

THE
Gardener's
FIELD

RETHINKING THE HARVEST

DAVE LOUDEN

The Gardener's Field

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The Holy Bible, New King James Version

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Preface

As I prepare this work, I do it in fear and trembling. The matters which I am burdened to share are largely unfamiliar to the majority of believers.

My interest is not to have a doctrinal debate; rather, I am introducing these crucial matters to the saints for their genuine consideration. Understanding these truths is essential for properly addressing the eternal purpose which Scripture reveals for the believer and, collectively, the church at large.

I became a born again believer at age seven. I am now 76 years old. I have been involved in Christian ministry for over 50 years, including more than 30 years of direct pastoral ministry. Additionally, I have heavily participated in church planting, discipleship, and evangelism. During this time I have also authored several books on a number of key topics in Scripture. These topics have been ignored or significantly misunderstood by many in evangelical circles.

For the entirety of my young life I was exposed to the Baptist sphere of teaching, including that of a Baptist Bible college which I attended from 1967-1971. So in my youth I was completely under the influence of a dispensational, pre-tribulation rapture, theological framework. I was told that upon death I would go straight to heaven in order to receive my mansion.

As a young adult I would travel in order to speak and sing in churches. I would speak and sing of heaven, mansions, and, of course, escaping the tribulation! What more could one desire?

Then in my mid-twenties I began to encounter a life changing understanding of the overall message of Scripture. For the first time in my life, the profound scriptural themes were logically assembled and explained in a cohesive manner. This instilled in me a marvellously glorious grandeur and appreciation for God's eternal purpose. What else could one expect from the eternal God?

This new understanding also left me with a *minimum* number of 'spare parts' (that is, contradictions and unanswered questions) left over. I no longer needed massive scriptural twisting and unreasonable assumptions regarding the biblical narrative in order to connect a hypothesized theological point. Thus I began to receive answers to the complex and previously unanswered questions that I had. My questions as a young man were caused by the disconnected and simplistic scriptural view which I was exposed to throughout my previous years in church, as well as the years in the Baptist Bible college.

These helps have served to reset my spiritual understanding and to sharpen my vision regarding God's eternal purpose. I have moved beyond the myth of merely dying to go to heaven to receive a mansion. Progressively, over these past 50 years, this profound understanding has continued to unfold in my spirit as I have pursued the Lord and studied His Word.

In this work, I am burdened to simply address a number of areas which became clearer to me over the years. I would

like to expose some profoundly inaccurate or incomplete teachings which are presented as truth in evangelical circles. I would like to explain how many of these ‘truths’ are actually irreconcilable with the whole counsel of Scripture. Misunderstanding these key themes has had a profoundly negative impact on the individual believer and the church as a whole.

One very specific question which I wrestled with for about 45 years is presented in this work. The answer to this sobering question will no doubt be found by some readers to be disturbing, heart wrenching, and that which one may simply not want to believe. One’s potential reaction could be the consequence of the prevailing diet of sugar-coated views of Scripture, and of God Himself, presented today in most evangelical circles.

I confess before you all that I have greatly struggled to properly present this sobering answer to this major question. I pray that the Holy Spirit would humble us and that we would give an honest and fair consideration to this writing as we consider the contrast between what Scripture actually says and that which the popular evangelical message is on a number of vital matters.

I have been deeply and inwardly pressed to prepare this work. I now trust the Lord to grace us all with a clear and sober realization of the solid truth, as revealed in Scripture.

Dave Loudon

MAY, 2023

Foreword

Many things that we choose to read in our spare time fail to challenge or provoke us to a deeper understanding of the Lord and His ways. This book is different. It bucks the status quo by addressing some of the deeper questions that will arise in our spiritual walk with Jesus if we carefully read Scripture and by the Spirit seek to apply it.

By grace through faith one is mercifully transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus. This event is often referred to as becoming “born again.” But what next? This book considers the eternal purpose of God and the participatory role that the believer has in accomplishing this purpose. If we are honest with ourselves, our willful submission to the Lord’s call on our lives is often sluggish at best. Are there consequences if we fail to say “yes” to the Lord’s promptings? Are all believers equally faithful? If faithfulness in the life of a believer is automatic why does Scripture so frequently exhort the church to overcome?

The Lord, the master Gardener, is seeking a harvest of mature believers and He is going to great lengths to obtain it. In biblical times the grain harvest was accomplished in multiple stages: the firstfruits, the majority harvest, and then the gleanings. This book describes how the future harvest of believers could be accomplished in a similar pattern. Have

you ever considered that your place in His harvest may be linked to your faithfulness in this life? Have you ever considered that salvation is for sinners but rewards are given to saints for faithfulness subsequent to salvation? Are you in the process of acquiring the “fine linen” in order to participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19)? Are you a wise virgin prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, or are you a foolish one consumed with the affairs of this life (Matthew 25)?

If you have never considered weighty questions such as these then prayerfully consider if you should read this book. But don’t just take the author’s words for it. Be a Berean and search the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11). Although I do not yet see everything clearly, the careful consideration of the preceding questions has been extremely beneficial for my spiritual walk.

Rob McLeod

August, 2023



CHAPTER 1

Are Dead Believers in Heaven?

Often when seeking to express heartfelt comfort in situations of great loss and suffering we sense that our well-intended words fall short.

Consider, for example, our struggle to honestly answer the ultimate question: **Where is a loved one, who has just died?** *Would our response be based upon biblical truth, fiction, or a mixture of unfounded hope and wishful thinking?*

The apostle Paul was confronted with a similar question which came to him from the church in Thessalonica. They had received *fake news*, which said that the Lord had already come. Simply try to imagine if that were to happen to us.

Thus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and in an attempt to comfort the church, Paul sent the following note as recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2: “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.”

Paul then proceeded to give several indicators to watch for at Christ’s return. He then concluded with a challenge to the church: “Therefore, brethren, *stand fast and hold the traditions* which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us *everlasting consolation and good hope by grace*, comfort your hearts and establish you in every *good word and work*.” (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17)

Paul called the believers to remember what he had shared with them: “Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?” (2 Thessalonians 2:5)

What did Paul previously tell them by word and by letter? Consider 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with

them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

In Paul’s attempt to satisfy their concerns he gave them some *basic* information just as others may do in similar circumstances. However, we must ask a question here. In the preceding passage did Paul provide an *exhaustive* explanation of *all* details concerning the Lord’s coming? The answer would be clearly *no*. Although what Paul shared was completely true, it is still far short of a thorough explanation.

And yet for most Christians it appears that Paul’s brief explanation in 1 Thessalonians 4 might be the only summary concerning the Lord’s coming which they have ever heard. Sadly, much of the corresponding exegesis of this preceding Scripture is also inaccurate.

My point can be further substantiated when one attends a funeral. Due to various inaccurate teachings, one can hear a travelogue of mixed truth and fiction when describing the current state of the deceased. Statements such as “He has gone onto his reward,” or “He’s now enjoying walking the streets of gold,” or “His new mansion must be incredible,” or “He has no more tears,” are frequently tossed around to the deceased’s loved ones as a form of comfort, inaccurate as they may be.

In such situations, such as at a funeral, we are often pressured to censor or adjust our words due to the fear of saying something insensitive. In this difficult situation the answer as to the current location of the deceased believer is often not substantiated with Scripture.

The Thief and Paradise

At this juncture let us begin our deeper truth discovery by listening in on a brief conversation between Jesus and the (unnamed) thief on the cross. The thief makes a request to Jesus. The request is that Jesus would “remember” him when He would come into His kingdom. Jesus then responds by saying, “Today you shall be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43)

Paradise?

In Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus he writes the following: “Now this, ‘He ascended’ — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?” (Ephesians 4:9) Upon His death, Jesus did not go to hell or to heaven but to Paradise! Paradise is sometimes referred to as the pleasant section of Hades (see Luke 16:19-31). ‘Hades’ is the Greek term for the realm of the dead. (The Old Testament uses the Hebrew term ‘Sheol’ to describe the grave or the abode of the dead.) Scripture indicates that Paradise (contained in Sheol or Hades) is in the lower parts of the earth (Job 7:9 and elsewhere).

Why Does Jesus Say “Paradise” and Christians Say “Heaven”?

This contradiction is not merely a product of scriptural inconsistency rather it is the result of what Peter referred to as the twisting of the Scriptures.

Among many religions of the world, one’s final destination upon death is ubiquitously, and erroneously, referred to as some sort of utopic ‘heaven.’ Our natural thinking easily

drives us to a similar conclusion. However, do we even dare to consider, amidst all the rhetoric in Christendom, that going to heaven upon our death is *not* the eternal plan of the God of the Bible?

Let us now consider several clear scriptural statements regarding the matter of (not) going to heaven immediately upon our death. Let us see if in fact any deceased human has ever gone to heaven!

Just to be clear: When we refer to heaven in this discussion we are referring to the location of God the Father and the primary abode of the supernatural heavenly host. This heaven is sometimes referred to as the *third heaven* or the *heaven of heavens* (Deuteronomy 10:14; Nehemiah 9:6; 2 Corinthians 12:2). The atmosphere and the stellar heaven (containing the moon, planets, and stars) are understood to be the first and second heavens, respectively.

The Clear Testimony of Jesus

John 3:13 “*No one* has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” *Here Jesus clearly states that no one has ascended to heaven.*

This creates a firm timeline. We can see at this point of Jesus’ teaching that no one had gone to heaven.

Consider Acts 2:34 where Peter speaks: “For *David did not ascend into the heavens*, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.”’”

Consider the timing of Peter’s declaration. It was spoken on the day of Pentecost. This was ten days after the ascension of Christ, at which time Paradise was *allegedly* emptied,

according to common evangelical teaching (more to be said about this later).

So here we see Peter clearly stating that David did not ascend into heaven. This presents a great dilemma for those that believe that deceased saints are currently in heaven. Either David was not saved, or Paradise was in fact not emptied at the ascension of Christ.

By these two clear statements from Jesus and Peter we should be able to conclude that deceased believers are not currently residing in heaven and that Paradise was not emptied at Christ's ascension.

We can now perhaps agree with the writer of Proverbs 30:4 who proclaimed: "Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?"

Where Did This Idea of Going to Heaven Originate?

How has Christianity come to such a different answer than Jesus' affirmation? This contrary thinking is due to a number of reasons. One of these reasons is that the early church fathers were guilty of some twisted scriptural assumptions and an incomplete exegesis of Scripture.

Their influence was buttressed in later generations through other teachers and translators. The erroneous use of the English word *mansions* by the *King James Version* translators in John 14:2 has done great damage. This word usage, coupled by the popular commentator John Nelson

Darby's literal hermeneutic emphasis of scriptural exegesis, has led to the literal belief in heavenly mansions awaiting the deceased believer.

In 1909 this perspective was reinforced by key footnotes located in the highly influential *Scofield Reference Bible*. On pages 1,098-1,099 of the footnotes (concerning Luke 16), this reference Bible uses a speculative phrase which says "*It is believed.*" Speculative phrases such as this were used to substantiate the conclusion that Paradise was transferred to heaven at a specific point in time (this time now being postulated as occurring at the ascension of Christ). This perspective is now endorsed by nearly all preachers.

To consider where Paradise is located let us appeal to Luke 16:19-31 on this matter. Since this passage is fairly long I have not included it here. Please first read it carefully and then you will have some context for the ensuing discussion.

We discover from Luke 16 that Paradise is contained in Hades. Luke 16:23 was given an extremely poor treatment by the *King James Version* translators when the word *Hades* was translated as *hell*. More accurate biblical translations render the Greek word *Gehenna* as *hell*. Please note that the word *Gehenna* is not used in the underlying Greek text of Luke 16:19-31.

In Luke 16, Hades is introduced as being composed of two sections. One section is a place of comfort for believers while awaiting the resurrection unto life. The other section is a place of present torment where unbelievers await the resurrection and their appearing at the great white throne judgment. The resurrection is directly and indirectly referred to throughout Scripture. Paul declared in Acts 24:15, "I have hope in God,

which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the *just* and the *unjust*.”

There are two other Scripture references (Ephesians 4:8 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-4) which are used to support the notion of deceased believers going to heaven upon their death. However, we must read the passages for what they say, rather than twisting them to fit another interpretation.

Let’s now consider the portion from 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 which says, “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to *visions* and *revelations* of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a one was caught *up* to the third heaven. And I know such a man — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows — how he was caught *up* into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

Let us focus on the word *up* from the previous verses. The underlying Greek word (har-pad’-zo; see Strong’s Concordance #726) for *up* can refer to a vertical movement but it can also refer to being *plucked* or *caught away*, without the implication of vertical movement.

For an example of the latter usage of the Greek word for *up*, please consider the following Scripture:

Acts 8:39 “Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip *away*, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.”

The Greek word here for *away* is the same Greek word as for *up* (Strong's Concordance #726) in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Philip was caught *away* and was transferred to Azotus. He was transferred to a completely different location but not caught up to some vertical location.

The clear reality is that the translators could have used the word *away* in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Paul's inspired account regarding multiple visions and revelations may have easily happened in the following manner: he could have been *caught up* to the third heaven (verse 2) and *caught away* to Paradise (verse 4) in the lower parts of the earth. Given the compelling testimony of Jesus who taught that no one has ascended to heaven but the Son (John 3:13) and Peter who, on the day of Pentecost, said that David had not ascended into heaven (Acts 2:34) we can quite reasonably conclude that Paradise is not currently within (the third) heaven.

Therefore, contrary to vast amounts of biblical commentary, Scripture teaches that no dead believer has arrived in heaven, nor have they yet received their reward, nor are they walking streets of gold, nor are they living in their mansion, nor are they currently looking down upon us. Rather, the dead are in a waiting place of comfort or in a waiting place of torment. Both groups are awaiting the resurrection — the believers unto life with Christ, and the unbelievers unto the eternal lake of fire.





CHAPTER 2

Where Do We Worship God?

Man often purports the idea that God is everywhere and thereby can be found anywhere. It is true that God can be seen in the creation and theologically it is said that God is omnipresent. Myriads of people have wistfully said that they have felt God in the gentle evening breeze or elsewhere in some poignant moment. Despite these purported spiritual experiences vast numbers of people are completely disconnected from actually being in touch with God, hearing Him speak, or personally communing with Him.

If we desire to connect with the one and only Creator we need to understand where He is, and thus where we must go to be with Him. Where does He reside or make Himself available to man? Most people would declare that God is in

heaven. However, if He is truly omnipresent where can we meet Him while we live on earth?

When looking for anyone, we must begin by identifying their correct address. We may then determine how to get there and then proceed to the correct destination.

Where Did People Meet with God in the Old Testament?

Deuteronomy 12:13-14 says: “Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.”

As recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures, when the nation of Israel went into the good land there was to be a pre-determined and unique geographical location for God’s presence. His presence was to be in the tabernacle, at the place of the mercy seat between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. There God would dwell and meet with them.

The portable tabernacle, as well as Solomon’s fixed temple, consisted of three sections: the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. The mercy seat was located within the holy of holies section of the tabernacle. *Remember this latter location, as it will become incredibly significant when we later consider where God meets believers in these New Testament times — the church age.*

Scripture records that God clearly delineated to Israel where, when, and how they could meet with Him:

Exodus 25:9 “According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.”

Exodus 25:22 “And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.”

Deuteronomy 12:1-14 “These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things. But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the first-born of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. You shall not at all do as we are doing here today — every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes — for as yet you have not come to the rest

and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.”

With the preceding words the Lord revealed to Israel the unique place where He was to be found, and where Israel was to worship Him. There was to be no other place. All other high places, that is, the other locations to supposedly meet with God, were to be torn down.

Where Do New Testament Believers Worship the God of the Bible?

Hundreds of years before Jesus’ death the Jewish prophet, Ezekiel, was inspired by the Lord to write: “I will put My Spirit *within you* and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.” (Ezekiel 36:27)

In John 4 we read of the interaction between Jesus and the woman at the well: “The woman said to Him [Jesus], ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will *neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father*. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when *the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’” (John 4:19-24)

Other crucial Scriptures concerning this topic are as follows:

John 3:6 “That which is *born of the flesh is flesh*, and that which is born of the *Spirit is spirit*.”

1 Corinthians 6:17 “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

Ephesians 4:1-3 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Romans 1:9 “For God is my witness, *whom I serve with my spirit* in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.”

The following verse from John 7 reveals a very crucial key in understanding the complete provision of Christ as the Seed. He is our everything!

“But this He [Jesus] spoke concerning the *Spirit*, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:39)

Please note: The translators of the *King James Version* supplied the word *given* as they missed the revelation being presented in the passage. (Italicized words in the *King James Version* and *New King James Version* Bibles indicate “expressions in the original language that require clarification by additional English words.”) I believe that the translators were in error with supplying the word *given* here.

Why? When Jesus spoke these words the *Spirit* (see Romans 8:9 or Philippians 1:19) was “not yet” because Jesus had neither been resurrected nor glorified (Luke 24:26). Please observe that the Spirit of God was present at the beginning of creation (Genesis 1:1-2). After Jesus’ death, resurrection, and glorification the *Spirit* was now given, because Jesus was now glorified. Recall that the Holy Spirit was breathed into the disciples by Christ on the same day He was resurrected (John 20:22). Contrary to prevailing interpretations of John 14:2-3, Jesus was going to the cross to fulfill God’s preparation to become the *Spirit* as the complete divine Seed. He is now producing many sons according to the Seed kind.

Why Was the Spirit “Not Yet”? (John 7:39)

The Spirit being “not yet” simply indicates a further step was required in the complete process in Christ’s full preparation as the unique Seed. This process included the steps of His incarnation, perfect sinless human living, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and finally, glorification. By Christ’s glorification, the full preparation was completed in order to

produce the *Spirit*. Jesus, then in resurrection and glorification, became the completed Seed as the life-giving Spirit.

An early Biblical picture of the Messiah (Jesus) becoming the life giving Spirit is portrayed in Exodus 30 where we are given the instructions for preparing the holy anointing oil. The preparation of the holy anointing oil required a hin (more than five litres) of olive oil as well as other ingredients (myrrh, cinnamon, etc). This oil was used to anoint the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, the altar of incense, the various utensils, and so on. The anointing of the oil on these objects declared the tabernacle and its objects of service as holy, set apart to the service of the Lord. Aaron and his sons, serving as the priests, were also to be anointed with the same oil. Now we, as priests in the new covenant (1 Peter 2:9), are set apart (that is, declared holy) by the Holy Spirit who indwells us as believers!

The title *Christ* means anointed. Jesus Christ was therefore prepared through all of the different phases (including resurrection and glorification) which He passed through in order to become the life giving Spirit. He is our everything, not just our Redeemer. He is the Seed, reproducing Himself in His redeemed believers, by means of the now completed Seed kind.

The divine nature and life in this Seed will mature and bear fruit according to His image and likeness which is exactly according to this Seed kind. Hebrews 5:8 says: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Thus Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers.

Romans 8:29 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Romans 11:16 “For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.”

Galatians 3:16 “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your *Seed*,’ who is *Christ*.”

Consider This!

The resurrected Christ now has a glorified body and is fully complete. In His eternal attributes He is the eternal God. He is however no longer limited by a physical, mortal body but rather possesses a glorified body. Therefore, as the eternal God (Father, Son, and Spirit) He can now actually make His home in us, by reason of the fact that He is omnipresent. John 14:23 records Jesus declaring: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and *We will come to him and make Our home with him.*”

Also, please consider the following verses:

John 17:23 “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

1 Corinthians 15:45 “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.”

John 4:24 “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Here we gaze on a profound fact. Jesus Christ is the *God-man* (that is, He is fully God and fully man). In His

resurrection and glorification He brought the redeemed, regenerated, and yet-to-be resurrected and glorified *humanity* into union with the triune God. He raised us up together and made us *sit together* in the heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*. (Ephesians 2:6)

The Completed Preparation

John 7:39 “But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet *glorified* [*Strong’s Concordance #1392*].”

Now Glorified

Acts 3:13 “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, *glorified* [*Strong’s Concordance #1392*] His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.”

John 20:17,19-22 “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”’ Then, *the same day at evening*, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He *breathed* on them, and said to them, ‘*Receive the Holy Spirit.*’”

The Old Testament tabernacle, in part, symbolized the coming reality of the spiritual tabernacle. As mentioned earlier, the tabernacle consisted of three sections: the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. These sections directly correspond to the three parts (body, soul and spirit) of man who in turn is also made in God's image of three parts: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Also, note that the ark which Noah was instructed by the Lord to build was comprised of three levels. Genesis 6:16 says: "You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks."

1 Thessalonians 5:23 "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Also the indwelling, life-giving Spirit is the fulfillment of what was prophesied in Ezekiel 36:2: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

Notice: Redeemed man is instructed to worship only at the place directed by God. This location is **no longer Jerusalem**. Rather, it is in our spirit which is born of the Lord's Spirit (John 3:6) and is also joined to His Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17).

John 4:23 "But *the hour is coming, and now is*, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."

Our worship of, and service to, God *must* originate from the place which He has chosen, not from any place which we choose. That unique place is His Spirit, which is joined

to our spirit. Our spirit is joined with His at salvation — this occurs when we repent and believe in Christ.

If the source of our work is not via His Spirit, then our work will not pass the testing at the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:13). Our lives will not have then produced the wedding garment which in turn is produced via the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:8). I will say much more about this later.

Finally, in Revelation we discover the *Spirit* addressing the churches. Consider the following examples:

Revelation 2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

Revelation 2:11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Revelation 2:17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”

Revelation 2:29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Revelation 3:6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Revelation 3:13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Revelation 3:22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Revelation 22:17 “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

Addressing Our God!

Consider the following Scripture:

John 14:8-9 “Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father?”’”

John 14:16 “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.”

John 14:26 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

John 15:26 “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”

John 16:7 “Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage *that I go away*; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”

John 20:22 “And when He [Jesus] had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Please note that the preceding verse demonstrates that Jesus did not say that He must go to heaven in order for the Spirit to come.

Our confusion in addressing our God is clearly manifested in our speech and verbal prayer. Statements such as the following express our lack of clarity: “*Jesus had to go to*

heaven, so the Spirit could come.” This articulation clearly reveals an improper understanding of the God of the Bible.

Please catch this: On the evening of Christ’s resurrection and subsequent glorification, and after He returned from the Father, He joined the brothers in a locked room. The Holy Spirit now came to the disciples in the closed room via Christ’s breath. Christ was there in the room with the disciples, not in heaven sending the Spirit from a distance. He merely breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit issued from the resurrected, glorified, and present Christ.

God the Father sent the Spirit in the Son’s name, which is equal to the Spirit coming with and in the Son. This expresses the eternal unity of the triune God.

Removing High Places

The preceding discussion strongly urges us to identify and tear down all of the ‘high places’ in our lives which we elevate above the Lord. These high places may be ambitions issuing from the actions and desires of the flesh, man’s traditions, self, and pagan influence. These must be removed until we only exalt Christ, drawing our life and direction from Him. He is now *the life giving Spirit*, joined to our spirit. Truly, many high places must fall.

1 Corinthians 15:45 “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

2 Corinthians 3:17 “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

1 Corinthians 6:17 “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

Ephesians 4:3 “Endeavouring to keep the *unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace.”

2 Corinthians 10:5 “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 12:13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

Galatians 5:17 “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”

Ephesians 2:18 “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

Ephesians 4:4 “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.”

Philippians 1:27 “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in *one spirit*, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

1 Peter 1:22 “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth *through the Spirit* in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.”

Romans 2:29 “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, *in the Spirit*, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Romans 16:17-18 “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Titus 3:8-11 “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”

Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him *to whom we must give account.*”

Romans 1:9 “For God is my witness, whom *I serve with my spirit* in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.”

God's unique place where He has chosen to meet with us in the church age is now in our spirit, which is joined to His Spirit. This is the only place where we will find Him. It is through the Spirit we are to live, move, and have our being. Completing the good works which He has ordained for us can only be accomplished via His power and motivation.



CHAPTER 3

Future Considerations

At this juncture we will examine the matter of the various locations of God's throne as recorded in Scripture. God's throne is a crucial focal point in the administration of various events in His divine economy and eternal plans. Lord willing, this study shall grant further clarity for us as to the actual location of future events.

Specifically, let us identify the various locations where we see God's throne at His Parousia (second coming). These crucial matters involve the consummation of the age as He brings in the eternal state. In the following pages I will substantiate the locations of God's throne with extensive Scripture. However, at this juncture I will simply present the locations in chronological order:

1. We see the throne of God in the third heavens.
2. We see the overcoming saints caught up to the throne of God in heaven.
3. We see the throne of God at the bema (the judgment seat of Christ) in the air.
4. We see the throne of God set up on the earth. The throne of God at this point is set up for the judgment of the living nations at the end of the tribulation.
5. God's throne, during the Millennial Kingdom, should be in Jerusalem where Christ begins with the judgment of the remaining living nations.
6. We see the throne of God present at the great white throne judgment which occurs at the end of the Millennium. It is difficult to establish its location for the following reason, as recorded in Revelation 20:11: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them."
7. In eternity, the throne of God will be located in the New Jerusalem which will be located on the new earth.

A careful consideration of the preceding points should assist us in accurately locating the throne of God at various future (eschatological) events. We will see that it is incorrect to assume that the throne of God is always in heaven.

In this study we will not find Scripture teaching that the throne of God is relocated back to heaven after coming to earth. Neither are God's people located in heaven for eternity but, rather, in the New Jerusalem which will be located on the new earth.

Regarding Martyred Saints

There have been many martyrs throughout the church age (the time since the ascension of Christ). Concerning these believers, consider what the first part of Revelation 20:4 says: “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God...” This portion refers to those martyred during the church age.

Martyrs during the tribulation

Revelation 20:4 continues: “...who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This portion of the verse refers to the saints who were martyred during the tribulation and are seen standing on the sea of glass (Revelation 15:2).

Some Clarification

We must be clear that the tribulation is not seven years. Rather a seven year agreement is made by the ‘Anti-Christ’ which is broken at the midpoint. Then there is the three and one half years of intense tribulation.

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

Matthew 24:15 & 21 “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand)... [21] 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.”

The Christ Rejecting People

We have now arrived at a crucial juncture in our study and with it comes an intriguing question. Have you ever considered *which gospel* is actually being proclaimed during the tribulation?

The ‘gospel of grace’ is the presumed gospel to be preached in the tribulation; however, this presumption is in error. This has brought immeasurable confusion and misrepresentation in Christian teaching.

In searching the Scripture, we can identify only one gospel being proclaimed during the tribulation. That gospel is referred to as the “everlasting gospel” (Revelation 14:6) and not the gospel of grace or the gospel of the kingdom.

Revelation 14:6-7 “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the *everlasting gospel* to preach to those who dwell on the earth — to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people — saying, with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’”

This matter of the everlasting gospel is essentially untouched in the majority of Christian teaching. However,

to rightly divide the word of truth we must clarify what this everlasting gospel is and who is proclaiming it.

Multimedia religious franchises such as the *Left Behind* series have propagated a web of doctrinal errors that have ensnared the masses. We must see that this everlasting gospel (yet to be preached) is *completely* different from the gospel of grace, the latter now being preached by the church during the current age.

At a certain time in the future a particular message, referred to as the everlasting gospel, will be proclaimed (again, see Revelation 14:6-7). We would be well served to identify its content and its proclaimer.

People will begin to hear the proclamation of the everlasting gospel *by means of an angel*. By reading Revelation 13-14 we can ascertain that this will occur around the time of the command to worship the beast and to take his mark.

The basic contents of this gospel are fairly straightforward: (i) Fear God, (ii) Give Him glory, (iii) Worship God, and (iv) Do not take the mark or worship the beast.

Please Notice: There are no items listed in this everlasting gospel which are the current essentials of the gospel of grace. That is, Revelation 14:6-7 does not mention the blood of Christ, being born again, or repenting. Neither has an angel ever been tasked to succinctly proclaim the gospel of grace in the church age.

Are We Confused Regarding the Nations?

At the end of the tribulation the living nations, composed now of those who survived the tribulation, are gathered to their judgment on earth. Among them will be some who

responded to the proclamation of the everlasting gospel. These ones feared God, gave Him glory, and worshipped Him. These people did not take the mark of the beast.

These God-fearers are those who are selected from the nations as sheep who, during the time of the tribulation, may even have risked their lives to take care of the Lord's brothers during the tribulation (Matthew 25:31-46). Note that I address this topic more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Now these brothers of the Lord are not uniquely the Jews, as is frequently purported, but are some of the Lord's born again believers. These believers are *not* saved during the tribulation but are sent there by the Lord as they did not overcome (that is, they failed to come to spiritual maturity) during their life. They have failed to produce the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11; Revelation 19:8). They lack fruitfulness and their supposed good works are not approved by the Lord.

So the believers in the tribulation consist of two categories: they are either those who were currently living at the time of the Lord's Parousia and were unready (not mature) at His return, or they are believers who were resurrected from the dead near the time of the midnight cry (Matthew 25:6) and also had not come to maturity during their lives.

The condition of the overcoming saints at the time of the Lord's return is represented in Scripture in multiple ways. For example, please consider the teaching in Matthew 24:40-42. Here the picture is given of two men working in the field and two women grinding seed at the mill. Typical Christianity teaches that the one taken from each pair was saved and the one left behind was lost.

This serious error is the result of an oversimplified biblical model consisting only of the ‘saved’ and ‘lost.’ Actually, the person taken at the mill and the person taken away in the field represent the living overcomers. They are the firstfruits of the Lord’s harvest. Again, the individuals left behind in the tribulation are believers who neither had maturity, nor the wedding garment, at the time of the secret rapture. This rapture of the firstfruits occurs just prior to the beginning of the tribulation. So, Matthew 24:40-42 should be seen then as describing the rapture only of the living firstfruits of the Lord’s complete harvest.

The immature believers are assigned to the tribulation by the will of our loving heavenly Father for the express purpose of maturing them. Recall Hebrews 12:6 tells us “For whom the LORD loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives.” Also, 1 Corinthians 11:32 says, “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

Some Sobering Musings

Do you believe that your spiritual maturation process is optional? Upon death, do you believe that the Lord simply leaves you ‘where you are’ in maturity for eternity? Perhaps you believe that any immaturity will be dealt with instantaneously at Christ’s return and your bodily resurrection. Caution: please do not confuse the instant glorification of the resurrection *body*, at the appearing of Jesus, with the necessary and progressive transformation of the *soul*, from glory to glory, by the growth of the divine Seed in you.

The great lack of truth in this area is largely due to the propagation of the narrow belief that one is simply saved or lost, destined either for heaven or hell, with not much needing to be accomplished in the interim.

The free gift of eternal life (salvation by faith or becoming born again) is just the beginning of our walk. Yes, being born again is absolutely a game changer in that we become children of God at this time and we are no longer of our previous father, the devil. We are also no longer under God's eternal wrath nor are we destined for the lake of fire. What a gift! But this is just the first step into maturing from a child to a full man in Christ (Ephesians 4:13-14; 2 Corinthians 13:11). When we are saved we still need the full revelation of God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 2:10; Ephesians 3:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 2 Timothy 2:9) which occurs as we grow in Him. The majority of the church has not been properly instructed regarding the need for holy, purposeful, and overcoming living *subsequent to being born again*. This is a great failure of teachers!

Philippians 1:6 "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has *begun* a good work in you will *complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*." This is according to Jesus' eternal plan; the conforming of us all to His image and likeness.

Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

If we are willing to look, we will see that Scripture teaches that the Lord's redeemed need to become fully mature believers — not just positionally but experientially. Therefore, a vital and sobering question must now be addressed. This will be our focus for much of the subsequent material in this book.



CHAPTER 4

A Sobering Question

Recognizing God's eternal plan that every believer becomes spiritually mature, what happens if a believer dies without coming to full growth in this life?

I actually posed a similar question to a number of major evangelical Christian teachers located in the USA. None of them provided me with an answer that satisfied the depth of the Scriptures. Their general response was along the lines of “When we see Jesus, everything will be fixed!”

Perhaps you have never considered this question. Somehow our thinking has led us to conclude that all of our spiritual lack will simply be solved when we die and see Jesus. Saints, if that were the case, then God could have written His plans on something the size of a note in a Chinese fortune cookie.

Seriously, the majority of the Bible would be pointless if God's eternal purpose were so brief and simple. Nearly all of the rich writings of Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, would be a complete waste. The crucial subject matter of dying to self, progressive growth (sanctification), sacrificing for the kingdom, building the church life, etc., would be of no import if all of our shortcomings and the consequences of our distracted living are merely rectified in the twinkling of an eye! Paul's travailing "in birth" until Christ would be formed in the lives of believers (Galatians 4:19) is a pointless endeavour if Christ simply fixes everything with no questions asked. A universally recognised pastor once declared that many believers would look something like Swiss cheese, full of holes for all eternity.

Please consider: Does the resurrected, glorified, and ascended Christ look like spiritual Swiss cheese? Saints, the necessity of being conformed to the image of Christ is not a suggestion in Scripture it is a major part of God's eternal purpose. The Lord will complete it through His unfolding and unstoppable process.

Job 23:13 "But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does."

Scripture contains a stunningly thorough answer to my preceding question; however, mainstream evangelical Christian teaching has ignored or nullified it for many reasons. Again, the simply 'saved or lost' model of biblical interpretation has left no room for opening the grand plan of the Lord regarding this profound matter.

We must now discover the mandatory process, planned by God for every believer, to successfully bring us to spiritual maturity.

As we begin, please consider that it is typically *believers* who are being addressed by the Spirit to overcome. A classic portion of Scripture in this regard is found in Revelation 2-3. These particular chapters are *not* written to unbelievers but rather to believers in actual church fellowships. The audience that is being exhorted to overcome needs to be discerned from the context of the corresponding Scripture. For example, in 1 John 5:5 (see below) overcoming is in the context of becoming born again, whereas other passages (Revelation 2-3; Revelation 21:7) are written to believers, instructing them to overcome in their walk *subsequent* to salvation.

1 John 5:5 “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Revelation 21:7 “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

I would strongly encourage you to read the exhortation given to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.

How Shall We Overcome in Order to Reign in the Kingdom?

Overcoming is not accomplished by trying to keep a law of man, or religious regulations based on self-effort. Rather, the distinctives of an overcomer are fully able to be produced in the life of any born again believer by the Spirit working within.

These distinctives are properly produced via the life of the divine Seed (Christ) through the spiritual growth and

maturation that it (He) produces in good 'soil.' The end result will be full development and fruitfulness in our lives. This in part will be evidenced by our righteous acts.

Mark 4:26-29 — "And He said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'"

Like any seed, the life it produces is exactly according to its seed kind. Apple seeds produce apples and corn seeds produce corn. Christ's Seed in the believer will reproduce everything He is by His life. This includes spiritual maturity, and the fine linen garment developed through the visible, righteous acts of the saints.

Seeds have a capacity to be dormant until they are placed in an environment conducive to growth. With the *proper environment* (suitable soil temperature, sunlight, and moisture) they will sprout. They also require a proper environment in order to *continue to develop and to bear fruit* according to their seed kind. Similarly, the Seed (Christ) will only produce fruit in the believer as we regularly feed on His living word, drink of Him as the living water, walk in the light as He is in the light, and submit to His life in our spirit as He directs us.

Submitting to the Spirit's anointing and empowering will produce the good works which He has planned for us to participate in (Ephesians 2:10). We will then properly conduct His kingdom work, which then results in the right-

eous acts that become the wedding garment. In nature, every living thing reproduces according to its kind. So it is in the spiritual realm.

The activity empowered by the Spirit in our spirit is completely different from our 'good ideas' merely propelled by fleshly zeal and natural ability. The Spirit produces the fruit which will be approved at the judgment seat of Christ.

This matter of our life emanating from Christ was first pictured in Genesis when God took a rib from Adam in order to build a woman. This picture reveals to us that the only thing which will be approved by Him is that which His life produces.

In our desire to rightly divide the word of truth let us further consider the two different types of overcoming recorded in Scripture. One type of overcoming is accomplished at the point of salvation (again, see 1 John 5:5 or Colossians 1:13-14) via grace and saving faith. This begins our walk as a child of God. A second type of overcoming is evidenced when faithful believers submit to the maturing process of the Lord. These ones will reign with Christ in the millennial age, as a kingdom reward (for example, see Revelation 20:4; 2 Timothy 2:12; Matthew 24:45-51; Matthew 25:14-30). Additional Scripture will also be presented a bit later.

We are not at all minimizing saving faith, rather we are highlighting the distinction between saving faith and the receiving of a reward based upon Godly living. These are gained on different bases. Salvation is for sinners; rewards are for saints. One is purely of grace; the other hinges upon job performance (that is, one's submission to the Lord in this life and the accomplishment of approved good works).

Let's further consider some verses describing the two different types of overcoming:

1. Salvation by Grace through Faith

Titus 3:5 “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

The preceding verses highlight wonderful news! As part of the free gift of eternal life, all genuinely born again believers will, in eternity, forever inherit all things in God's eternal kingdom.

2. Rewards for Faithful Saints (Overcoming Believers)

We must understand, dear saints, that believers will not all receive an equal reward (Matthew 25:14-30). Although all believers are eternally saved, not all will qualify for the kingdom reward — that of reigning with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom for one thousand years on the restored earth (Revelation 20:4-6). Nor will those who fail to overcome in this life participate in the wedding feast (Revelation 19:6-9).

Consider again a brief glimpse at the reason for which we were created and saved: Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Upon believing, the Lord has good works for us to conduct in an approved manner. If we do as He has asked us His plan is to reward us. Our work is not to repay the Lord for our salvation! Our salvation is a free gift; it is not expected to be paid back in some sort of installment plan over the rest of our lives.

Early in his walk, the disciple Peter told the Lord that he was committing to be a faithful follower of Him. From studying the exchange of words between Peter and Christ it seems as if Peter was subtly asking, “What do I get in return for this commitment?” Please carefully observe Peter’s words and the Lord’s response as recorded in Luke 18:28-30. “Then Peter said, ‘See, we have left all and followed You.’ So He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.’”

In response to Peter, the Lord Jesus immediately told him that commitment in this life will produce rewards now *and* later. Please note that Jesus did not rebuke Peter for possibly desiring something in return for a life of faithful service.

Here is some additional Scripture concerning the topic of receiving rewards for faithfully serving in this life:

Luke 22:28-30 “But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

2 Timothy 4:7-8 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid

up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Revelation 22:12 “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”

Matthew 25:23-30 “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents. For to every one who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

This matter of the future reigning of overcoming believers is a crucial truth. In order to open the understanding of God’s overall plan this truth needs to be presented to, and understood by, the dear saints. If this is understood by believers it may produce a life testimony similar to our Lord’s: “Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” (Hebrews 12:2). These overcoming believers will

then be qualified to sit at the table of the marriage supper (Revelation 19:6-9).

The Gathering of the Firstfruits of the Saints at the Lord's Second Coming

The events occurring at the Parousia (the second coming of Jesus) is a sequential event. It's somewhat like getting a package delivered by a courier. The courier will send you a tracking notice indicating if and when the package left the sorting facility, where it currently is, and when it will arrive.

The sequential nature of harvesting is described in Scripture as follows: first you gather the firstfruits, then the majority of the harvest, and then finally the gleanings.

The sequential nature of reaping a crop is also observed in the spiritual realm with the eventual ingathering of believers. Our focus at the moment will have to do with the gathering of the firstfruits. The firstfruits of the Lord's spiritual crop are the overcoming believers. The firstfruits will be gathered in the initial phase of the harvest. As mentioned earlier in this book, the firstfruits are composed of two groups of believers. They are as follows:

1. The overcoming saints that are alive on the earth at the beginning of the Lord's Parousia.
2. The overcoming saints who have previously died and are in Paradise (see our previous discussion) awaiting the resurrection.

The living and overcoming saints are taken secretly just prior to the beginning of the tribulation, as described in Matthew 24:40-42. The person taken at the mill and the person taken away in the field represent the living overcomers.

They are part of the firstfruits of the Lord's harvest. The individuals left behind to enter the tribulation are believers who neither had maturity, nor the wedding garment, at the time of the secret rapture. The dead believers will be resurrected (as described in Matthew 25:1-13) and those who are already mature at this juncture will then be taken to the third heavens in a secret manner, at Jesus' Parousia (Revelation 12:5). Those believers who are unprepared, indicated by the lack of oil in their vessel (Matthew 25:8), will be sent into the tribulation to complete their maturity.

Contrary to common teaching, the ones who are taken in Matthew 24:40-42 are the rewarded overcomers, *not simply the saved ones*. The ones left behind have not met the requirements of spiritual maturity and the gaining of a wedding garment.

The living overcomers at the Lord's return are then seen in Revelation 14:1-5 on heavenly Mount Zion. Please note that they are referred to as "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" in verse 4 and that they are "redeemed from among men."

In Matthew 25:1-13, the believers that have died (or fallen asleep, verse 5) over the millennia are referred to as ten virgins. At the midnight cry (verse 6) all of these believers are resurrected, indicating the coming of the bridegroom. However, contrary to popular thought, not all of those who are resurrected will immediately be caught up from the dead, or *raptured*, upon their resurrection.

(By the way, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) popularized the word 'rapture' and is referred to by many as the father of the rapture. Despite John Nelson Darby popularizing the term rapture he did not invent the doctrine of the rapture.

The rapture is an actual, future biblical event described as being “caught up” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).)

A Verse-by-Verse Consideration of Matthew 25:1-12

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins aptly describes God’s real-time process of bringing all believers to spiritual maturity! Let’s look at this parable in verse-by-verse detail. (My commentary on these verses will be italicized immediately following each verse)

1 “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”

Here we see that all present are virgins, all had lamps, and all went out to meet the bridegroom. That they are virgins implies that they are believers. They are all planning to meet the bridegroom (albeit with different levels of preparedness).

2 “Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.”

All of the virgins experienced God’s grace; however, their conduct was noted and all must bear personal responsibility.

3 “Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them.”

The spirits of the foolish were alive but they were careless. They did not commit to having their soul transformed and to walk filled by the Holy Spirit. Consider Proverbs 20:27 which says: “The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart.”

4 “But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.”

During their lives, the wise responded to the Lord and desired for His transforming work to change them from glory

to glory. Thus oil was supplied in their vessel, as well as their lamp, throughout their lives.

5 “But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.”

This represents the majority of the dear saints, both wise and foolish, who have died by the time the Lord begins His Parousia.

6 “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.”

This signifies that all virgins (believers) are resurrected at the same time. An important observation here is that dead believers and dead unbelievers are resurrected approximately one thousand years apart (Revelation 20:5-6). So, one cannot claim that the five foolish virgins are resurrected unbelievers.

What does the trimming of the lamps refer to? We are not explicitly told; however, all of the virgins did it. This at least hints at some form of final preparation for meeting the bridegroom.

8 “And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’”

Here we read a dialogue between the wise and foolish virgins. One group is going to request oil from the other, only to be refused. The wise do not have the responsibility (or ability) to supply what is lacking in the foolish.

We should agree that we are never told in Scripture to buy salvation, as it is a free gift. However, we discover the saints in Laodicea are counselled to buy! Revelation 3:18-19 says

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.”

10 “And while they went to *buy*, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.”

The foolish virgins go into the tribulation time to buy the oil (more will be said concerning this later). The wise virgins who were ready go into the wedding feast with the bridegroom. This is an exclusive time together as the door is shut.

11 “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ 12 But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’”

After paying the price in the tribulation to buy the needed oil the foolish virgins return and request entrance to the wedding feast. They are refused.

A Time Gap

To help unlock some of these truths in our understanding we must acknowledge that there *can be* a time gap between the resurrection, and that of being caught up, or raptured. Unfortunately for most believers today the words *resurrection* and *rapture* represent synonymous events.

As an example of this distinction, consider the Lord’s experience subsequent to His resurrection. Jesus was walking around on earth for *40 days* before His ascension to heaven (Acts 1:3).

The mature saints (referred to as the five wise virgins in Matthew 25:1-13) that are among the resurrected believers will *very* shortly be caught up to the throne in the third heavens (Revelation 12:5). However, there is some indication of a brief delay in Matthew 25:1-13. One event contributing to the delay is that the ten virgins all rose and trimmed their lamps. Second, while the five unwise virgins went out to buy some oil the bridegroom came and those five wise virgins who were ready “went in with him to the wedding” (Matthew 25:10).

Where is the Oil Located?

I have now mentioned multiple times that the unwise virgins will need to buy oil. This ‘purchase’ is accomplished during the intense three and one half year tribulation. But where is the oil located and from whom is it purchased? The prophet Zechariah foreshadowed the answer and the apostle John expounded on these details in Revelation. Consider the following:

Zechariah 4:11 “These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.”

Zechariah 4:14 “So he said, ‘These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.’”

Revelation 11:3-4 “And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.”

Please note that one thousand two hundred and sixty days is forty two months. This is equivalent to three and one half years, the length of the tribulation.

Revelation 11:7-11 “When they [the two witnesses] finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless

pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, *where also our Lord was crucified*. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.”

In Revelation 11:3 & 8 we identify the source of the oil and its location. The source is the “two witnesses” of God and the location must be Jerusalem “where also our Lord was crucified.” Jerusalem will be the hotbed of the tribulation. There is some debate as to the identity of the two witnesses (prophets). It seems reasonable that they may be Elijah and Moses given that Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets, respectively, and whose teachings Christ fulfilled. Moses and Elijah were present with Jesus at the mount of transfiguration as His glory was briefly revealed to Peter, James, and John. Furthermore, God dealt with Moses and Elijah in a unique way: Moses died and God hid his body (Deuteronomy 34:5-6) and Elijah was transferred to the other realm by God (2 Kings 2:11). This was possibly accomplished so that they could be the unique witnesses in the tribulation. While the churches are the lampstands during this age (Revelation 1:20), it is the faithful testimony of the two witnesses during the tribulation

that will be life-giving oil and light for the saints (the unwise virgins) who are enduring and maturing at that time.

An Aside: The Number Twelve

In Scripture, numbers matter. As we read through the Bible, we see that numbers are used to enumerate quantities (say length of time, length of objects, weight, populations) or to symbolically represent spiritual realities. Certain numbers appear more frequently in Scripture than others with ramifications needing to be considered. Much has been written about the significance of numbers such as three, six, seven, and forty.

Given our discussion on the previous pages let's consider the number twelve. It appears frequently in Scripture. Think of the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve disciples, and that twelve is a factor of 144,000 (Revelation 7). It seems that twelve can figuratively be used to represent the Lord's people.

Now note that twelve can be represented as the sum of two and ten. The two in the field and the two at the mill (Matthew 24:40-42) represent the minority of the saints who are alive at the beginning of the Lord's Parousia. The ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) represent the saints (no doubt the majority) throughout the ages who have previously died.

The Male Child

Leaving our discussion of numbers behind for now, recall that the foolish dead saints are resurrected at the very same time as the wise saints. However, not being mature, the foolish ones will then be advised to go to those who sell the oil which they are presently lacking in their vessel. The now-resurrected wise saints are allowed into the wedding.

The wise ones are soon caught up to the third heavens and are represented in Revelation 12:4-5 as the “male child.”

Saints, please consider the symbolism of the male child in Revelation 12. The male child is not Jesus. Please consider my reasoning for just a moment. In Revelation 1:1 and Revelation 4:1 the book of Revelation is referred to as a book of signs which must yet come to pass. In other words, Revelation is a prophecy of future events, not of past happenings.

Revelation 1:1 “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants — things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.”

Revelation 4:1 “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’”

When the book of Revelation was written by the disciple John on the Isle of Patmos (around 95 AD) Jesus had already ascended to heaven some sixty years earlier.

Note that this male child is brought forth from the “woman.” This male child then represents the stronger (overcoming) part of the woman. In Scripture women are referred to as the “weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). The next chapter will delve deeply into a study of the *woman* and *child*.



CHAPTER 5

A Cast of Characters: Two Women, a Child, the Nations, and the Gleanings

The prominent American theologian and professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, J. Dwight Pentecost, taught that the woman in Revelation 12 refers to Israel. His reasoning was based on his belief in the pre-tribulation rapture theory which postulates that *all* believers are caught up *prior* to the tribulation. His reasoning was also due to the alleged lack of Scripture referring to the church as a woman.

I would like to propose that the Scripture does, at multiple times, refer to the church as a woman. Let's consider this topic now.

It is said that in the book of Genesis all the seeds of the divine truth are found. Indeed, in Genesis 2 we discover a very profound seed. In this account we find that Adam is put to sleep and out of his side a rib is taken. From that rib a woman is built and presented to Adam as a perfect counterpart. Besides Adam simply receiving a bride, what is this event picturing? Recall the crucifixion of Christ. On the cross His side was also opened and out flowed blood and water. This signified the redemption of man and our opportunity to receive the life of God. Born again men and women could now become His bride.

At the end of the Bible (Revelation 21:2) we also see a bride prepared for her husband. The husband is Christ and the church is His bride. Although the word ‘woman’ is not strictly used here it is most obvious that the bride is a woman, which in turn is the church.

Please consider several passages regarding this theme:

Genesis 2:22 “Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a *woman*, and He brought her to the man.”

Revelation 12:1 “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.”

Revelation 12:4 “His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the *woman* who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.”

Revelation 12:6 “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.”

Revelation 12:13 “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the *woman* who gave birth to the male child.”

Revelation 12:16 “But the earth helped the *woman*, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.”

Revelation 12:17 “And the dragon was enraged with the *woman*, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Revelation 21:2 “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a *bride* adorned for her husband.”

Revelation 21:9 “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the *bride*, the Lamb’s *wife*.”

Revelation 22:17 “And the Spirit and the *bride* say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

We conclude that, on a number of occasions, the church is truly pictured in Scripture as a woman.

The Other Woman

In Scripture and in life experience we observe that Satan often presents a counterfeit duplicate in an attempt to twist and disrupt what the Lord seeks. As we observe the woman as the bride of Christ, we see Satan’s tactic also operating here. While reading from Genesis to Revelation we discover that there are actually *two* women emerging in the text. They

originate from vastly different seed kinds. The one woman is the church, the bride of Christ, and she originates from the Seed which is Christ (Galatians 3:16). The other woman is the harlot, Satan's counterfeit seed (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 17), manifested through the ages in the form of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, all hidden in a cloak of religion.

This counterfeit and Satanic woman is seen riding on a beast and is referred to as the mother of harlots:

Revelation 17:5 "And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

(As an aside, have you ever wondered who the harlots are? It's a sobering study.)

More Insight Concerning the Male Child

Now back to Revelation 12. In verse 11 we read "And *they* overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and *they* did not love their lives to the death." Question: who does "they" in this verse refer to?

Answer: Since no other identifiable group is seen in this text, "they" in Revelation 12:11 refers back to the male child in Revelation 12:1-6.

Now recall some of our earlier discussion. The male child is representative of the stronger part of the woman. The woman represents *all* of the dead believers over the millennia. These overcoming saints, represented by the male child, are saints who have previously died and are now resurrected and caught up to the throne in the third heavens just prior to

the onset of the tribulation. (In Chapter 6 we will discuss the initial location of the *living* overcomers after their rapture. Hint, their location is discussed in Revelation 14:1.)

The unwise saints requiring more oil (Matthew 25:10) have been sent to make the costly purchase during the tribulation. (See our previous discussion regarding the source of the oil and the identity of the two olive trees.) What I do want you to notice here, via Matthew 25:10, is that there is a time gap between the resurrection of the immature saints and their rapture to the throne. This time gap occurs since they need to purchase ‘oil’ during the tribulation.

Matthew 25:10 “And while they [the foolish virgins] went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those [the wise virgins] who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.”

The foolish virgins (represented in Revelation 12 as the woman that remains after the male child was drawn) will be taken to a place in a wilderness to be nourished by the Lord during the intense tribulation. During this time, the maturing believers will face the possibility of imprisonment, torture, deprivation, and martyrdom. Nevertheless, the Lord will be their supply and encouragement during this difficult time. They are now seen ‘buying the oil’ which they had previously refused to purchase. In contrast, the mature overcomers receive the *reward* of the *conditional promise* that is articulated in Revelation 3:10: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

The Devil's Seed

Some religious teachers like to proclaim that all people are God's children. However, in Scripture we discover that this is more fake news. John 8:44 says: "You are of your *father the devil*, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Just as Satan has desired to counterfeit the bride of Christ, so too he has waged a war to counterfeit the legitimate Seed. The battle between the two kinds of seeds is found beginning in Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between *your seed* and *her Seed*; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

Galatians 3:16 "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ."

Galatians 3:19 "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the *Seed* should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator."

From these two seeds, one being Satanic in nature and the other being the divine nature of God Himself, we can then further clarify the identity of these two different women. One is the bride of Christ from the divine Seed and the other is Satan's counterfeit woman formed by the fallen seed. Satan's seed is manifested in global wickedness and the mother of harlots — *false religion* with its deadness and lies.

The harlot, produced via Satan's seed, is in great contrast to the now resurrected and ripe overcomers that have produced the wedding garment during their lives.

The Nations

The immature believers will experience much hardship and persecution during the tribulation. But this is allowed so that these believers will be brought to maturity as they 'buy the oil.' Scripture such as Philippians 1:6 will then be fulfilled: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has *begun* a good work in you will *complete* it until the day of Jesus Christ." This completing work will transpire through the means of the Lord's spiritual nourishment, as well as chastening and scourging, during the tribulation.

During the ordeal of the tribulation these ripening believers will be cared for by those of the *nations* (Matthew 25:31-46). In this passage the *nations* are referred to as "sheep" by the Lord as they care for His "brothers" (verse 40), the immature believers. You may already have a question as to the nations being referred to as sheep. As we consider the text in Matthew 25:31-46 we must have our thinking challenged concerning who the *nations* are. Our conclusions will go against the understanding of many.

We must first see that there is no biblical reference that identifies born again believers as mere *nations*. Consider some Scripture below; do you feel that the *nations* discussed in these passages refer to believers?

Zechariah 14:1-3 "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the *nations* to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be

taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those *nations*, as He fights in the day of battle.”

Zechariah 14:16 “And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the *nations* which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”

Zechariah 14:18 “If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the *nations* who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”

Matthew 24:9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all *nations* for My name’s sake.”

Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the *nations*, and then the end will come.”

Revelation 18:23 “The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the *nations* were deceived.”

Revelation 19:15 “Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the *nations*. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

Revelation 20:3 “And he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should

deceive the *nations* no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”

Revelation 20:8 “And will go out to deceive the *nations* which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.”

People from the various *nations* on the earth who cared for the Lord’s brothers during the tribulation will be blessed and, at the judgment of the *nations* in Matthew 25:31-46, will be designated as sheep. At the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) these sheep will be akin to restored humans. [*Strong’s Concordance* #605 restoration (Greek — apokatastasis): of the perfect state before the fall.]

They are restored to a condition that is similar to the pre-fall condition. However, they are not regenerated in that they are not born again believers and will never possess eternal life. They will be transferred into the Millennial Kingdom as restored humans and blessed by the Lord’s Father. (Please note that Matthew 25:34 and Matthew 25:40 does not say “their Father” or “their brethren.” Rather, Christ says, “My Father” and “My brethren,” respectively, in these verses.) Also, Matthew 25:34 records the Father telling the sheep to inherit the kingdom prepared for them “*from* the foundation of the world.” In contrast, believers are told in Ephesians 1:4 that we were chosen in Christ “*before* the foundation of the world.” This is a big distinction between sheep and saints — “from” or “before.”

Again, the sheep are not born again via faith in the gospel of grace. They are mortals living during the tribulation who

have become believers of the “everlasting gospel.” As believers in this regard they will also have empathy for the Lord’s saints. (Please refer to our earlier discussion concerning Revelation 14:6 where we compared and contrasted the gospel of grace and the everlasting gospel.)

These sheep from the nations, by virtue of their normal humanity, will naturally be capable of procreating, sinning, growing old, dying, and rebelling. This is possible under the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) which will occur during the Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 11; Isaiah 65:17-25).

Again, many Bible teachers purport that the sheep in Matthew 25 are those who are saved (born again) by the *gospel of grace* during the tribulation and then enter with mortal bodies into the Millennial Kingdom. (We have already discussed that it is *not* the gospel of grace which is preached during the tribulation.) Consider the theological consequences of such an understanding of Scripture: the supposedly born-again sheep may then go into the Millennial Kingdom still able to sin, rebel, grow old, die, procreate, and possibly join Satan to go up against the camp of the saints, only to be consumed by fire from the Lord (Revelation 20:7-9). This theological dilemma is forced upon those who correctly believe in the Millennial Kingdom but errantly hold that the nations in Matthew 25 may contain born again believers. With such confusion running amok it is no wonder that many believers today are drawn to eschatological positions that repudiate the notion of the Millennial Kingdom altogether.

The Gleanings of the Harvest

Recall that the Lord places immature believers (the foolish virgins) into the tribulation to be further refined and matured. From this group there will be a substantial number who will be martyred for their refusal to receive the mark of the beast. These particular saints are seen standing on the “sea of glass” in Revelation 15:2 — “And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.”

These victorious believers represent the rewarded and now-to-be reigning overcomers from among the gleanings of God’s crop. They have ‘bought the oil’ and have willingly become mature.

The believers who have become mature during the tribulation are observed standing in Revelation 15:2. This indicates their victory over Satan. In the resurrection they will be among the reigning overcoming believers in the Millennial Kingdom.

Dear saints, in God’s great love and mercy He has given a second opportunity to His immature believers to become an overcomer. However, the price for this will be high — it will require physical martyrdom, resulting from their refusal to receive the mark of the beast. Those seen standing on the sea of glass, imply resurrection from the dead, having been martyred.

Recall the *conditional* promise from the Lord as recorded in Revelation 2:11 — “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be *hurt* by the second death.” The “second death” is

mentioned in Revelation 20:14 — “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the *second death*.”

It appears that the lake of fire, which is the second death, will be used by the Lord in the maturing process of saints who did not ‘buy the oil’ in their life.

A key observation in Revelation 2:11 is that the remaining immature believers will be “hurt” but not destroyed or forever condemned by the second death. This hurt will be used for the maturing of His saints. We are not told additional details, only that we observe saints standing on the sea of glass, implying their victory and overcoming. This is the purpose for the suffering arranged by our loving heavenly Father.

Please do not confuse this interpretation as supporting some sort of purgatory. Rather, this chastening allows for the continuing and completing work of Christ in order to produce the ripening of God’s complete field. Every believer must be brought to full maturity in Christ. Our Lord can only be wedded to a ready bride. Regeneration, transformation, and glorification must happen; not just as a doctrinal position but in reality.

Coming Openly at the End of the Tribulation

At the end of the tribulation the Lord will make the final move in His Parousia. He will openly manifest Himself with a shout and the trumpet of God. Consider the following Scripture:

Matthew 24:29-31 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth

will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

The Close of the Millennial Kingdom

Some recap: because of their immaturity, non-overcoming believers will be refused the reward of reigning in the Millennial Kingdom. They have failed to participate with the Lord in producing the fine linen garments, which are the righteous acts of the saints. As well, these particular believers will be excluded from participating in the wedding feast.

At the close of the millennium the Devil will be loosed from the bottomless pit. He will then go out to deceive the *nations* for a season (Revelation 20:7-8) and gather them for a final battle. The nations in this passage are the offspring of those who were originally selected as *sheep* at the judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46. (We have previously discussed the selection of the sheep.)

The descendants of the sheep have procreated now for one thousand years and have repopulated the earth. When Satan is loosed from the bottomless pit, he will stir up many of these people from the nations to go with him against the camp of the saints.

Revelation 20:7-9 “Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the

breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.”

Those from the nations who do not join with Satan at this critical juncture will survive God’s eternal judgment that will now be poured out on the rest of the populace. The ones that do not rebel will then enter into eternity restored by God. However, note that these obedient members of the nations are not saved via the gospel of grace which was previously preached during the church age prior to the tribulation.

Nevertheless, these saved ones from the nations will live forever. But they require something unique to survive in eternity. Consider Revelation 22:2 which says: “In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the *healing of the nations*.”

The nations that enter into the eternal age require the leaves of the tree of life as they do not possess eternal life via the gospel of grace that was preached during the church age. By the mercy of the Lord they are in a restored condition but this new condition requires some type of maintenance that can only be acquired via the leaves of the tree of life.

We conclude that the condition of the surviving members of the nations is completely different from that of the glorified saints which enjoy glorious resurrection bodies.

The Mystery of God is Finished

Revelation 10:5-7 “The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore

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

The Son of Man will appear on the clouds after the tribulation of three and one half years. He will manifest Himself with a shout and the trumpet of God. Furthermore, He will be accompanied by His armies, which include the soon-to-be reigning overcomers. The main harvest with the gleanings will then take place. These believers will simply be caught up *to the air*, not to the third heavens. This event is analogous to that which occurred to crops in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were brought by the people to the house of the Lord (that is, the tabernacle or temple) whereas the majority of the harvest was stored in barns or elsewhere for later use. Consider the following passage: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the

Lord *in the air*. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Revelation 20:6 “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the *first* resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a *thousand years*.”

Philippians 3:11 “If, by any means, I may attain to the *resurrection* from the dead.” [*Strong’s Concordance* #1815; exanastasis; ex-an-as’-tas-is (an overcomer).]

The wise virgins (and soon-to-be reigning overcomers) are the ones caught up to the third heaven (that is, heavenly Mount Zion). They will accompany Christ upon His return. In contrast, the believers amongst the dead and living that were deemed unwise will be simply caught up (raptured) to the air. These will meet the Lord in the air.

As mentioned, this spiritual harvest of believers is analogous to the crop harvest in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were taken to the Father’s house but the harvest was taken to the barn. God’s harvest plan was revealed to us via the Old Testament order for collecting the crops!

The Tabernacle of God Is with Men

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled or tented] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

In the preceding verse the human body is depicted as a tent or temple in which the soul dwells. This tent is taken down at death.

2 Corinthians 6:16 “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For *you are the temple of the living God*.

As God has said: 'I will *dwell in them* and walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.'

In a sense, this tabernacle of God is enlarging as the number of saints increases. In this tabernacle, or mutual abode, He dwells corporately with the saints from all the ages.

We can now follow the progressive development of God's dwelling place with humanity. It began with the tent of Moses outside the Israelite camp (Exodus 33:7) and continued (and expanded) to a portable tabernacle, then to Solomon's fixed temple. It further continued to Christ's personal body as the living temple. It has been enlarged now to consist of the saints, the church, and it will culminate in the New Jerusalem where "God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." (Revelation 21:22)

"Dwell in them" or "Dwell with them"

Let us consider 2 Corinthians 6:16 again (see above) and compare it with Revelation 21:3.

Revelation 21:3 "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is *with men*, and He will *dwell with them* , and they shall be His people. God Himself will be *with them* and be their God.'

There are two expressions in these two verses which we need to pay close attention too. Specifically, please consider the phrases " *dwell in them* " (2 Corinthians 6:16) and " *dwell with them* " (Revelation 21:3). The "in" refers to the believers of all ages in which Christ dwells whereas the "with" refers to the restored nations in eternity who will require the healing of the leaves from the tree of life. Christ will dwell among the nations but not in them.

Below are some additional verses describing the fact that God dwells *in* His believers:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

1 Corinthians 6:19 “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”



CHAPTER 6

Eternity and Other Issues

We must see from Scripture that the complete elimination of negative matters such as tears, crying, dying, sorrow, and pain does not occur until the New Jerusalem descends out of heaven at the end of the millennium (Revelation 21:1-4). If we fail to live an overcoming life in Christ during our life there is a very great possibility that we will be found weeping at the judgment seat of Christ, and at subsequent moments, when we finally realize the consequences of our life choices and unfaithfulness to the Lord. Please note that the following verses are not referring to the lost (unsaved).

1 Corinthians 3:13 “Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work of what sort it is.”

Matthew 24:51 “And will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.”

Revelation 21:4 “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Revelation 22:3-5 “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”

Consider that last statement in Revelation 22:5 — “*They shall reign forever and ever*.” This will be the state of all born again, now fully matured believers, for all eternity. Amen!

The Opening of the Books

I will now briefly consider additional items that have been overlooked by the majority of Christian teachers. To accomplish this, first consider Revelation 20:12 & 15 which state: “And I saw the dead, small, and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. [15] And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Now please consider the timing of the events described in the previous verses. When doing this, also please recall that both the resurrection of the saints and the assessment of the

saints at the judgment seat of Christ have already occurred one thousand years previously! So then, to whom does the opening of the books apply?

It would appear that in Revelation 20:12 there are two categories. One assessment takes place based upon what is recorded in “the books” and another assessment is based upon what is found in the Book of Life. We must conclude from this passage that there are two distinct sources used in the evaluation of those standing at what is often referred to as the “great white throne judgment” (Revelation 20:11).

Amongst the ones at the great white throne judgment will be the sheep from the nations and their descendants. This will include individuals from the nations that have died during the millennium. Some will have died, not due to rebellion or by being dealt with by a rod of iron but rather due to old age or other causes. Others from the nations will have died during the rebellion that occurs at the end of the Millennial Kingdom.

The sheep, along with their obedient and disobedient descendants, will be raised and will be present at the great white throne judgement after the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom. These individuals will be assessed via the opening of the books and the Book of Life. Those of the nations found in the books will proceed into the eternal state where they will be forever nourished by the healing properties of the leaves of the tree of life (Revelation 22:2). The rebellious ones of the nations will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). Additionally, all unbelievers that have rejected the gospel of grace and the everlasting gospel and have died prior to the Millennial Kingdom will be present

at the great white throne judgement. These ones will also be cast into the lake of fire as their names will not be found written in EITHER the books or the Book of Life.

There is also a possibility that the millions of babies who have been slaughtered in the womb via abortion or other means will be found to have their names in the books at this juncture. Scriptural details are a little sparse on this matter but this viewpoint affords a realistic possibility for how children younger than the 'age of accountability' may be dealt with by our Lord.

The Dead in the Sea

Now consider the situation described in Revelation 20:13 — “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”

Question: If the spirits and souls of all people go to one of the two sections of Hades upon physical death then who are the dead in the sea? Do you believe that the dead in the sea are just individuals who perished in maritime accidents or possibly in naval war? Some suggest that the dead in the sea are the spirits of a pre-Adamic race which was initially judged by the Lord. The proponents of this perspective believe that this is what caused the earth to be waste, void, and covered with water (Genesis 1:2).

It is also suggested by some that these spirits are referred to later in Scripture as devils or demons. These disembodied spirits appear to strongly desire to re-inhabit a body. Recall the account in Scripture concerning the Gadarene demoniac (Matthew 8:28-34). When the Lord prohibited the demons

from possessing the two men He did allow them to enter the pigs at their request. The pigs subsequently drowned.

It is correct to say that this topic is intriguing; however, there is not enough recorded in Scripture to form concrete conclusions. But there is one general thing we can be certain of: all demons, as well as the humans that have rejected the mercy of the Lord at various stages in earth's history, will be cast into the lake of fire.

The 144,000 and a Sincere Math Question

Theologians often postulate that all living believers will be raptured prior to the tribulation. Many such proponents also suggest that during the tribulation the gospel will be preached by 144,000 now born again Jews who function as a team of evangelists. The following verse is used to support this notion:

Revelation 7:4 “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.”

Supposedly Revelation 7:9 suggests that these Jewish evangelists are so fruitful that an innumerable multitude comes to faith in Jesus as a result of their witness during the intense three and one half year tribulation period.

Revelation 7:9 “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”

Let's consider the possibility that a “great multitude” comes to faith in Jesus during the tribulation. We will

first use some basic math for anecdotal evidence and then conclude using Scripture.

Currently the world population is estimated to be around 8 billion people. During the intense portion of the tribulation death and destruction will be rampant. For example, just consider the scene of blood flowing up to the height of horses' bridles (Revelation 14:20). Ezekiel 39:11-12 seems to refer to this time as well. Ezekiel prophesied that it would take *seven months* for Israel to clean up the ensuing mess:

Ezekiel 39:11-12 "It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land."

Given the presence of the nations in the tribulation, there could still be many babies born into the world at this time despite starvation, disease, and violence being rampant. Let's generously assume that there are 400,000 babies born each day during the three and one half years of the tribulation. (At the time I am writing this book, the United Nations estimates 385,000 children are born each day.) This amounts to approximately five hundred million new babies in three and one half years.

If I do not subtract any of those people who die in the three and one half years, this means that there is only an increase from 8 billion to 8.5 billion people. (Again, for sake of simplicity, these calculations assume a world population like ours at the onset of the tribulation.) Of course not

accounting for anyone dying is simplistic but this is exactly my point — during the three and one half years of the tribulation the earth will likely have a population that is countable. Now don't forget that this "great multitude" in Revelation 7:9 supposedly only refers to the number of people *that get saved during* the tribulation. Surely this number of new believers would be significantly fewer than 8.5 billion. So this leads to my sincere math question. Should we be comfortable with stating that "a great multitude which no one could number" refers to the number of new believers coming to faith in Christ during the tribulation?

Our second argument for saying that the "great multitude" does not refer to those believing in Jesus by faith during the tribulation is due to the fact that, as discussed earlier in this book, there is no supporting Scripture which suggests that the gospel of grace is actually preached during the tribulation.

We must observe that the only gospel being proclaimed during the tribulation is clearly revealed in Scripture to be the "everlasting gospel" (Revelation 14:6). This gospel is stated to be preached by an angel, not by other believers.

Revelation 14:6-7 "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth — to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people — saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.'"

Note that the content of this everlasting gospel is restricted to certain commands: fear God, worship Him, give Him glory, and do not worship the beast. In contrast

with the gospel of grace, the everlasting gospel mentions nothing regarding repentance, the need for the blood of Christ, redemption, being born again or regeneration. In addition, we see that the everlasting gospel is preached by an angel whereas the gospel of grace is preached by the church in this current age.

So, Who Is This Great Multitude Which No Man Could Number?

Revelation 7:9 “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”

Please consider that this innumerable multitude represents all of the redeemed saints, through all ages, which come from every tribe, tongue, and nation. They are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, at the last trumpet, which is at the end of the tribulation.

This great multitude includes the soon-to-be reigning and overcoming saints, who had previously been secretly caught up just prior to the beginning of the tribulation. They have returned from the third heavens with the Lord as Jude 14 records (more will be said about this very shortly).

Three Groups of People

For one to understand biblical eschatology it is useful to note that Scripture distinguishes between three groups of people. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:32 which says: “Give no offense, either to the *Jews* or to the *Greeks* [nations] or to the *church* of God.”

In the coming Millennial Kingdom, the redeemed Jews will have a very particular role. Given the scope of this topic I will not discuss it in this writing. However, the role of the Jews has been addressed in other writings by other authors. As we have discussed a bit already, in the Millennial Kingdom the restored but not born again nations will have a very particular role. Meanwhile the born again, transformed, and glorified overcoming saints will have an indescribably vital role in reigning with Christ during this time. If we fail to discern each group's participatory role subsequent to the Lord's return, we will be unable to unlock the mystery and the richness of the kingdom!

Those Coming with the Army of God

A great point of misunderstanding in Scripture concerns the identity of the saints coming with Christ when He returns from the third heaven. Related to this issue is a question: how do these saints first get to heaven in order for them to be able to return with Christ to the earth at His visible second coming?

Jude 1:14 "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints.'"

Revelation 19:14 "And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses."

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be

caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Who Are These Saints?

Recall a previous discussion where I shared that the overcoming saints are taken to the third heaven to escape the three and one half year trial of the tribulation. *I believe that Jude 14 and Revelation 19:14 describe the overcoming saints accompanying their victorious Christ in His army, which descends to the air from heaven.* (The “air” is the location to which the remaining “caught up” saints (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) are also gathered.) In the order of the biblical harvest the armies of the saints represent the firstfruits of the harvest. Recall that the firstfruits consist of the overcoming saints who are alive at the time of the rapture of the overcomers as well as the dead (but resurrected) overcoming saints. Here is some Scripture that describes both subgroups of the firstfruits.

The Living Firstfruits

Revelation 14:3-4 “They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being *firstfruits* to God and to the Lamb.”

Please note that the 144,000 in the preceding verses are the *living* firstfruits. They are to be distinguished from the 144,000 God-fearing Jews in Revelation 7.

Dead but Resurrected Overcomers

Revelation 12:5 “She bore a male Child who was to *rule all nations* with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.”

Revelation 12:11 “And they *overcame* him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

In Chapters 4 & 5 I taught that the resurrected overcomers are the male child. If necessary, re-read those sections for a reminder of the finer details.

The ‘Thread’ of Fine Linen in Scripture

I have already highlighted the fact that the good works conducted by the saints serve as spiritual fine linen for them.

Revelation 19:8 “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

If you follow this topic of fine linen, beginning in Genesis, you will observe a spiritual thread being weaved by our Lord. Being clothed in fine linen is imperative for overcoming!

Genesis 41:42 “Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of *fine linen* and put a gold chain around his neck.”

1 Chronicles 15:27 “David was clothed with a robe of *fine linen*, as were all the Levites who bore the ark, the singers, and Hananiah the music master with the singers.”

2 Chronicles 3:14 “And he made the veil of blue, purple, crimson, and *fine linen*, and wove cherubim into it.”

Mark 15:46 “Then he bought *fine linen*, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb

which had been hewn out of the rock and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.”

Revelation 19:14 “And the armies in heaven, clothed in *fine linen*, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.”

The believers who form part of the armies now seen coming with the Lord were *not* previously caught up to heaven at the point of their physical death. Nor do they represent *all* believers raptured to the throne just prior to the tribulation (contrary to popular opinion). Rather these ones were selected *out from among all of the resurrected* saints at the time of the midnight cry (see Matthew 25:6 specifically and our previous discussion concerning Matthew 25:1-13). Also, the saints in the returning armies include the mature believers that were alive at the beginning of the Lord’s secret Parousia. These ones are taken (raptured) by the Lord as firstfruits (Matthew 24:40-42; Luke 17:34-36; Revelation 3:10). This pre-tribulation rapture is to take place just prior to the three and one half year tribulation. This teaching represents a sharp distinction from common Christian thought. Again, the individuals in Matthew 24:40-42 and Luke 17:34-36 are *all* believers. However, only certain ones are selected as reigning overcomers. The others are not mature and do not possess the wedding garment. We have previously discussed this at some length.

The pre-tribulation rapture of the overcomers is the Lord’s fulfilment of His *conditional* promise made to those who would overcome (Revelation 3:10). Please consider again: if simply being born again made us an overcomer the entire call to the *churches* (consisting of believers) in Revelation 2-3 would be pointless!

Also consider an Old Testament example. *All* who applied the lamb's blood on their door posts in Egypt were passed over by the death angel; however, most of the nation of Israel did *not* enter the good land of Canaan due to their unbelief in the wilderness.

Hebrews 3:7-12 "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways." So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."' Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil *heart of unbelief* in departing from the living God."

The saints coming in the armies with Christ have the fine linen garments which were produced by their obedience and righteous acts in submission to Christ.

Who Is Casting Their Crowns?

Another major error which we must address is the popular Christian teaching that believers will cast their crowns (read 'rewards') at Jesus' feet. This teaching is based upon an erroneous interpretation of Revelation 4:10-11 and a sometimes misinterpreted word in Revelation 5:10.

Revelation 4:10-11 "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.'"

To address the erroneous teaching we must correctly determine the identity of the twenty-four elders. Contrary to popular opinion, the elders are not resurrected and raptured believers. To see this we now need to consider Revelation 5:6-10. The Bible translation one uses is actually quite critical in determining the identity of the elders in Revelation 5:6-10.

Revelation 5:6-10 “And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb [Jesus] standing, as if slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him [the Father] who sat on the throne. When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slaughtered, and You purchased people for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You have made *them* into a kingdom and priests to our God, and *they* will reign upon the earth.’” [NASB]

Note that some Scripture translations (for example, the KJV and NKJV) use the words *us* and *we*, respectively, in verse 10, whereas in the majority of translations (including the Greek interlinear, ESV, and NASB) these words are translated as *them* and *they*. This difference has critical implications. Correctly translating the words as *them* and *they* significantly reduces the likelihood that the twenty-four elders in this passage are human believers.

I believe that the elders are angels (or other supernatural beings) and they are not casting their rewards at the feet of Jesus. Angels are not redeemed believers that receive rewards. So what does a crown in the context of Revelation 4:10-11 then represent? Here the twenty-four angels are seen relinquishing their authority (symbolically represented by crowns) as authority is now being assumed by the over-coming saints during the Millennial Kingdom and continuing into eternity.

Luke 19:17 “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’”

The underlying Greek word for “crowns” (Xsstef'-an-os; see *Strong's Concordance* #4735) used in Revelation 4:10 can represent multiple concepts, depending upon the context. These include:

- (i) a literal crown
- (ii) a mark of royal or (in general) exalted rank
- (iii) the wreath or garland which was given as a prize to victors in public games
- (iv) a metaphor for the eternal blessedness which will be given as a prize to the genuine servants of God and Christ: the crown (wreath) which is the reward of the righteousness.
- (v) that which is an ornament and honor to one

I believe that the crown which these angels cast is that of a mark of royal or exalted rank, not a believer's reward. Remember, these angels are not redeemed believers. It is also interesting to note that after Revelation 19:4 we do not see further references to the twenty-four elders. This suggests

that there has been a transfer of reigning from the angelic order to the overcoming saints.

1 Corinthians 6:3 “Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?”

Hebrews 2:5-7 “For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: ‘What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor and set him over the works of Your hands.’”

Sadly, the expectation that believers will merely discard their rewards serves to reduce the importance of faithful service in the minds of believers today. I believe that this is a very subtle tactic of our adversary as he seeks to downplay the glorious plan of the Lord. It is utterly amazing how the misuse of the words “us” and “we” can have such an impact on vital teaching.

The “Out-Resurrection” of the Overcoming Saints

Revelation 20:6 “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

The preceding verse refers to the out-resurrection or the best resurrection from among the dead. Overcoming saints will assume the rule during the Millennial Kingdom and then on into eternity with all believers joining in the eternal kingdom.

With the preceding thought in mind, please consider the following overlooked verses:

Philippians 3:11 “If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians 3:14 “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Verse 14 does not appear at all to be a ‘grace-based statement’ by the apostle Paul. He appears to be working towards an end goal. Ask yourself this question then: If being born again is the big prize what could Paul possibly be pressing towards?

Perhaps there is something more for a believer subsequent to salvation. Perhaps Paul is expressing his heart’s longing for a deeper participation in the Lord’s coming kingdom.

To determine what Paul is longing for please consider the word “from” in Philippians 3:11. Vine’s Expository (entry #1815) defines this word as “from” or “out of.” The “out of” can imply an “out-resurrection” from among a larger group of dead individuals. This can be viewed as a special, first resurrection for a subset of dead believers. (This would be consistent with our earlier, and extensive, discussion concerning Matthew 25:1-13.) Those who participate in this first, or out-resurrection, are the reigning overcomers whom we have referred to many times in this book already. *Please do not associate overcoming in this context with merely being born again.* Overcoming in the context of Philippians 3 (and many other passages that we have discussed) refers to the walk which believers willingly participate in so as to be matured by the Lord. This wilful submission to the Lord’s plan produces the

wedding garment necessary for participation in the wedding feast and for ruling in the Millennial Kingdom.

More Concerning the Twenty-four Elders

Again, the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:10-11 are supernatural beings, *not believers*. These beings have been exercising authority in the universe for millennia. However, the Millennial Kingdom shall bring in a change of the age and a significant transfer of authority. Those saints who have part in the first resurrection will be given places of authority with Christ in His kingdom for one thousand years on the restored earth.

Revelation 4 (and the ensuing discussion of the twenty-four elders) is not describing a raptured church for several reasons, which I now formally list:

1. This chapter does not discuss the matter of the overcomers nor God's reaping schedule of His crop.
2. Scripture says that when the Lord comes, He is bringing His reward with Him (Revelation 22:12). It does not say that believers are going to the third heaven to get it, just to give it back!
3. The throne for the bema (where the assessment of a believer's works occurs) is in the air, not in the third heaven.
4. The number twenty-four has no actual or symbolic connection to the church anywhere in Scripture.
5. If the scene in Revelation 4 is describing the rapture, then we must ask, when did the so-called elders of the church get gathered to the throne? And when were they crowned? If they are going to reign, why are they casting their crowns down before the Lord? Again, in this context, crowns do not

represent reward but authority, as the elders are seen sitting on thrones. Thrones are symbolic of authority.

6. We see the twenty-four elders worship the Lord singularly as the Creator but not as their personal Saviour or Redeemer.

To further address points 1 and 5 above recall from earlier discussion surrounding Revelation 12 that the resurrected overcomers are exclusively raptured to the throne. At the beginning of the Parousia, the living overcomers are raptured to heavenly Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1). The non-overcoming believers are later raptured to the air, at the end of the tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16), where the bema seat is located. The Lord's throne is next found on the earth. It is then that the living nations, who have survived the devastation of the tribulation, are judged.

Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats."

More Understanding of the New Jerusalem

After the Millennial Kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth will be unveiled. The New Jerusalem shall descend out of heaven as a bride (Revelation 21:2).

Revelation 3:12 "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes

down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”

Please recall that the writer of Revelation stated that this is a book of signs of things that must yet come to pass. Contrary to popular opinion, the New Jerusalem is not a literal cube of gold. Rather it represents the spiritual reality of God’s eternal purpose.

Consider what the cube represents, both in shape and material. For example, the holy of holies in the tabernacle was a cube. This location housed the Ark of the Covenant, where God’s glory dwelled between the cherubim. This cube was enlarged in Solomon’s temple. We then see in Revelation 21:9-27 that the holiest place culminates in a cube with measurements revealing the completeness of God’s expression. It is now His mutual abode with *all* of His redeemed.

The gold of the New Jerusalem refers to God’s divine life. There are not streets of gold therein but a street (Revelation 22:2). The New Jerusalem is thus a corporate and enlarged holy of holies where God and believers dwell together for eternity in perfect communion.

Note that during the Millennial Kingdom the New Jerusalem will be composed of only the reigning overcomers who evidenced maturity by having their works approved at the judgment seat (bema) of Christ. The remaining saints will be outside of the New Jerusalem at that time. This is what Scripture refers to as the “outer darkness” (Matthew 25:10 & 30). The outer darkness is in stark contrast to the New Jerusalem at this time where the resplendent glory of the wedding feast occurs. Believers in the outer darkness will weep and gnash their teeth. They will be aware of what is

being missed! However, these believers will still be with the Lord, on the restored earth, in glorified bodies.

The non-overcoming saints are located in what is identified in Scripture as the “camp of the saints” (Revelation 20:7-10). When Satan stirs up the nations after the close of the Millennial Kingdom he will go up against the camp of the saints and the holy city. The holy city is not referring to the New Jerusalem but rather to the earthly Jerusalem. Recall that the New Jerusalem does not descend to the earth until after the great white throne judgment.

A Comforting Word

Perhaps we may not be reigning overcomers during the Millennial Kingdom but we shall always be with the Lord as eternity unfolds. This is a comforting word. We will have a glorified body and dwell on the restored earth during the Millennial Kingdom. Although during the wedding feast non-overcomers will experience a period of profound regret, all will not be lost for those failing to be in attendance there. All believers will be a part of the New Jerusalem on the new earth reigning with Christ in eternity. Finally there will be no more crying, sorrow, or death (Revelation 21:4). The nations who are preserved to this point will continue to be healed by the leaves of the tree of life (Revelation 22:2).

We must truly conclude that the Lord's eternal plan is profound and full of purpose! It transcends anything that mankind can imagine in their vain thinking or futile plans!



CHAPTER 7

Summary of Truths

Let's revisit and summarize some of the things that we have discussed thus far.

Our eternal salvation is completely secure by reason of the transaction provided by Christ. He alone paid the ransom price for us by shedding His blood on the cross. He is the one and only perfect payment for our personal sin debt. We are completely unable to pay this debt via any of our supposed good works.

Jesus paid this monumental price with His own blood, shedding it to purchase our freedom from spiritual slavery and the eternal penalty of sin. Without this gift we would be forever paying for our sin debt in the lake of fire.

By offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice Jesus thereby completely satisfied the righteous and just requirement of our holy and righteous God. We have no other qualification to claim: “Who [Jesus] was delivered up because of our offenses and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25). “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The timing and location of the Lord’s return can be quickly summarized with the following Scripture:

Matthew 24:29-30 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Acts 1:11 “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

The preceding verse suggests that the Lord’s visible return will take place at Jerusalem. This is the same location from which He ascended forty days after His resurrection.

The Lord Jesus is visibly coming to establish His kingdom on the earth and then for all eternity on a new earth (2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:1). Every person born of God will be in the eternal kingdom reigning with Christ on the new earth. However, one must make a careful distinction between the eternal kingdom on the new earth and the Millennial King-

dom. Participating in the one thousand year reign of Christ on the yet-to-be fully restored earth is a special reward for the overcoming saints. Those virgins who come back from the tribulation having purchased the required oil will still be excluded from the millennial reign, including the wedding feast, as well as all the glories which Christ has planned for the reigning overcomers during His one thousand year reign. Sadly for the foolish virgins, their maturing via the tribulation has come too late.

To value this opportunity for participatory ruling with Christ we must make a clear distinction between the gift of eternal life, which is according to grace, and the reward in the Millennial Kingdom for approved works subsequent to our regeneration. The approved works are a by-product of our willful participation with Christ in our spiritual maturation. In this process we fulfill the good works which He has ordained for us (Ephesians 2:10). Ultimately this life of submission to Christ produces the wedding garment (Revelation 19:8).

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

All approved service will be rewarded by the Lord when He returns (Hebrews 6:10). If we lack the maturity in life and the good works which produce the wedding garment,

we will then be excluded from the Millennial Kingdom reign, the wedding feast, and all that He has planned for the overcomers at this time!

Now recall Philippians 1:6 — “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

For those believers not yet mature at Christ’s return He will bring them to full maturity by using the tribulation as their maturing grounds. Finally, the Lord’s entire crop will be brought to maturity. He will accomplish this crop maturation by utilizing the heat of the late summer, *which is greatly needed to ripen crops*. He will also provide nourishment, protection, and loving care for the maturing saints during the tribulation but this will be accompanied by His chastening, scourging, and the martyrdom of some. However, please be encouraged. *Those martyred* will be granted full participation in reigning in the Millennial Kingdom along with the overcoming saints that were spared the tribulation.

Colossians 1:28 “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

This topic is not simply a matter of perspective or a dry doctrinal position. It concerns the actual maturity in Christ that we require for reigning with Him in the Millennial Kingdom. Our maturation is a predetermined goal of our Lord and Saviour. Let us not quench His desire (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Matthew 25:23 “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”

Luke 9:23 “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’”

Luke 19:17 “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’”

1 Corinthians 9:25 “And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an *imperishable* crown.”

Philippians 3:14 “I *press toward the goal* for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

2 Timothy 2:12 “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.”

2 Timothy 4:7 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Hebrews 12:2 “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Revelation 2:11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Revelation 3:5 “He who *overcomes* shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”

Revelation 21:7 “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

Revelation 22:12 “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone, *according to his work*.”



AFTERWORD

A Final Appeal

I leave you to read this last passage from 1 Peter 4. It encapsulates much of the sobering discussion that we have already considered in this book.

1 Peter 4 “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the *same mind*, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an

account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.' Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part, He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?* Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' Therefore let those

who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

If the profound scriptural truths that we have discussed in this book are believed and obeyed they will come with both great reward and personal cost. Deeper spiritual understanding provides great joy and purpose in this life with reward in the next. However, you may experience significant push back from many believers for whom you deeply care!

Personally speaking, the topics we have discussed in this small work have played a seminal role in my adult life. They have firmly influenced my decision making during my entire adult journey. I cannot begin to thank those, some living and some who have gone to Paradise, who have been concerned enough to share these profound truths with me. This subject matter of God’s true eternal purpose has absolutely and completely captured me.

If you have a deep desire and hunger for further fellowship on these matters, please feel free to contact me.

Your brother in the Lord,

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