

Tapestry

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Introduction

Perspective is a critical determinant in whether you see God's Word as edifying or irrelevant, foundational or fictitious. As many of you know, identifying with 'Christianity' no longer gives a 'Christian' perspective – that's sad but not new. The same is true concerning 'church'.

The perspective that unlocks God's Word comes from the indwelling of His Holy Spirit and that indwelling is only obtained by sincerely believing in Christ and what He accomplished on Calvary.

Unlocking God's Word does not simply reveal more truth but actually opens and nurtures a personal, relational, intimate knowledge of Him. Apart from that, believers simply go through routines and when faced with crises of faith, fall away.

As they fall away, a spiritual vacuum of sorts is created, and their perspective adapts to that of the corrupt sin-nature or even an 'unholy spirit' in order to fill it. As a result, they become critical of the things and people who they judge guilty, hypocritical, and wrong. Then they set themselves up as superior to God and Jesus and create their own truth - philosophies that reflect puffed up egos – and they don't even recognize the vanity of that perspective.

Perspective. It can draw you closer or drive you further from Life.

I hope these following lessons will serve to encourage and perhaps challenge you to draw closer. Though they deal primarily with the subject of prophecy, they are by no means inerrant. You are certainly free to disagree. The perspective that's critical is your view of Christ, not this or any other human narrative.

That said, I sincerely hope you are blessed in reading them.

A Sure Ticket for Trouble

After so much miraculous intervention on God's part, you have to just shake your head in wonder. Why would he do it?? OK, let's look at the record – ten disastrous plagues destroyed Egypt, a terribly powerful nation at the time; the Red Sea split in two leaving a dry channel through which the fleeing Hebrews escaped the wrath of the pursuing Egyptian army; then the army was destroyed under these same waters as the Hebrews reached the distant coast; for the following 40 years, this wandering hoard of 2 – 6 million people were given water from a rock, bread from heaven, a cloud and pillar of fire for daily directions; their sandals never wore out; the Jordan river miraculously stopped running to allow their crossing into Canaan; the walls of Jericho simply fell down before them...the list goes on and on.

So WHY would he do it?? It wasn't as if he didn't know God had miraculously brought them back to the land of their fathers. And it wasn't as if God hadn't given them clear and specific instructions – Joshua told them, *“Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction...and you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver and gold vessels of bronze and iron are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.”*

But he did it anyway! You know the story – after wiping out Jericho, the armies of Israel were defeated at the little nothing fortress of Ai. The people were instantly demoralized. What in the world had happened? Was God with them or not??

Joshua, their commander sought the LORD and found out the problem – God said, *“There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.”* So he called for the whole host to assemble, then he called out the tribe of Judah; then he called out the family of the Zarahites; then he took the clan of Zabdi and then he took the man Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah. Achan, his knees must have really been knocking!

And he confessed, *“Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel and this is what I have done; When I saw among the spoils (of Jericho) a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.”* So, he was taken, along with all that pertained to him – his family and his goods, and all Israel stoned him; then they burned him and finally heaped a great mound of stones over the ashes. The experience was so powerful that they memorialized the place of his execution calling it the Valley of Achor, the valley of trouble. Achan was his name and that spelled trouble.

For this study, we'll look at the root cause of this trouble, the real consequences in personal application and the repeat-coming in prophetic terms.

Root cause – covetousness. God had protected, prospered, prepared the people for this campaign. They were all in line, so to speak, save one man, and his folly threatened the whole nation. He didn't need the spoils of the war; he had a lifetime of experience of God's goodness and faithfulness. He was fully informed as well. But he let his sinful lust drive him to the deed. It's interesting that when confessing, he asserts that the thing that first caught his eye was “a beautiful Babylonian garment” or a

robe from Shinar. The prohibited items specified by the Lord initially did not mention garments. Could it be that his attraction for this Babylonian delight led him to greater guilt -- taking the silver and gold? Whatever the case, he coveted them.

The word translated as coveting here in Joshua chapter seven is basically lusting after something. It is the same word used when Eve looked upon the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden and in the Ten C's of Exodus when the Lord forbade coveting your neighbor's blessings. Whew! Talk about root cause! This is the stumbling block for all of humanity.

And the tragedy is that just as Eve was surrounded by God's incredible blessings and goodness in the garden, so was Achan upon entering the promised land, and so are you and I BY FAITH. Oh, we may yet wonder how we're going to make the next mortgage payment or 'just how lonely can a person get?' But we have God's Word on it – all things are ours in Christ. (1 Cor 3:21-23). Paul made it abundantly clear that we are more blessed in heaven than can be described. Whether we enjoy earthly blessings or travail in earthly sufferings, we need not covet for we have such glorious promises of eternal rewards that they're just not worth comparing (Rom 8:18).

Real Consequences – coveting is intrinsically destructive to the individual soul and the community as a whole. Achan was bombarded, burned and buried. These consequences are the fruit of covetousness. Play with it and you'll be hit by temptations and lies, hurt by the heat of the flesh's insatiable appetite for sin and heaped upon in condemnation and guilt. Just stop! Consider the outcome – set your mind on things above.

Ever see a person afflicted with leprosy? Hands and feet decayed and gone; the face not recognizable as human, the senses dead – a sad, sad condition. And it all starts with one diseased nerve. One hidden problem. Such is the spiritual effect of covetousness in the body and the community. Sad to say, it is the foundational principle of today's entertainment and advertising with which we're pummeled day by day – it's mantra -- promote covetousness rather than contentment. Like the host of Israel, you have to deal with it radically.

Return-coming – the prophetic illustration is wonderful here. This Valley of Trouble is very symbolic for the Jewish nation. You see, just as in the book of Joshua, the host of Israel had only recently entered the Promised Land so too the modern nation of Israel has only recently re-entered it. Just as Jericho miraculously fell to the ancient host of Jews, so have the modern Israelis have had miraculous success in warfare and it may culminate with their victory over the Ezekiel 38 and 39 predicted invasion of Russia and its allies.

But trouble's coming. One man is coming who cannot control his desire (the Antichrist). He will bring a time of false peace and then great trouble to Israel – the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jer 30:7). It will be during the last seven years of this age, the 70th week of Daniel's famous prophecy (Dan 9:24-27). As with Achan, it may begin with a temptation associated with Shinar (i.e. Babylon or modern day Iraq) and lead to some problematic buried treasure (oil??). Like Achan, he will be hung up on silver, gold and pleasant things (Dan 11:38).

Regardless,... Israel will be greatly troubled during this time of judgment. *"The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and*

desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers” (Zeph 1:14-16). And, like Achan, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy...” (Zeph 1:18).

And Daniel speaks of this as well, *“At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people (the Jews); and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time...” (Dan 12:1).*

But with the peril also comes a promise (or promises) –

- *“And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.” (Dan 12:1)*
- *“I will punish her for the days of the Baals (false gods) to which she burned incense and she decked herself with her earrings and jewelry and went after her lovers but Me she forgot,’ says the LORD. ‘Therefore, behold, I will allure (or open) her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her (speak to her heart). I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope...” (Hos 2:13-15)*
- *“I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD.” (Hos 2:19,20)*

The Jewish people in rejecting their Messiah have placed their hopes in other things and so for two thousand years they have been ‘ripped on’ as a consequence. Now that God has graciously gathered them, they have re-entered the Promised Land and even enjoyed military success. But they look to America and their own wits, their own power to preserve them. They’re not yet ready for their true Messiah, they’re ready for a false one.

And Christ will remain in heaven until it’s time – *“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue. I (Jesus) will return again to My place (heaven) till they (the Jews) acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”*

Jesus prophesied of the Jews in the tribulation period, *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations (by the 144,000 sealed Jewish evangelists? See Rev 7) and then the end will come. Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (the wilderness?)...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)*

However, because of God’s love for them, it is in this ‘valley of trouble’ that they will find a ‘door of hope’. They will say, *“Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days (prophetically, 2,000 years – see 2 Pet 3:8) He will revive*

us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning (of the third day); He will come to us as the rain (from heaven not the US, UN or the EU) like the latter and former rain to the earth (two times – one fulfilling the Spring or latter rain festivals and one fulfilling the Fall or former rain festivals. More on that in another study, Lord willing). (Hosea 6:1-3)

It could even be that they will literally pass through this valley which is near Jericho on the way to the wilderness.

Are you in such a 'valley'? Do you know someone who is? Has covetousness led to trouble? Whatever trouble you may be in, know this – that in Jesus Christ and Him alone there is a door of hope, the door of salvation. Jesus said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep...If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."* (John 10:7-9) (Also see Rev 3:8 and 4:1).

Yes, He can turn that place of trouble into a peaceful pasture. In fact, He promises it – the prophet Isaiah spoke, *"Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for My people who have sought Me."* (Isa 65:10)

This is true. As with Achan, that 'Babylonian' treasure may be quite attractive, but it's a sure ticket for trouble. As Israel did, remove the 'accursed thing' from your midst – give your sin to God. Only then can you stand before your enemies. And one day soon, we who believe will leave this trouble behind!

A Trumpet and a Blink

Jesus said, *“In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”* (John 14:2,3) Most generally, this return is understood to be Christ’s coming for His bride, the church, in what we call the rapture. It comes from 1 Thes 4:17 where the word translated as “caught up” is “harpazo” in the Greek and “raptus” in the Latin.

Paul wrote that we should expect the dead in Christ to rise first at this time. The spirits of our dear ones who have been with Jesus will be seen with their new eternal bodies reformed somehow from the substance of their former – a metamorphosis → bodies built for heaven! No sin or sorrow; no more aches or pains; no more blurred vision or muffled sounds; no more shuffling in weakness or imbalance. There’ll be perfect health, radiance and freedom.

And then, in a moment, in the blink of an eye (now go ahead and blink – yep, that quickly!) we who are alive and watching, saved by faith in Jesus Christ, will be saved in fact by Jesus Christ. We also will likewise be changed – instantly. And we’ll soar or be translated into His presence to join our great family in the clouds. Then we’ll go home to the place He’s prepared for us.

This glorious event will be announced by the sound of the Trumpet of God and the voice of an archangel (1Thes 4:16). Now, for those of you who have a hard time imagining this, don’t worry. It has nothing to do with your imagination or mine. God will do it.

I think we can, however, glean some helpful insight on it from the account in Exodus 19. You see, the rapture trumpet is specifically the Trumpet of God and is also called the Last Trump (1 Thes 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52). Unfortunately, some have confused this with the last trumpet of Revelation and thus are expecting to have to go through the tribulation before hearing it. But that tribulation trumpet specifically belongs to an angel (Rev 8:2,6; 11:15). It is not the Trumpet of God.

So, the one we’re waiting to hear is the “last trumpet” and in order to understand where to find the first trumpet we consider a similar description/adjective concerning Christ. He is called in 1 Cor 15:45 the “last Adam”. So, now, the “first Adam” is obviously – wait for it - the first “Adam” – deep, huh?

Well, the same ‘genius’ can be applied to the “first trumpet”. The first “trumpet” mentioned in the Bible is sounded in Exodus 19 and it gives us some prophetic clues as it points forward to the last trumpet. You see, after two months of wilderness wandering, fighting with the flesh (typified by Amalek), murmuring at Meribah (the well of bitterness), providential provisions of food and drink – the host of Israel came to Sinai, the wilderness mountain, and they camped before it.

Until that time, all the people knew about God was from what they’d seen Him do – they’d witnessed the miraculous hand of God, but they’d not heard the voice of God (see Romans 10:17). Moses had always been the go-between. Now, before the mount, God prepared the people for something shocking – more so than any of the previous wilderness signs and wonders.

You see, it was Moses who spoke with God. He was the man with the message and the people were submitted; they said, *“All that the Lord has spoken, we will do”* (although they didn’t). So then the Lord told Moses that He Himself was going to appear *“in the thick cloud”* and speak aloud so that from that

time forward, the people would believe. Moses told this to the Jewish people and, as God instructed, prepared them for “*the third day.*” (Ex 19:11)

God also commanded that the people were not to go up the mountain when this happened – they weren’t even to touch it, or they’d be put to death. He told them, however, that when they heard the trumpet, to approach the mountain.

Now, for two days, the people were sanctified (set apart) and they washed their clothes per the Lord’s instructions. Moses seemed to throw in on his own that they should also be celibate. In any event, on the morning of the third day, here’s what happened:

“...there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.”

“... the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder...and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up.”

I’ll suggest for you Bible students that this is a wonderful prophetic picture of the church age and its culmination. You see, for two prophetic days (possibly representing 2000 years – see 2 Pet 3:8) the Jewish people have been set apart, sanctified if you would. The world has abhorred them – they’ve been set apart from the Lord (for their rejection of Christ), from the land of Israel (for their rebellion against Rome) and from the ‘world’ (by antiSemiticism).

But the trumpet’s going to sound! And as with the first trump, the Lord Jesus will appear in the clouds (both at the rapture and His Second Coming to earth - see Mat 26:64; Mk 14:62; 1 Thes 4:17; Rev 1:7). It’s quite possible that in a manner similar to this first trumpet that the coming last trumpet, the trumpet of God, will also blast loud and long. Everyone in ‘the camp’ will hear it and tremble.

And as the Lord did with Moses, I suspect that Christ will speak to us, saying, “*Come up here!*” (See Ex 19:20; Rev 4:1; 1 Thes 4:16) and we will be gone – up the mountain if you would. And perhaps the Jewish people will witness this as they did before mount Sinai.

In any case, friends, it’s coming. Christ is indeed at the door; it will be soon. Don’t be dumbed-down by the world’s continual distractions or disappointed by the wait. Don’t be left in ‘the camp’. You’ll be taken out of harm’s way if you’ve “washed your clothes”.

This simply pictures that you’ve accepted God’s gracious gift of His Son’s blood shed on the cross. There, He paid the price for all our sins. It is always and only His blood that spiritually gives us ‘clean attire’ (See Rev 1:5; 7:14). When the call comes, be ready – be ready for the Third Day. If you’ll rise to watch the dawn, you’ll see that the Son is about to appear!

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 15:5,6 – *“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.”*

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 physical body member associated with impregnating. In fact, alluding to it further, immediately following, God ‘cut covenant’ with Abram.

You see, if you consider the symbolism of the 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 own eventual ‘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 already 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 following this ‘insemination’ came conception and gestation – something spiritual and eternal. You see, the picture of God’s plan continued, 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 this 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."

In a spiritual sense, the descendants of Abraham acted jointly 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 12:1,2 – *"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."*

Herein, the woman is the Jewish nation just as Jacob, the father of Joseph, described 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 first 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, evidently 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' during the last two millenia, so that the world could be saved, but when they are finally redeemed, 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 (like spiritual DNA) 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!

Bread, Fish and the Plan of God

See Mat 14:13-21; 15:32-39 and 16:5-12 with parallel passages in Mark, Luke and John. What we're going to learn is that these passages are wonderfully prophetic in a pictorial way and their message is very pertinent to us.

You know, the scriptures say, "...*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" (Rev 19:10) That is, His life and words fulfilled prophecy and declared it. Let's look at the circumstances of each of these two miracles and then I'll give some suggestions for you to consider.

In the first case (Mat 14), Jesus was trying to get some quiet time, but when the people found out where He was headed, they followed him on foot from the surrounding cities. *"And when Jesus went out, He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them and healed their sick."* When it got late, His disciples wanted Him to send the crowd away to find food. *"But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' And they said to Him, 'We have here only five loaves and two fish.' He said, 'Bring them here to Me.' Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So, they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained."*

In the parallel passages, we also learn:

- that the place was nearby the town of Bethsaida
- that the people followed Him because they saw His miracles and
- that Philip thought 200 denarii (a denarii being an average day's wage) was barely sufficient to buy enough to give everyone a little bread.

Also, they mention that:

- the Passover, a feast of the Jews was near
- that the five loaves were barley loaves and
- that the people were told to sit down on the grass in groups of 100s and 50s.

In addition:

- Jesus said, "Gather the fragments so that nothing is lost."
- there were about 5000 men in the crowd and
- the Lord saw them as sheep not having a shepherd.
- also, in response to the miracle, the people said, "This is the Prophet...".
- afterwards, Jesus departed the scene and went up a mountain alone.

In the second case (Mat 15), they were on the other side of the sea of Galilee in a more 'gentile-ish' region.

- Jesus healed many people and the multitude marveled *"and they glorified the God of Israel."*

"Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away

hungry, lest they faint on the way.’ Then His disciples said to Him, ‘Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?’ Jesus said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ And they said, ‘Seven, and a few little fish.’ And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. So, they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat and came to the region of Magdala.”

- In parallel passages we also learn that in the crowd, “some of them [had] come from afar.”
- Also, Jesus gave thanks for the bread and blessed the little fish.

Now, for our study, the key symbols to note are the:

- Setting
- Bread
- Fish
- Baskets
- People
- Commands
- Following actions

The **setting** of the **first** case was in the area of Bethsaida, a primarily Jewish area. There, Jesus acted out of compassion because the people were like sheep without a shepherd. Also, the Jewish feast of Passover was near and money was the only solution the disciple Philip could fathom. The **setting** of the **second** case was in a place populated with more gentiles. There, the people had followed Jesus for three days and some of them had come from far away.

Bread is symbolic of the Word of God. You can refer to Deut 8:3; Mat 4:4; Ex 16:4, Psa 78:24; Isa 55:10,11 and John 6:31-33, 50,51,58 as examples. Jesus is also the Word of God. In both cases the bread was broken and in both cases the bread was first given to the servants of the Lord and then they distributed it to the crowds. In the **first** case, there were five barley loaves. In the **second** case, there were seven nondescript loaves.

Fish can be symbolic of men in the scripture. You can refer to Hab 1:14; Mat 4:19 and Mk 1:17 as examples. We should note that these fish are associated with the bread. In the **first** case, there were two fish, but the Greek word used is oparion which generally refers to fish that are cooked or about to be cooked. In the **second** case, there were a few little fish – that is, the number was not important, but their size was – little. The Greek word used is ichthudion – little fish -- as opposed to icthus which simply means fish.

Baskets are symbolic of periods of time. In their first mention in scripture, Joseph interpreted them as meaning days – see Gen 40:18. In the **first** case, there were twelve baskets full of fragments gathered ‘so that nothing would be lost’. The Greek word used is kophinos – simply a nondescript basket. In the **second** case, there were seven large baskets of fragments gathered. The Greek word used is spuris, a large hamper sized basket. This word comes from the word meaning to sow or scatter seed. It is the same word used for the basket Paul was let down in while being saved from getting killed in Damascus.

The **people** are symbolic in a couple of ways. **First**, they were eating or consuming. As such they can correlate to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream where he stated that the cattle and the ears of corn that consumed their counterparts in the dream were years. **Secondly**, they were the recipients of Christ's gracious repasts. In the first case, there were about 5000 men besides women and children who came to Jesus. They came because they were fascinated by the miracles they saw, but later when they were confronted with the difficult spiritual truth about eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood, they forsook Him. They were ordered to sit down in ranks or groups of 50. In the **second** case, there were about 4000 men along with women and children. When they were fed, they glorified the God of Israel, some coming from far away, and they continued with Jesus for three days.

As for **commands** from Jesus, in the **first** case the people were commanded to sit. Afterwards, He commanded His disciples to depart over the sea. In the **second** case, the people were also commanded to sit.

Following the **first** case, the people saw Jesus as the Prophet whom Moses had foretold. Jesus left these people and went up a mountain out of sight. Later, as mentioned above, Christ reproved them for only thinking of their bellies and they then rejected his teaching. Following the **second** case, Jesus went to the area of Dalmanutha, specifically Magdala.

Let's now consider the interpretation of these symbols and consequently the message of these events as a prophetic picture orchestrated by Christ. **Jointly, these miracles illustrate the ministry of God's Word to and through His children – Jew and Gentile.**

Consider the **settings** – The **first** location was primarily Jewish and the **second** was significantly gentile. This order makes sense historically and theologically - see Rom 1:16. In the **first**, Jesus saw the crowd as sheep without a shepherd. Num 27:15-18 says: *"Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: 'Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.' And the LORD said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him;'"*

Moses was concerned that Israel would indeed be shepherdless so God said, "Give them Joshua" (same name as Jesus). In many other places, the Jewish people are specifically identified with sheep. See 1 Kings 22:17; Eze 34:12; Zech 13:7; Mat 9:36; Mark 14:27 as examples. In rejecting Jesus, they have indeed been Shepherdless for the last two millennia. It is also specifically mentioned that in the **first** setting the Passover, a feast of the Jews was near. Each of these things points to a setting that pictures the Jewish people.

In the **second** setting, it was said that the people followed Jesus for three days. Of course, the number three points to the resurrection for Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. It also says that many came from very far away. Indeed, the mostly gentile church has followed Jesus because of the resurrection and is made up of people from every far away tribe and tongue on the earth.

As for the **bread**, in both cases it was broken and clearly this speaks to the broken body of Christ. It was passed from Christ to the disciples and from the disciples to the people sitting down. This is indeed how the Word of God has come to us – divinely inspired people recorded it, and it has then been passed

to us to 'eat'. The scripture says concerning the Word that, "...prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Pet 1:21)

Now, the loaves in the **first** setting were specifically of barley and there were five of them. Barley is associated with the Jewish law in that it was used as part of the process to sanctify a field to the Lord. It is interesting that the people in this setting were commanded to sit in groups of 50 for Lev 27:16 specifies that the sanctification process for this field included a valuation of a homer of barley at 50 shekels. It says, "If a man dedicates to the LORD part of a field of his possession, then your valuation shall be according to the seed for it. A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver."

As an aside, this number fifty is also associated with the Jubilee which is a beautiful picture of Jesus but is also a celebration that the Jews never fully observed – at least it is not recorded.

Now, there were five loaves. Is there a number five associated with the law of God? Certainly. The Law of God, as a group, is identified with the five books of Moses, the Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As many of you know, five also speaks of grace in the Bible. This fits our prophetic picture as well for the scripture says, "For the law was given by Moses, [but] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)

In the **second** setting, there were seven non-descript loaves. As the mostly gentile church is not under the Law of Moses, the non-descript nature is appropriate. How about the number seven? Again, as with the number five, the number seven is associated with a theme in scripture – completion. I'll suggest that this pictures the complete or full revelation of God's Word. Whereas the Jews have for a time been blinded to the truth of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, the fullness of this awesome message has been revealed to the Church.

This also points to the fact that the scriptures as they have been passed to us in the form of Old and New Testaments are complete and should be passed on to the congregation that way. As the apostle Paul wrote, "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) Adding to or taking away from the seven loaves so to speak is not how Jesus fed the people; neither should we.

Next, we have the **fish** that are closely associated with the bread. In the **first** case, there were two fish, two 'opsarion'. In order to understand this, we should ask how the Jewish people have traditionally viewed their scriptures and whether there are two men who stand out as representative of them. Here's what the Bible says:

- "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Mat 5:17)
- "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Mat 7:12)
- "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." (Mat 11:13)
- "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'" (John 1:45)
- "And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, 'Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.'" (Acts 13:15)

- *“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.”* (Acts 24:14)
- *“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,”* (Rom 3:21)

Clearly, the segmentation of the OT which the Bible itself uses is the **Law and the Prophets**. These two are represented by Moses and Elijah who by the way were the two men who met with Jesus upon the mount of transfiguration.

Now, they are also referred to as opsarion – fish that are cooked or about to be cooked. Fish in the **fire**...hmm. You know the Tribulation and the last days in general are referred to in the Bible many times as a time of fiery trial. (Isa 66:15,16; Eze 39:6; Joel 2:30; Zeph 3:8; Zech 13:9) Could it be that these two will be the two witnesses of Rev 11? Some people expect that Enoch will be one of these two. We’ll see.

In the **second** setting, we have a few little fish, a few ichthudion. And consistent with the prophetic picture there were indeed a few ‘little’ men who are associated with the NT – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter (and the writer of Hebrews if you don’t think it was Paul). Why little? Let’s see what the Bible says:

- *“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)
- *“Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Mat 18:4)
- *“Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.”* (John 13:33)
- *“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,”* (Gal 4:19)
- *“I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.”* (1 John 2:12)

The point is, you have to be ‘little’ to enter the kingdom of God, that is, to receive and pass along the truth of God’s message – salvation in Jesus.

- In fact, the name Paul, who wrote a lot of the New Testament, means “little”.

Now for the **baskets**. In the **first** case, we have twelve baskets. We need to keep in mind that these baskets contained the bread and that they prophetically represent some period of time. For this reason, we ask was there a period of time in which a group of twelve held the bread, the Word of God? Sure. The twelve tribes of Israel – the ones to whom Jesus said He was sent (Mat 15:24). And just as He told the disciples to gather the fragments so that none would be lost, this is representative of how precious the Word is – each scrap if you would.

Concerning Samuel, the prophet it is written, *“So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.”*

Also, the principle of losing nothing applies to Christ’s concern for His sheep. The scripture records concerning Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane: *“Then He asked them again, ‘Whom are you seeking?’*

And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,' that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.'" (John 18:7-9)

And so even today, God is not done in reaching out to the Jewish people. In due season, all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26).

In the **second** case, we have a group of seven baskets which hold the bread or Word of God. Is there a group of seven during the NT times that have held the Word? Sure. The 'church age' as represented in Revelation. The seven churches which represent the entirety of the church during the church age.

In fact, it is said of the church of Philadelphia, "...*you have a little strength, have kept (to attend to carefully) My word...*"

It is also interesting to note that the word for these baskets is, as mentioned above, spuris. It comes from the word meaning to scatter seed. This is clearly appropriate for this has been the charge of the church – to scatter the seed of God's Word, to spread the Gospel around the world. It is also appropriate that it is the same type of basket in which Paul was saved from death for this is the message of the bread we spread abroad – salvation from death, eternal life in Christ.

Now the baskets, as we've seen, represent a period of time but how much? This is where the **people** fit in. As we mentioned above, they can each represent, consistent with scripture, a year. In the **first** case, we have about 5000 people or about 5000 years. We should ask, is there a period of about 5000 years that the twelve tribes of Israel have been ministered to with the Word of God? Sure. God first spoke to Abraham, the first Jew, about 2000 years before the birth of Christ. Since then, it has been another 2000 years or so, and if Christ comes quite soon, as we expect, and reigns with the Jews as priests (see Eze 40 – 48) for 1000 years as prophesied, that makes about 5000 years.

The people in the first case, came to Jesus because of the miracles they saw Him do but deserted Him when He told them it was He Himself they must consume. In like manner the Jews have always sought after signs (see 1 Cor 1:22) but rejected the principle of salvation through Christ Jesus.

Sitting in groups of 50 should have reminded the people of the principle of Jubilee which was to be celebrated each 50 years. In that year, debts were cancelled, slaves were set free, everyone returned to their home or possession and there was to be no oppression – hey, this is what Jesus is all about, isn't it? (see Lev 25)

In the second case, we have about 4000 people. Is there a period of about 4000 years in which God has spoken to the gentile world and ministered His Word through the mostly gentile church? Sure. Now, keep in mind that we are letting the Bible interpret itself, so it doesn't matter how long ago you think Adam and Eve were created. The Bible itself specifies that from the creation of Adam until the call of Abram to leave Haran was 2021 years. You can do the math yourself. During this time, there were no Jews, the world was all gentile if you would. Add to this the approximately 2000 years of the church age and you have about 4000 years.

Now, you may ask, "What about the millennium?" Recall that the church is referred to as the Bride of Christ and will literally be married to Him before the millennium. During this time, the Bible says we will be one with Him, ruling with Him but at home in Heaven. We will know Him even as we are known

(see 1 Cor 13:12). So, during that 1000 years, He will not be feeding us in the same manner as when we were earth-bound. Praise God!

Next, Christ's **commands** to each group. To both He directed to sit down which indicates rest. In like manner, to receive nourishment from the Lord your soul must be at rest. Take that quiet time each day. Learn to sit at the Lord's feet and listen.

Also, it was away from that group that Jesus commanded His disciples to leave. This typifies the movement of His church away from the legalism of the OT Law. Additionally, the disciples were commanded to go over the sea and as many of you Bible students know, the sea is a type or picture in scripture of the gentile nations. In type, Jesus sent His disciples away from the Jews to cover the gentile world with the Gospel.

Jesus said, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*

And of Paul it is recorded, *"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region." (Act 13:44 – 49)*

Following the **first** miracle feeding, Jesus left the crowd and went up out of sight. The people thought He might be "the Prophet" but later rejected Him altogether. This is consistent with the picture for the Jews as a group indeed rejected Jesus though some of them have regarded Him as a prophet. After coming to them, He departed to heaven but before He left, He said, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Mat 23:39)*

Also, just as He reproved them for coming after Him simply because they were fed by the loaves and fish, the scripture says, *"The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the stomach of the wicked shall be in want." (Pro 13:25)*

Following the **second** miracle feeding, Jesus went to Magdala the town of Mary Magdalene. As stated above, the people had followed Him for three days which recall points in type to the resurrection; they then received the miracle feeding. This portrays wonderfully exactly what happened for it was after His resurrection that the disciples believed Him – that is, truly received His Word and the first person He met was Mary Magdalene there in the garden.

So, it would seem that in His testimony, His words and life, Jesus was indeed broadcasting the magnificent plan of God in feeding and redeeming His children both Jew and gentile. Of course, like the people in the stories, we have to 'sit down' to receive it. In this day in which we see around us the increasing fulfillment of Paul's declaration to Timothy, *"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and*

worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” (2 Tim 3:13) it is comforting to know that God’s plan and purpose are unaffected by the world’s moral and spiritual decline.

But we do have to beware of the increasing amount of false teaching in this time. After the **second** miraculous feeding, (Mat 16:5-12) the disciples forgot their bread. (May we never leave the Word of God behind!) Here’s what happened: *“Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we have taken no bread.’ But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, ‘O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?— but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”*

Dear friends and loved ones, there are many other fascinating parts of this prophetic picture we could consider. However, what I want to leave you with is this -- in this day there are so many even within the church who are finding new ways to entice believers into leaving the bread of God and are falling for the doctrine of false teachers – contemporary counterparts to those Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus’ day. What they are peddling is not true bread but leaven, which typifies sin in the Bible. Now leaven puffs up bread and makes it look more impressive size wise. In like manner, some of these folks sound impressive at first and some gather large followings, but I pray we will all have sufficient discernment to recognize the leaven and avoid it. I urge you emphatically, stick to the Word or get back to the Word. We are close, very close – His picture is nearly complete.

Breakpoint and Beyond

We'll pick up our study on the final events of this age in Revelation chapter four. Briefly, in chapter one, the apostle John saw the glorified Lord Jesus, and in chapters two and three, he learned of the seven churches which not only existed in John's day but have played out as an accurate picture of the subsequent historical eras up unto our present day. In speaking to each of them, Jesus made clear that they all had/have a need to overcome, and He said that anyone who "has an ear to hear" should take heed. Thus, in speaking to them He speaks to all of us who believe.

Additionally, in chapter one verse nineteen we have the table of contents for the whole book of Revelation. It says, "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this." This is Jesus speaking to John. The things which you have seen refers to the resurrected, glorified Lord of Heaven and Earth, Jesus Christ (chapter one). The things which are refers to the seven churches and the church age they cover (chapters two and three). The things which will take place after this is our breakpoint. After what things? Well, the church age of course. The Greek expression is 'metatauta' and, not coincidentally, it is also how we begin chapter four:

"After these things (metatauta) I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven."

After that which typifies the church age, the first thing the apostle saw was an open door in heaven. You Bible students know that Jesus referred to Himself as the Door and as it was open, the sense is that the way into heaven is open through Him. There's a welcoming and receptivity.

Looking back into chapter three, we see that one group of believers who seem to be around during the last days, Philadelphia, has the promise from Jesus – "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it." Many believe this to be an open door, so to speak, for missions, and I can agree, but we have to qualify that interpretation as based more upon an extrabiblical historical perspective rather than being purely scriptural.

However, if we let the Bible 'interpret itself' if you would, I'm inclined to believe that this is really saying that these last days believers, who chapter three says 'have a little strength' and 'hold on to His Word' (including His promise to return), are those who will experience, as John did, the next part of the revelation: "And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.' Immediately I was in the Spirit;"

This is a prophetic picture of the rapture. It is prefaced by a trumpet and it is instantaneous just as with the other scriptures that describe it.

After this, the earthly witness of the mostly gentile church is over – the baton will be passed, if you would, to another group. After this breakpoint and beyond, that church is seen only in heaven, but the whole church is as yet incomplete.

John continues to record his experience: "...and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald."

Now, it's a good thing John was in the Spirit for the Bible says no man can see God and live. Even in the Spirit, John's attempt to describe the appearance of our Lord is brief. He's clearly overwhelmed and at a loss for appropriate descriptors. But he tries. What he's attempting to convey seems to be purity, brilliance and beauty.

Each of these stones were found in the breastplate which the high priest wore. As such, they represented the tribes of Israel, however, we cannot be certain about which stone and which tribe go together. I like what David Guzik has to say about this scene – “Around this setting of all sovereignty, power, authority and glory - this setting of the throne of God - God has placed a reminder of His own promise to never destroy the earth again with water, a promise that directs His sovereignty, so that it is not capricious or against His promises. A throne says, “I can do whatever I want, because I rule.” A promise says, “I will fulfill this word to you, and I cannot do otherwise.” A rainbow around the throne is a remarkable thing, showing that God will always limit Himself by His own promises.”

John continues to describe the throne room of heaven: *“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices.”*

Now, elders represent the people of God, especially in the Old Testament. The 24 courses of the priesthood (1 Chronicles 24) represented all the priests, while the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles represent all the faithful. Exactly who these elders are we are not told, and that's certainly for our good. You see, all eyes are upon Someone else.

Both angels and saints are pictured in the Bible as clothed in white garments which represent righteousness. However, angels are never pictured in scripture with crowns. Therefore, I believe the picture here is of redeemed, glorified man sitting enthroned with Jesus. On lesser thrones, to be sure, but thrones none the less. This agrees with the scriptures that proclaim we are joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), and we will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12).

Next, we read: *“Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”* Seven in the Bible speaks of completion or perfection. As with the Father and the Son, there is nothing lacking to His Spirit. His being, His ministry, His fruit, everything about Him is perfect.

In addition, before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. Which communicates a sense of perfect peace. After this, John continues by describing four fantastic beings: *“And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’”*

Each of these creatures are full of eyes, that is, they are all-seeing. All failure to truly worship is rooted in a lack of seeing and understanding. In addition, they each have a unique characteristic; one is like a lion, one is like a calf, one has a face like a man, and one is like a flying eagle. As we consider them, we recognize that one aspect of Christ's ministry toward mankind is pictured in scripture by each. He is known as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” – powerful and kingly; He is the burnt offering calf – wholly devoted to Father God and atoning for our sins; He came to earth as the “Son of Man” presenting

the character or face of God to man, experiencing all our temptations, knowing our grief and sorrows; He has borne His people on eagle's wings in delivering them from bondage and preserving them in trial. Together, these creatures ceaselessly praise God Almighty and in doing so, they represent the response that resounds from all creation because of His mercy and goodness toward us. And, clearly, this response is contagious, if you would, for... *“Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.’”*

These crowns which are cast before the throne are the stephanos, the crowns of victory, not royalty. They are the crowns of achievement that a winning athlete would receive at the ancient Olympic Games. The twenty-four elders - representing all the redeemed of God - throw every achievement reward they have back before God because they know and thus proclaim that He is worthy . . . to receive glory and honor and power.

In other words, as we consider these creatures, the expression of God in the person of Jesus Christ, as we consider His power and strength, His devotion to the Father and His sacrifice for us, His touchability, His leaving of heaven's perfection to come to us here in this dark, diseased world, and His care, protection and provision throughout our hardships – if we are believers - born again in Him, like the twenty-four, we will naturally and ceaselessly praise Him in response. He created all things, all things. Whether seen or unseen, they exist and were created by His will.

This, then, is the first 'act' of the 'great beyond'. It is the first scene for the church in heaven and of course it's all about God, His Son and His Spirit.

Daniel 7 – the ‘Quartet’?

This fascinating chapter of Daniel has had a traditional interpretation that matches its four main characters to four of the five elements in Daniel’s vision of chapter two. The match is really quite good except for a couple verses that seem to throw a proverbial monkey-wrench into the whole thing. Because of that, I’m going to offer another possible explanation which seems to make more sense.

In researching this chapter, I found another author who reflected my sentiments. He writes: “With the events happening in the Middle East transpiring at an alarming rate, I am placed into a situation I care not to be in. ... Of all the articles I have written from a faith perspective, I have steered away from that which is controversial... The truth is controversial enough. “

As a pastor and Bible teacher, I’ve always asserted that you should be leery of anyone who claims to have an authoritative personal interpretation of prophecy, i.e. one that doesn’t sync with the scriptures and which has no support from other sincere scholars/believers. I’ll reiterate that. I don’t offer this as authoritative. However, neither is it speculative. If nothing else, my hope is that it will stir you to soberly consider the days in which we live and scrutinize the scriptures yourselves in Berean-like fashion.

OK, Daniel Seven. The chapter begins with Daniel telling us that he recorded the main facts of a vision he had during the night. He spoke, “*I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.*” The four winds of heaven prophetically indicate that this is a global movement versus one that is simply local to Daniel. The Great Sea has always been synonymous with the Gentile nations in scripture as well as to the ancient Jewish mind. So, the context of the vision is that it centers around a global gentile concern.

Daniel continues, “*And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.*” Now traditional explanations assert that, in this chapter, we’re going to be looking at the same entities as are represented in the chapter two image of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay, minus the clay. It asserts that in chapter two, we are observing these four entities as man sees them and that the descriptions in chapter seven are from God’s perspective. Now, I’m not really comfortable with this explanation for the initial reason that I don’t see this ‘duality’ as a pattern elsewhere in scripture.

In any event, on to the next verse... “*The first was like a lion and had eagle’s wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man’s heart was given to it.*” The word ‘first’ here implies a chronological order. Traditional scholarship says that this is the kingdom of Babylon. This is because of the similarity to a story about Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of Babylon who God humbled. As the prophet declared, he lost his mind and began to eat grass like an ox while his matted hair eventually resembled eagle’s feathers. He was later restored to sanity and gave glory to God. Also, one symbol of Babylon was a lionlike creature. So, clearly, there are similarities.

However, since we are considering the last days, the modern-day country whose symbol is of a lion is England. England at one point was such a vast empire that it was said that “the sun never sets on the British Empire”.

Now consider that out of the Lion came Eagle's wings. As you all know, the modern-day country whose national symbol is the Eagle is the United States. Historically, the US came out of England by fighting the revolutionary war against the British Colonial power and claimed independence from England eventually becoming a superpower. (T.Y. George Whitten) I'd like to add to this that, in scripture, eagle's wings are associated with the Lord's provision and His saints - He told the children of Israel that He had taken them out of Egypt "on eagles wings" (Ex 19:4) and in Isaiah, the prophet says, *"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles..."* (Isa 40:31) Also, in Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17:37 eagles are likened unto the believers gathering around the 'Body' that is, Christ.

Now, many if not most of America's national ballads sing of God's grace and blessings. Also, America, rightly or wrongly, is known worldwide as a Christian nation, founded on Christian principles. Thus, I am inclined to agree with Whitten. This beast could represent the British-originated American superpower which we could say began in 1776.

The wings being plucked off could indicate a violent act aimed at grounding or humbling the power of the beast except that the word used here means to make bare or polished as opposed to "plucked" in verse eight or in Daniel 11:4 where other words are used which do imply a destructive rooting out. Also, the verse continues with a blessing - the beast is then lifted up, made to stand upright and given a new heart. With that in mind, it begs the consideration - could this be speaking of rapture, uprightness and transformation? (1 Cor 15:51,52 and 1 Thes 4:16,17) Also, the word "given" in the phrase "given a new heart" can mean "paid for" which compliments this idea (See Mat 13:45,46; 1Cor 6:20). More on this later.

"And suddenly, another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said to it 'Arise, devour much flesh!'"

This second beast appears suddenly and looks like a bear. Traditionally, this is said to be the Medio-Persian empire which conquered Babylon. We gather from history that the Persians were stronger than the Medes and thus we could liken that to the bear-like creature raising up on one side.

However, there is a more contemporary (last days) perspective on this as well. "The modern day country whose national symbol is the bear is Russia. When the Medes and Persians came to seize power from Babylon and conquered the city, they came and killed Belshazzar and the royal family. When Lenin and Trotsky led the Bolshevik revolution in Russia the first thing they did was kill the Russian Czars and their families. Another similarity is that the Medes and Persians had seven kings. The collapse of the USSR occurred in the reign of their seventh premiere, Mikhail Gorbachev. This beast was to devour much flesh... The Russian people suffered some of the worst persecution known to mankind under the reign of premieres like Stalin. Stalin killed more Jews than Hitler, yet this fact still escapes most of the known world. Christians during the era of the communists were slaughtered by the thousands, because of non-conformity to governmental standards." (Whitten)

The Bolshevik revolution was in 1917 and happened quite "suddenly". The formerly docile Russia quickly became a threat to the whole world for the Soviet Union had obvious global aspirations. Now, in the vision, after the bear appears, it rises up on one side giving the impression that, as the traditionalists say, it is stronger on one side, or from another perspective, that it is wounded. The mighty Soviet Union

was wounded, it became lame, when the Union crumbled and left only Russia as a strong military power.

As for the ribs, the word for 'rib' in the Hebrew originates from the primitive verb "to curve". It is actually in Aramaic in this verse though and is pronounced, 'alah' (as in Allah). Hmm. Recall also that Russia, the land called Magog in Ezekiel 38, 39 is pulled down into a Middle Eastern war by "hooks" in its jaw (curved instruments). Thus, an additional consideration - could this be a picture of Russian involvement with Arab nations motivating it to fulfill prophecy? Remember that the crescent (curved) moon is a universal sign of Islam for Allah is the moon god.

Also, this bear has already devoured much flesh – Stalin alone killed more than 10,000,000 of his own countrymen. And there may be more to come from other Russian leaders.

Moving on, *"After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it."*

Traditionally, this is likened to the Grecian empire which was created as Alexander the Great raced across the Middle East as far as India conquering all. His four generals split the empire up after his death. All that seems to fit the prophecy well, however, there's a problem with the last part – *"and dominion was given to it."* Alexander was not given dominion (or authority), he took it forcibly.

At this point, we should remember that one of the keys to understanding this passage is to keep in mind that these four beasts are wrangling over Israel. This is quite evident in verses 17 and 18, *"Those great beasts, which are four are four kings (or kingdoms) which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."*

Though Israel was somewhat of a problem for Babylon and Rome, none of the four empires the traditionalists cite really wrangled over Israel and especially not with each other over this comparably militarily impotent nation. However, we know from Zechariah 12:2,3 that Israel and specifically Jerusalem will become a real problem for all nations in the last days.

Now, leopards are known for spots -- lots of spots on one body. A 'congregation' of spots so to speak. "The leopard is found throughout sub-saharan Africa and southern Asia. It is the most adaptable and widely distributed of all the big cats. They have beautiful spotted coats -- even black leopards (also called black panthers) have spots, although they are difficult to see." (leopardsetc.com)

Also, this creature has four wings and four heads. There is wide agreement among Bible teachers that 'four', in the Bible, generally pictures the world and thus, this could picture worldwide mobility and worldwide leadership. We know from other scriptures that the last days global environment will be divided roughly into four major spheres relative to Israel – the king of the north, the king of the south, the kings of the east and the western EU based AntiChrist government.

Thus, it could be that we're looking at a beast representative of a worldwide entity which is given authority. Sounds like it could be the UN to me. Chronologically, this is accurate also as the UN was formed shortly after WWII and thus after the Russian 'bear' which arose after the US.

"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the

horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words."

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).

Verses nine and ten in our study chapter portray the judgments of the Ancient of Days in heaven – 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.

And here's the biggest reason to reconsider the traditional view – verse twelve: *"As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time."*

This makes no sense if you're considering these beasts as Babylon, Medio-Persia, Greece and Rome. However, if you consider them to be contemporaries, last days powers -- perhaps, the US, Russia, the UN and the EU-based AC government -- all striving over Israel, and bear in mind that after Armageddon, during the millennium, the scriptures indicate that elements of these first three continue in subjection to Christ's rule, it makes sense. Also, many scholars believe that people's lives will possibly be prolonged during the millennium (refer to Isaiah 45:20).

So, what happens to the first beast? Is it the US? Well, if we consider the tribulation beast of Revelation 13, we see something interesting, *"Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion..."* We see that the AC has assimilated or taken on characteristics of the leopard, the bear and the lion into his government. However, *"the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority."* That is, Satan is behind it all.

But did you notice what's missing? The eagle or more specifically, the eagle's wings which were plucked off. Thus, it would seem that the US is not referred to in this final beast.

In conclusion, I'll refer you to this edited article published by the United States Mission to the European Union and you can decide for yourself if it's relevant:

Following their meeting in New York July 16, the **Quartet** group consisting of the United Nations, Russia, the United States and the European Union expressed strong support for the goal of achieving a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following is the text of a joint statement issued by the "Quartet" following their meeting in New York:

Consistent with President Bush's June 24 statement, the UN, EU and Russia express their strong support for the goal of achieving a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement which, with intensive effort on security and reform by all, could be reached within three years from now. The UN, EU and Russia welcome President Bush's commitment to active U.S. leadership toward that goal. The Quartet remains committed to implementing the vision of two states, Israel and an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as affirmed by UN Security Council

Resolution 1397. The Quartet members, in their individual capacity and jointly, pledge all possible efforts to realize the goals of reform, security and peace and reaffirm that progress in the political, security, economic, humanitarian, and institution-building fields must proceed together, hand-in-hand. The Quartet reiterates its welcome of the initiative of Saudi Arabia, endorsed by the Arab League Beirut Summit, as a significant contribution towards a comprehensive peace. The Quartet reaffirms that there must be a negotiated permanent settlement based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. There can be no military solution to the conflict; Israelis and Palestinians must address the core issues that divide them, through sustained negotiations, if there is to be real and lasting peace and security.

Please understand that the study of prophecy is NOT a retrospective-only endeavor. If so, then prophecies like Christ's of Luke 21:20-22 or nearly the whole book of Jeremiah would be unnecessary. Some prophecy does indeed glorify God in its exacting precision when viewed historically such as Daniel 2 and 11. Others are given as a forewarning such as those mentioned above as well as most of the last days prophecies.

Whether or not the "Quartet" spoken of here is indeed prophesied in Daniel Seven clearly remains to be seen. "I think Dr. Scofield points out that all the symbols of modern nations are representations of birds or of beasts of prey. Our own nation is symbolized by an eagle, a bird of prey. The British Empire is a lion. Russia is a bear. The prophet sees these nations struggling together culminating in the powerful reign of a single individual over the whole of this Western world." -- Ray C. Stedman

In any event, let's not let our Bibles gather any dust nor our hearts any crust. These are the last days and we need to be more passionate for the Lord and obedient to Him than ever!

Daniel's Display

Historically, Daniel came on the scene coincident with the first of three Babylonian dispersals of the Jews from Judah. In fact, he was a part of the first group of captives to be taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's army. Of course, many of you already recognize him from the well-known Bible stories in the book that bears his name in the scriptures.

Not only was he a prisoner, he was a prophet and one of distinction, as Jesus validated him in the New Testament. However, he not only recorded prophecy and interpreted prophecy but he himself lived or rather portrayed a prophetic picture. You see, in a very beautiful way, Daniel seems to picture the mostly gentile church which is unusual because all his prophetic writing focuses upon the Jewish people. I'll present some examples for you to consider and then explain why this is important.

- First, by reason of persecution, Daniel wound up in a foreign land and never did return to Jerusalem. In like manner, it was principally persecution that resulted in the early church, which was comprised of Jewish believers, being scattered into gentile lands and since that time, the church has never really returned to take root or blossom in Israel.
- Next, in this foreign land, Daniel's name was changed, and like manner, the Bible tells us that the believers were first called Christians in Antioch, a city in present day Turkey.
- Next, Daniel's life spanned the entire time of the Jews' banishment from Jerusalem during which he was exalted to prominence, ultimately being promoted highly by each of four kings. We also note that his first promotion took place after a period of testing. Likewise, the church, after an initial period of testing and persecution, rose quickly to become the dominant cultural and authoritative body in the world second only to the sovereigns.
- Next, in chapter six, Daniel was thrown to the lions and survived. Many Christian martyrs were likewise thrown to the lions in Rome, but the church survived.
- Next, Daniel is a rare figure in scripture in that he has no recorded sin and was only imprisoned with the lions because of his devotion. This mirrors the sinless state of sincere believers in God's eyes since it is the atoning blood of Christ that covers our sin. Meanwhile it is our devotion to Christ that generally brings the world's scorn and anger.
- Next, in chapter nine, it was Daniel's understanding of the scriptures and the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy that drove him to his knees in prayer seeking God's forgiveness of His people and their return to Jerusalem. In like manner, it was partly by the instigation of many fervent praying Christians that the major governments of the world ultimately brought the nation of Israel back into being in May of 1948.
- Next, besides King David, Daniel is the only man in the Bible to "confess" his sins and to ask for God's mercy and forgiveness, asserting that his coming to God was not based upon man's righteous acts but on God's great mercies. God responded through the angel Gabriel and quickly told him that he was "greatly beloved". Of course, the similarity to the church is clear – as believers, we are instructed to confess our sins and to ask for God's forgiveness, trusting completely in the sacrifice of Christ – the expression of God's mercies. And, we are told by Jesus in the Word that we are greatly beloved because of Him.

- Next, Daniel’s vision of the divine messenger in chapter 10:4 and 11:16 – 19 is strikingly similar to John’s record of Christ’s appearance in Revelation 1:1-20 which we should also note prefaces Christ’s detailed address to the seven churches of the “church age”.

OK, so those are quite a few examples of Daniel’s “display” of the mostly gentile church. But the reason this is of importance for us beyond the interesting similarities is that there is another display that is yet to be fulfilled. We find it in Daniel chapter three. You may recall the story.

In the previous chapter (ch 2), Daniel and his three companions revealed the prophetic dream of Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted it for him. It was a dream of a large statue of a man with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, an abdomen of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay mixed. Daniel told the king that he was symbolized by this head of gold. That must have been an ego-stroke for Nebuchadnezzar. The downer, however, was the clear indication that his kingdom was to be replaced by others in successive order of the metals in the statue.

In chapter three, ‘Nebby’ apparently decided to assert his own ‘divine’ plan by constructing what would appear to be his own version of the dream statue, but you see he made it entirely of gold. In his arrogance, he was defying the prophetic dream-message and declaring that his kingdom would last forever – a messiah complex, if you would.

Well, he commanded everyone in the kingdom – all officials specifically – to gather around the immense golden idol and when the music played, to bow down and worship this false god. Anyway, the music played, and all the people bowed except for three – Daniel’s companions – who remained standing.

When the king learned of this defiance to his dictate, he was incensed and had them brought before him. With the intent to utterly intimidate, he gave them another chance to bow or be thrown into a fiery furnace. Their response was awesome – in essence, they said, “God may or may not deliver us from you, king; but we won’t bow”.

Now with that answer, the king went ballistic and had the furnace heated up seven times hotter than normal – so hot that it fried to death the soldiers who tossed the three of them in. But then the king’s choler turned to confused amazement. He asserted to everyone around that he saw the Son of God walking with them in the fire and they were untouched by the flames – only their binding ropes were burned off.

Now, many of you know this story, and how it accurately portrays the coming seven year Tribulation time in which the Antichrist, portrayed by Nebuchadnezzar, will attempt to force the worship of his own idol – the image of the beast (Rev. 13:15) on the whole world and specifically the Jewish people and how a ‘remnant’ of faithful, born again Jews will stand up against this, incurring the fire of his hatred.

This believing “remnant”, however, will be divinely protected by Christ and will in fact be freed from their bondage to death and sin to preach the good news worldwide.

So, what’s the big deal about Daniel??

It’s simple. Where IS he?

As the senior-most advisor of Nebuchadnezzar's wise men, he of all people should have been present, but he is not even mentioned. Did he bow? NO WAY. He's simply gone. Do you get the picture?

In like manner, we as the church, will not be present during the seven-year Tribulation. Our calling to be a witness for the Lord to the world will soon be passed to the Jewish believers of this coming period. (Rev. chapter 7 specifies their divine anointing and the outcome of their evangelism.) The church will be in heaven – see our lesson “Breakpoint and Beyond” for more on this, and our exposition of the book of Revelation, “Fire Eyes”.

That's great news for all believers! Even when Daniel is not displayed in his book, he's prophetically portraying the church and God's plan for us. Just as he stood courageously to speak the truth of God's plan to Nebuchadnezzar in Chapter two, so must we speak the truth in love in this present age. We are racing toward the end when we will disappear! Until then, may we all faithfully display the Gospel!

ENSCONCED AND ECSTATIC

I've always loved that word – ensconced. I heard my pastor use it some years ago; ever since then it has been like a mental 'perennial' that seems to blossom year after year in my heart and mind with new beauty. It means to 'shelter or conceal' and as one who longs for the Lord's appearing, for a heavenly home, I long to be ensconced in the arms of my Savior and doubtless, you do as well.

Yet this wonderful expectation, what the Bible refers to as our 'blessed hope', has been shrouded for all of us in degrees of mystery. In fact, the Thessalonian believers were quite disturbed when they were told in error that Christ had come, and they'd been left behind. The apostle Paul addressed this in his letter Second Thessalonians Chapter Two. He wrote:

"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming." (2Thes 2:1-8)

As you can see, he started by reminding them concerning two things – the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, and then he says 'Don't be shaken up by others trying to convince you that the "day of Christ" (or more accurately "day of the Lord" - that is, His second coming) already came.' He then follows with some specifics on a series of events leading up to the Day of the Lord, clarifying their order in sequence.

There are four of them we need to understand:

1. A "falling away". The Greek word here is apostasia from which we get our English word 'apostasy'. The Greek word however does not necessarily mean the exact same thing as the English descendant and it has led to some debate concerning this verse. 'Apostasia' is an adjective in the ancient Greek meaning "something seperative" and is a derivative of the word 'aphistemi' meaning "to remove".

It is significant to note two things about this word – first, that it is in the feminine form and second, that its object is implied, i.e. it is not explicit in the verse but is understood based upon the context set by the previous verses. It is used in only one other place in the New Testament – Acts 21:21 where Paul is informed of being accused of teaching believers to 'be separated' from the Law of Moses. In that case, the object is explicit and is the Mosaic Law. It could be that the object linkage in this verse may have influenced our contemporary perspective of the meaning of the word in 2 Thes 2.

Now, other scriptures such as 2 Tim 3:1; 2 Pet 3:3 and 2 Tim 3:13 make it clear that the last days church will face some serious problems from within and without. Thus, it's understandable that this passage could be considered in some respects to be pointing to the final apostasy – certainly, the church in some areas has grown very weak and compromising. However, the church has experienced several periods of wide-spread apostasy throughout its history. As an example, during the Inquisition, the church murdered millions of sincere believers.

And it should be noted that the true church of born anew believers is growing phenomenally under persecution in many parts of the world. So, while some parts of the church are indeed becoming apostate, some parts are growing more fervent and fruitful. Arguably, our current apostasy is not yet universal. So, for a number of reasons, I am personally convinced that this passage in 2 Thes does not refer primarily to the apostate church but rather to the rapture of the true church; notice that the implied object that 'apostasia' refers to is the world for the context is clearly given by Paul in verse one as our gathering together to Christ, not our separating from Him and to faithfully interpret the scripture we must follow the author's line of thought – that's called 'context'. (It should be noted that good Bible teachers line up on both sides of this – some, like Kenneth Weiss and Dr. E Schuyler English agree that this passage refers to the rapture while others claim it is referring to the apostate church.) I think it could be pointing to both.

Now recall that the adjective is feminine as you would expect for it refers to the Church as the Bride of Christ separating from the world as He snatches us up to meet Him in the clouds. (See 1 Thes 4:16-18)

2. Chronologically, the event of verse seven in our passage happens at this time also. "*He who restrains*" is generally acknowledged to be the Holy Spirit and the word for "restrains" literally means "to hold down". Also, "*...until He is taken out of the way,*" is equally translated 'until out of the midst He becomes'. That is, the Holy Spirit, Who is in all true believers is holding down the lid so to speak on the full expression of evil in the world, but He is taken out of the midst and thus out of the way of the evil one. Now, He cannot be taken out of the midst of the believers or God would be lying when He said, "*Never will I leave you. Never, will I forsake you.*" (Heb 13:5)

So clearly, He is taken out of the midst of the world as He presents the church to Christ at the rapture. Now, I am personally convinced that the Lord's Spirit will still be at work on the planet during the time of the "lawless one" – i.e. the Tribulation, because it appears that 144,000 Jewish men are 'sealed' or 'anointed' near the beginning of it and huge numbers of people get saved during this time as evidenced in Revelation chapter seven.

So, it could be that as Abraham's servant brought Rebecca to Isaac in Genesis 24, a beautiful Old Testament prophetic picture, so the Heavenly Father's Holy Spirit will bring us to Christ. Even now, the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' (Rev 22:17) to our Lord Jesus and to the unsaved. The Holy Spirit and the bride of Christ are inseparable until the bride is safely ensconced and ecstatic in the presence of her Bridegroom.

3. The revealing of the “lawless one”. Next, the “man of sin,” otherwise known to us as the antichrist, will be revealed. Thus, it is not right for believers to be looking for him in this present time. He won’t be ‘seen’ until after we are gone. On the contrary, we are repeatedly instructed in scripture to be watching for Jesus. Now, the revealing of the AC will be at the beginning of the seven year-long ‘tribulation’ period. Revelation chapters 6 – 19 describe it in some detail.

4. Then comes the “Day of the Lord” – that is, His second coming to earth. This could also refer to a period of time when He pours out His judgment but if so, it still culminates in His second coming. He doesn’t stop at the clouds as with the rapture. This will be the literal, awesome, forceful invasion of the earth and the complete destruction of the rebellious kingdoms of man. Christ will conquer all who oppose Him, imprison Satan and establish a 1000-year righteous reign over the remnant of sinful man.

The Rapture, Tribulation and the Second Coming or the Day of the Lord are all barreling down the tracks toward us and nothing will prevent them. Let’s not get rooted in this world but rather ensconced in ecstasy – His presence.

Stage Right

My wife loves to see plays but I'm only a ho-hum fan of the theatre so you can probably count on one hand the stage productions we've seen (yeah, yeah, I know, what an uncultured slacker). However, when it comes to the heavenly drama that is playing out all around us, produced and directed by our Lord, I'm totally mesmerized – awestruck. And although the theatre is in general not the best illustration of God's work, He is definitely setting the right stage for the final act so to speak.

Now, there is no prophecy that at this point prevents the church from being snatched up in the Rapture. Some may argue that the gospel must first be preached to the whole world, but this was never spoken as prerequisite to the rapture. Rather, it precedes Christ's second coming as the conquering King. For some 2000 years the church has delivered the gospel, but I submit to you that it is only God Himself who can and does accomplish this fully.

In Revelation 14:6,7, we find that during the tribulation period, the Lord's angelic messenger proclaims the gospel to the whole world. In addition, some 144,000 Jewish men appear to also have an evangelistic role during this time for just after their anointing or sealing in Revelation 7, we find innumerable multitudes of saints in heaven who have come out of the great tribulation.

“The promise of the Rapture added a new dimension to the disciples' expectations. Jesus was returning to heaven to prepare a place for them in the Father's house. He would return to receive them to Himself, taking them where He was in the Father's house. This was a promise of removal from earth and entrance into heaven. He mentioned no signs preceding and no tremendous prophecies that needed to be fulfilled first. It was to be an imminent hope, something that would be the expectation of each day after He left them.” (John F. Walvoord)

All this is to say that although we as Christians have the urgent and loving responsibility to the Great Commission, to share the gospel with everyone, the Rapture of the church is not scripturally dependent upon the accomplishment of preaching it to the entire world. Nor is it dependent upon ‘the last soul being saved’ for as I just pointed out, there will be huge numbers of believers born again during the incredibly difficult days of the tribulation.

Then how about something on the world scene? Nope. How about something related to Jerusalem or the Jews? At this point, no. So, what is it dependent on? Father God. Indeed, it is purely His call – Jesus said so. (See Mat 24:36 and Mark 13:32)

It is analogous to the old Jewish wedding practice in which after the bride's ‘price’ had been paid, the bridegroom would return to his father's house to prepare a place for his bride. And only the father could approve the final results – only he could say to the son, “OK, it's ready. Go get your bride.”

So, I'll suggest that pertaining to the Rapture, what we're waiting on is not some great human performance or grand ecclesiastical achievement, but on the preparation going on in heaven – our eternal home. Jesus mentioned only one activity that He wants to accomplish in heaven before returning for us at the Rapture – it's in John 14:2,3 *“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”* He is setting the stage so to speak for the holy celebration – His marriage to us, His bride.

Now perhaps, our earthly obedience effects that preparation somehow for we know that all the angels in heaven rejoice over the repentance of just one sinful person. And we're told that as we sincerely look forward to the day of God, we actually hasten it (See 2 Pet 3:12). But if you study all the parables Jesus gave pertaining to the Rapture, you'll see no mention of any earthly or human accomplishment as a prerequisite – rather we are admonished to be ready in heart, obedient in works and watching in anticipation – always.

And as the stage is being set in heaven so the earthly stage is also being set exactly as the Lord foretold. Center stage are the Jewish people, Jerusalem and the temple mount. Only our Father knows when the 'stage' is right in heaven and while the same goes for the stage on planet earth, He has given us advanced warning on what to expect here. The terrestrial stage of the last days is focused not primarily upon the church but upon preparing for the last act – the seven year-long tribulation period that is called the time of Jacob's trouble.

You see, when the 'curtain goes up', so will we, the church – up to meet the Lord in the clouds and that will be the start of a whirlwind of final events on earth. "...if there are no signs for the Rapture itself, what are the legitimate grounds for believing that the Rapture could be especially near for this generation? The answer is not found in any prophetic events predicted before the Rapture but in understanding the events that will follow the Rapture. Just as history was prepared for Christ's first coming, in a similar way history is preparing for the events leading up to His Second Coming." (Walvoord)

So how is this stage being set? Matthew 24:4-26 describes for the tribulation period (not the church age primarily) as does Revelation chapters 6 – 19, Daniel 11:36 – 12:13 and several other passages. From these we expect to witness in the last days the following:

1. The means to propagate on a worldwide basis, great spiritual deception. Rev 13:11-14, 2Tim 3:13, Mat 24:4,5.
2. A world-wide 'Christian' led organization or myriad unified groups of the same which hold to religious form but not to true godliness. Rev 13 and 2Tim 3:5
3. A dramatic increase in travel and knowledge. Dan 12:4
4. The power to spread disease or to create wide-spread conditions conducive to pestilence. Mat 24:6,7
5. Technology capable of controlling globally, individual consumer spending as well as sales. Rev 13:16-18
6. The rebirth of the nation of Israel under one government. Eze 37, Isa 66:8,9, Mat 24:32-35
7. The re-emergence of the old Roman Empire in a less cohesive form. Dan 2:41-43
8. A worldwide attention to and perplexity about the conflicts surrounding Jerusalem. Zech 12:2-4
9. The ability to report rumors and news of warfare worldwide. Mat 24:6, Mk 13:7

10. Plans and preparations for the construction of a new Jewish temple and the start of a Levitical worship system (note: for the Antichrist to place the “abomination of desolation” in the holy place, it must clearly be in existence.) Mk 13:14, Dan 11:31, Dan 12:9-13

11. Widespread and increasing immorality and violence. Mat 24:37, Gen 6:11,12

12. Exaltation of youth and degradation of old age in society. 2Tim 3:2

13. An emerging military coalition or the potential for one between Russian, Iran, Ethiopia, Libya, Turkey and many united nations against Israel. Eze 38:1-8

14. A conflict between the reborn Israel and her immediate neighbors. Isa 17:1-3, Eze 36:6,7, Joel 3:19, Isa 11:11-15

15. The potential to create large scale geological and environmental disasters. Mat 24:6,7

16. Jewish control over Jerusalem with European influence. Dan 2:41-43

17. The Jews looking for a man who, coming in his own name, will bring them a false security. Jhn 5:43, Dan 8:25, 1Thes 5:3

18. Societies consumed with self-gratification. 2Tim 3:1,2

19. A rising and subsiding in intensity of the world situation resembling the contractions of birth. Rom 8:22, 1Thes 5:3

20. A materialistically, ‘here-and-now’ minded church. 2Tim 3:1,2,5, Rev 3:15-17

Look around. Do you notice any (or all) of these ‘back drops’ and ‘stage props’ being moved into place? Absolutely! “The world today is like a stage being set for a great drama. The major actors are already in the wings waiting for their moment in history. The main stage props are already in place. The prophetic play is about to begin.” (Walvoord)

The stage is right and seems ready for the last act. How about you?

This, Your Day

Luke 19:37-44

It was an incredibly special day, unlike any other. After approximately three years of public ministry, Jesus was approaching Jerusalem on His Father's schedule. Quite some time earlier, after miraculously feeding between five and fifteen thousand people with only five loaves and two fish (see John 6:1-15), the 'diners' had wanted to make Him their King. But, at that point, Jesus split the scene – you see, it wasn't yet time.

However, as the special day was now at hand, He rode down the slope of the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey's colt (see Zech 9:9), and those following Him began shouting, *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"* And, this time Jesus was 'into it' – you see, this was the day, literally the set time.

True to form, the religious leaders nearby wanted Christ to shut them up, to zip their lips. They said, *"Teacher, rebuke your disciples."* Jesus responded, *"... if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."*

What? Was Jesus just being a bit over-enthusiastic? Perhaps euphemistic? Was this just some Middle Eastern saying of the time? Now, I don't know about you, but I've never heard stones talk, and yet Jesus, the one Who commanded the winds and the sea, was not exaggerating. Obviously, the moment was very, very special and the pronouncement of His arrival as the King was absolutely going to be made. But why?

Well, Jesus gave us the clue. As He drew near to the city, He wept (the word means to sob or wail loudly). In verses 42 – 44 He said, *"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time (literally, the set time) of your visitation."*

Now, the word, "day" in verse 42 most frequently means 'daylight period' which makes sense for Jesus claimed that while He was in the world, He was the light of the world (see John 9:5), and the word "time" in verse 44 literally means a "set time" as in a time previously established. What Jesus was claiming in all of this was that this was a day, a set time, which was foretold prophetically. It was a day and a situation that they could have recognized had it not been hidden from them. (He mentioned a set time or "my time" in other scriptures as well – see John 7:6, 30.)

And some astute disciple might have asked, "Lord, what so special about March 30, 33 AD (and that would have been especially astute seeing as they didn't use a Julian calendar then!) But to answer this, Jesus would have taken him to a portion of scripture in Daniel that we know as Chapter 9, verses 24 – 26. It says,...

V24 *“Seventy weeks 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.”*

V25 *“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again and wall, even in troublesome times.”*

V26 *“And after sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; ...”*

In this passage, the word translated as ‘weeks’ is literally ‘sevens’ so the prophecy starts with a declaration that 70 sevens have been determined or pre-established in which several awesome things will be accomplished. Note also that these ‘sevens’ are set specifically for the Jewish people and Jerusalem. So, what are these awesome things?

First, he says, *“To finish the transgression”* or literally, the rebellion or break-away. You see, mankind broke away from God back in the Garden of Eden and the Lord said that within this prophesied period, the rift would be healed – mankind (including the Jewish people) would be reconciled with our loving creator—the revolt ended, the rift healed.

But for this to happen, the next promised occurrence had to take place – *“To make an end of sins”* or literally offences and their penalties. All of man’s offenses before a just and holy God had to be paid for – all past, present and future offences.

And furthermore, the slate had to be wiped clean so the true reconciliation of man with God could take place. That is, not only would all offences and their penalties be satisfied but it would be as if they never occurred in the first place – *“to make reconciliation for iniquity.”*

Then he added the kicker – not only would the rift be bridged, offences and penalties ended, and reconciliation produced, but then, a perfect future is guaranteed, for he said that *“everlasting righteousness”* would be brought in – eternal rightness in everyone and everything! Wow!

Finally, he said that vision and prophecy would be sealed or closed up and that the Most Holy would be anointed.

So, what was revealed in this passage is clearly the grand and glorious plan of God, and the timepiece so to speak for it is also made obvious – the Jews and Jerusalem – like two hands on a clock. And they’re ticking off 70 sevens or 490, but 490 what? We’ll see that it is referring to 490 years. Verse 25 gives more detail.

Specifically, the passage says that from the going forth or issuance of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and notably the wall of the city, until the coming of Messiah the Prince (i.e. Messiah hailed as royalty, in the line of David) would be total of seven plus 62 or 69 ‘sevens’ or 483 years. Then verse 26 adds that after this period, the Messiah would be cut off or killed but not for Himself.

This prophecy is so explicit in its schedule – only God could pull it off. You see, just as Daniel predicted, the command which allowed the Jews to restore Jerusalem and specifically to rebuild the wall was given March 5, 444 BC by Artaxerxes Longimanus to Nehemiah. (Other similar decrees were given but this one included the rebuilding of the wall, i.e. restoring the city’s defenses as mentioned in the

prophecy.) We arrive at this date by looking at Neh 1:1 and 2:1. Then, by knowing that Artaxerxes succeeded his father Xerxes immediately after his death around Dec 17, 465 BC and had a year of accession before his own reign began, we come to Nisan 1, 444 BC (March 5).

Now, we're going to do a little arithmetic. Although the total period outlined in the passage was 70 sevens or 490 years, the declaring of the Messiah as King was pinpointed as being after the 62 sevens which are listed after the first 7 sevens. Therefore, this put it after 7 + 62 or 69 sevens. That equals 483 years.

Also, we must use the 360-day calendar for each year. This was the calendar of the day, the calendar originally used as shown in the Genesis account of Noah's flood – it's the prophetic year, if you would. So, if each year holds 360 days and we want to measure out a span of 483 years, that is the same as 173,880 days.

Now, beginning with March 5, 444 BC, if we proceed forward 173,880 days, accounting for the 116 leap years, only one year between 1 BC and 1 AD, and a couple other slight imperfections in our own calendar -- we come to Monday, March 30, 33 AD exactly. There indeed we find Jesus, riding on the donkey, entering Jerusalem, hailed as the Son of David, that is, Messiah the Prince. Of course, the rocks would have cried out!!

This prophecy is so stunningly accurate that numerous critics have tried to disprove it. But honest and thorough historical, theological and archeological research has validated it (as if God's word needed validation!)

And Jesus wept, for the people could have known – if they had not been blinded. And just as Daniel foretold, Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself. Jesus laid down His life freely on the crucifix of Calvary the following Friday, April 3, 33 AD – but not for Himself. You see, He was sinless, the spotless Lamb of God. He was 'cut off' for us!

Now, although Jesus said, no man would know the day or hour of His coming to rapture the church – to take us into heaven, (as pictured in the parable of the five wise virgins in Matthew 25) He also gave us many prophetic indicators. Paul wrote, *"you are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief"* (catch you unawares).

May we not repeat the blindness of His people concerning His coming as Messiah the Prince. He told us to watch, to be discerning of the signs of the times and to eagerly wait on His appearing! As for Israel, Messiah the Savior is yet to be recognized, but we know from Romans 11:25 that this will happen.

And if you've been tracking with me, you have probably noticed that there's still one 'seven' remaining of the 70 sevens. Lord willing, we'll look at that in another study. God bless you as you seek to welcome our coming Savior-King!

Tapestry

This, Your Day – Part 2

Jesus was in His own town, in the synagogue. Having recently spent 40 days in the wilderness overcoming Satan's temptations, He now began to present some very good news. Standing, He took the scroll of Isaiah the prophet and opened it to what we call Chapter 61. Reading from verses one and two, He said, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel (good news) to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."* (Luke 4:18,19)

At this point, He closed the scroll, sat down and with every eye fixed on Him, He began, *"Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

Of course, those around were astounded at such a proclamation but something important happened in what He didn't read. You see, the passage runs from verse one to verse three and Jesus stopped in the middle of verse two. The clear implication was unspoken – the ensuing part of the passage remained as yet unfulfilled. What immediately follows in verse two is a *"day of vengeance"* and then a comforting and consoling of those in Zion (implicitly, the Jews) who mourn.

Thus, a period of vengeance and mourning was yet to come, but when? Turn to Daniel 9.

In our lesson, 'This Your Day', we looked at a period of time described in verses 24, 25 and the first part of verse 26 as representing a total of 69 consecutive seven-year "weeks" (out of 70) which culminated with Christ's first coming and specifically His entrance into Jerusalem while being hailed as King. (see Luke 19:38).

Therefore, one seven-year period remained. But what is the cause of the disconnect? Why is this last 'week' separated from the first 69? Let's look again at the passage. In verse 26, the Messiah is *"cut off"* or killed and then the *"people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary."*

This part was clearly fulfilled exactly as Christ Himself prophesied in Mat 24:1,2 saying that the stones of the temple buildings would be thrown down. In 70 AD, four Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

"The prince who is to come" may, as many scholars assert, point to the coming Antichrist who we are shown in other prophecies arises to power in the 'revived' Roman Empire (more on that in another study, Lord willing) and so the *"people of the prince..."* would speak of the Romans just as was fulfilled.

Now, the next part of the 70 week prophecy says, *"The end of it shall be with a flood and till the end of the war, desolations are determined (or decreed)."* So, during the period of time between Messiah being cut off and the last week we have a war and some decreed desolations all culminating with a flood.

What is this war? What is this flood? And what are these desolations?

I believe this war is that which has been going on since the time Messiah was cut off. It is a war between Israel and the Lord. A conflict in which Israel has stubbornly continued to reject the gracious covenant of God through Christ's atoning blood. But the war will end. Isaiah writes, *"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" says your God. 'Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.'"* (Isa 40:1,2)

And what's this "flood" spoken of in Daniel's prophecy? Well, this isn't the ordinary word used in the Bible for a flood. This word literally means a "cleansing overflow" and I believe refers to that which is spoken of in the following three passages (as well as others):

"In that day, a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech 13:1)

"Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb, Who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant...for I will pour water on him who is thirsty and floods on the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;" (Isa 44:1-3)

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." (Zech 12:10)

Lastly, the desolations were to the land and to the temple. Concerning the land, Josephus who observed the Roman conquest wrote, "The Romans, though it was a terrible struggle to collect the timber, raised their platforms in twenty-one days, stripped the whole area in a circle around the town to a distance of ten miles. The countryside, like the city, was a pitiful sight; for where there once had been a lovely vista of woods and parks, there was nothing but desert and stumps of trees. No one – not even a foreigner – who had seen the old Judea and the glorious suburbs of the city, and now set eyes on her present desolation, could have helped sighing and groaning at so terrible a change; for every trace of beauty had been blotted out by war, and nobody who had known it in the past and come upon it suddenly would have recognized the place; when he was already there he would still have been looking for the city." Even Mark Twain who toured the area in the late 1800's described it as an unbelievable desolation.

Concerning the temple or sanctuary, the Romans dismantled the temple Herod built stone by stone. In addition, we know from prophecy that the antichrist will desolate the coming tribulation temple (see Mat 24:15 and Dan 12:11) so then it's clear that two temples (plural) will be desolated during this period.

This is predicted in Lev 26 where the Lord, in answering a stubbornly rebellious Israel says, *"I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation (note the plural), and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas (that is, the sacrifices offered will not be acceptable to Him). I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it."* (Lev 26:31,32)

However, as desolations came upon God's people, land and the first temple, in Christ, He was also building another matching, complimentary set – that is, He made a new people who were not a people, bringing new birth to individuals all around the world – the mostly gentile church. (see 1 Peter 2:9,10).

Also, He has prepared a new place or land for them – heaven (see John 14:1-3). And, He is forming a new glorious temple or tabernacle by joining together all genuine believers (see Eph 2:19-22).

But the gentile church is not a replacement for the Jewish people. The church is not Israel of prophecy. Israel is the Israel of prophecy. Eventually, the church-age will be ended – a wrap, done, finito (see Romans 11:25). But that's not the end of God's plan! The scripture says that Jesus will come for His bride (that's us who believe!) and will take her home. In this, there is a wonderful alignment symbolically even with the old Jewish wedding practice.

You see, it used to be that when a man would desire a woman for his own, he would come to the house of her parents and pay the price for her. He would then return to the home of his father and would prepare an addition to his house for himself and his new bride. Meanwhile, as the bride to be did not know when her bridegroom would come back, she would wait eagerly for him, prepared for his imminent return. Even the bridegroom did not know the day of his return for it was his father who would finally say that the new dwelling place was finished. When he did, the bridegroom would come for the bride accompanied by all his friends. He would take her then to himself and bring her back to his home where a grand wedding feast would be held. Then she would be intimately cared for in her new home away from the public eye for one week. After this, they would both emerge, and she would be publicly displayed as his new bride.

This parallels perfectly the great anticipation of the church as the bride of Christ. Christ did come and paid the fantastic price for us with His own blood. He then returned to the Father where He is preparing our new home in heaven. The time in which He has been gone has been the Church-Age in which He said He would be with us in the Spirit always (see Mat 28:20). When He returns to take us home, there will indeed be a glorious wedding feast and we will spend the next seven years (or 'week') on a rapturous honeymoon! After this, we will return with Him to earth to save the remnant of His people and conquer planet earth.

But while we who believe are gone to heaven, that is, during this week of heaven, there's a week of hell back on earth. This is the 70th week of the Daniel 9 prophecy – just as with each of the first 69 weeks, it is a seven-year period. You see, the church was not present during the first 69 and will not be present on earth for the 70th – specifically, it's called the time of "Jacob's trouble" (see Jeremiah 30:7).

And the church age is about to close. From Abraham to Christ was approximately 2000 years and so also with this present age – a perfect balance if you would. It's no accident that the entire church, Jew and Gentile believers in Christ is called the dwelling place of God. In fact, the wall of the original tabernacle was a beautiful type and symbol of this.

In Exodus 26:1-8, we see that the tabernacle's walls were made of ten curtains – grouped specifically in two sets of five each (five is the number of grace in the Bible!). The two groups of five were then joined together by 50 gold clasps. Now, 50 is the number of jubilee in scripture (refer to Lev 25:10) and when you read about it, you can recognize that of course, Jesus Christ is our Jubilee.

And so, pictured here in the design of the curtain walls of God's dwelling is that we are saved by grace and joined together in Christ – Jew and Gentile believers.

Now the Gentile 'bride', the church, has been prepared by receiving the atoning blood of Jesus. But the 70th week is designed to prepare the Jewish bride for her Husband. She has not yet accepted His Spirit (typified frequently in scripture by oil). She is not yet ready for his appearing.

In fact, Jesus may have spoken of this when in Mat 25 after describing the Great Tribulation and the unexpectedness of the rapture, He speaks of five (remember the tabernacle walls above?) wise (or saved) virgins and five foolish (or as yet unsaved). The latter could not get into the wedding feast.

However, the 70th week will prepare them. It will complete the tapestry of the spiritual tabernacle if you would. And it's right around the corner. Are you ready? If so, you can say, "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!"

Finishing the Feasts

God seems to love festivals and has used them not only to bless His people with reasons to worship and fellowship but also to appreciate His divine plan, for each of the seven that He specifically ordained have prophetic fulfillments. Four of them have been fulfilled in the first appearing of Jesus Christ and the consequent birth of His church.

Briefly, Pesach or Passover was fulfilled on the day of this festival when Jesus was crucified. He was the true Passover Lamb that all the sacrifices pointed to since Moses first told the Hebrew slaves to kill a lamb and place its blood upon the door openings and in the basin (see Exo 12). Where they placed the blood pictured the bloody head, arms and feet of Christ on the cross. Also, there have been some very symbolic traditions:

The lamb which the High Priest was to sacrifice would be brought from the Mount of Olives, down the road, through the gate into Jerusalem, and finally to the temple. Once there, it was put on display for three days. The people would line the road, laying palm fronds and their cloaks on the road for the lamb to walk upon. When Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem, the people forsook the Passover lamb, in favor of the true Lamb of God. Jesus then spent three days in the temple, being questioned by the Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers.

For the Passover meal, the lamb was roasted whole. However, it was done in an unusual way. For Passover, the animal's entrails would be removed and wrapped around the head, forming a crown. Once the lamb was skewered, it was roasted over a fire vertically, not horizontally. As you can see, this pictures Jesus on the cross, with the crown of thorns around His head.

During the Passover, only unleavened bread would be eaten. In addition, leaven, which symbolizes sin, would be removed from the whole house. Jesus was the only One found without sin. Before cooking, the unleavened bread would have rows of holes pierced in it. Similarly, Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. When it was cooked, brown stripes would form between the rows of holes. The Bible says that by His (Jesus') stripes, we are healed.

As part of the Passover meal, three pieces of this bread are stacked and placed in a linen bag. The middle one is removed, and the others set aside. This middle cracker, called the afikoman is broken. Part of it is wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden. In like fashion, Jesus who was crucified between two thieves, was broken for us, wrapped in linen, and buried. At the end of the meal, the children search for the afikoman. When it is found, it is unwrapped for all to see. Whichever child finds it, receives a prize. Whoever finds Jesus also receives a prize, eternal life.

The next feast is all about this unleavened bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began the day after Pesach and was a continuation of the Passover. It lasted for seven days (see Lev 23:6). Recalling that leaven in the scriptures speaks of sin, this unleavened bread pictures a needed purity of that which we as believers take in. Jesus' perfectly pure life fulfilled this. As the spotless Lamb of God, His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary was acceptable to God. Believing that is what we consider 'taking Him in' to our hearts.

Unleavened bread also symbolizes the manna that the Israelites ate when they traveled through the wilderness. This reminds us of Jesus' own words, *"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."* (John 6:57,58)

The Feast of First Fruits was celebrated soon after the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Lev 23:10,11; Deut 26:1-4). The first of the barley harvest was dedicated to God and brought before Him. The Jewish people recognized that it was God who brought the increase, and it all belonged to Him. By giving the first part, they were recognizing God as the provider. Christ fulfilled this holiday literally with His resurrection, *"on the day after the Sabbath"* and thus He is called the *"firstborn among many brethren"*. (Rom 8:29)

The Feast of Weeks which we know as Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after this last feast. This celebrated the harvest and was again, fulfilled to the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers gathered together in the upper room. Three thousand souls were saved that day, and the church was born having a commission to reap the harvest of souls in all nations.

Hence, there remain three festivals or feasts to be fulfilled. They are all in the fall season. The first is the Feast of Trumpets, Rosh Hashanah. This festival starts the new year with the blowing of the ram's horn trumpet, hence the name. Since it is a preparation of repentance, the traditional activities center around looking at sins. It has become customary to go down to the sea, filling one's pockets with rocks along the way. Once there, the rocks are thrown as far as possible into the sea, identifying one area of sin with each rock. As they are thrown, it symbolizes a cleansing, representing God removing the sins to the bottom of the sea.

This feast will be fulfilled at the last trumpet (as opposed to the first – see Exo 19:16) and the voice of our Savior calling us up in the Rapture of the church (see 1 Cor 15:51-55). In a glorious transformation, all our sin natures will be left behind forever. Though we know the day of this festival, Jesus said that no one knows the day or hour of this event. It is always to be considered imminent. Its position, however, preceding the next feast is very relevant for its fulfillment will surely precede the fulfillment of the following one.

The sixth holy day is the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. This is the only solemn feast - all the nation of Israel would fast together, coming before Him, to atone for their sin. This is the one day of the year when the High Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies, bringing the blood to place on the mercy seat. The temple of God and all the worship items in it were consecrated anew to the Lord. I'm strongly inclined to believe this will be fulfilled when the 144,000 saints of the tribes of Israel are saved by grace, sealed and sent, like the church, to continue God's witness in a godless world (see Rev 7). They will bring the atoning grace of God through Jesus Christ to both Jew and gentile in the terrible days of the tribulation.

Finally, there remains the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot. This seven-day festival commemorates God's provision while the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness. In addition, the people express thanksgiving to God for His continued provision in their lives. During this festival, the people live in, or at least take their meals in temporary shelters, commemorating that time. The family starts building their sukkah (tabernacle) immediately after Yom Kippur. It is noteworthy that this is the only feast that

will be celebrated throughout the millennial reign of Christ (see Zech 14:16-19). As such, it will undoubtedly also commemorate the caring of God for His remnant of Jewish believers in the wilderness during the tribulation. From its place in the sequence of feasts and its symbolism, I'll suggest that it will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ, the victory of Jesus and His saints at Armageddon and the ushering in of the millennial age.

Now, one of the timing aspects of the tribulation has always seemed very important. It is represented in the following prophetic scriptures:

"But leave out the court, which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Rev 11:2,3

"Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days." Rev 12:6

"But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent." Rev 12:14

"So, they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?' And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven." Rev 13:4-6

"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

"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; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished." Dan 12:6,7

"And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days." Dan 12:11,12

In these scriptures we see periods of time measured in days, months and "times". All but the last two specify the same length of time – three and a half prophetic years. All of them refer to events during the tribulation:

- The treading underfoot of Jerusalem by non-Jews -- 42 months
- The blaspheming God by the antichrist -- 42 months
- The prophesying of the two witnesses -- 1260 days

- The feeding and nourishing by God of the Jewish remnant of believers in the wilderness -- 1260 days or 3 ½ years
- The persecuting of the saints (believers in Christ) -- 3 ½ years
- The shattering of the power of the Hebrew people -- 3 ½ years

We also know from scripture: *“And he (the antichrist) shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease...”* (Dan 9:27) The word for “midst” is “half” and comes from the word meaning “to cut in two”. As such, it is potentially a bit less specific than the numbers above. What we see here, though, is that the antichrist will confirm a covenant with a large group for seven years.

This action will be the trigger for the tribulation period also known as the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy in chapter nine.

In the middle of this period he will stop two things – sacrifice and offerings (oblation). Now, offerings refer to such things as the grain offerings, peace offerings and daily sacrificial offerings, but I contend that the stated sacrifice refers to the annual sacrifice that most angers the spiritual power (Satan) behind antichrist – the Passover.

That’s because the Passover symbolizes Christ’s victory over Satan on the cross of Calvary. It is represented in the very first sacrifice in the Bible (Abel’s) as well as Abraham’s sacrifice on Mt. Mariah. Makes sense that it would be the one sacrifice he will most want to cease.

During the first half of the tribulation, the antichrist will blaspheme God and seemingly get away with it. During the latter 1260 days, Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot of the gentiles, the power of the Hebrew people will be shattered and the saints – the Hebrew remnant of believers – will be protected and cared for in the wilderness by God.

Meanwhile, the two witnesses will be testifying in Israel to the truth. Though it seems in the book of Revelation that their ministry will be predominantly during the latter half of the tribulation, the exact start and end dates are not given.

At some point close to the middle of the tribulation “week”, the antichrist will place in the temple ‘his image’ which will likely be the “abomination of desolation”. At the same time, he will stop the daily sacrifice or offerings. That action starts another clock ticking. You see, confirming the covenant started the seven-year (2520 day) ticker. Stopping the daily offerings and placing the abomination of desolation starts the 1290-day ticker.

Recall above, we pointed out that the final feast, Sukkot, will be fulfilled at the conclusion of the tribulation, and it would seem that the annual sacrifice which the antichrist’s stops in the middle of it is the Pesach or Passover. Keeping in mind that the Passover feast, which includes the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is eight days long, if we look at the time between the end of the Passover feast and the beginning of the Sukkot feast in the third year following, lo and behold, it is frequently 1260 days. Examples (not predictions) are:

Pesach 2016 - Sukkot 2019

Pesach 2019 - Sukkot 2022

Pesach 2020 - Sukkot 2023

I cannot believe that's coincidental. To fulfill the 1290-day ticker, it could be that the daily sacrifices or offerings will be stopped thirty days earlier than the conclusion of Passover. Putting the abomination of desolation in place would likely happen at the same time but making it fully operational may take the additional thirty days.

There is another possibility though – from the end of Pesach 2021 to the beginning of Sukkot 2024 is exactly 1290 days. Waiting the additional 45 days, making a total of 1335, leads to a blessing. The beginning of the reign of Christ on earth will certainly be a blessing. The resurrection of the OT believers will be a blessing to many. The giving of ruling authority as kings and priests will be a blessing. Perhaps this additional waiting period refers to one of these.

In summary, I am very much inclined to believe, whatever the case may be, that the events of the latter half of the tribulation will be 'bookended' by the final Pesach and the fulfilled Sukkot. This will finish the prophetic fulfillments of the feasts.

You Can't Fight God and Win

On the near horizon is an event which will humble the enemies of Israel so completely and so dramatically as to usher in the final episodes of this age. It was revealed to the prophet Ezekiel some 2600 years ago but has, in the last decade or so, appeared on our radar. It is a war.

Now, stop yawning. I know, I know, you're thinking, 'another war'? And I don't blame you for your under-impression. There have been at least 11 wars or conflicts between Israel and her enemies since she was reestablished as a nation in 1948. This, however, will be one of the three big ones that remain.

Recent, best-selling books have alerted us to its catastrophic importance, but not many people really understand what the Bible has to say about it. There is a 'high level' chronology in the last part of the book of Ezekiel. In chapter 36, we read of the mountains of Israel coming alive again and then in chapter 37 we find an eerie resurrection of sorts – a vast valley of dry bones which come together, become covered with flesh and then receive the breath of life – a huge army which pictures Israel becoming a nation again.

Then come chapters 38 and 39 which deal with our war (we'll look at those in more detail) which are followed by detailed instructions for the millennial temple, its services and divisions of the land for Israel during the 1000-year reign of Christ found in chapters 40 – 48.

So, we find this war, commonly known as the war of Gog/Magog, nestled between the time of Israel's rebirth as a nation and the events of the millennium. Some folks get confused by the multiple wars spoken of during the last days and that's understandable.

Briefly, there are three that are blockbusters so to speak and global in impact. The first is the war of Gog/Magog – details to follow. The second is the Battle of Armageddon, which occurs at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation. This is when Christ returns from heaven with His army. When He does, the Antichrist will rally the armies gathered with and against him there in the Valley of Meggido to fight against the 'alien invaders'.

The last war will come at the conclusion of the millennium. At that point, Satan will be released from his prison and will proceed to deceive the nations of the world to once more fight against the Lord. This will end in their annihilation and Satan's eternal damnation after which the Lord will completely renew both the heavens and the earth.

Among these three wars there are several distinctives; for instance:

- Gog/Magog – God destroys the armies in the mountains of Israel with fire and brimstone from heaven.
- Armageddon – Christ destroys the antichrist-gathered armies with the Word of His Mouth
- End of the Millennium – Christ destroys the armies Satan gathered from the four corners of the earth

Now, as we examine chapters 38 and 39, we'll find many strange names and you might wonder why the seeming obscurity? But, actually, the use of these names allows us to most clearly identify the places and players. As a fictitious example, my great, great, great uncle Ivan lived in Petrograd which

was known as St. Petersburg but then became Leningrad which then became St. Petersburg again, but my great, great, great uncle Ivan was always Ivan.

You see, people move and the places they move to are always getting their names changed, so if you want to be most accurate about the location of a future event, you nail it to the name of someone way, way back and to his descendants. The task then becomes one of tracing his descendants to the time of the future event.

So, let's consider now our two chapters and we'll cover each name in some detail as we proceed.

Ezekiel 38: *Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him,... (v1,2)*

First, we have someone called Gog. He is the leader of the horde. Now, in Amos 7:1 (KJV) we read, *"Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings."*

OK, here is the same verse from the Septuagint: *"Thus the Lord showed me, and behold a swarm of locusts were coming, and, behold, one of the young devastating locusts was Gog, the king."* The cause of the difference is in the translation results from a little mark from the original that was overlooked.

And referring to this king, we read in Revelation 9:11, *"And [the locusts] had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon."*

From this, we can see that this leader, Gog, is probably a demonic or demonized entity.

Now for Magog. Though it is the name of a land in the prophecy, it was originally the name of a grandson of Noah. His descendants are often referred to by their Greek name, the Scythians. Early historians identified Magog with southern Russia. "Scythian designates a number of nomadic tribes from the Russian steppes. Many of the later Scyths settled in the fertile area of the Ukraine north of the Black Sea while other related tribes occupied the area to the east of the Caspian Sea. The Scythian language belonged to the Iranian family of the IndoEuropean languages. The Ossetian dialect of central Caucasus appears to be a survivor." (Chuck Missler)

So, back to verses one and two. The latter part of verse two above should read more accurately, *"the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal."* In more than 420 other instances in the Bible, that is the way the word Rosh is handled. So where are Meshech and Tubal?

Meshech was the sixth son of Japheth, the son of Noah. He is identified with the ancient Mushki of the Assyrians and the Muschoi of the classical Greek writers. Assyrian inscriptions describe them as inhabiting Phrygia in northern Anatolia (modern Turkey). Herodotus identified the Mushki with the mountains southeast of the Black Sea, the northeast part of modern Turkey. Josephus also identified the descendants of Meshech as dwelling in eastern Turkey.

Some later writers identify the name of Meshech as preserved in the old tribal name of the Muscovites of Russia, after whom Moscow is named. This is not at all unlikely, especially when we consider their historically close association with the people of Tubal.

Tubal was the 5th son of Japheth and a brother of Meshech. The descendants of Tubal first come to our notice in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I, king of Assyria in about 1100 BC. He referred to them as the Tabali whose original area of settlement was adjacent to that of Tegarama. Their land, in Josephus' day, was called by the Romans Iberia, and covered what is now the country of Georgia whose capital still bears the name of Tubal as Tbilisi.

The scriptures continue: ...and say, *"Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords'"* (v3,4). From this passage, it is clear that it is the Lord who is behind this whole event. Gog is "turned around" and led out by hooks in his jaws. The ancient Assyrians led their captives out in a similar way.

So, the picture is that Gog and his horde, though they think they're acting on their own, are actually the prisoners of the Lord's will. It is a large, well-armed host.

Next, are Gog's allies: *"Persia, Ethiopia and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you"* (v5,6).

Persia includes the descendants of Elam, the first son of Shem and is now modern Iran. Iran was known as Persia until it changed its name in 1935. The name Iran is derived from the term airyana; Middle Iranian, 'ry'n, "Aryan" or in New Persian, Iran. Iran is the leading ally in the Ezekiel list and the present major exporter of "Islamic Fundamentalism". Persia covers present day Iran and Iraq.

The original language for the next name is Cush and refers to the land lying to the south of Egypt, usually translated in English Bibles as "Ethiopia". Originally Cush referred to a piece of territory lying between the second and third cataracts of the Nile. Later it came to refer to a broader area known as Nubia. Today, this land is occupied by Sudan. Sudan is home to the National Islamic Front, is ruled by an Islamic military dictatorship, was home to Osama bin Laden from 1991-1996 and harbors countless Islamic terrorist groups. It also trades military supplies with Iran for docking rights on the Red Sea shipping routes.

The next name, in the original language, is Put. Put was the third son of Ham, the son of Noah. Josephus identified him as the founder of Libya, whose inhabitants were called Putites. Put, however, is associated with all North Africa, also populated by the Berbers and tribes distinct from Cush. Put encompassed the area from present day Libya to Mauritania and the Mahgreb, that is, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The next ally mentioned is Gomer. In the Babylonian Talmud the Biblical Gomer, the father of Ashkenaz, is rendered "Germania." Gomer is also associated with the Cimmerians who were expelled in 700 BC from the southern steppes of Russia into what is today Turkey but eventually established themselves in the Rhine and Danube valleys. So, Gomer potentially covers area from eastern Turkey to as far north as present day Germany and Austria.

Togarmah was one of the sons of Gomer. The Assyrians called them Til-Garimmu, a name derived from the Hittite city Tegarama and carried into classical times as Gauraema, presently known as Gurun, 70 miles west of Mylayta. The city was destroyed by Sennacherib in 695 B.C. The Armenians still refer to

themselves as "The House of Togarmah" even to this day. So Togarmah is the present-day area that covers part of eastern Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Nearly all of the allies of Magog have in common that they are Muslim.

"Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them. After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you" (v7-9).

Here in verse eight, we have an additional clue – this massive army will march against the regathered nation of Israel whose people are dwelling safely. Thus, something has to happen to give the Israelis this sense of peace. It may be a peace covenant.

So Gog and his hordes come against Israel and this is God's reaction: *"And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," says the Lord GOD, 'that My fury will show in My face. For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.'" (v18-20)*

First, there will be an enormous earthquake – seemingly 'off the scale' and extremely wide impacting.

Next... *"I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord GOD. 'Every man's sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone'" (v21,22).*

Gog's armies, a Muslim brotherhood, will turn on each other perhaps using not only conventional weapons but bacteria and/or viral agents. Meanwhile, the Lord will rain down huge hailstones, fire and brimstone. Later, in the next chapter of Ezekiel, the Lord says that He will completely disarm these assailants and adds, *"And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the LORD" (v39:6).*

We know where Magog is, but the "coastlands" is somewhat of a mystery. Typically, they represent areas quite distant from Israel. That they "live in security" may speak of people who simply don't expect to have any trouble perhaps because they have stayed out of the conflict. In this passage, Israel is seen as being basically on her own in the world. A few countries seem to give Gog a verbal slap on the wrist, but no one acts to defend God's people except God. Could these coastlands refer to the US or EU? Possibly.

"Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years. They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because

they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them,' says the Lord GOD" (v39:9,10).

These verses make me think that this cataclysm will take place before or at the beginning of the seven-year long tribulation. It won't be during because that would not give enough time to burn all the left-over weapons nor afterwards as there will certainly be no plundering or pillaging under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ.

Scriptures which follow state that the people of Israel will be burying the bodies of the dead for seven months and indicate by way of their procedure that the bodies may be radioactive. Though translations differ, verse two of chapter 39 indicates that these enemies of Israel will be annihilated leaving as little as one sixth of them alive.

Now, recent events are quite sobering for not long ago we saw the leader of the modern day land of Magog attack the very place where the ancient Magogian language is still spoken – Southern Ossetia in the country of Georgia, the home of the descendants of Tubal. It would seem that there's a clearing of the way going on, for if Russia is to sweep south it must pass through Georgia and thus it is very much against allowing Georgia to become an active part of NATO.

In addition, Russia not long ago created a historic treaty with Iran, providing advanced nuclear and military technology and supplies. Syria has opened its ports on the Black Sea to Russian naval vessels and is also being supplied militarily from Moscow. Libya and Sudan are also now formally tied to Russia via treaties and myriad agreements. So, as you can see, nearly all the players are in place and for the first time in history are allied with each other.

Iraq would pose a problem for them if the US was still in place so as we predicted America essentially vacated Iraq. Turkey is also a part of NATO but has been cozying up to Russia very significantly in recent days.

So, an amazing display of the power and authority of God Almighty foretold 2600 years ago is about to take place in the Middle East. Keep your eyes open and be in prayer!

Rolled Away

What kind of a general in his right mind, camped in enemy territory on the brink of going into battle, requires his whole army to be circumcised?? (See Joshua 5)

Earlier, at the beginning of the book of Joshua, the children of Israel were camped on the east side of the overflowing Jordan river. Moses, who had led them for forty years of wilderness wandering was dead and had appointed Joshua to take the mantle of responsibility for leadership.

In short order, he began to instruct the people and *“...they answered Joshua, saying, ‘All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage’”* (Josh 1:16-18).

It wasn't long before the willingness of the troops to follow their new leader was put to the test. But the interesting thing is not so much that they were willing to go through with the circumcision on the eve of battle; rather, it's the fact that they needed to do so at all. Now, the Bible explains, *“...this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised.”* (Josh 5:4,5)

Now, this is truly bewildering. Consider that some 40 years earlier as recorded in Exodus 4, in sending Moses back to Egypt to lead his people out, God met him along the way and threatened to kill him if his wife did not circumcise their two sons. She was infuriated, but she complied.

Then later, in giving the law to the people, the Lord confirmed the requirement of this practice, which started with Abraham, when in Exodus 12 He made clear the necessity of circumcision in order to celebrate the Passover. Even foreigners who wanted to celebrate it had to be circumcised.

So, what in world happened? You mean to tell me that a whole generation who grew up in the wilderness and who celebrated the Passover annually (as Num 9:4,5 makes clear) just blew off one of the most central and ancient laws. Did Moses just blow it off too?? Did the Lord show tolerance of this while at the same time instructing them to use drastic discipline in the other aspects of the law? I mean this represented 40 years of overt disobedience to God's command. This was a blatant desecration of the Passover year after year. Did a whole generation simply 'not get the memo'?

There is really only one plausible explanation – the Lord allowed it in order to give us a lesson and I submit that it is a prophetic one -- a picture-lesson that may startle and inspire you. Let me explain.

First, a little history. Forty years earlier, Moses led them out through the Red Sea. Therein, they were separated from Egypt, a picture or 'type' of the world in scripture. Some people point to this event as a picture of salvation, but I don't think that's the primary point. They refer to 1 Cor 10:1,2 which says, *“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,...”* In this passage,

Paul was exhorting the Corinthians to avoid idolatry noting that even though the host of Israel was separated from Egypt, they lusted and became idolatrous and as a result incurred the wrath of God.

We as Christians have been separated, if you would, from the world as well and some will add that we as believers can wander in a period of wilderness-like experiences until we enter the promised land of heaven or when we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I don't disagree, but I don't believe that's the principle point of the picture.

Remember, the key to prophecy, whether in prose, praise or picture, is the Jewish people not the gentile church. Some point to the word baptism in the verse, however the baptism of Moses is not a symbol of salvation any more than the baptism of John.

I suggest that it is rather symbolic of the separation of the Jewish people from the world. Clearly, the Jews have always considered themselves a separate people and the rest of the world has agreed. It all started with Abraham who was called out of world so to speak around 2000 BC and up to the time of Christ, it spanned 40 generations as cited in Matthew chapter one.

The men who came out of Egypt were indeed circumcised, but over the course of the wandering in the wilderness for 40 years they, as a group, became uncircumcised. Then, they came at last to the place of the crossing on the east side of the Jordan. This was the same place, in fact, where John the Baptist later baptized Jesus, immersing Him under the water. You may recall that John, being somewhat dumbfounded said, "I should be baptized by You!" But Jesus replied, "*Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" (Mat 3:15)

At this point, Joshua chapter three picks up the story. "*Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it'*" Josh 3:1-3.

For many years, Bible scholars have shown how the ark of the covenant is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus. Thus, in type, we have a scene wherein the people were told to follow the symbol of Jesus. The passage continues, "*Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about **two thousand cubits** by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before.*" (Josh 3:4 emphasis mine).

Anyway, Joshua then told the priests to carry the Ark into the Jordan river. Now, this gets interesting because the name Jordan means "descender" and indeed, it descends into the Dead Sea. As such, it has long been known to be a picture of death or sin leading to death.

But here in Joshua, as the priests who were carrying the Ark, the type or picture of Christ, entered the river, something supernatural happened – "*So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap **very far away at Adam**, the city that is beside **Zaretan**.*" (Josh 3:14-16 emphasis mine)

Supernaturally, the river was immediately ‘swallowed up’ – the water stopped far upstream, all the way up at a place called Adam!

Can you see it? The picture is perfect. That’s why Jesus insisted on being baptized in that very spot. When Christ died for us on Calvary (as the Ark entered the river) sin and death (the Jordan) was “*swallowed up*” in victory (1Cor 15:54) all the way back to Adam! All the way back to the time when mankind first sinned and died. (I’ll get to the Zaretan part momentarily.)

As a consequence, all the people crossed over on dry ground – death lost its sting (1Cor 15:55) – and they entered the promised land of God’s Kingdom. Isn’t this beautiful?!

But there’s more. Just as Jesus told His disciples to follow Him, Joshua told the Israelites to follow the Ark. But they were told to follow it specifically from a distance of “about 2000 cubits”. Now, I will suggest that this could be a prophetic illustration of the Jews following Christ in fulfillment of Romans 11:25-27 about 2000 years after Christ’s death and resurrection.

Paul wrote in that passage, *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins’”*.

So, the time in which God worked, both in and through the Jewish people, was about 2000 years (Abraham to Christ) and the time He has worked in and through the Church is about the same – about 2000 years. See Pro 11:1 and Pro 16:11.

But there’s still more. Back in Joshua, we read that the day they did this crossing was the 10th day of the first month which was the day specified in the law that each man was to choose for himself and his family a spotless lamb in advance of the Passover. Remember, this is prophetic through and through, and it is specific to the Jewish people not the mostly gentile church.

So, the Jewish people miraculously crossed over the Jordan on dry ground and camped at Gilgal. *“At that time the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.’ So, Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.”* (Josh 5:2,3)

“So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, ‘This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.’” (Josh 5:8,9 emphasis mine)

To appreciate this last statement, we need to do two word-studies. First, we’ll look at the term “rolled away”. Its first mention is in Genesis 29 and is used referring to the rolling away a stone so that waters would gush forth which speaks prophetically to the flow of “living waters” – i.e. the Holy Spirit. Additionally, pertinent to Christ, it is recorded in Mat 28:2, Mk 16:4 and Lu 24:2 that the stone covering Christ’s sepulcher was rolled away by an angel to reveal the empty tomb – to show that Christ had risen.

So, on this day of being circumcised after 40 years of disobedience, there was a “rolling away” that points forward in time to a fountain of the Spirit and the revealing of the risen Messiah.

Do we have prophetic scriptural support for this? You bet: Zech 13:1 says, *“In that day (the last days) a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.”*

And, Zech 12:10 says, *“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”*

The prophet Zechariah proclaimed the time in the last days when the Jewish people would be provided a fountain for sin and uncleanness receiving the Spirit of grace and have revealed the One whom they pierced – Jesus. Remember that name Zaretan? The city next to Adam? The Jordan was heaped up “far away” all the way back to Adam which is next to Zaretan. What do you think the name Zaretan means – yep, pierced.

What a wonderful prophetic picture! Not only does this event portray the swallowing up of death and sin all the way back to the first sinner, the first Adam; but it also speaks to the revealing of the last Adam, Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor 15:45) who was pierced for us.

Psa 22:16 prophetically quotes the Messiah, *“For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet;”*

Rev 1:5-7 says of Jesus, *“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”*

Now for the next word-study, “reproach”; it is first mentioned in scripture in Gen 30:23 where Rachel, after being barren for so long, finally has a baby (Joseph, who is also a well-known type of Christ) and says that God has taken away her reproach. Therefore, we can associate in ‘type’ this term with the reproach of barrenness and specifically barrenness linked to being without Christ.

This brings to mind the scripture passage wherein Christ, being hungry, came to the fig tree (a well accepted symbol of Israel) and finding no fruit on it, said, *“Let no fruit grow on you ever again.”* (Mat 21:18) and indeed, Israel has been spiritually barren for the last 2000 years or so.

But God has pictured that the time will come when all Israel will again be circumcised. Now, you may think, ‘Wait a minute. It is still the Jewish custom to circumcise the male children; always has been.’ Yes, but that’s not the circumcision this event portrays.

Moses wrote in summation of the law: *“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed, heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it. The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore, circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”* (Deut 10:12-16)

And in speaking of the last days, he recorded: *“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all*

the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” (Deut 30:1-6)

And the prophet Jeremiah, pointing to the time of God’s wrath, wrote: *“If you will return, O Israel,’ says the LORD, ‘Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved. And you shall swear, the LORD lives, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory.”*

“For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: ‘Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Jer 4:1-4)

Just as the original Jews who left Egypt were circumcised, the original forefathers had saving faith – Abraham, Isaac and Israel. But, separated from the world and under the law of Moses, their descendants became uncircumcised -- faithless, dedicated to works, walking in the reproach of spiritual barrenness. And though they have, over the centuries, kept the Passover in a manner of speaking, that is, they’ve held to their customs and law, as with the children of Israel in the wilderness, it has all been ‘illegitimate’.

But it has now been about 2000 years (cubits) since the day that the ark (Jesus) cleared the way past death and sin. Therefore, the day is upon us in which their condition will change.

Yes, the days are upon us in which Joshua (which is the same name as Jesus) will fulfill this prophetic picture and figuratively lead Israel across the Jordan on dry ground. That is, He will extend His saving grace to them. The stone of their blindness (see Rom 11:710) will be rolled away and they will see the resurrected Christ. As a consequence, their hearts will become circumcised – radically changed. Saved by faith, they will receive a marvelous outpouring of the Holy Spirit and once again bear much good fruit!