curse** and the oath written in the **Law** of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.*

(Dan 9:11)

Only Jesus, who fulfilled the Law perfectly could honestly tell us to **trust** God and **revere** Him because **in Him**, sin was cleansed, eradicated, and because of that, **in Him** no longer do we harbor Satan's mindset towards our Lord:

Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

(Gal 3:24)

In oneness with Christ, we can **hear**:

*“**Fear not**, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*

(Isaiah 41:10)

And we can be **assured**:

*For God has **not** given us a spirit of **fear**, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

(2 Timothy 1:7)

You see, Jesus paid the price for our innumerable sins to give us eternal life and thus specifically to set us free from the bondage of fear – the great fear:

*Inasmuch then as the children (that’s us) have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and **release** those who through **fear of death** were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

(Heb 2:14,15)

Yes! There is escape from fear in accepting the gift of God by Jesus Christ:

*There is **no fear in love**; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been **made perfect (complete) in love**.*

(1 John 4:18)

If our relationship with God is marked by this tormenting fear, it shows that we have not been made perfect – that is, complete, and mature – in His love. – Guzik

If you are facing this fear and you **don’t** know Jesus as your Savior, open your heart to Him now:

*“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will **by no means** cast out.”*

(John 6:37)

If you have surrendered your heart to Jesus and you are facing fear, ask Him to open your understanding of your **identity** – you see, you are **no longer** the person solely of your

flesh. Your **true identity** is indeed your inner being united by God's grace with His Spirit – you are indeed complete **in Him!**

*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and **you are complete in Him**, who is the head of all principality and power.*

(Col 2:9,10)

In Jacob wrestling with “the Man” (Gen 32) God foreshadowed **all of us who believe** in the “Man”, Jesus Christ. He received a **‘new walk’ and a new identity**. And as with Jacob, we often need some time to recognize that new identity. But with that identity comes **perfect love** and **freedom** from **all ungodly fear**.

Chapter 13

Jumping for Joy

*On the third day there was a **wedding** in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.*

And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.

When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the [guests] have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

*This **beginning of signs** Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory; and His disciples **believed** in Him.*

(John 2:1-11)

Now, "wedding" is a New Testament word and "marriage" is only used twice in the Old Testament which I find interesting. Of course, weddings and the concept of marriage are as old as the story of mankind. And notably, weddings are the joyous celebration of marriage

and thus it's natural that Christ's first miracle as recorded in John chapter two was in support of that joy.

And that same joy is proclaimed **in heaven** at the end of the age:

*"Let us be glad and **rejoice** and give Him glory, for the **marriage** of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."*

And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

*Then he said to me, "Write: '**Blessed** [are] those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."*

(Rev 19:7-9)

You see, the union of Jesus Christ with His Church, which consists of all of us who believe, is indeed something to be **excited** about and to anticipate with ultimate **joy**. I mean you'd jump off a camel in excitement. What? Yeah. Let me explain.

One of the Old Testament pictures of Christ is Isaac. That's because when he was in his early thirties, God told his father Abraham to take him up to the place He would show him and there offer him as a sacrifice. In obedient trust, his father took him on a three-day journey to a place that would later become known as Calvary. There he laid the wood of his sacrifice on Isaac's back (just as Jesus carried His cross up this same mount). He also bound his amazingly submissive son and just as he was about to drive a knife through his chest, the Angel watching said (probably shouted) "Stop!"

The Bible tells us that leading up to this, Abraham had the faith that if he obeyed God and killed his son, that God could and would raise him from the dead. Of course, all this is clearly prophetic of Christ's obedience to His own Father and what transpired on Calvary.

Well just a few years later, (a couple of chapters) Abraham calls his servant to his side and makes him swear an oath to go back to Haran and there to obtain a wife for his son from his family. Anyway, his faithful servant promises to go and ask for the bride but says, "What if she won't come with me back here?"

Abraham replies that if that is the case, then he will be released from his oath. So, the servant travels the great distance from Abraham's camp in the promised land back to Haran in Syria. There he 'just happens' to encounter a beautiful young lady named Rebecca. Now, the servant had **just** prayed for God to lead him to Abrahams family and that if the maid he asks to give him a drink from the well indeed gives him a drink and also

draws water for all his camels, (he had a **lot** of camels and camels can drink a **lot** of water) then he'd know that she's the one.

So, there he is at the community well and up comes Rebecca. He asks her who she is and discovers that she is actually from Abraham's family. Next, he asks her for a drink, and not only does she give him a drink from her water pot but even without his asking, she draws water for all his camels! Well, as you can imagine, the servant is excited that God is answering his prayer, so he tells Rebecca who he is. This, in turn, excites her and she runs to tell her family.

In a short while the servant is welcomed into Rebecca's home and her family rolls out the red carpet so to speak. During the meal, the whole situation is explained to the family heads and their response is:

"The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the LORD has spoken."

(Gen 24:50,51)

And of course, they asked Rebecca if she would go to which she answered, "Yes."

So, the dozen or so camels were loaded up with riders and supplies and the caravan headed back to Abraham's camp. And the scriptures tell us:

*Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming. Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she **dismounted** from her camel; for she had said to the servant, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So, she took a veil and covered herself.*

(Gen 24:62-65)

Now, the word "dismounted" doesn't do justice to the event for the Hebrew word really describes an action wherein Rebecca was so honored and glad to meet Isaac that she lay prostrate before him. I suspect that she 'jumped' from her perch to the ground and bowed before him in humility.

So, you can see that this story is a wonderful foreshadowing of God's plan to bring the spiritual bride, that is the church, to His Son in heaven. Isaac is the picture of Jesus, Rebecca pictures the Church and the nameless servant pictures nicely the work of the Holy Spirit.

And we, as believers, should understand that this coming relationship to our Lord is an amazing part of what will make eternal life in our heavenly home so special. No wonder the great preponderance of references to weddings and marriage is in the New Testament for the Church age is really the age of preparation for the Bride and the new Home.

Chapter 14

The Way of Trust

Sometimes you can miss the potential for catastrophe when you read the stories of the Old Testament. This is one of them. The one we know as the ‘father of our faith’ seems to have stumbled in his trust in God’s promise. In Genesis chapter twenty, we read that God came to a chieftain or king, Abimelech in a dream and said:

“Indeed, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”

(Gen 20:3)

Now, Abimelech claimed innocence because the fellow from whom he took this woman said she was his sister. And God agreed. He said:

“Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore, I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”

(Gen 20:6,7)

So, to his credit, this ‘heathen’ king obeyed the Lord first thing in the morning and it’s a good thing he did for as we read, we find out that God had sterilized the whole kingdom. Now, this woman’s brother was indeed Abram and though he hadn’t outright lied, he admitted not telling the whole truth because he was afraid. And as you read, it’s evident that in repeating this same half-truth ploy – the same one he had done earlier to Pharaoh of Egypt – he was afraid that God would not protect him. It looks like he had lost his trust in the Almighty.

This was a big deal, a really big deal. Abram had trusted God to obey and leave his family in Haran many years previous. He had built altars and worshipped God. Two chapters earlier, when a son of promise was foretold to him by God, a son from Sarai, his 'sister', it says that Abraham (Abram's new name) **believed** and as a consequence, God declared him righteous.

But in this situation, not long after that, he had surrendered the girl that God promised to use to give him his heir to another man in order to save his own neck. What happened? Where is the trust that made him righteous?

Now you probably know the rest of the story and that Abraham proved to be a giant of faith. So, what brought him to this point?

To answer that, we need to step back one chapter when he was 'up north'. The scriptures tell us:

And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace.

(Gen 19:27, 28)

You see, Abraham's nephew, Lot, who was like a son to him and who had journeyed with him from Haran and in the Promised Land had departed, at Abraham's request, to make more room for their herds. Well, he ended up in Sodom while Abraham had remained in the hill country.

When the Lord had visited him, he told Abraham about needing to see Sodom because the stench of its evil had reached heaven so to speak. Alarmed, Abraham aggressively negotiated with God to spare the city from destruction if he found just ten righteous people there. The Lord agreed.

But in chapter twenty, as Abraham was looking off in that direction, the whole valley became a billowing furnace, like a nuclear bomb had dropped. It's likely that Abraham's heart just sank. You see, they had no cellphones then. Abraham saw this inferno in the valley and surely thought his beloved Lot was toast, literally. He had no way to know that God had saved him by taking him out of there.

Anyway, he immediately pulled up stakes and headed south, maybe fearful, maybe not, but certainly dismayed and seemingly distrustful.

Soon, he set up camp near Abimelech's city and well, you know what happened. Sarai was taken by the king into his harem. The potential at that point for

absolute disaster was bigger than the destruction of Sodom – I mean, no wife for Abraham, no promised heir. No promised heir, no Messianic line. No Messianic line, no Messiah. No Messiah, no salvation for anyone – the whole plan of God’s redemption was endangered by Abraham’s temporary loss of trust.

But the good news is God Himself. He rebuked Abimelech in his dream – literally putting the fear of God into him. Sarai was returned to Abraham and just as God had promised, Isaac was born right on schedule. All of this in the face of Abraham’s period of fearfulness.

God promised and God delivered. And when God promised, Abraham believed so Abraham’s stumbling in faith after the judgement on Sodom did not hinder the Almighty. Now, don’t go thinking that I’m saying that you don’t need faith – you absolutely do need faith – it is through faith in Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection that we are saved!!

And more good news - Abraham recovered his faith in God. In fact, he trusted Him to raise Isaac from the dead if need be, when He commanded him to offer his son up in sacrifice. That’s amazing faith and trust in our Maker. What a comeback!

*For by grace you have been **saved** through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*

(Eph 2:8)

So, when **God makes a promise**, it’s on God to fulfill that promise. It does not depend on us and our faith. Of course, when **you come to God**, you need to come in/with faith. That’s another issue entirely and in that case your faith is fundamental.

*“Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you **ask** when you pray, **believe** that you receive them, and you will have them.*

(Mark 11:24)

So, isn’t it wonderful to know that **our God is completely trustworthy**. His plan for mankind is His **promise** of redemption, and **He will keep that promise**:

*For this is the word of **promise**: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”*

(Rom 9:9)

*For He remembered His holy **promise**,
And Abraham His servant.*

(Psa 105:42)

*“From this man's seed, according to the **promise**, God raised up for Israel
a Savior—Jesus*

(Acts 13:23)

*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of
your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with
the Holy Spirit of **promise***

(Eph 1:13)

Chapter 15

Goodness

*Then He said, "I will make **all My goodness** pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."*

(Ex 33:19)

Now **that** was a sight to behold! The scriptures tell that no man has seen God at any time but here the LORD (Yahweh) caused all His **goodness** to pass before Moses. You see, Moses had just requested, "Lord, show me Your **Glor**y." He told the man of God:

"You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"

(Ex 33:20)

*Then Yahweh said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while **My glory** is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. "Then I will remove My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."*

(Ex 33:21-23)

To be sure, there are several different uses of the word "good" or "goodness" but Jesus told us:

*"No one is **good** but One, that is, **God**."*

(Mat 19:17, Mar 10:18, Luk 18:19)

These verses show us that God associates His **Glory** with His **Goodness**. What a uniquely special thing this was for Moses, but he could not see God's face, only His back else he would die.

But even as I write these words, I'm reminded that we, as believers, have seen His face:

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone **in our hearts** to give the light of the knowledge of the **glory** of **God** in the **face** of **Jesus Christ**.*

(2 Cor 4:6)

*...and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made **peace** through the blood of His **cross***

(Col 1:20)

So, in **Jesus** we see the **Glory of God**, and on the **cross** we see the **Goodness of God**. We know that because when we **accept the work of the cross**, that Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the grave and is seated at the right hand of the Almighty, we **receive His Holy Spirit** in our hearts Who brings with Him His fruit which includes peace and goodness:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**, longsuffering, kindness, **goodness**, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

(Gal 5:22,23a)

That is, the very Goodness and Glory of God which Moses beheld from **behind**, we now have **within** our souls and behold in our mirror-reflection of Christ:

*But we all, with unveiled face, (as opposed to Moses' veiled face) beholding as in a mirror the **glory** of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from **glory to glory**, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

(2 Cor 3:18)

And because, as we saw above, **God associates His goodness with His Glory**, I'll suggest that we could also cherish the promise that we are being transformed into the same image from **goodness to goodness** by His Spirit.

Chapter 16

The Secret Place

Three teachings together form one of the pillars of Christ's message, like a three-fold cord. They speak to the three main foci of religion – charity or giving, prayer, and fasting or worship. Jesus does not say to stop doing them but rather He tells us HOW to do them and the essence of each is the same:

*“Beware of doing your righteousness **before men** to be noticed by them;”*

*“Therefore, when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be **glorified by men**. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”*

*“But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your **Father** who sees what is done **in secret** will reward you.”*

(Mat 6:1-4)

*“And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be **seen by men**.”*

*“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is **in secret**, and your **Father** who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”*

(Mat 6:5,6)

*“Now whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be **noticed by men** when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”*

*“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your **Father** who is **in secret**; and your **Father** who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”*

(Mat 6:16-18)

The first teaching regards doing righteousness which includes kind deeds, giving, and service or any personal sacrifice. Religion emphasizes doing these things publicly and many systems are in place to acknowledge the ‘righteous doers’ and to glorify them. But Jesus trashed that as vanity and self-promotion; it serves only to puff up in pride and to foster self-righteousness.

The same is true for the second teaching, prayer, that is communicating with God. Religion is filled with public prayer. In contrast, Jesus prayed almost entirely in private. Even in Gethsemane, just before his crucifixion, He prayed alone. On one occasion He prayed publicly just before raising Lazarus from the dead, and He said:

*“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, **that they may believe that You sent Me.**”*

(John 11:41b,42)

For religionists, praying publicly is a way to present themselves as righteous. Christ wanted those who heard to know that the ensuing miracle was God’s work. Big difference.

The third teaching deals with how we worship and display our devotion to God. Because religionists don’t really know Him, they want people to see them as utterly serious, dour before the Almighty. They seem to want to impress us with the supposed requirement to approach Him in terror of judgement rather than sincere respect and reverence. Again the point of their act is to focus our attention on them in dutiful awe. All religionists want to stand between God and His children.

In each case, Jesus said that they want to be **glorified by men, seen by men, or noticed by men** and specified that in doing so, they have their reward. Sadly, that is exactly what the religionists want. They don’t really know the Lord and for many the whole show is just pretense and for some simply a means to profit.

But the way Jesus told us to do all these things was with a sincere, that is honest focus upon our Father in heaven. When our love for Him takes us into the secret place of His presence, we do these things in such a way that we know we have an audience of One. And Christ said that if such is the case, God *“who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”*

Is your relationship with Him real? Really real? If so, you don't need the attention of people or the accolades of anyone but One. In the end, you will stand before Him, not those people the religionists want to impress and it's His "Well done" you'll want to hear, not theirs.

Chapter 17

Perceiving and Producing

“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ‘And I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.’

(Mat 25:24,25)

This parable from Jesus speaks to the **character** of the Almighty and, importantly, about **our perception** of His character. Unfortunately, many preachers and commentators ignore that and zero-in on the issue of their productivity or lack thereof.

A translator’s job is not easy and they, like all of us, have their own biased perceptions which can influence their own ‘productivity’. This story is important because mankind’s perception of God is the consequence of the original sin, and I think Jesus herein is enlightening us about it. I’ll share my own thoughts, and you can decide for yourself.

To begin with, the Master has three servants. He gives responsibility in the form of talents (a weight of money) to each according to their capabilities but there is no statement of any specific expectation from the Master. Three things are His focus in the end:

First, He addresses their character; next, He speaks of their actions and lastly, He pronounces their rewards.

What we need to realize is that all three things are the **result** of their perceptions of the Master. To the first two, He says the same thing:

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

(Mat 25:21,23)

To delve into the meanings of a couple words here is instructive for understanding the gist of the parable – perception not productivity. The Master calls them “good” and “faithful” which literally mean that they are “**good**” and that they **trust** the Master.

When a listener in another setting approached Jesus and called Him “good Teacher”..., to which Jesus replied:

*“Why do you call Me **good**? **No one is good but One, that is, God.**”*

(Mat 19:17)

And yet, Jesus, in His parable had the Master address two of His servants as “good”. Because of that, I’m inclined to believe that He’s saying they were filled with God’s Spirit. And that’s reinforced by the follow-up because they also “trust” the Master. The Bible tells us that trust (i.e. faith, same word) is a gift from God by hearing His Spirit:

*So, then **faith comes** by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

(Rom 10:17)

*For by grace you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the **gift of God**,*

(Eph 2:8)

Of course, salvation is itself a gift, right? But it’s the **faith** (trust) that is the gift (that is the grace) that enables you to receive it.

So, I submit that Christ was saying that the first two servants in His parable were saved and filled with God’s Spirit. Thus, their perception of the Master produced their response to the responsibility entrusted by Him.

And their response was that they were, “*faithful over a few things*”. Note, He doesn’t laud their doubling of the talents. In fact, He doesn’t address the ‘return on investment’ at all. He simply says that they were “trust worthy” with a few things. His recognition is of the fact that their actions were based upon their trust in Him and that it made them trust worthy.

Lastly, the Master pronounces their reward (again, both of them the same):

*I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the **joy** of your lord.’*

(Mat 25:21,23)

Both of them had the same perception of the Master, responded in the same fashion to Him and both were rewarded the same way. But then, there’s the third fellow...

He perceived the Master quite differently:

I knew you to be a hard man...

And this is the perception of all of mankind since the time the serpent slithered into Eden and warped our perception with his lies. We see God as “hard” or literally “dry”.

The Master characterizes him as a “wicked and lazy servant” which means ‘evil, hurtful’ and ‘slothful’. This servant’s perception of the Master produced his actions and his reaction – he **hid** the one talent and was **afraid** of the Master. By the way, the Master does NOT validate the man’s perception as a truthful characterization, only that it was his perception.

And this reminds me of a similar story starring someone with a similar perception of the Master – Adam, whose first perverted perception of the Almighty after siding with the serpent was to say to Him:

*“I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was **afraid** because I was naked;
and I **hid** myself.”*

(Gen 3:10)

The servant in the parable was so hard-hearted (a reflection of how he perceived the Master) that he didn’t even do the simple act of giving the one talent to the bank. That is, he went dark, very dark. He actually judged the Master showing that, like Satan, he was lifted up in pride.

Thus, the Master’s decision was to take away the one talent and “cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness”. Again, like Adam and Eve who were forced out of the garden of Eden (for their own protection).

So, this parable tells us that those with the perception of the Almighty resulting from the indwelling of His Spirit trust Him and enjoy great reward. Their productivity is the result of their relationship and perception. The trust and love go both ways.

Chapter 18

The Mystery

*Then God said, “Let Us make man **in Our image**, according to **Our likeness**;*

(Gen 1:26a)

I suggest that this declaration from the Godhead was/is so cataclysmic that it sent alarms throughout the cosmic darkness and crazed the evil one so much that he dedicated his hellish being to destroying this plan. After all, it was his own avowed desire to be “like the Most High” (see Isa 14:14).

Nevertheless, the forming of Adam and Eve from the dust of the earth and filling them with the breath of life was the **one part** of God’s amazing mystery. And contrary to the carnal mind, the ensuing ‘high-jacking’ of mankind by Satan in Eden was not a setback; to the contrary, though sad (even for God), it was a necessary part of His divine plan – a plan conceived and even mysteriously accomplished before time began.

What was/is this mystery? God began to reveal it when He said:

*Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and **they shall become one flesh**.*

(Gen 2:24)

Now, was God simply giving a biology class? No. This oneness, this unity foretold of another part of His mystery:

*For we are **members of His body**, of His flesh and of His bones.*

(Eph 5:30)

*This is a great **mystery**, but I speak concerning **Christ and the church**.*

(Eph 5:32)

You see, most of us can get ‘on board’ with the spiritual ‘flesh and bones’ deal (if we don’t think too hard). But the follow-on to this concept is:

*But he who is **joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.***

(1Co 6:17)

And this ‘joining to’ the Lord, being one spirit with Him, has unique consequences:

*For now, **we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.** Now I know in part, but then **I shall know just as I also am known.***

(1 Cor 13:12)

When you look into a mirror, you’re looking at yourself – the implication is that with Christ in you as a believer, you are **also** seeing Jesus but dimly because of the flesh. Therefore you ‘know’ or recognize Him in part. But the time is coming when you will **perfectly** know Him just as He knows you. You’ll know Him this way because you were made to be this way – **in His image.**

Even David looked forward to this:

*As for me, I will **see Your face in righteousness;**
I shall be satisfied when I awake **in Your likeness.***

(Psa 17:15)

For David, this awakening speaks of his resurrection. For those of us who are born again in Christ, we experience by faith/trust a transformation of our inner being as we are joined with Him even now:

*But we all, with unveiled face, **beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image** from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

(2 Cor 3:18)

And the **culmination** of the mystery is **when He is revealed** to us either at the rapture or the resurrection or in heaven:

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that **when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.***

(1 John 3:2)

Seeing Him “as He is” is what produces the big transformation. John could write this because he witnessed someone in Revelation that he must have **thought** was Jesus.

That's because he fell down and **worshipped** this Jesus look-alike guide while in the heavenly scene (in Revelation). In fact, he did it twice! Oops!

*And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am **your fellow servant**, and of **your brethren** who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*

(Rev 19:10 and 22:9)

So, God **began** to create beings "in His image" in Eden and will ultimately accomplish that in our union, perfect union, with His Son – get this! - the bride of the first Adam produced one flesh while the bride of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ produces One Spirit. Us in Him and He in us. What a wonderful mystery!

Chapter 19

Humbling Three

Revisited

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore, be serious and watchful in your prayers.

(1 Pet 4:7)

So, it's been about two thousand years since Peter wrote this, but it is no less true and no less important for us. As I observe what is transpiring with Iran, Russia and Israel, I sense that it would be good for us to review part of Daniel chapter seven:

“Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows.”

“I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.”

(Dan 7:19-22)

In Chapter Seven, Daniel describes a vision of four beasts; he goes into detail on each one – I've dealt more with that in my lesson entitled “Daniel 7 – the Quartet?”. Herein, our focus is upon the fourth beast. This fourth beast is traditionally said to be Rome (the iron legs of Daniel 2) but is also said to foreshadow the Antichrist government (the iron and clay

feet and toes of Daniel 2) which arises out of the old Roman empire (principally Europe and the Arab dominated Middle East and North Africa). I think this creature does indeed picture the Antichrist government which I'll suggest will arise out of Europe (which, by the way is particularly supportive of the Arab world).

This war against the saints is the antichrist's attacks against the Jewish believers during the up-coming tribulation time. Therein the AC will indeed seem to prevail over them until the Ancient of Days – Jesus Christ – comes and deals a crushing blow. Daniel's narrative continues with the angel's explanation:

“Thus, he said:

*‘The fourth beast shall be
A fourth kingdom on earth,
Which shall be different from all other kingdoms,
And shall devour the whole earth,
Trample it and break it in pieces.’*

(Dan 7:23)

Historical accounts clearly describe Rome's behavior as a trampling and breaking in pieces during its conquests.

“The ten horns are ten kings

*Who shall arise from this kingdom.
And another shall rise after them;
He shall be different from the first ones,
And **shall subdue three kings.**”*

(Dan 7:24)

So, who are these ten kings? There are several good theories. One points out that there are ten European founding members of NATO. NATO's original members in 1949 were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. That's 12 but of course, the UK and the US are not in the EU.

Another theory points out the 10 NATO Countries With the Largest Militaries. However, the US and Turkey are not in the EU. For this reason, I think the first theory is more likely.

Now, who are the three that need to be “humbled”? “The EU three, also known as EU big three, EU triumvirate, EU trio or simply E3, refers to France, Germany and Italy, a group that consists of the three large founding members of the European Union.”

And the prophecy adds that another ‘horn’ or power, the anti-christ, will arise after the ten horns:

*“He shall speak pompous words against the Most High,
Shall persecute the saints of the Most High,
And shall intend to change times and law.
Then the saints shall be given into his hand
For a time and times and half a time.”*

(Dan 7:25)

So, it will look grim for the saints – the Jewish tribulation believers, especially during the last half of the seven-year long tribulation.

*“But the court shall be seated,
And they shall take away his dominion,
To consume and destroy it forever.*

(Dan 7:26)

You see, the AC is going DOWN. When Christ comes again with His hosts, that evil one is toast.

*Then the kingdom and dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”*

(Dan 7:27)

Now, earlier in verses nine and ten we see portrayed the judgments of the Ancient of Days– definitely an end time event. Then, in verse eleven, the beast (the AC government) is slain and its body is given to the “burning flame”. This may not be the same event, but it is probably tied to the one described in Revelation 19 and 20 where the AC and his false prophet are cast into the lake of fire.

So, you can see that this ‘other’ or ‘little horn’ the anti-christ, is bad news for the world and especially for the Jewish nation. We read more about him in the book of Revelation (see my commentary “Fire Eyes”). In that book, we find something called the “image of the beast” which seems to be an artificial intelligence (AI) and a decree for the whole world to take a ‘mark’ that qualifies eligibility to buy and sell in the AC economy (the buy and sell club). As an information scientist/engineer, it’s clear to me that managing

such a large-scale campaign will require enormous computing capability, biotechnology and highly advanced computing and digital technology.

So, with the recent rapid advancements in AI and supercomputing, I'm anticipating that Peter's exhortation is extremely relevant right now. Be alert!

Chapter 20

Whom Do You Seek?

So, Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, “Whom do you seek?”

(John 18:4)

As the soldiers sent by the Chief Priest along with Judas Iscariot approached Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, He asked them a most poignant question reaching far beyond that pivotal night. It transcends time. Thus, He asks us the same question today.

They were not seeking Jesus Christ, not Jesus the Son of God. And they are/were not alone – many, many people seek Jesus but not the Son of God. For instance:

Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

(John 6:26)

They seek to be filled. Most if not all people can sense their lack. The flesh lusts for all sorts of fillings. Because of that we usually seek not a Savior but a filler or a fixer or an answer man. And we want that fill, that fix and/or that answer fast, but it disappoints or even angers us when God doesn't jump to fulfill our demands. Most of the time, that fill or fix or answer are demands of the flesh and are not put to God in humility and faith:

*But without **faith** it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must **believe** that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently **seek Him**.*

(Heb 11:6)

You see, “Whom do you seek?” is the real question. Do we really seek the Son? The one Who is seated on high?

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above,
where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*

(Col 3:1)

Bear in mind, the 'things which are above' are **all** found in Christ and only in Christ. That's because He is the One – the one Who is One with God Almighty – God the Son. He alone is the giver of eternal life, He alone paid the price for all our **sins** and that brings up an important point for all of us.

Jesus, speaking to those who did **not believe** in Him said:

*"Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do **not believe** that I am He, you will die in your **sins**."*

(John 8:24)

But just before that, He said:

*Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will **seek Me**, and will die in your **sin**. Where I go you cannot come."*

(John 8:21)

Do you see the difference? Sins and sin. Now, **sins** (plural) were/are the result of disobedience of the Law, but Jesus said they would die in their sins because of the one fundamental **sin** (singular) of **disbelief** or distrusting God.

It's important to understand - the **one sin undergirds all sins** and its that one sin that will, though you **seek** Him, keep you separate from Him. **The one sin was/is the original sin.**

So how does anyone **come** to Him in belief? Where does that trust come from? It's a **gift** from God.

*No one can come to Me **unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

*And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me **unless it has been granted to him by My Father**."*

*"**All that the Father gives Me** will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.*

(John 6:44,65,37)

You may have thought that you were once ‘a seeker’, nobly looking for the truth but in fact, if you found the Savior, it’s because it was God Who drew you to Him. And, by the way, you actually did not have to be a ‘seeker’:

*“I was found by those who **did not seek** Me;
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.*

(Rom 10:20)

That’s because God Himself is a Seeker:

*“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will
worship the Father in spirit and truth; for **the Father is seeking** such
to worship Him.*

(John 4:23)

And Jesus is a Seeker as well:

*“for the Son of Man has come to **seek** and to save that which was lost.”*

(Luke 19:10)

Whom do you seek?

Chapter 21

Light Hearted

It was God's first restorative act:

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

(Gen 1:3)

I mean, He could have done **anything**, created **anything**, said **anything**. But light was first and that should laser-focus our attention. So, let's see what we can glean from scripture about light to better understand its importance and our relationship to it.

To begin with, we know that light is **separate** from darkness and that it is **good**:

*And God saw the light, that it was **good**; and God **divided** the light from the darkness.*

(Gen 1:4)

Light was not born out of darkness. It has no relationship to darkness, no dependency upon darkness. It is completely separate, and from it, darkness flees. Now, you may think that this is obvious, but it's important to note because darkness is the habitat for evil and it attempts to encroach on the domain of light and to convince mankind to pervert or should I say 'shade' the light. God knows this and hates it.

*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*

(Isa 5:20)

That's because **God is light**. Of course, we know that that God is love as well (1 John 4:8,16) so clearly there's a relationship:

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you,

that **God is light** and in Him is no darkness at all.

(1 John 1:5)

But when mankind died in Eden and thus became disconnected from our God of Light and Love, we all were doomed and entombed in darkness, the darkness of evil and sin. Apart from God, we exist in darkness.

But the story of light continued:

*The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.*

(Isa 9:2)

For the Light could not be shut out. God had a wonderful plan for redemption that was older than His creation and, in its time, the light of life again invaded the darkness. And the darkness could not stop it.

*And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not
comprehend (overcome) it.*

(John 1:5)

Enter Jesus Christ:

*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "**I am the light** of the world. He
who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of **life.**"*

(John 8:12)

He shared God's light:

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has
shone in our hearts **to give the light** of the knowledge of the glory of
God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

(2 Cor 4:6)

*In Him was **life**, and **the life was the light** of men.*

(John 1:4)

Of course, this wasn't the life of our mortal bodies, it was/is the life of our souls, eternal life.

So, when we are born again, we become His light:

*“**You are the light** of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*

(Mat 5:14)

*“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may **become sons of light.**”*

(John 12:46)

*For you were once darkness, but now **you are light in the Lord.** Walk as children of light*

(Eph 5:8)

*You are all **sons of light** and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*

(1 Thes 5:5)

And as His children, we abide in Him and He in us. That’s how we see/know light – we **live in** His light and are thus **separated** from the darkness, we **comprehend** the light:

*For with You is the fountain of **life**; in **Your light we see light.***

(Psa 36:9)

And praise the Lord – this glorious gift will be forever!

*“The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you;
But **the LORD** will be to you an **everlasting light**,
And **your God your glory.***

(Isa 60:19)

Thus, in thankfulness for His awesome work on the cross, we rejoice **in His light**:

*The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us **put on the armor of light.***

(Rom 13:12)

*But if we **walk in the light** as **He is in the light**, we have **fellowship** with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses us from all sin.***

(1 John 1:7)

For His light is not only armor against the works of darkness but our place of fellowship with Him. But sadly, some men actually prefer the darkness. They love it.

*“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world,
and **men loved darkness** rather than light, **because their deeds
were evil.***

(John 3:19)

So, as you can see, God’s light is completely awesome. But some men will always choose evil. They are Satan’s spawn and will always opt for hatred and deception and death. Nevertheless, we need not fear them for:

***The LORD is my light and my salvation;**
Whom shall I fear?*

(Psa 27:1a)

And it’s **everlasting!**

*“The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you;
But the **LORD will be to you an everlasting light,**
And **your God your glory.***

(Isa 60:19)

Chapter 22

Inside Out

“But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.”

(Luke 11:41)

Now giving alms was basically giving to the poor. But this is a radical statement – “all things are clean to you”. We have to understand that the Jewish religion was bound up in traditions relating to ceremonial cleanness. You not only had to wash but wash in a very specific way. For instance:

*Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with **unwashed** hands?”*

(Mark 7:5)

For the religious, it was all for show, all external. Today, it is the same, at least for some people who don't know any better. It's true for politicians as well – all for show.

So, the discussion was about cleanness or purity which was something of paramount importance, and we could relate it to sincerity for which the outward show is one thing but does not necessarily reveal the inward reality of the heart.

Spiritual cleanliness comes from an inner change (like a clean heart) that naturally produces compassionate actions, making external rituals meaningless without it.

“This passage illustrates a core message about true cleanliness that transcends mere actions and rituals. Jesus emphasizes the need for an inward transformation, where actions like charity can purify the heart and soul, contrasting with superficial compliance to ceremonial laws.” – The Bible Says

Of course, religion is all about external rituals, where we worship, when we worship, how we worship. And rituals are not without value, but rituals often take on the entire essence of worship and even faith.

God gave some rituals to the Jews to teach them about principles, important principles of regarding and worshipping the Most Holy. The rituals became everything and the principles took a back seat. The same is true today with the church because we strive to 'fit in' and rules, rituals and such help us fake it while 'hoping' we make it.

But Jesus overthrew their tables on this by asserting that they were like 'deer in His headlight' so to speak. Exposed as fakers with God. What He was saying is what He always said – "*You must be born again.*" You must be completely, changed inwardly to be clean (i.e. acceptable) before God. You simply cannot get away with the outward show.

Perhaps you've observed that many preachers have mastered the 'good show', but God knows the heart. People can be impressed with the show, they'll pay for the show, they may even rave about the show. But it's still a show.

That's why Jesus so often spoke of giving in such a way that even one hand would not know what the other was doing or going into your private place to pray or to worship in sincerity. Sadly, too many today, just as then, are merely observing the rituals, most of which are man-made.

Let's do it right. Let's hear what Jesus said/says and follow His example. Be changed inwardly by the Spirit of God and love freely and sincerely. The show is for the circus; God wants your heart.

Chapter 23

Faith and Duty

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

(Luke 17:5)

More faith, sounds good, right? But in this we have to look at context and 'mindset'. Jesus had just spoken some 'difficult' words on forgiveness:

"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

"And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

(Luke 17:3,4)

So, perhaps these guys were shaking their heads and thinking, 'Wow, forgiving THAT much, we're going to need some help.' Whatever the case, Jesus responded with a 2-part lesson that we all need very much to take to heart:

So, the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

(Luke 17:6)

He first addressed the 'size' issue of their request – that is, size isn't really the issue. More or increase isn't really the issue. Even the smallest of seeds can produce amazing results, and you cannot judge spiritual power based upon the outward appearance. Then part two:

"And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'?"

"But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'?"

"Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

*"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are **unprofitable** servants. We have done what was **our duty** to do.' "*

(Luke 17:7-10)

You see, the context of the lesson was/is our duty to forgive but the lesson goes beyond that and puts a spotlight on the condition of the heart of the forgiver or servant of the Lord.

These servants were told to plow, to tend and then to serve supper and in like manner, we are commanded to forgive:

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

*Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to **seventy times seven**.*

(Mat 18:21,22)

And sometimes, it may seem like a monumental deal to forgive. You may even feel like God owes you a pat on the back or at least a thank you. But Jesus makes it clear that the attitude that the Father desires is simply that when we've done all that He commands, we know that we are "unprofitable", that is, **unmeritorious** servants.

I like this comment:

This attitude understands that our Master has done **more and greater** things for us than we could ever do for Him. What He did for us was out of **pure love**; what we do for Him is out of proper gratitude and **duty**. -Guzik

So, is this about faith? You bet! The biggest faith-fueled miracle is the **honest** change, the **sincere** and **real** transformation of the human heart – submitting entirely to the Lord and realizing the **greatness of His Love and Forgiveness for us**.

Chapter 24

It's About Time

God is very much into **timing** and scripture is filled with examples. Just after appointing twelve disciples, Jesus instructed them:

“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

(Mat 10:5,6)

However, later on the mount of ascension, He would say:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

(Mar 16:15)

On another occasion, upon being prodded by His half-brothers to go the feast in Jerusalem, He said:

“My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready.”

(John 7:6)

“But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.”

(John 7:10)

God does what He wishes in His time, not ours; and He conveys His Words and His Will in His time as well. Upon explaining to His disciples that He had to “go away”, Jesus said:

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

(John 16:12,13)

Now, this becomes quite poignant to each of us when it comes to our expectations of God and how He decides to answer our prayers. You see, He has said many things concerning His willingness to hear our prayers of faith and to respond but as you search the scripture, you'll note that He never commits to respond according to our timetable. And if you take your trust back (which you should never do) this can be disappointing, frustrating, and even disillusioning.

It's not that God is slow. It is not that He is juggling too much. It is not that you are in a queue of billions waiting for your turn. All those are human concepts and of course, we are quite prone to placing our human characters and concepts on Him. God's infinite capabilities, knowledge and presence are well beyond these notions.

But our spiritual enemy has shrewdly manipulated society, rev'd it up so to speak, so that we all want any and everything NOW. Food, entertainment, information, money, justice, you name it – we are conditioned for instant gratification. And when God doesn't play that game with us, a game that the enemy has driven into our characters, we doubt and complain that God doesn't see or care.

Why did God wait for several thousands of years after He first alluded to it in the Garden of Eden to bring the suffering Saviour, and risen Lord, Jesus Christ? Why did the Hebrew people have to wait 400 years in Egypt before being freed? Why have these same people endured nearly 2000 years of "stupor" and "blindness" to their true King and why must they still endure seven years of horrendous rule by a false king?

Timing. It is so real and so important and yet, for us, it is so mysterious. Can you imagine being with Mary when the angel Gabriel told her, 'You're the one. You will give birth to the Messiah.' Or with Noah when the Lord said, 'Come into the ark.' Or with John at the foot of the cross when Jesus said, "*It is done.*" Timing is a mysteriously important part of all that God does. Existing outside of time gives Him complete perspective and full control. This is clear from the following verse provided in two translations:

*"While we were still weak, at the **right time** Christ died for the ungodly."*

(Rom 5:6 RSV)

*"You see, at **just the right time**, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."*

(Rom 5:6 NIV)

Now all of this is simply an introduction into the purpose of this message – you see, we have yet another time to be aware of, to "Watch" for and to be prepared for. Jesus Christ

is going to return to take possession of this world. He will resurrect His faithful ones from their graves, rapture those who are waiting and found faithful, and will conquer Satan and his loyalists. The former two will occur in an instant.

And our waiting for this reminds me of a story in scripture.

He was a truly godly man. We don't know if he was a priest or member of any select group of religious/pious people. He may have been a devoted Levite or simply a farmer or even a beggar. In any event, he was in the temple at the right time.

In all likelihood, Simeon had earnestly desired to witness the coming of the Messiah. He probably longed for it for many years. Surely, he had pleaded with God to let him see Christ and perhaps days strung out into weeks, into months and years. At some point, he struggled with believing that God had heard his prayers as his own life waned and he grew older. He knew his time to pass was close and it would seem that he hung out continually in the temple, hoping and waiting and hoping.

One day as he stumbled along, making his way to the temple courtyard. Something Holy drove him to come this time - perhaps in great faith, perhaps in great expectation, perhaps in despair, perhaps in the midst of a spiritual battle – the greatest of his life. The Holy Spirit moved him and I'll bet as he entered, he sensed a glorious presence that grabbed his heart and lifted his step. A lifetime of waiting was culminating in the most amazing moments he could ever have imagined – a baby. And he supernaturally recognized this child instantly. His waiting was over in an instant.

*“And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. So, he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ‘Lord, **now** You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.’”*

(Luke 2:25 – 32)

In like manner, our waiting for the true King of Israel will soon be over. Like Simeon, do you want to “depart in peace?”

What are you waiting for? God's timing is perfect and usually mysterious, but your time is easy to understand - it is right now. That is, you have no guarantee of tomorrow. If you don't **know** that you have a right relationship with God via Jesus Christ, **your time is now**. Pray for God to forgive you for all you have erred in and to redeem you by the sacrifice of His Son.

If you're already saved through faith in Christ and waiting on an answer to prayer, wait in **patience** and **peace** – if you asked in faith, God heard you and He will answer.

All our waiting will be over soon.

Chapter 25

Restoring All Things

John the Baptist was an enigma. The religious and political powers of his time did not know what to make of him. He was the true anti-establishment prophet. His background, all the way from his birth to his life in the desert wilderness, his dress code, his diet and especially his message were all entirely a declaration of a truth-filled counter cultural clash with a hypocritical establishment.

But John the Apostle of Christ (who originally followed the Baptist) along with the other disciples, were also surprised when they asked Jesus about a puzzling theological issue that involved the enigma. It stemmed from the last scriptures in the Old Testament, in the book of Malachi, which says:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

(Mal 4:5,6)

With this in mind, the disciples asked Jesus a question. Peter, James and John had just witnessed His marvelous transfiguration on the mount and His discussion with Moses and Elijah. Jesus charged them, saying:

“Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”
And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”
Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first^[fn] and will restore all things. “But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished.

(Mat 17:9b-12a)

Thus, He clearly spoke of two ‘comings’ (His own) with two ‘precedings’ by Elijah, or as with John the Baptist, by someone with the anointing and power of Elijah.

Now, the Baptist’s message was essentially one of repentance. Luke records:

“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”

And he pointed to Jesus’ ministry saying,

“I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

(Luke 3:3,16)

In this manner, he paved the way for Jesus and prepared the hearts of the people to receive Him. So, what was the spiritual quality of this preparation? Jesus made that clear when He explained to His followers:

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

(Mat 18:3)

Thus, you could say that John’s ministry of baptizing for repentance was to prepare childlike hearts – or to say it another way, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. In other words, to show the ‘learned’ and ‘mature’ that they didn’t really know what they needed to, and that their religious standing or life-experience couldn’t substitute for childlike innocence and trust in God. Even Christ submitted to his baptism to demonstrate, as God’s Son, the heart of the Father for His children as well as His own child-like submission to and faith in Father God.

So, it is evident that the first part of Malachi’s prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist. But, what about the second part? Recall, it says, *“...and the heart of the children to their fathers,...”* I suggest that this may point to what Jesus said, *“Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.”*

Note the future tense indicating that this restoration was yet to come. Of course, to restore something implies that at one time it was whole or in good condition. Many commentators agree that this second part is saying that someone who either is or who operates in the power of Elijah will guide the descendants of Israel back to the faith in God in which the Patriarchs, the fathers, walked. But it may be something more.

You see, 'restore all things' can also be translated 'restore everyone'. If so, who would this 'everyone' be? To answer that, we look to Isaiah who spoke of a restoration – he prophesied of the Messiah, Jesus, and said:

*“And now the LORD says,
Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,
So that Israel is gathered to Him
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,
And My God shall be My strength),”*

*“Indeed He says,
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”*

(Isa 49:5,6)

Here we see that Father God appointed Jesus to restore the preserved ones of Israel who I suggest are the faithful remnant of believers seen in Revelation who are preserved from the worst of the Tribulation times. And if so, this restoration would not only bring these people back to the faith in God the Father but also God the Son. The people who have rejected Christ for so long will be restored to right standing before God by faith in the real Sacrificial Lamb of God.

In his Gospel account, Luke records the words of the Archangel Gabriel speaking of John the Baptist:

*“And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their
God. And he shall go before him in the **spirit and power of Elias**, to
turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to
the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

(Luke 1:16,17)

Interestingly, in the Greek, the first part could read “*turn the hearts of fathers to children*”. The ‘the’ is not present. The second part, which reads “*disobedient to the wisdom of the just*” corresponds to Malachi’s “*children to their fathers*”. And actually, the better or more literal translation of the Greek word rendered disobedient is unpersuadable. So, what ‘Elijah’, preceding Christ’s second coming, will do is ‘turn the unpersuadable to the wisdom (understanding) of the just (righteous).

That is to say that the Hebrew people, who have for two thousand years been unpersuaded by the understanding of the righteous – the Gospel – will be turned to accept it by 'Elijah'. Hallelujah!

Chapter 26

On the Watch

When I first read about the “mark of the beast” some 45 years ago, I was intensely curious and have since that time continued to study and investigate the scriptures to learn all I could about eschatology, that is, end times. Now, I’ve never stood on my roof anticipating the rapture or told anyone to do so, but I am witnessing, very clearly, the events and spirit of increasing deception the Bible warned would be evident to believers if they would watch.

One of those may have just happened.

Back to the mark of the beast. Let’s do a little review – the book of Revelation 13 tells us about a devotee to the Antichrist (referred to as the “beast”) known as the False Prophet. It says:

*“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a **mark** on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may **buy or sell** except one who has the **mark** or 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 it is the number of a man: His number is **666**.”*

(Rev 13:14-18)

Some years ago, a company came out with a chip that is embedded under the skin and can transmit information to a computing device. Many of us thought that perhaps this was the mark of the beast or a precursor of it. It used NFC (Near Field Communication).

But there is a small problem with this – the definition of the word “mark” in scripture is “a stamp, an imprinted mark” or “the mark branded upon horses”. The closest thing we can associate with this is a tattoo of some sort. That is, it is indeed a mark **on top of the skin**, not something under it.

So, this mark upon the skin will allow the followers of the beast who have believed the False Prophet to buy and sell – like using a credit card with a chip or just a magnetic strip. Of course, almost all stores now have computing/cashiering devices that conduct transactions in this manner. But is there a tie-in with this number 666? Perhaps...

If we do a search in scriptures for this number, we find:

“The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold...”

(1 Kings 10:14)

In fact, it is the only mention of this number apart from the verse in Rev 13. Clearly, the number is **associated** with **gold**.

So does tattooing, gold and buying and selling come together? **Maybe** so. Here’s an article I just recently read:

Microsoft and MIT Turn Temporary Tattoos Into Touchpads

By [David Murphy](#) August 13, 2016 06:59pm EST

The temporary tattoos allow you to interact with connected devices - turning your wrist into a touchpad for your smartphone, for example.

Temporary tattoos are more than just a fun activity to try down at the beach boardwalk, or some novel way to test out a real tattoo before you go under the needle. If some PhD students have their way, they'll soon be a fashionable way to control your smartphone.

That's not a typo. A new project from Microsoft Research and the Media Lab over at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology combines embedded sensors and gold leaf - a connective element - to create interactive temporary tattoos. And these DuoSkin tattoos aren't just input-only. While you could use one of these a tattoos to theoretically control the volume on your smartphone, they could also be used as an output device. In other words, tiny components in the temporary tattoo (like LEDs) could change in some fashion based on a stimulus, like your body temperature. The tattoo could also store data and transmit information when queried by other devices (like an NFC chip of-sorts).

Could this represent the “mark of the beast”? **Maybe** so. In any event, for the first time we have a mark upon the skin, made with gold, that will enable the wearer to transact business – to buy or sell. It is clearly still speculative to assert that this is or will be the “mark” but it does appear to be a sobering reminder of the days in which we live.

And this reminder is especially sobering because of the warning tied to it. Revelation 14 says:

“Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.””

(Rev 14:9-11)

Let’s be on the watch!

Chapter 27

Kingdom Come

The Hebrew people have been a fractured group for a long time – arguably, all the way back to Jacob’s twelve sons. And, as a nation with one king and one capital, their experience was pretty brief. David consolidated his rule over the whole country when he accepted the offer from the 10 tribes aligned under Saul’s incompetent son to be king over them as well as his own tribe, Judah. At that time, he moved the capital from Hebron to Jerusalem and that’s where, in God’s view and to the Jewish people, it’s been ever since.

But about 70 years later, when David’s grandson took the throne, the people felt so oppressed that the ten northern tribes broke off to form their own nation taking the name of their forefather, Israel. Unfortunately, they never had a good king and very quickly reverted to worshipping golden calves just as their fathers had done after leaving Egypt. As a result, it was all downhill for them and eventually God brought severe judgment.

The southern nation, Judah, had a series of kings as well – some good and some bad – but eventually, their spiritual depravity and disobedience resulted in their own destruction as well.

So, the Hebrew people, united under one king based in the holy city, Jerusalem was momentous but historically momentary. Like man’s enjoyment of the paradise of God’s presence in the Garden of Eden, it was established by God, but man ruined it and was ‘evicted’. Nevertheless, the Lord will restore a united kingdom of Israel and it will happen in our days. Ezekiel foretold it. Let’s take a look.

“The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones.”

(Eze 37:1)

This is how Ezekiel chapter 37 begins. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, but he was among the people who had been taken captive by Babylon so as he is speaking, the Northern Kingdom of Israel has already been crushed by the Assyrians and scattered around the world while the Southern Kingdom, Judah, who has been recently conquered, is still in rebellion against God and against their Babylonian overlords. In this passage, the prophet is looking far into the future, declaring a vision of what is almost universally considered to be the rebirth of the nation of Israel in our days.

The prophecy continues:

Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'"

(Eze 37:11)

To which the Lord answers that He will raise them up, as a nation, from their graves and do something never done before:

"I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.' "

(Eze 37:14)

So, God said that not only would he resurrect the nation, but that He would place them in their homeland again. This, as you know, was made official on May 14, 1948. But He doesn't stop there.

The Lord instructed the prophet to take two wooden staffs (probably shepherd's staffs) and write on one *'For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions'* and on the other *'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.'* Then as he held them together, they miraculously became **one staff**. This represented their miraculous reunification.

Ezekiel recorded:

*"Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and **one king** shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again."*

(Eze 37:21,22)

And to be clear, “king” here means king, not governor or prime minister.

Now a bit later in this same prophecy, God says that not only will they have one King, but also one Shepherd and it will be David who most students of Scripture agree prophetically pictures the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

And so, we can look forward to a time, quite soon, when Christ as the King of kings will rule his people and there will be no more division among them. Why soon? Well, Christ was asked about His return by His disciples. They inquired:

“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

(Mat 24:3)

He answered with a description of events leading up to and including what is called the Great Tribulation – a final period of horrendous difficulties. He said:

“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.”

(Mat 24:21)

Note: Another scripture calls this the time of “Jacob’s trouble” and it is described in detail in the book of Revelation.

And then He gave a sign, a trigger so to speak:

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.”

(Mat 24:32)

Throughout Scripture, the fig tree is symbolic of the nation of Israel (both Northern and Southern kingdoms as a whole). The picture here is of the nation coming back to life after a period of dormancy. It is blossoming again.

*“So, you also, when you see all these things (the things He just described to His disciples), know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, **this generation** will by no means pass away till **all these things** take place.”*

(Mat 24:33, 34)

You see, Jesus Himself told us that the generation that witnesses the events He described symbolized or triggered by the rebirth of the fig tree – Israel – will see ALL these things, including the Great Tribulation, take place.

Now, that begs the question – how long is a ‘prophetic’ generation? As we know, the rebirth of the nation took place in May of 1948. One noted Christian author indicated in his best-selling book way back in the 60’s I think that such a generation might be 40 years long and well, oops, 1988 came and passed. And since then, Christian authors by and large have avoided the notion of a prophetic generation. No one wants to be seen as a wide-eyed loon, and I don’t blame them. But if there is a length that the **Bible indicates** as a prophetic generation, it would be truly loony not to consider it because there is indeed a prophetic year (360 days) and a prophetic week (7 years) that most Bible scholars agree to as they consider both scripture and prophetic fulfillment.

I’ll cut to the chase – I think we do have indication of a scripturally valid prophetic generation. It is seen in several scriptures but the most revealing is in Psalm 90. It starts off, “*Lord, You have been our dwelling place in **all generations.***” So right off the bat, the Psalmist, led by the Spirit of God, gives a hint concerning a coming insight. A little further on he writes:

*“The days of our lives are **seventy years**; and if by reason of strength (or **force or power**) they are eighty years, yet their boast (or pride) is only labor and sorrow (literally **trouble**, vanity, nothingness)...”*

(Psa 90:10)

Recall what I mentioned earlier about the Tribulation time being known as “*Jacob’s **trouble***”. (See Jer 30:7)

Now you might think the writer is simply making a general observation and that could be so if the writer weren’t Moses who lived to be **120**. And at the time he wrote this, the men of war among those he led (those above 20 years old according to the book of Numbers) all died off during the 38 – 40 years they wandered in the wilderness. So, the last ‘hanger-on’ers’ among them were about 60 when they died. So perhaps, Moses is writing **prophetically** that **70 years** is a prophetic generation **unless** there is a **force or power** in play. Then it is **80**.

But back to Ezekiel. Not only did God use him to forecast the coming united kingdom under one King, He used him as a visual aid to declare a period of judgment upon the divided kingdoms. In chapter four of his book, the Lord instructs him:

“You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem. Lay siege against it, build a siege wall against it,

and heap up a mound against it; set camps against it also, and place battering rams against it all around. Moreover, take for yourself an iron plate, and set it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face against it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel.”

(Eze 4:1-3)

Here we see that the first focus is upon **Jerusalem**. Then He follows with:

*“Lie also on your left side and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, **three hundred and ninety days**; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.”*

*“And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of **Judah forty days**. I have laid on you **a day for each year.**”*

(Eze 4:4-6)

So, God said that Ezekiel, whom He earlier called the “son of man” – the title Jesus used for Himself – was to bear the iniquity of these divided kingdoms for $390 + 40 = 430$ days representing **430 years**.

Now the Jewish people were in Babylonian exile until the Persian king Cyrus allowed them to return, but when that happened, it was the remnant mostly of the people of **Judah** (not the other tribes) and they were **never again to have a bona fide Jewish king and Jerusalem as their capital**. This has been the case from 586 BC until today. So how does this 430 years figure?

Keep in mind that this prophecy is picturing through Ezekiel that it is the Lord (the Son of Man) who is bearing with the condition of the divided kingdoms. In it, each of the **11 tribes** with an original allotment of land essentially got a judgment of 40 years (**minus one mysterious decade**). So, it would appear that the 430 years is how long the Lord declared He would bear with the situation – that is, **Jerusalem** being without the one **King** over the whole of the united nation. Another way to say this is that the prophecy declares the time period that will conclude with a renewed “One Capital, One King”.

Historically, this troubling situation began when King Solomon died, because the rebellion by the northern tribes against his son, Rehoboam was almost immediate. This was **930 BC**. And the last king of Judah who was also the last king of the divided kingdoms,

Zedekiah, was dethroned and Jerusalem destroyed on the **9th of Av, 586 BC**. So, the period covered was **345 of our calendar years** (inclusive of the partial years on each end).

OK, hang with me here. Because this is a prophecy, we must consider **not** our 365.25 day calendar years but Biblical or 'prophetic years' which are 360 days long. When you do the math, this era works out to be exactly **350 prophetic years** which then leaves $430 - 350 = 80$ years. So where are those remaining 80 years?

Fast forward to May 1948. Once again, as Ezekiel prophesied in chapter 37, the Jewish nation was 'brought to life' back in their homeland and had rule over part of Jerusalem but since that time, they have not had a king let alone the King of kings reigning from the city. And though they are in one country, they **have once again** had **two capitals** - Jerusalem and Tel Aviv; and they are still utterly divided amongst themselves united only in their mutual defense.

So I **suggest** that since Jesus said there would be a last generation that would see all the things He foretold leading up to and including the Great Tribulation, and since Moses declared that a generation could be 80 years if a power or force was in play, and since the 'fig tree' of Israel budded so to speak in 1948, and since beginning with this new 'budding' the Jews have once again had two capitals, we **could** have an **approximate** forecast of the coming rule and reign of Christ from Jerusalem. One question remains – what 'power' is in play?

I suggest that this power may be the power or self-reliance or military prowess or national pride of the Jewish people themselves. When that power is broken, Israel will look to their Savior. I think that may be so because of what Daniel, the prophet, spoke concerning the last days and the Jewish people. In chapter twelve of his book, he had a vision of a "man clothed in linen" (that is, a righteous man) inquiring about the length of the tribulation time upon the Jews and how it would all conclude. He recorded,

*"And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time (3 and 1/2 years); and when the **power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.**"*

(Dan 12:7)

There's the 'power' in play.

So, 1948 plus 80 years? You can do the math. Now, **don't** cancel your life insurance or quit your job – I could be totally wrong here. But this study can and should help motivate us all as believers to look ever more sincerely for the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The King is coming! See Isa 32:1; Isa 33:17, 22; Isa 44:6. Of course, I don't know when exactly. No one does. But, along with you, I can see the **signs of the times** and surely it won't be long!

*"I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your **King**."*

(Isa 43:15)

May His Kingdom come!

Chapter 28

Seeking Face-Time

It was dark outside on the deck as I saw him huddled in the far corner. His gut-level weeping was like a knife in my heart. I approached slowly and knelt down beside him laying my arm on his shoulder. In a moment, his tears were falling on my chest as he buried his face.

Behind it all was a terrible tale of bewildering betrayal and abandonment that had ravaged an innocent, loving heart. In the cold night air, he seemed so incredibly alone and devastated. A week earlier, he had despaired of life and came very close to ending it. You see, his wife had been cheating on him for years, treating him with disdain and mind numbing abuse and then one day simply left him with their two children. Now, with a deathly sense of finality, having had his latest request for reconciliation trashed, he understood just how dark her heart was, how it really was over. In addition, it wasn't that long ago that his little brother, who he was so close to, had died.

He had always been tender, as a child and as a man, filled with the sincere desire to live a godly life. Now, he was utterly broken.

Comfort? What does comfort look like in times like these? For it's at the bottom of these deep canyons of anguish that we're vulnerable to feel abandoned by God as well. You can question the very beliefs that have guided your life and devotion. It's the heart-cry that's present in death, in divorce, and in the often-rapid-fire succession of destructive dilemmas that seem to rain down on us and can crush a tender soul. Bitterness, anger, and hurt can flood in and be vented out in all directions.

Comfort? We want answers, explanations, freedom from the pain and sometimes comfort seems like a vapor, an empty theory.

Her eyes were filled with loss and pain as she looked into mine. Her precious daughter had died and though her faith was deep and solid, she, like so many of us, cried out inwardly for comfort and assurance. Many had consoled, many had cried with her and her dear husband. Now, as she gazed into my soul, she gently smiled and said, “You know. I know you know.” She did the same with my wife.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

(2 Cor 1:3,4)

We need to believe God’s Word regardless of how we feel. It’s simply true.

But what does this comforting by God look like; how does it work out?

Basically, there’s a face-to-face encounter that’s necessary. Just as my dear friend looked into my eyes knowing that we shared a common experience, a common grief, so we can each look into the loving, compassionate and fully understanding eyes of our God, and know He knows as well.

It wasn’t long after I lost my son that I realized that the heart of God not only understood my grief but knew it firsthand and to a degree that dwarfed my own. Not only did His Son die, but He died in sinful alienation from His Father. Now, it was in obedience to the Father’s will, but He was carrying the sins of the whole world – past, present and future. Father God not only watched Him die but sent Him to Hell all for us. It was the horrible complete judgment we all deserved.

*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have **suffered** the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the **fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death,*

(Phil 3:8-10)

You see, there is an amazingly deep relationship, a fellowship derived in suffering. Of course, there are the ‘hill top’ experiences – powerful encounters with a holy, all-powerful God – just ask Moses, Peter, or Elijah. And there is a fellowship there too.

But just ask any soldier who has fought for his life alongside another. The bond of a really meaningful shared experience is very powerful. And God has shared your grief, your suffering. Is it any wonder He calls His Spirit “Comforter”? The name literally means one who comes along side to help.

So how does this comforting work? It’s like a **pearl**. Like the very doors of heaven.

This is how it works. Each time you come to God in prayer or worship and find the understanding kindness in His face, your pain is covered, it is assuaged. The scarring, however, is not removed. As with Christ’s scars, you keep them just like that piece of grit in the center of a pearl. But, slowly and purely, that grit, that scar, is transformed. Oh, you will always know it is a gritty deal at the core, but God and others will increasingly see it as a pearl.

Yes, this comfort is an increasingly beautiful thing; a patient process requiring lots of **Face-time**, lots of fellowship, with our Father and our Savior.

Out of this fellowship, you will find the trust to continue, to know that His coming along side is indeed to help. It’s not about answers or ‘what-if’s’ or quick-fixes. It’s about a continual covering, it’s about communing, it’s about eternal assurance and healing. And I will tell you from first-hand experience, it does work. That’s because, like with my friend and I, you can look into His eyes and say, “You know. I know you know,” and be comforted.

Chapter 29

Available to All

The entire story of mankind is epitomized in the age-old saga of bondage versus freedom. When we think of bondage, we often picture prison cells, balls and chains, chain gangs, slave auctions, soldiers forcing people to work or to pay taxes, etc. Some may even think of their financial debt or monthly bills as a form of bondage. In the Library of Congress, there are way more than 10,000 titles associated with this topic.

In short, it has historically been a matter of overwhelming importance. And man's answers to resolve these various bondages take the form of political elections, civil rights marches, tax reform, limited government, and such.

But the oldest and most severe form of bondage has not been and frankly, cannot be addressed by any power, politics or philosophy of man.

In the beginning, man's disobedience to God's command concerning the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil introduced the pernicious, chronic, trans-generational and ubiquitous bondage of **sin and death**.

And sad to say, mankind, on his own, simply cannot be free from these two oppressors no matter what he tries or how long or how hard he struggles. Even imagining they don't exist or trying to 'redefine' them doesn't work. Every man is a **slave to sin and doomed to die**.

If you've read it, you know the Bible makes clear that there is indeed a lifelong bondage in every person – that is, the fear of death. See Hebrews 2:14, 15. And we all know this very basic foreboding nests in the background of our psyche, emerging when we feel threatened.

Becoming a sincere Christian can and should alter this for when you are at peace with our Creator and have the guarantee of eternal life, physical death no longer masters you. Of course, that's not to say that Christians lack survival instincts, not at all.

But the believer knows that physical death has lost its 'sting'. For the Christian, it is merely a transition and in fact, the fulfillment of being born of the Spirit.

And so, Christ offers many freedoms – freedom from the slavery to sin, freedom from hatred and bitterness, freedom from condemnation and guilt, and freedom from fear. Of course, all of these are blessings of believing in Him right now. But there is also the greatest freedom of all – an eternal one that Christ described in John chapter 3. In this life, when you are truly saved, Christ sends His Spirit to live within you – it's called a 'down payment' by some, of the things to come. (See 2 Cor 1:22, 2 Cor 5:5 and Eph 1:14). And thus there is a spiritual insemination of sorts. But, for the true believer, physical death is the culmination of being 'born again' or literally translated, 'procreated from on high'. It is really the climax of being "born of the Spirit".

And Jesus described it like this:

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

(John 3:7, 8)

It is the eternal awesome unsurpassed freedom of the Spirit. Perfect freedom!

No more bondage to a fallen, sinful human nature. No more threat of death or tragedy or sorrow. You'll be moving about like the wind, freely wherever you wish. You'll find the fruit of the Spirit - love, humility, joy – all as pervasive and free as the air we currently breath; and all embedded in the new heavenly nature even more than sin is in the old.

When you finally experience the fulfillment of being born of the Spirit, when you leave this earthly life and are welcomed into the heavenly, that's when real freedom embraces you.

Now, this freedom is not for everyone. It is **available** to everyone, but Jesus Himself said few would find it. That's because it's found only in Christ. And you cannot fake it. Those who turn Him down, spurn the amazing love, ignore the gracious gift and choose their own path – these leave this earthly life for a permanent desolation.

Don't be one of them! Choose life, choose freedom, choose the unmerited, unconditional, everlasting love of Christ. Be forever FREE.

Chapter 30

It's a Must Do

I was seriously considering death. No, not suicide! Not yet anyway – ha! Rather, I was reading in Revelation Chapter Six where many saints were found under the altar in Heaven and we are told that they are those who were slain because of their testimony in Christ and their trust in His Word.

As I pondered this scene, it struck me that not only do we all die eventually – that it is inevitable, but that it is also **necessary**. More accurately, it is necessary in its **time**.

In John Chapter Three, one of the grand teachers of Israel, Nicodemus, came to Jesus and the conversation quickly turned to the theme of Christ's message. John the Baptist had preached, "**Repent!**" Jesus taught "**Be reborn.**" This latter teaching was what Nick needed to know so:

*"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"*

(John 3:3)

When the flabbergasted teacher mentally stumbled over this, Christ continued:

*"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**.'"*

(John 3:5-7)

Of course, most of us understand that being spiritually born again is fundamental to being a Christian but thinking that this simply means a sincere invitation to Jesus to come into our heart and be our Lord is missing the bigger and more beautiful message here.

To start with, this is one of those instances where the translation needs some clarification. You see, the words “born” and “again in the original language actually mean “procreated” and “from on high” respectively.

Nick was indeed confused because he did not understand Jesus to be explaining a spiritual **process**. And it is this process that got me to musing. This is because procreation is not simply the delivery, is it. It’s not what we call being born. There is a different Greek word used for that in the Bible. The word Jesus used and what He was referring to was a grander and more complete picture – procreation.

If you’ll permit me, it includes fascination, insemination, fertilization, gestation and then, at the appropriate time, expulsion or as we commonly say, delivery.

As I was pondering it, it struck me that as a believer, I’m still in the “procreated from on high” process. Each step in the physical procreation process has a corresponding spiritual reality. Let me explain.

Fascination – this is really the first step. When God made Eve way back in Genesis and presented her to Adam, he said, and I paraphrase liberally, “this is Wow-man.” He was indeed impressed and attracted to her. Spiritually, we can liken this to the initial prompting of the Holy Spirit that attracts us to the Lord and His Word.

The following story from a new believer, Michael, highlights this:

“Although outwardly happy and content with every material need met, internally where no-one could see, I had an aching emptiness and longed to understand life’s purpose. I remember even at seven years old considering what life was about whilst lying in bed and at eleven sitting in the garden alone on a summer’s evening looking at the stars and being oppressed by melancholic thoughts about the vastness and anonymity of the universe and my place in it!”

“The turning point came when a Christian friend invited me to his church. The people were kind, genuine and loving and although I thought they were all slightly mad I was attracted to something I knew they had which I lacked which, although I didn’t realize it, was inner peace. A few weeks later it was Easter and the leader of the church spoke on Jesus’ Resurrection. At that moment I knew that I believed it, that it had actually happened and that therefore everything Jesus had said about himself was true.”

Insemination – Sometime after His introduction, God told Adam and Eve to “*be fruitful and multiply*”. As a man’s seed is placed within his wife, so God’s Spirit plants the seed of the Living Word within our hearts. The Bible says that we are to:

*“...love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been **born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God** which lives and abides forever”*

(1 Pet 1:22, 23)

Fertilization – what a marvelous mystery! The female egg is surrounded by so many sperm cells and yet just one penetrates and joins to create a new life. So it is that God’s Spirit is deposited in our hearts – one thought, one word, one prayer triggers a whole new spiritual life. And as we all know, the timing must be right for both the ‘divine encounter’ as well as the physical.

Gestation – Of course, this new life (physical or spiritual) must grow. It must be prepared for what’s ahead – a life outside the womb that it cannot even imagine. And so, it is with baby and believer. Every believer must grow spiritually within the womb of this earthly life. When the time is right – a time that God determines – the last step in the procreation process occurs...

Expulsion – Delivery is a painful event for mom and certainly a radical one for the new child. It’s transformative. Yes, death is a ‘delivery’ that is necessary. As believers, we are then finally born again into the presence of our eternal family.

Jesus told Nick:

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

(John 3:7,8)

With this, He clearly asserted that the culmination of the spiritual procreation process is a complete freedom – as wonderful and as mysterious to us as the wind (i.e. the Spirit) blowing wherever it desires. Jesus said:

“Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

(John 8:36)

This spiritual delivery or birth into eternity frees us from the constraints of this earthly life and the sinful nature.

And for us who believe, it is all in God’s hands, all in His time. For those without faith in Christ, death is the transition into an eternal separation from God more isolated, painful and bitter than they can imagine.

You can follow Buddha, Mohammed, or just your own fanciful notions but unless you are born again, procreated from on high – by God through Christ's Spirit – life is pointless and death is just death eternally.

So, seek Him out and open your heart to His awesome loving message. Be born again, live with purpose and grow in grace. Then death will be deliverance.

Chapter 31

Hold Fast!

The SS Daniel J. Morrell was the second-to-last shipwreck on the Great Lakes, torn apart by a fierce blizzard on Nov. 28, 1966. Dennis Hale was the sole survivor of that wreck. He had been sleeping when, around midnight, the 60-year-old ship started to break up amid 25-foot waves. Hale had just enough time to grab a lifejacket and pea coat—though no pants—before the life raft launched. But before it was clear the pulverized ship slammed into the raft, knocking everyone into the water. Only four made it back into the life raft. By the morning, two of them were dead, and the third man died a few hours later, with the life raft just 200 yards from shore. Hale held on to life over the next 34 hours in that life raft, in the freezing storm, before the Coast Guard finally found him, 25 pounds lighter than when the ship had sunk.
(thanks to www.newser.com)

Now Hebrews 11 describes faith as the “*evidence of things unseen*”. But the scriptures admonish us, especially in these last days, to hold fast or cling tightly to, our faith. How does that work? How do you hold on to what you cannot see?

King David showed us how. He said in Psalms 42:5,6:

*“Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.*

*O my God, my soul is cast down within me;
Therefore I will remember You...”*

Even as things break up around us, perhaps as the ‘sole survivor’ of a messed-up life, we can and must remind ourselves of what we still know to be true, what God has promised. We hold to faith, hold to eternal life, even as everyone else lets go and as we are being hammered to do the same.

You see, ultimately, no Christian is defeated in God's eyes by sin or moral failure; those things **lead** to defeat. Defeat is when you let go of your faith. It's when you cease to trust in God's grace, love and forgiveness.

David confessed:

*“From the end of the earth I will cry to You,
When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”*

(Psa 61:2)

Amidst the ashes of Ziklag, he was challenged to let go. If you read the story in 1 Sam 30, you see that David was truly tested. All his cherished family were taken as slaves, his men were about to stone him to death, he was already an utter outcast and fugitive from his people – nevertheless, he held on to his faith. He *“encouraged himself in the Lord”*.

Why is this important to us generally?

As I sat alone in the hotel room in a hot muggy Dallas, my heart was broken, no, shattered. For years, we had fervently labored both in prayer and by law to keep our granddaughter in our son's care after his former wife went off the deep end morally with a number of other men and disavowed any faith in God but rather a new 'belief in lust'. Afterwards, she had abandoned her kids and her husband for years and then came around with a lawsuit, serving him and his new bride on his wedding day to take them away. She had lost the very same suit two times previously but had clearly made 'arrangements' with certain members of another court and smugly told us that this case was basically sewn up for her.

Indeed, she won. The judge was emotionally reacting to our son from the outset, refusing his testimony and declaring him to be (while nearly screaming), against all evidence and two previous rulings, an incompetent parent. She awarded care of both children to a person who we knew would make all efforts to crush their young faith in Christ.

How could God let this happen? Where was He in our time of need? I felt abandoned. That night, for the first and only time in my life, I yelled at God. I told him I didn't understand and that I was mad. This was so utterly wrong, and it was the little ones who would be hurt the most.

This tantrum and loss of faith continued for hours until late at night/early in the morning my heart held on by the tiniest thread to a hope.

Every lawyer we found told us that nothing could be done to reverse the decision. There were many years of California legal precedents that stood in the way as an immovable wall. Nevertheless, a small seed of faith convinced me to not give up.

We took the case to the 5th Court of Appeals and after a lengthy process, gained an almost unheard-of unanimous decision from the court that overturned the decision. It effectively rewrote California Family Law. Though there is much more to the story, suffice it to say that God won in the end and the kids are now growing and indeed flourishing in His Love.

Holding on or “holding fast” implies that there is an opposing force – something that either tries to forcibly take away what you’re holding on to or tries to get you to let go. That opposing force is both sin and the one who uses it to destroy.

The harsh reality of our world is that it’s a war zone –not just in the Middle East but in the middle of our lives daily. Jesus put it this way:

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.”

(John 15:18)

and,

“In the world you will have tribulation” (trouble, persecution)

(John 16:33)

That means that every sincere believer in Christ will deal with these ‘opposing forces’ including, sometimes, mind-jarring difficulties that may cause you to say, “Where are you, God?”

But even then, we need to hold on to our faith, if for no other reason than to strengthen our spiritual ‘muscles’. For generally speaking, life’s trials and tribulations are both battles and basic training – they test us in the present and prepare us for the future. You see, stronger, more experienced faith leads to greater relationship with God. That’s shown in Hebrews 11 which, in speaking of the faithful believers in the past, says:

“...others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonment...”

(Heb 11:35,36)

Wow! A better resurrection! Now, that’s the most wonderful of relationships with our Father.

What do you sense – was Job stronger in faith before his trials or after? How about Joseph or David? Even Jesus benefitted – Heb 2:10 says He was made perfect (or complete) through sufferings. In fact, I'll suggest that each believer is made stronger, more complete in God because of struggles, even as they sometimes weaken us outwardly, they compel us to rely on divine strength to finish our lives well. You remember the story of Samson, right? It's a principle as true today as it was then.

And so, to bring it home, in our time why is holding on important? While hardships tug at our faith, deceptions and ease 'grease' our grip. The Bible foretold that a prevailing characteristic of our day would be deception. Indeed, people are being deceived into blowing themselves up for a false god. People are deceived into sending their savings to TV hucksters posing as evangelists. People are deceived by advertisers, politicians and even spouses. The list is lengthy.

And the dangerous dynamic behind this sad state of affairs is that for deception to be effective it must be believable. Of course, this takes us back to the beginning. After listening to the serpent's lies in the garden, Eve:

"...saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise..."

(Gen 3:6)

She got deceived because the deception LOOKED believable.

What this illustrates and amplifies for us is that the only way to discern and dump deception is to have a strong connection to or grasp of the truth. Believe God and you'll see clearly; believe the lies of Satan and you'll be blind-sided.

In Revelation, Jesus told the Philadelphian church, a group prophetically identified with faithful believers in the last days, to HOLD ON. He said:

"Behold, I come suddenly: hold tightly that which you have so that no man takes your crown"

(Rev 3:11)

In other words, He's warning us that the 'opposing force' we mentioned earlier will take the crown(s) if allowed to. What men of the opposing force would do such a thing? Deceivers.

"... and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution and evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

(2 Tim 3:12,13)

So, what's happening to contemporary faith and how does this play into Satan's plans? Bob Beltz, author of "Real Christianity", writes:

I fear for the future of authentic faith in our country. We live in a time when the common man in our country is thoroughly influenced by the current climate in which the cultural and educational elite propagates an anti-Christian message. We should take a look at what has happened in France and learn a lesson from it.¹ In that country, Christianity has been successfully attacked and marginalized by these same groups because those who professed belief were unable to defend the faith from attack, even though its attackers' arguments were deeply flawed. We should be alarmed that instruction in authentic faith has been neglected, if not altogether eliminated, in our schools and universities.

Is it any wonder then that the spiritual condition of our country is of little concern to those who don't even educate their own children about true Christianity? Their conduct reflects their absence of concern, not only for the state of Christianity in our own country, but also for the need to communicate the message of Christ to those in other parts of the world who have not heard this truth.

Some might say that one's faith is a private matter and should not be spoken of so publicly. They might assert this in public, but what do they really think in their hearts? The fact is, those who say such things usually don't even have a concern for faith in the privacy of their interior lives. If you could see their hearts, you would find no trace of authentic faith. God has no place among the sources of hopes, fears, joys or sorrows in their lives. They might be thankful for their health, success, wealth and possessions, but they give no thought to the possibility that these are all signs of God's provision. If they do give credit to God, it is usually done in some perfunctory way that reveals that their words have no sincerity.

When their conversations get really serious, you will see how little of their Christianity has anything to do with the faith taught by Jesus. Everything becomes subjective. Their conduct is not measured against the standard set by the gospel. They have developed their own philosophies, which they attempt to pawn off as Christian faith.

One critic of the modern church writes:

According to the Hartford Institute of Religion Research, more than 40 percent of Americans "say" they go to church weekly. As it turns out, however, less than 20 percent are actually in church. In other words, more than 80 percent of Americans are finding more fulfilling things to do on weekends.

Furthermore, somewhere between 4,000 and 7,000 churches close their doors every year. Southern Baptist researcher, Thom Rainer, in a recent article entitled "13 Issues for Churches in 2013" puts the estimate higher. He says between 8,000 and 10,000 churches will likely close this year.

Between the years 2010 and 2012, more than half of all churches in America added not one new member. Each year, nearly 3 million more previous churchgoers enter the ranks of the "religiously unaffiliated."

All that to say that a greatly increasing number of believers today are deceived and their faith, if it exists, is tepid. Consequently, large portions of the Church corporate are in retreat or in hiding. Thus, the void created is allowing an ascent of evil in every aspect of our societies.

And this is yet one more signpost of our age for Paul wrote to his protégé, Timothy, *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:*

For men will be lovers of themselves (self-absorbed), lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers (speaking against God), disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy (literally, wicked), unloving (hard-hearted especially toward family), unforgiving (literally, without devotion), slanderers (literally, devils), without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors (or surrenderers), headstrong, haughty (conceited), lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness (an appearance of piety) but denying (rejecting) its power..."

(2Tim 3:2-5)

So, what did the Apostle admonish his follower to do? He told him:

*"But you must **continue** in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have **known the Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation **through faith** which is in Christ Jesus."*

(2 Tim 3:14, 15)

He told him to 'hold on', to not back down, to keep the faith.

Dear friends in Christ, we are living in the midst of what Paul projected in this passage and just like Timothy, we must continue to believe the Scriptures, to hold fast to our faith, to press ahead in spite of the opposing forces, to follow the lead of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This is our calling. We are placed in this time and situation for this very purpose, to fight the good fight. Don't cave in or retreat; don't despair or be fearful. The

King is coming. Stand strong even if you're the last one standing because eternity is at the doors. God bless you as you hold to Him!

Chapter 32

It's Time

It is one of the saddest, most tragic things Jesus ever said, yet it is fantastically important for us today.

He began by explaining to his disciples about how the Word of His Gospel would be spread and under which conditions it would be fruitful. Let's look at Mat 13:

*“Then He spoke many things to them in parables saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some [seed] fell by the wayside; and **the birds came and devoured them**. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”*

(Mat 13:3-8)

Later, Jesus explained:

*“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand [it], then **the wicked [one] comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart**. This is he who received the seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches*

choke the Word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the Word and understands [it], who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

(Mat 13:19-23)

Now, you’re all probably familiar with this passage known as the parable of the sower. Seed representing His word is scattered here and there – in some hearts it’s stolen away, in some it’s received but only superficially; in some it’s choked out and ruined; and in some it’s productive.

To be clear, this is not just a truth for all time, but is also a prophetic picture, that is, a description of how the church got started. Jesus said to His disciples, *“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel...”* and indeed they did. In less than a generation, the Good News had spread to most of the civilized world and in only three centuries it was elevated to the proclaimed religion of the Roman Empire. Of course, this was historically a sad day for this status led to great compromise within the church, and that very situation brings us to the next part of Christ’s series prophetic parables.

Following the parable of the sower, Jesus spoke of what the enemy of the Kingdom would do in response to this growth:

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

(Mat 13:24-30)

Herein, it’s clear that the tares represent unbelievers and deceivers in the church. You see, as young sprouts of tares resemble young sprouts of wheat, so phony Christians can be hard to discern from the sincere. Yet given time to mature, they both become quite evident and distinctive. And notice that this prophecy propels us forward all the way to the

last days – the tribulation time. When Christ returns, the tares will be burned, and the wheat will be ‘barned’. Now, this is not speaking of the rapture, for that is when the Bride of Christ, the assembly of honest believers still on earth, is taken up and brought, along with all the resurrected faithful (also part of the Bride), into the presence of the Lord. In the rapture, the wheat is separated first rather than the tares. So, this parable is pointing to the second coming of Christ to earth which will happen at the conclusion of the Tribulation.

So then, having moved us forward from the initial spreading of the Word and the consequent sowing of the enemy’s tares unto the final days of the age, Jesus next describes the unnatural nature of the last days Kingdom of God on earth with the story of the mustard seed:

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

(Mat 13:31,32)

Now, in another parable, Jesus used the mustard seed as a picture of faith. (See Mat 17:20) And indeed, the church began in faith. You see, the mustard seed is small and will naturally grow into a modest herbal plant, but Jesus said this kingdom would grow unnaturally large with branches that would be big enough for birds to perch upon and presumably nest.

So, what’s the big deal? Of course, this is a well-known passage and many of you already know that as with the fowl in Christ’s previous parable of the sower, **birds represent the agents of Satan**. So, this is a pretty scary and sobering truth – the final state of the church is that of being filled with evil agents. They are in its branches.

And that brings us to the tragically sad prophetic proclamation we first mentioned. Here it is:

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

(Mat 13:33,34)

For those of you familiar with the meanings of prophetic imagery in scripture, this passage has some recognizable elements. We know from (John 6:31-35 and John 1:1) that bread or meal is symbolic of teaching or doctrine while leaven is always a picture of sin or sin-filled doctrine. Jesus said:

“Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”

And in the following verses, it was said of his disciples:

“Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of (literal) bread but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

(Mat 16:6,12)

In this last parable, a woman is mixing leaven in specifically three measures of meal (flour). This is arresting, because again, Christ is speaking of the church, and from the chronological order derived from His sequence of parables, it's the last days condition of the Church. So who is this woman and what do the three measures picture?

Because this is a prophetic parable, it's quite clear that this woman is not a specific person or historical figure; she pictures a spiritual force that is corrupting the doctrine of the church with sin and its close cousin, deception. The Bible says concerning the last days that:

“...evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

(2 Tim 3:13)

Now, as we let the Bible interpret itself, we refer to Rev 17 where we see another prophetic woman riding a beast. It is said of her:

“The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.”

(Rev 17:4-6)

This woman, the great whore, pictures the false religious system that deceives the whole world. I refer you to our devotion entitled **Pious Prostitution** for a more in-depth study on this. I suggest that she and woman mixing leaven in Christ's parable may be one in the same or at least of the same spirit.

And as we continue to consider the book of Revelation, we see in chapters two and three that there are four churches out of the seven mentioned which will be active at the end of the age. Refer to our devotions **Fire Eyes, The Heeding Never Halts**, and **Victory!** for more on this. These four are **Thyatira**, representing the Roman Catholic church

system, **Sardis**, representing the mainline protestant denominational church system, **Philadelphia**, representing the weak but faithful believers whose beginnings are associated with genuine moves of the Holy Spirit beginning in the 1800's onward, and **Laodicea**, representing the last days, self-absorbed or narcissistic church system whose congregants carry many Christian-like names but fundamentally are not Christ-centered.

In Revelation, only one of these four is commended by Christ for holding on to the veracity of His Word – Philadelphia; and this is the one group that Jesus promises to guard or keep from the hour of temptation or testing (the Tribulation time) which He says shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell on the earth (see Revelation 3:10). For that reason, we are confident that the Philadelphian believers will be raptured before the wrath of God is poured out.

That leaves three remaining behind; three churches or church systems who like the three measures of meal in Christ's parable, have gotten their meal or doctrine mixed with sin. The entire church left behind at the rapture will be both a corrupt and corrupting entity. Its doctrine will be filled with sinful error and its branches filled with Satan's agents. It is a horrible, sickening truth.

But, unlike the rapture, which will occur in a "blink of an eye", the infestation of the birds and the mixing in of leaven both take time and I'm firmly convinced have been going on for quite a while already. The contemporary church as a whole is filled with squawking, filthy fowl and rotting worldly doctrines dressed up to look and sound very Christian, very open minded and sensible. Therefore, if you are a Philadelphian believer, your guide and guard is the unaltered, unembellished Word of God.

The one world religion of the last days that will be the result of 'leaven in the meal' and 'birds in the branches' is very ecumenical. There will be an increasing equality among the faiths and even a mixing. Take Christianity and add a bit of Islam, throw in some Buddhism and Mormonism and... even ancient Judaism – you get my drift. And that is indeed happening even now – the birds are squawking and the leaven is rotting, and **it's time** for sincere believers to stand up against it radically or get out of it entirely!

Chapter 33

The Final Garden Plan

So, what is “the lie”?

In the book of second Thessalonians verse 2:11, the Apostle wrote that because the people of these last days have no love for the truth, God Himself will send them strong delusion that they may believe “the lie”. (NKJV and NIV)

In order to understand what that is we simply consider what the Bible says is “the truth”. Fortunately, that is quite clear for Jesus Himself said:

“I am the way, the truth and the life...” and He added, “...no man comes to the Father (God) but by Me.”

(see John 14:6)

Therefore, the lie, being the antithesis of the truth, is that Jesus is not – not who He said He was, not the truth, and not the only way to approach God.

Now consider Genesis and the Garden of Eden; how did Satan first interact with mankind? With a lie. In fact, Jesus clearly stated:

“He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

(John 8:44)

In addition, we know from scripture that in the last days of the age a man possessed by Satan will lead the world in a final great rebellion against God deceptively claiming that he himself is God.

Sad to say, in our age, Christian believers have, by and large, been successfully distracted away from confronting the **spiritual** enemy with **spiritual** weapons. This is important because Paul wrote that:

*“the weapons of our warfare are **not** **fleshly**...”*

(2 Cor 10:4)

But today, the Christian focus is upon self-purpose, politics and pleasure. It is indeed the age typical of the Laodiceans (see Rev 3) and the church, overall, is lukewarm, truly missing the mark.

At the same time, evil is being exalted. Psalmist says:

“The wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted.”

(Psa 12:8)

As the spiritual power and influence of the church is receding, evil is filling the vacuum “on every side”. But this was to be expected, not desired, but **not** unanticipated, for Paul warned us that:

“evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

(2 Tim 3:13)

Thus, people today are being ‘primed’ for the ultimate propaganda – the Big Lie. For you history students, it was Hitler who rose to power in pre-WWII Germany through the same deceptive campaigns - bigger and bigger lies.

When society fails economically, morally, judicially, etc., people become pressed and ready to forsake the norms they are persuaded are at fault, and to embrace the promise of “a better way”. And of course, this is when the ‘message machine’ becomes most effective.

You see, Satan’s methodology is all about deception. So, it’s clearly no coincidence that people with the same fundamental mindset – deceiving and being deceived – have taken control of the large majority of our media. And it is NOT some human conspiracy; it is truly spiritual in nature and power. That’s because the battle is for our beliefs.

It is, in fact, the same battle that started the world war – Satan wants us to doubt God and by default, to believe his lies. Here’s how it worked back at the beginning...

The serpent crept quietly into place within earshot of Eve. Now, **Adam** had spoken with God and had first- hand knowledge of His warning – the danger inherent in the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve was not present at the time, and we have no record of

her interacting with God before the ‘tree incident’. Thus, she was an easy target for the crafty serpent. In a similar way, Eve’s relative inexperience with God’s presence and words mirror that of our contemporary generations.

So, how did the serpent begin? Very subtly. “Yea, has God said...?” He simply opened the door to dialog. Eve was not prepared for this interaction – she was naively susceptible to the serpent’s tactic.

In like manner, our self-absorbed society which is constantly hammered to be “open minded” and tolerant of evil, is an easy mark. They may be open-minded, but they are not well, or should I say **truthfully**, informed.

Thus, dark spiritual forces are at work today just as the serpent was then, to change our thinking on things like the value of human life, human sexuality, even the value of church, marriage and family. You might say that a replay of Satan’s ‘Garden Plan’ Phase 1 is in full motion right now.

Conceptually, the ‘machine’ that is pumping out the message is utterly deceptive.

And when the Holy Spirit together with the sincere believers of the church are removed from the scene, this world will be truly ready to worship, to follow, a new savior – a **superhero** of sorts.

The Bible describes this man, and I emphasize **man**, as ‘gifted’ in spiritual power, oratory skill, the making of war and more. Already, with so many problems around the world and so little effective leadership, people will welcome a superman, even a demonic one. In fact, as we approach the time in which he will be revealed, this whole notion of a superhero savior is increasingly popular and attractive to the public.

Sure, it’s fantasy – sci-fi – for now. But, just as John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus with a message to the people, so today the modern media and the dark, deceptive forces behind it are paving the way for the Jesus-opposite, the Savior-imposter.

In the last say thirty years or so they have successfully corrupted the moral thinking of the society and at the same time have promoted the fantastic image of the man with super powers as being the one who will save mankind – someone to rally around. Promoted? Oh yeah, and people are just eating it up.

Now, I am persuaded that he, this satanically motivated antichrist, is even now on the scene. But the Bible is very clear that he will not be revealed in power, evil and deceptive power, until the church is gone.

And that’s when the subtle Phase 1 of the ‘Garden Plan’ will turn into the slam dunk Phase 2. What was Phase 2 in Eden? A lie. The first and greatest Weapon of Mass

Destruction. The serpent basically told Eve, “God lied to you.” The father of lies hissed that the Truth was a liar. He made promises that were deceptions. And, just as mankind bought into them then, they will again.

The modern ‘superhero’ will be seen by the Jewish people in particular as a Savior and the rest of the world will agree.

This is “the lie”.

And God will let it run its course – even promote it as 2 Thes 2:11 says. But unlike the movies, this superhero will be exposed as a fraud when Christ, the true Savior, returns. As with the Wizard of Oz, the curtains will finally be opened and the little man pulling the levers will be exposed. Then will he and the dark power behind him be dealt with.

So, watch out what **message** you get close to – don’t let the subtle deception of the serpent set you up today to believe the slam dunk lie of Satan that’s coming.

Jesus Christ is the Truth and He is the Only Way to the Father.

Believe that!

Chapter 34

Born Again!

How utterly ironic that God chose a childless man of about 85 years of age to impregnate with faith – a spiritual conception so to speak. We read of it in Genesis:

“Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be. And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

(Genesis 15:5,6)

God spoke the Word, Abram believed and the holy seed of faith germinated, commencing a divine ‘gestation’.

Now, my terminology may seem unusual but conceiving, growing and then giving birth are indeed what this promise above was all about and it was to be symbolized by cutting the body member associated with impregnating. You see, immediately following, God ‘cut covenant’ with Abram.

If you consider the symbolic sacrifices used in it, you get a clear picture of Christ – a three year old heifer (calf) which was the biblical animal of sacrifice, a three year old goat which was the animal of transference, the three year old ram which was the animal of substitution, the dove which was the symbol of the Holy Spirit and the nestling which was the symbol of innocence.

This is all a fascinating study in and of itself, but it is sufficient herein to note that God’s own ‘cutting’, His part was the sacrifice of His Son. Abram’s cutting, that is the symbol of circumcision, came a couple of chapters later:

“And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your

descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.”

(Gen 17:9-11)

Now, I've long wondered why God chose the male sex organ to 'cut' as the binding symbol, generation after generation, of His committed relationship to Abraham (note the name change) and his descendants and their commitment to Him. But I suggest it was truly a perfect picture of what God had done. You see, He had just planted the seed of faith in the father of the Jewish people – the people God calls His Wife. (See Isa 54:1-6)

And with this insemination came conception and gestation – something spiritual and eternal. You see, the picture of God's plan continues for just as the human gestation period is 40 weeks, broken up into three periods, three trimesters, so the line of descendants from Abraham to Christ as recorded by Matthew (that is, the Messianic line) is 40 generations broken up into three equal parts. (See Matthew 1)

So, what did the spiritual pregnancy bring forth? Well, of course, Jesus Christ and His church – revealing the gift of eternal salvation. That's why Jesus specifically put salvation into this context when He said to 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.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

(John 3:3-8)

In a spiritual sense, the descendants of Abraham acted as a womb, a place where the faith in and knowledge of God Almighty, the great I AM, ultimately birthed the glorious Light of Truth, Redemption, Grace and Eternal Life! This is pictured for us also in Revelation:

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve

stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.”

(Rev 12:1,2)

Herein, the woman is the Jewish nation as Jacob, the father of Joseph pointed out in Genesis 37:9,10.

But, as we know, the Jewish people did not take hold of this – the Light shone elsewhere. This was also alluded to when God told Abram:

*“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many **nations**. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many **nations**. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make **nations** of you, and kings shall come from you.”*

(Genesis 17:4-6)

In fact, it is no accident that the word “nations” is specifically gentile nations. Except for the first few years of Christianity, that’s where the Gospel Light was received – in every tribe, tongue and nation apart from Israel. But that is about to change in a big way.

Isaiah foretold:

*“And He will destroy on this mountain (Jerusalem)
The surface of the covering cast over all people,
And the veil that is spread over all nations.*

*He will swallow up death forever,
And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces;
The rebuke of His people
He will take away from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.*

And it will be said in that day:

*“Behold, this is our God;
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.
This is the Lord;
We have waited for Him;
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”*

(Isa 25:7-9)

For what was conceived in Abram and birthed by way of Christ applies to both Gentile and Jew. Though it has been 'delayed', if you would, (by design) for the sake of the Gentile church, the same salvation will be born in the hearts of the Jewish people – the Bible calls them the "remnant".

Speaking prophetically of the last days, John the Apostle said:

"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 thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:"

(Rev 7:1-4)

And the ministry of this group will result in the filling of heaven with a huge number of 'newborns' (see Rev 7:9,10 and 14b). In God's wisdom, the Jews were 'set aside' so that the world could be saved, but when they are saved, it's gonna really get wild! Paul wrote:

"For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"

(Rom 11:15)

And that day is virtually upon us! Isaiah, speaking for the Almighty, spoke rhetorically:

*"Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?" says the Lord.
"Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?" says your God.
"Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her;
Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;"*

(Isa 66:9,10)

Are you ready?

"Therefore, know that only those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham."

(Gal 3:7)

May the new life that was born with Christ be found in you. Be born again by the Spirit of God and be ready for His return!

Chapter 35

The Stand

*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil.*

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].

*Therefore, take up **the whole armor of God**, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**.*

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

(Eph 6:11-17)

After 54 years as a born-again believer in Jesus Christ including seven years in the military I'm convinced that there are indeed things that are worth fighting for and that there are some fundamentally key things to know about that fight.

First, you must know your **Commander** and how to **obey**

Second, you must know the **nature of your warfare**

Third, you must know who your **enemy** is

Fourth, you must know your **weaponry**

Fifth, you must know your **end-game**

Father Abraham went to war for his nephew Lot. Moses, Joshua and David fought wars. Dear Peter fumbled with his sword. Jesus said:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”

(Mat 10:34)

So, this is a topic we all need to better understand. The Apostle Paul told Timothy:

“Fight the good fight of faith...” and “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

(see 1 Tim 6:12 and 2 Tim 4:7).

So, Who is your Commander? Joshua was about to go into battle. The impenetrable walls of Jericho loomed over his head, and he was new to this leadership roll over the hosts of Israel:

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?"

*So, He said, "**No** (i.e. wrong question), but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"*

(Jos 5:13,14)

Joshua was so new he didn't recognize the Commander, likely Jesus Christ Himself. But he's not alone – even Philip the disciple had that problem:

*Jesus said to him, "**I am** the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."

*Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and **yet you have not known Me, Philip?** He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

(John 14:7-9)

Yes, the first thing you need to know is your Commander. Jesus must be your Lord; not just a religious idea you know about, not because you think you 'met Him in church' or

at another gathering. Your heart, your inner being, must be filled with His Spirit's presence and you, like Joshua must have a truly submitted heart attitude toward Him. You must KNOW Him.

Next, you must understand the **nature** of this war and how it is fought. Basic ground-rule #1:

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

(Rom 12:21)

Basic rule #2 – it's a **spiritual** war:

*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.*

(Eph 6:12)

You cannot win this war with fleshly strength or weapons. That's why the enemy wants you to try, to continually keep TRYING. As long as you continue to see the battle as 'carnal', he knows you cannot win. You **cannot make yourself or the situation better**. It's like when Paul wrote:

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but **[how] to perform what is good I do not find.***

For the good that I will [to do], I do not do; but the evil I will not [to do], that I practice.

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

*But I see another law in my members, **warring against the law of my mind**, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

(Rom 7:18,19,22-24a)

Your Christian warfare is not about making yourself more godly or more like God; that's a works trip. It's about surrendering yourself continually to His Holy Spirit and thus cooperating with God as He lives in and through you.

Next, that leads us to the enemy. It's not that person that hurt you; it's not that group or idea you don't like or even yourself. It is the **evil one**. Jesus said to the Jewish religionists:

*“You are of your father **the devil**, and the **desires of your father** you want to do. He was a **murderer from the beginning**, and does not stand in the truth, because there is **no truth in him**. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”*

(John 8:44)

To underscore this, when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He said:

*“And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us **from the evil one.**”*

(Mat 6:13a)

And there is no reason, none, to fear him:

*But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and
guard you from the evil one.*

(2 Th 3:3)

And...

*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them,
because **He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.***

(1 John 4:4)

Comparatively, it's easy to recognize Satan's work outwardly but not so obvious when his work is inward and most of the time it is. His thought-arrows are deception, hatred, pride and lust, etc. As he influences you with his 'propaganda', you become his tool.

Next, you must know your weaponry. There are six parts: (see Eph 6:11-17 above)

The Belt of Truth: Stand firm in God's truth, rejecting deception and embracing honesty and integrity in all you do.

The Breastplate of Righteousness: Protect your heart by living a life that reflects God's goodness, relying on Christ's righteousness rather than your own.

Feet Fitted with the Readiness of Peace: Be a peacemaker and confidently share the good news of the Gospel, remaining steady on your spiritual journey. Remember, that peace is specifically the **peace between God and man** established in Christ Jesus. This is about spiritual war.

The Shield of Faith: Use your faith (trust) to block and extinguish the "flaming arrows" (doubts, fears, or temptations) of the enemy.

The Helmet of Salvation: Protect your mind from negativity and doubt by resting in the assurance of your salvation through Jesus Christ. Moment by moment, heed the command:

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

(Col 3:2)

The Sword of the Spirit: Equip yourself with the Word of God (scripture) to actively combat temptation and confusion. (See Heb 4:12)

Don't buy into the diatribe that your Christian faith is basically a milk-toast, weak belief. It is militant, **spiritually militant**. Even Jesus emphasized this (and I repeat intentionally):

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

(Mat 10:34)

So, what is the 'end-game'? Remember, it's God's 'end-game', not yours; it's not your 'wish-list' or mine – that would be a total bummer. God's end is infinitely better than you could ever imagine:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

(1 Cor 2:9)

But there is indeed a destination, a living hope, an eternal blessing, a joy, an atmosphere of genuine love, a wonderful purpose which God has not told us much about because if He did, we inevitably would trivialize it.

In the meantime, wear the **whole armor of God** and in humble obedience to Him, **stand**.