

Jerusalem Bride

By Lorri Frandsen

The cover illustration is a symbolic representation of the Bride of Christ as the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven (symbolised by the stairway) to reign on the earth during the millennium (symbolised by the clock).

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*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth:
for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away;
and there was no more sea.*

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

*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,
Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,
and he will dwell with them,
and they shall be his people,
and God himself shall be with them,
and be their God.*

(Revelation 21:1-8)

INTRODUCTION

It is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Corinthians 2:9)

Eons ago, before our world ever existed, God had a plan, an absolutely amazing idea that involved something so spectacular that it would defy imagination. It involved the creation of beings made in His image, who would be so constructed as to communicate with Him directly. God would have a special relationship with these creatures based on mutual love, and they would be as holy as He Himself. So united would they be in mind and heart with Him, that together they would function as one. It would be complicated because these creatures (humans) would have to be created with freedom of choice, because love requires that. Love has to freely choose its object of affection. And God definitely wanted to be loved by these beings, even at the risk of losing some of them. In fact, He was aware that they would rebel against Him and prefer autonomy so that they could go their own way. However, some would eventually belong to Him and love Him as much as He loved them. He would select them in much the same way a groom selects the bride of his choice. As God looked into the future and foresaw all that would be required for this plan to work, He knew that it was a monumental undertaking that would come at great cost to Himself. However He was absolutely committed to the idea. With a fixed agenda in mind, God began creating this world according to His master plan. Everything He designed came out of Himself, fashioned with His ultimate goal in view. He was the center and focus of the entire concept, but the chosen human beings would comprise His Bride, more precious to Him than His own life. In fact, the more He thought about them, the more He loved them and desired to communicate with them. It was crucial that they come to see Him, and love Him, for who He really was. The problem was that He was God and they were merely creatures. That gap would need to be bridged. It would require lifting them up to be more like Him, and humbling Himself to be like them. In fact, God would combine His own Spirit with theirs, so as to make them worthy with His worth - a fitting Bride for a heavenly Groom! It was the perfect solution and the focal point of the entire plan. Everything would converge around this divine marriage between God and His human creation. It would all focus on Jesus Christ, God's Son, the Groom of the Jerusalem Bride.

Chapter 1

(from Paul's Letters to the Bride Residing in Rome)

The plan was inaugurated in the Garden of Eden when God created Adam and Eve, the first humans. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and their sin resulted in being cut off from Him and being subject to death. But God, in His kindness and mercy, promised to redeem them. He killed one of His own precious creations, probably a lamb, to provide a covering for Adam and Eve's sin. This symbolized what He would do later when He came to earth Himself as the Supreme Sacrifice for sin. The lamb's blood that was shed in Eden foreshadowed the death that would one day come to the Redeemer of mankind. Later in the Old Testament, animal blood sacrifices continued to be offered, such as when the patriarchs and prophets wanted to approach God. When God gave instructions to build a Tabernacle in the desert, these animal sacrifices became an integral part of Jewish worship and practice. These sacrifices did not eradicate sin, but temporarily covered it until the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, came to take sin away forever. During the interim time, God was being both gracious and merciful to His human creation, delaying judgment until the Redeemer arrived.

Sadly, most of the world is still not aware of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. In fact, most people do not have a true understanding of God at all, even though His power and divine nature are clearly displayed through His creation. The evidence is there, but people persist in denying Him, refusing to extol Him or thank Him for all He has done. They have made themselves enemies of God, becoming fools as they regress to the point of worshipping idols and indulging in all sorts of licentious perversion. God has always hated such behavior and He has repeatedly warned about the repercussions.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”(Revelation 21:8).

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might. (2Thessalonians 1:8-9)

Those who oppose God are described in the Bible as arrogant rebels and malicious plotters of evil, with no love or mercy in their hearts; living for themselves and caring nothing for others; persisting in evil and even praising those who do likewise. God promises that His judgment is against such people and they will not escape. God is still being kind by allowing time for repentance, but it will not always be so. By stubbornly refusing to turn to God, they are storing up more and more of His wrath for that day when they will finally be judged.

Judgment

The Bible states that Judgment will not be the same for all the wicked. Those who have never known God's Law will still perish, but the Law won't condemn them. They will be judged according to the light they had from their conscience, and how they responded to it. The conscience is God's law written on the heart. Where people resist their conscience, they will receive condemnation. Where they obey it, they will be excused. But it will be otherwise for those, like the Jews, who had the Law to guide them as well. Not only will their conscience accuse them, but the Law will condemn them as well. The Jews viewed the Law and the rite of circumcision as badges of honor that raised them above the rest of sinful humanity. But they were lawbreakers too, appearing as God's people outwardly, but inwardly their hearts were as corrupt as the rest of the world. Physically they were circumcised by the written code, but spiritually their hearts were uncircumcised. They missed the whole point of what the rite meant. It was to be a sign of an inner transformation by the Holy Spirit that removed the sin nature they were born with, and infused them with the life of Jesus. They had so many benefits that other nations never had, such as the promises and prophecies that spoke of God's love for them. They had the Temple to provide them with sacrifices that temporarily averted God's punishment for their sins. God spoke to them personally through great men of God and He did many miracles in their midst. They were entrusted with the very words of God! Yet they forgot that they, along with the Gentiles, were under the power of sin and needed a Savior. They forgot what was written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good; not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18)

Those who are under the Law have no defense concerning its decrees. The Law silences every mouth and holds the entire world accountable to God. The Law will never declare anyone righteous in God's sight because everyone breaks the Law. But what the Law does accomplish is to make people conscious of their sins.

For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (James 2:10)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the Law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. (Romans 3:20)

The Law makes us aware of God's righteousness, and it also makes us aware of our own *unrighteousness*. It doesn't matter whether someone is a Jew or Gentile, because we are all sinners, but we can all now be justified by God's grace through receiving the righteous nature of Christ. Jesus is our Atonement through the blood He shed for us on the cross. The blood sacrifices in the Old Testament all pointed to this marvelous redemption when Christ would come to offer His blood to actually pay the penalty for sin, and make His righteousness available for justification for all those who have faith in Him.

Faith

Faith is the key to obtaining this salvation. A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law, meaning that none of us can boast because our human effort has nothing to do with God's justification through Christ. Righteousness cannot come through human works. Take Abraham, for instance. The Bible says, *"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."* (Genesis 15:6) He didn't earn righteousness like a worker earns wages. He received it as a gift. That's how God justifies us as well. Our trust (faith) in Him is credited to us as righteousness. David spoke of how blessed a person is when God credits him with righteousness apart from works: *"Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them."* That's how Abraham received God's righteousness, and it happened BEFORE he was even circumcised. Circumcision was a sign or seal of the righteousness that was already his by faith. It was required of all of Abraham's descendants as a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham, and later the Mosaic Law repeated the requirement (Leviticus 12:2-3). But the Law acknowledged that physical circumcision was not enough to please God.

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. (Deuteronomy 10:16)

Circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God. (Romans 2:29).

Physical circumcision involved the removal of physical flesh, but it was the removal of the soul's 'flesh' that God was really after.

Flesh

The flesh comprises the behavioral patterns of the soul and body. These patterns belonged to the old fallen nature, which was done away with when we (believers in Christ) received our new nature at the new birth. However even though the old nature (or old man) was eradicated by Jesus Christ on the cross, as long as we Christians are still in our physical body, we will still have the sinful impulses that were previously aroused by the old nature.

These impulses are a carryover from our past, which continue to work through our physical bodies - **if allowed**. But just as the old sin nature can no longer define us, the flesh also does not define the Christian.

(Romans 6:6 "our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin... reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord")

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if it is so that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his. (Romans 8:9)

We do NOT have a sin nature, and we are not IN the flesh, although fleshly urges still operate through the body. These cannot be overcome by asceticism, self-effort, or suppression. Only faith in our new identification with Christ will provide the confidence and power to reject fleshly impulses. As soon as shame, guilt, or fear enter the picture, our focus will turn to 'self' to solve the problem. However, if we realize by faith that we cannot be condemned because we are perfect in Christ, we will simply turn away from fleshly patterns and not give them the significance that they demand.

For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (declared sacred.) (Hebrews 10:14)

The flesh gets its power to control from the Law, which produces guilt and shame when it is disobeyed. Condemnation can be used by the flesh to forge chains of bondage and death. It is crucial that these bonds be broken so that we can follow the Holy Spirit without hindrance. That is why 'circumcision' of the flesh was so important to God in the Old Testament. It represented cutting off the power of sin in our lives. It was also a declaration of faith in God's promise to bring righteousness to mankind through a Savior.

Abraham was commanded to circumcise himself and the males of his household as an outward sign of their faith in God's promise. If that promise had depended on the Law to make Abraham and his descendants heirs to God's righteousness, then his faith would have meant nothing and the promise would have been worthless because no one can keep the Law. The Law can only bring God's wrathful judgment. It has no power to control the flesh. But there was no Law when Abraham received the covenant promise and was circumcised as a sign of that covenant. The covenant was based solely on Abraham's faith that he would be a father of many nations. He believed that God could give life to the dead and that He could call into being things that are not. That's why even though his body was as good as dead (at 100 years old) and Sarah's womb was also 'dead', Abraham continued to believe the promise of God. He gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised. Consequently his faith was credited to him as righteousness. And it's the same for us, to whom God also credits righteousness when we believe that Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Because we have been justified, we are now at peace with God.

Through our faith in Jesus we have entered into God's grace, in which we stand. It is amazing what God has done for us. We were weak and sinful, yet Jesus died for us. Its rare for anyone to die for even a good person, yet alone for someone who is a sinner. But now that we have been reconciled by Christ's blood, it is a certainty that we will never face God's wrath.

Sin

Sin has always been in the world, and as a result of that fact, death came to all people because everyone sins. Sin was in the world before the Law was given, but people at that time were only condemned for sinning against the law of their conscience (God's law written on the human heart). Death reigned after Adam sinned because all of mankind was born spiritually dead and disposed to committing sin. Adam's single act of rebellion doomed the entire human race because Adam represented all of us. Many died because of that one sin, but God's gift through another Representative, Jesus Christ, brought justification to many. God's judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but His gift followed many sins and ultimately brought justification.

As mentioned earlier, sin is not condemned where there is no Law, but God brought the Law so that people would be aware of sin. In actuality, the Law made sin increase. People see themselves as more sinful when they are aware of the Law's demands. But where sin increased and reigned in death, God's grace increased even more, because Christ put away sin and overcome death on the cross.

Dead to the Law

Everyone who was baptized into Christ Jesus was baptized into His death. We were buried with Him, and just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we also have been raised with Him in order to live a new life. Our old self was crucified with Jesus so that the body ruled by sin (the flesh) might have no power. Christ was raised from the dead and cannot die again because death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. And it's the same for us. We count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. This is because we are IN Christ. Whatever He accomplished on the cross is applied directly to us. That's why it's ludicrous for us to let sin reign in our physical body so that we obey its evil desires. Before we were Christians, our sin nature forced us to live that way. However now, as born again believers, we offer ourselves to God as those who have been rescued from death to life, and we surrender every part of our being to Jesus as an instrument of righteousness. Sin is no longer our master, because we are not under the Law, which is where sin gets its power. We are now under grace. Once we were slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, but thanks to God, we have come to obey from our hearts a new Law that has set us free from sin. We have become slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. The wages of sin is always death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Analogy of the Law to Explain its Authority

The Law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives. Take for example how a married woman is bound to her husband by law as long as he is alive. However if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. If she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. That's similar to what happens to us when we die to the Law through Christ's death on the cross. We are released from the Law through our identification with Jesus. When Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised with Him. We now belong to Him so that we might bear fruit for God.

Using the analogy of the married woman, we were released from our former husband (the old man) and are now free to be married to another (Jesus, the New Man). By dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the Law so that we now live in the new way of the Spirit, instead of the old way of the written code (Law). This doesn't mean that the Law is sinful, or that faith makes the Law futile. Faith sets the Law in place, giving it its rightful place and significance as a tutor pointing the way to our need for Jesus as Savior.

An Analogy of the Law to Explain Its Limitations

Another analogy may help us understand this. Imagine buying a ticket to take a train trip to a far off city. We expect that the train will take us there, but after awhile, as the train rides along the railroad tracks, it suddenly comes to an abrupt stop in the middle of nowhere. We look out and see that the rail tracks have ended abruptly where a huge sinkhole has formed. We can see the city in the distance, but have no way of getting there by the train. That's like the Law, which offers us life but isn't able to deliver because of our sin (sinkhole). Even one sin makes the Law of no effect in our lives. The Law condemns sin, and death is the result. It cannot take us to the place where there is life. The Law can only point us in the direction of the city (righteousness) but it cannot actually take us there. If the Law were by itself, leading to nothing but death, it would be futile. But the Law points us in the right direction (Christ as Savior) and that establishes its significance and purpose.

Before this faith came, we were held in custody under the Law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the Law became our guardian to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. (Galatians 3:23-25)

Without the Law, we would not have known what sin was. How would we know what coveting is if the Law's 10th commandment had not said, "*You shall not covet.*" However, by making us aware of what coveting is, the Law gives power to sin, revealing how weak we are, and stirring up guilt whenever we covet. Before, when we didn't know that coveting was wrong, we felt no guilt when we coveted.

Without guilt, we felt alive, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and brought death to us. The commandment of the Law offers life but it actually brings death, because no one can perfectly obey it. This doesn't mean that the Law is not holy, righteous and good. It was essential that the Law show sin's true character.

Set Free from the Law

The Law is spiritual, but before we came to Christ, we were unspiritual. We were actually slaves to sin. We may not have understood why we kept doing the things that we didn't want to do - things we hated. We may have agreed in our minds that the Law is good. We may have even delighted in the Law. However righteousness didn't dwell within our sinful nature. We had no power to stop sinning, even when we wanted to live differently. In fact, often we ended up doing the very things we wanted to get away from. It was like a force living inside us, waging war against our mind and making us a prisoner of sin working inside us. What a wretched existence that was!! But thanks be to God, He rescued and delivered us through Jesus Christ our Lord! And because He did, we are absolutely free from any condemnation from God. The law of the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death. The Law was never able to give us life because our human flesh was always causing us to sin. No human being could live up to the Law's demand for perfection and even one infraction was enough to damn us to eternal destruction. But then a perfectly righteous Jesus Christ was sent by His Father to offer Himself as a Sacrifice for mankind. His humanity qualified Him to become the legal Representative of us all. This allowed Him to assume our debt so as to take God's wrathful judgment for sin upon Himself. God condemned sin in Jesus' flesh, but once that debt was paid, Christ's sinlessness gave death no legal hold over Him, and He could rise from the grave as a New creation. As our Representative, we were all placed spiritually into Christ. Consequently, when Jesus died and was punished for sin, so were we. (Our old nature died with Jesus). When He rose up victorious over death, so did we! (We received the new, righteous nature of Christ and became new creations). Because believers in Jesus Christ are new creatures with a divine nature like His, we now live according to the Spirit and no longer according to the flesh. This amazing miracle is available to the entire human race, but applicable only to those who believe in Jesus and what He has done on the cross for them.

Not IN the Flesh

Those who do live **in** the flesh, live according to bodily appetites, with minds set on fleshly desires, unlike Christians who live according to the Spirit. The minds of those who live in the flesh are hostile to God, resulting in death, but we have minds governed by the Spirit, so we have life and peace. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God, but God is well pleased with us. We are not **in** the flesh. We are in the realm of the Spirit; that is, if we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Him.

It's true that our physical bodies will die like everyone else's because of sin's effect, but the Holy Spirit inside us (who raised Jesus from the dead) has given us resurrection life and made us immortal. So since we are alive because of the Spirit, our only obligation is to live by the Spirit, unlike those who live according to the flesh and experience death as a result.

Children of God

We are children of God, set free by the Spirit so that we can live without fear of condemnation or death. God is our loving 'Papa' and we are His heirs, even co-heirs with Jesus Christ. Whatever Jesus receives in glory, we do too. It's true that we will share in Christ's sufferings, but our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory we have in Christ. As children of God, we have been liberated from bondage to decay. We have the Spirit, the Guarantor of redemption and divine adoption, living inside us. Everything that happens to us in the meantime is used by God to work out for our best. This is because we love God, and He loves us. God called us according to His purpose to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that Jesus would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. He predestined us, and those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified. Knowing all this, how can we doubt that God is for us? And if God is for us, who can be against us? He didn't spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all. Since He did that, how can we ever doubt that He will not also graciously give us all things? Who can possibly accuse those whom God has chosen? Since He has justified us, who can condemn us? Absolutely no one. Christ Jesus died, was raised to life, and is now at the right hand of His Father, interceding for us. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword do it? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Jews

Unfortunately most Jews have missed out on all this. They had the adoption of sonship, the covenants, the Law, the temple worship and the promises, the patriarchs, and the human ancestry of the Messiah. But not all received the promises of God. That's explained by the fact that not all who are descended from Israel are really Abraham's children. It was through Isaac that Abraham's offspring would be counted. It would not be the children by physical descent, but the children of the promise who would be regarded as Abraham's offspring.

God's Choice

The 'children of promise' were elected by God. An example of this is found in the story of Rebekah who was pregnant with twins and was told by God that the older son would serve the younger. This went contrary to tradition and no further justification for this state of affairs is given other than that God loved (chose) Jacob but hated (rejected) Esau. This wasn't because God is unjust. He told Moses: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* This shows that the Covenant promises depend on God's mercy, and not on a person's desire or effort. Salvation is not of works.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. ... (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Jesus told the hardened Pharisees, who rejected Him, that no one could come to Him unless His Father drew him. He was basically saying that they were unable to accept Him as their Savior because God wasn't drawing them. Without the Holy Spirit's regenerative work (opening the eyes of the Pharisees to see the truth), they would never, in themselves, receive Jesus as their Messiah because they were dead spiritually and their minds were darkened.

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me. (John 6:44-45)

The Greek word for 'draw' means "to drag" indicating it is a one-sided affair. God draws us to salvation and we respond to His drawing. Some are more willing than others, but eventually everyone He chooses comes to Him.

Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me. (John 6:45)

It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (Romans 9:16)

It cannot depend on a person's human desire or effort because the Bible says that no one is righteous, understands, or seeks after God. Nobody - not even one person - does good. All are worthless. (Romans 3:10-12). So unless God has mercy and initiates the regeneration of the human heart, no one comes to the Lord on his own.

The General Call

However, there is a sense in which God draws all men, known as the "general call" as opposed to the "effectual call" of God's elect. This is the invitation freely given to the world to come to Christ for salvation. It is open to all and everyone is invited. But only those who have been drawn through special revelation by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God actually come to Jesus. The Holy Spirit must put God's general call into effect if anyone is to be regenerated.

The natural objection might be that if God's salvation depends on His mercy and not on human endeavor, why does He blame us for not obeying Him? Who can resist His will? It's actually a presumptuous question for a mere human to ask the mighty Creator 'Why did You make me like this?' A potter has the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use. It's the same with God. He can make objects of wrath to show His power and patience, and He can also make objects of mercy whom He selects in advance for glory. God can do what He wants with His creation. If He wants to call Gentiles into His kingdom, as well as Jews, that is up to Him too. It is written in Hosea: *"I will call them 'My people' who are not My people; and I will call her 'My loved one' who is not My loved one, and in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.' (Hosea 2:23)*

God knew beforehand that most of the Jewish nation would reject the Messiah. He had given out countless warnings in the Old Testament that if Israel continued to rebel against Him, God would give His promises to a different people. It was His plan to draw the Gentiles to Himself. They were the ones who didn't pursue righteousness at first, but when Jesus came, they were the ones who received Him by faith. The Jews pursued the Law as a way to righteousness, trusting in their own merits to gain eternal life. They made the mistake of Cain. Then when Jesus came, they stumbled over the Stumbling Stone, just as prophesied in the Old Testament.

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame." (Isaiah 8:14)

Why Was the Law Given?

Since salvation requires the Holy Spirit, why did God bother to give the Law to Israel? Why add the Ten Commandments to the Old Covenant? The reason has to do with the spiritual state of the surrounding nations of that time. The pagan people were involved in idolatry and wickedness of every kind. The sacrificial laws and the tabernacle were all part of God's plan to set the nation of Israel apart for Himself. It was so easy for the Israelites to be seduced by their unbelieving neighbors. Even with the sacrifices as a constant reminder that they were sinners in need of a Savior, the Jews needed the Law to show them that holiness through their own efforts was impossible. Unfortunately the Jews just added works of the Law to the sacrificial system as a means to gain God's acceptance. This was not God's intention for the Law.

Why, then, was the Law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The Law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. (Galatians 3:19)

We also know that the Law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers...(1 Timothy 1:9).

The Law belonged to the Old Covenant, which although glorious, would eventually fade away, to be replaced by the more glorious New Covenant. After Jesus fulfilled what was written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Law passed away. This included religious ceremonies and prophecies and everything that Moses wrote. However, it had to stay in effect until it was completely fulfilled by Jesus. Every promise and prophecy concerning the Messiah had to be realized. Every standard of the Law had to be attained. Every penalty of the Law had to be applied. That's why Jesus had to be born under the authority of the Law.

“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to redeem those under Law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

Jesus fulfilled the Law in its entirety. Consequently, we as Christians are no longer under the Law.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ...Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the Law, but under grace.(Romans 6)

Abraham's covenant was a covenant of faith involving sacrifices that pointed to the coming Ultimate Sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The Law did not alter the Abrahamic Covenant. Rather the Law of Moses was a temporary measure until Christ, the Seed, came.

“Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the Law” (Galatians 3:25)

Christians are now a new humanity with new natures. Our hearts have been regenerated. We are led by God's Spirit who transforms us on the inside to be willingly obedient to the new, divine nature He has put within us. This new nature is like Christ's and He is the standard. The Old Covenant Law is not our standard. It belonged to the old humanity, the Jews in particular. However the Law could not create righteous hearts or impart eternal life. The Law is actually far inferior to the New Creation that operates by faith and is grounded in God's grace. The Law works on the outside to repress sinful behavior, but it cannot change the heart. New Covenant grace operates inside the regenerated heart so that it wholeheartedly desires to obey Christ.

Unfortunately many Jews preferred to keep the Law as their standard and they rejected Jesus and the New Covenant. James, the brother of Jesus wrote that such people who chose the Law to gain righteousness had to live by the entire Law. They couldn't break even one commandment.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For He who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:10-13)

Of course this meant that no one could attain righteousness through the Law because everyone sins. And the Law has no mercy for the sinner. The Law pronounces judgment on all lawbreakers without qualification. Justice and punishment are the Law's creed. Consequently salvation cannot come that way for the sinner. A new way had to be made and that was the 'righteousness by faith', which has been made freely available to all.

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, "that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:6-9)

In Deuteronomy 30:11-14, Moses told the Israelites that they didn't need to ascend to heaven to get God's word, or go across the sea to find it. The word was near them, in their mouths and in their hearts. Paul, the apostle used this scripture to say the same thing to the Romans. He was saying that it wasn't hard to find God's salvation. They did not have to seek proof of God's salvation by bringing Jesus down from heaven, or descend into the grave to see if Jesus was there. God had come and given them the truth through the gospel of grace, and through faith it was right there in their hearts when they believed, and in their mouths when they confessed Christ as their Savior. Isaiah wrote in Psalm 19 that the Jews as far back as Moses knew this message.

"Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

God hasn't rejected all of Israel, for He has chosen a remnant by grace. The elected ones believe in Christ as their Savior, but the rest are hardened, as it was written in Deuteronomy 29:4 *"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear to this very day."*

Although this has come true, it doesn't mean that they can never be recovered. Salvation has come to the Gentiles because the Jews rejected God, but this is so Israel will become jealous. Israel's sin has meant riches for the world by bringing reconciliation to all nations, but Israel's inclusion will mean even greater riches of eternal life. Take the analogy of an olive tree. If the roots of the tree are holy, so are the branches. The Jews are like branches that are broken off, and the Gentiles are like a wild olive shoot that is grafted in among the others so it can share the sap from the olive root. The root supports the branches, which are in the olive tree by faith. God was stern to those that fell (the Jews who wouldn't believe), and He was kind to the Gentiles because they did believe. But if the Jews do not persist in unbelief, God will graft them back in. If Gentiles (cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature) were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, think how much more readily the natural branches (Jewish people) can be grafted into their own olive tree! Israel will only experience hardening until all the Gentiles are saved. After that they will return to God and so **all** Israel (comprised of Jews and Gentiles) will be saved. In fact, it is written: *"A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the Lord.(Isaiah 59:20)*

So, as far as the gospel is concerned, the Jews were enemies for our sake, but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs. God's gifts and His call can never be retracted. He will not forget the promise He made to Abraham. God has permitted the Jews to be disobedient, even as the Gentiles were, in order that He may have mercy on all people, from every nation under the sun. God's plans are inscrutable and His wisdom is mysterious. No one can claim to know His mind and no one would have thought of such an amazing plan. Everything that exists is from God, and everything that exists is through Him, and ultimately everything is for Him.

God has called together the peoples of the world to reflect His grace and glory as the Church of Christ. We are all parts of Christ's Body, and each member belongs to the others. It is in this community that God's love is marvelously illustrated to the world. The Body of Christ is meant to showcase divine love, which is why we are called to be patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, and generous and hospitable with the Lord's people who are in need. As for outsiders, we are to bless those who persecute us, rejoice with those who rejoice, and empathize with those who mourn. God wants our lives to be lived in harmony and humility. He is pleased when we are willing to associate with people of low position, and when we refuse to repay evil for evil. It is important to Him that we guard our reputation, always doing what is right in the eyes of everyone and trying to live in peace with everyone. If we are opposed or persecuted, God desires that we leave room for His wrath because only He can avenge. Our part is to feed our enemy if he is hungry, and give him something to drink if he is thirsty. That will bring conviction, like burning coals, on his head. We are people who overcome evil with good, having only one debt - to love one another.

Love fulfills the Law's commandments, "you shall not commit adultery," "you shall not murder," "you shall not steal," "you shall not covet." In fact the entire Law is summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is the Law of Love that characterizes the Holy Spirit and energizes the Christian's heart. Because the Holy Spirit indwells the New Creation, there is no need for an external Law of commandments.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Galatians 5:18)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:17)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:23)

Chapter 2

(from Paul's Letter to the Bride Residing in Corinth)

It is easy to dismiss the gospel (good news) of what God has done because it goes against the natural inclinations of the human mind. Human reasoning leans towards merit as the means to obtaining divine favor. This was Cain's understanding of how to please God, but God indicated that He was not impressed with the fruits of human labor as a means to approach Him. Human effort and works were not acceptable to Him. Unfortunately most of mankind continues to follow Cain's example, which is why all of the world's religions are based on a merit system of some kind or another. However God's grace doesn't work that way. Rather than a merit system of works for reward, God's grace is a freely offered gift without any dependence on human effort. God's grace must be experienced as a life-changing transformation instigated by God because fallen man is dead in spirit and cannot produce life in himself. Fallen mankind has no capability of entering a realm where God's love and life exist. Left to himself, fallen man doesn't love God and doesn't know Him. He is unable to reach into the hidden spiritual realm where supernatural realities form the foundation of everything. No matter how hard he tries to attain spiritual life through meritorious works, he is doomed to failure, as Cain discovered when God rejected his human efforts. Only God's gracious kindness can rescue humanity. Human meritocracy has no power to save.

The Person of Jesus Christ perfectly reflects God's grace and mercy. In fact, Jesus is the Gift of Grace! He is the Foundation, the Rock and the Truth. All exists by Him, through Him, and for Him. Those who avail themselves of His grace and salvation become members of the Church, His Bride, His Holy Temple. God's grace is motivated by His love, which is so great that it stymies the imagination! It is a reality so precious and powerful that it cannot be contained, which is why, as servants of God, we have the high calling, as grace ambassadors, to proclaim the miraculous accomplishment of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, while living out the life He has put inside us.

Human Representative

In the beginning, God's grace was exhibited in His creation, but then sin entered our world and death followed on its heels. Death came in two forms. The most obvious was physical death where the body ceases to function as a living organism and begins to disintegrate back into the dust from which it originated. Then there is spiritual death where the human spirit is cut off from communion with God, and the soul is suffocated in a shroud of ignorance, fear, and shame. Both kinds of death came through our ancestor, Adam, in the Garden of Eden. He was the representative of humankind, the figurehead for the entire human race. The decisions he made affected all of us.

When Adam chose to rebel against God and subsequently fell into sin, all of us were caught up in that decision. Adam's spirit died in that Garden, and each and every descendent who came after him was born dead in spirit as well.

In contrast, Jesus is the Representative of a New Humanity (New Creation). Although He was divine, He was also human, which gave Him the legal qualification to assume representation of mankind in Adam's place. This also enabled Him to assume the guilt of humanity's sin so that He could die on the cross. When Jesus died, He took the whole of humanity into Hades with Him. After dying, however, the grave could not keep Him. Death could only hold Him for as long as it took to fulfill God's judgment on mankind's sin. Once our debt was paid off, Jesus threw off the shackles of death and was resurrected as a New Creation. Every believer in Christ is now part of that New Humanity. We have been placed into Christ and are therefore out of death's reach because, like Jesus, we are without the guilt of sin. Christ now lives in and through each of us, and His righteousness is our own. So, as in Adam all died, in Christ all believers are made alive with resurrection power.

Resurrection

The gospel declares that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, raised on the third day, and appeared to the apostles, as well as to over five hundred others. Everything in this gospel rests on the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Without that, there is no salvation for anyone - not for the Old Testament believers, and not for Christians today. If Jesus was not raised, then the world is lost forever, and Christians are the most deceived people on the face of the earth. If Jesus remained in the grave, we have no hope of eternal life with God, and heaven is but a dream. But thanks be to God, the resurrection IS true! Christ rose from the dead! He DID rescue us! And we, as Christians (along with the Old Testament saints) have been recreated as eternal beings destined to live with God forever.

This is a mystical concept and someone may ask 'How is this possible? How can we, as physical beings, live eternally in heaven with God? He is Spirit; we are flesh. What kind of body will we have there? Will we be disembodied spirits? Will we recognize one another? The apostle Paul dealt with these kinds of questions and his answer was that what is sown does not come to life unless it first dies. He drew a parallel with planting a seed. It grows into a plant after it is placed into the ground (synonymous with death in a grave), where it germinates, and then pushes up through the earth as an oak tree, or stalk of wheat, etc. He was explaining that death is necessary to transform the seed into a fully-grown plant. Then he spoke of the flesh of animals, fish, and humans, which are all very different from one another. He also spoke of heavenly bodies such as the moon, the stars, and planets, each with a different kind of splendor from that of the earth. Paul said it is the same with the resurrection. To don our eternal body, physical death is necessary, just as the seed dies by being placed into the ground so that it can germinate. The physical body that dies is temporal and inglorious, but the body that arises from death is spiritual and glorious.

The natural (or earthly) comes first, just as the first Adam started out as dust of the earth. The spiritual comes next, represented by Jesus, the Second Adam, who came from heaven. We all start out with earthly bodies, but Christians have a spiritual body after the earthly one wears out and dies. This is what the resurrection is all about. Paul spoke of this resurrection as a mystery, asserting that it would happen in the lifetime of some of the believers he was addressing. He said that some of them would 'sleep' (their physical bodies would die) and they would await the resurrection while in the grave (Sheol). Others would be living when the Great Change would occur. It would happen in a flash, as quick as a bat of an eyelash. The living believers would have their bodies changed, but it would not be seen with physical eyes. In other words, whatever changes occurred, it would not affect their physical bodies, but something spiritual would happen on the inside that would result in a new spiritual body. This spiritual body would be immortal.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (1Corinthians 15:51-54)

This victory over death was a promise from God 700 to 800 years before Jesus came to earth.

"I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? (Hosea 13:14).

That victory over death involved overcoming sin because sin goes hand in hand with death. Death is like a wasp with a poisonous stinger. Death's stinger is sin. Sin gets its power from the Law's condemnation and its demand for the death penalty. Death and sin work hand in hand, and they use the Law to effect their purposes.

"The sting of death is sin.." (1Corinthians 15:56) "..and the power of sin is the law." (1Corinthians 15:56) "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23)

By taking upon Himself the death sentence declared against sinful humanity, Jesus fulfilled the Law's penalty clause against sin. Once the Law was satisfied, it no longer had any basis for condemning sin. Jesus paid the debt in full. In this way, sin lost its power to threaten death, and death lost its stinger. Sin was dealt with forever on the cross - completely taken away. And Jesus could not be judged for any sin of His own either, because He never committed any. Furthermore, through Christ's resurrection from death, believers have been given the Savior's righteous life and His divine nature. This is not symbolic but an actual effect of the new birth.

Therefore it is impossible for us to be condemned for sin anymore. We have passed out of death into eternal life. We have come out of the Old Man and into the New, released out of bondage into freedom. We are no longer separated from God, but have been brought into close intimacy with Him. What Jesus has accomplished for us is truly beyond what we could ever have thought or imagined! All the promises of God have come true in Jesus. As our Foundation, we have firm footing that makes our calling certain and our future secure. In addition, God has set His seal of ownership on us and put His Holy Spirit within our hearts. We, as Christians, belong to Him and like the captives of a victorious army commander; we are led by Jesus in a triumphal procession of victory for the entire universe to see. It is a display open to the angelic and demonic realms, as well as to the world we live in. Everyone can see that we belong to Jesus! That is why Christ's followers in the early Church were called 'Christians' or 'little Christs'.

To those who long for an eternity with God, Christians are like a sweet perfume, enveloping the soul and drawing it to breathe in the quickening vitality of Christ's life. However to those who are perishing, we are an unsavory aroma that portends their death and ultimate destruction. But no matter what the response, Christians serve as God's ministers in bringing the message of His New Covenant to the world.

Covenant

A 'covenant' is an agreement between parties to do something specified. The Old Covenant was between God and the Israelites and it was conditional on their obedience to Him. The Law was given to help the Israelites understand just what that obedience entailed. It was a two-sided agreement, between God and man, but no human could keep the Law's perfect standards. However the Old Covenant was replaced with the New Covenant of the Spirit, which gives life, completely at variance with the Old Covenant. Unlike the Old, the New Covenant was one-sided (only God was involved) and it brought about the re-creation of humanity, whereby dead spirits (hearts of stone) were replaced with living spirits bearing the life of Christ (hearts of flesh).

The Law, or ministry of death, played a significant role in the Old Covenant. It was engraved as Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone. Moses received them on Sinai from God Himself. Being in God's presence had been so momentous that Moses was filled with the Lord's glory, which shone from him like a light. It lasted for a while but eventually the light of glory faded so that Moses put a veil over his face so that the Israelites wouldn't see it leave him. This fading away of glory was to signify that the Law would one day pass away. It was temporary, designed to expose sin and point to the need for a Savior. However, the Israelites were largely blind to this. A spiritual veil hung over their minds and hearts so that they mistakenly believed that the Law would always exist as a means for gaining righteousness and favor with God. When Jesus came to earth as the Light and Life of God, ushering in a New Covenant not based on works of the Law, most of the Israelites rejected Him and His message.

They tenaciously clung to the Old Covenant, refusing to exchange the ministry of death for an eternal ministry that far exceeds the glory of the former. They clung to the veil over their minds and refused to let go. Many still wear that suffocating veil today. However everyone who turns to Christ has that veil taken away, and as we gaze at the Lord's glory with unveiled faces, we are transformed by His Spirit into His image, becoming increasingly like Him. His glory becomes imprinted on our hearts and minds and we shine with the radiance of His truth and righteousness. However this Light of God's grace is housed in our weak and fragile bodies so as to show that it is God's glory and not our own. When we are assailed on all sides, sometimes to the point of despair and confusion, God's victorious power (glory) shines through, lifting us past our human limitations. We are never destroyed, no matter how great the persecution. Our mortality embodies the death of Jesus as a man, while the life of Jesus shines forth majestically from within as power from God.

It is our faith that doesn't let us give up and become discouraged. Although we are physically dying, our spirits are renewed every day. The problems we encounter on earth are just momentary troubles that pile on eternal glory for us, which far outweighs any difficulty we encounter. This is why we keep our focus on what is unseen rather than what is seen, because what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Earthly tents like our physical bodies are destroyed, but we won't be found naked, for every believer in Christ is an eternal being. We have an eternal house in heaven and the Holy Spirit is the guarantor of this.

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit gives you life because of righteousness.

And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who dwells within you. (Romans 8:10,11)

Immortality

Paul told the early Christians that they already had spiritual life because of their new birth in Christ, but that wasn't all that God had for them. Something more awaited them concerning their bodies. The Holy Spirit, who lived inside them, would give them immortality. Some believe Paul meant that after we die physically, we will be resurrected physically at the end of time. Others believe Paul was referring to a spiritual resurrection that would occur shortly within the lifetime of some of the believers he was addressing. Paul said it hadn't happened yet, and wouldn't, until Christ would return to bring judgment on Israel.

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:28,29)

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body. (Philippians 3:20,21)

"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:39-40)

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day." (John 6:44)

Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." (John 6:54)

Paul indicated that the believers would be resurrected on 'the last day'. They would become immortal - equipped for eternity. Jesus would give their natural bodies a spiritual element that would make them eternal beings.

It is sown a natural body, it is RAISED A SPIRITUAL BODY. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. (1 Corinthians 15:44-46)

Jesus told Martha that whoever believed in Him would never die (spiritually), whether they were dead (like Lazarus) or alive (like Martha).

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

For those who died under the Old Covenant, Jesus would return at His second coming (on the last day of the Old Covenant age) and take them out of Sheol to heaven. Those still alive at that time would also be resurrected, but not in an observable event. The apostle Paul said it would be instantaneous and mysterious.

*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him. ..I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: **We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed**— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (1Corinthians 15:22-23, 50-54)

The resurrection was a past event. Old Covenant saints were taken from Sheol in 70 AD and are now with Jesus. Because Christians have eternal life and can never die spiritually, we go to be with the Lord in heaven the instant our physical bodies die. We have already put on immortality, so when we die physically, our new spiritual bodies will appear, enabling us to dwell in the spiritual realm with Christ. But of course now, while living on the earth, we wish we could be away from our earthly body and at home with Jesus. Nevertheless, we are here, and so we make it our goal to please Jesus as we live out our earthly lives. While doing so, we look at things from an eternal perspective. We see that because we are in Christ; we are new creations; the old has gone and the new is here!

Chapter 3

(from Paul's Letter to the Bride Residing in Galatia)

The gospel of God's grace in Christ Jesus was attacked in the early Church by Jewish legalists, with the result that many Christians were thrown into confusion. It is still the same today. Much of today's Church has incorporated the Jewish Law into the gospel, thereby distorting its message and destroying its power. Misguided and self-deceived teachers have promoted this false gospel for centuries and the end result has been spiritual chaos in the Church. The apostle Paul was adamant that if anyone (himself included) or even an angel, preached a false gospel, they were under God's curse. The true gospel of grace stipulates that a person is justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not the works of the Law. It was through the Law that we died to the Law, so that we can live for God. The Law condemned sin and demanded the death penalty and that applied to all of humanity. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, He was the Representative of the human race, which means that all of us were therefore, by identification with Him, crucified as well. It was as though all of mankind was fused spiritually with Jesus. He died; we died. The punishment for sin was satisfied in Christ, and therefore it was satisfied in us too. This is what scripture means when it says that through the Law (being in Christ when He suffered the Law's penalty for sin), we died to the Law (once the Law was fulfilled in Christ it had nothing more to say to sin). Consequently we can now live for God.

Our first representative was Adam, also called the Old Man. Adam caused the entire human race to be put to death because he sinned in the Garden of Eden. As mankind's representative, his doom passed on to all of us. However Adam's representation of mankind passed from him to Christ when Jesus assumed the sins of the old nature on the cross. Therefore when Jesus died by paying the penalty of death, which the Law required, the old man (old humanity) died with Him. Then when Christ was raised from the grave, He became the Representative of the New Man (new creation), and by identification, all believers have been raised with Him. His life has become our own so that the life we now live in our bodies is Christ living in us. We enter into that life through faith in Him, who loved us and gave Himself for us. That is what God's grace is all about. It provides us with Christ's life and righteousness, which can never be gained through the Law. If it was possible to become righteous through the Law, then Jesus died for nothing.

Superior Life

It is therefore ridiculous for a Christian, who has received the Holy Spirit by faith, to try to live by the works of the Law. It is sheer foolishness. If we began by the Spirit, we are meant to finish by the Spirit, not by the works of the flesh. The Law cannot give us the Spirit or work miracles. The New Covenant of the Spirit is far superior to the Old Covenant Law.

Looking back to the Old Testament, we see that Abraham *“believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”* That also applies to us Christians, who are children of Abraham because we seek righteousness through faith, like he did. God said that all nations would be blessed through Abraham, so those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. But those who rely on the works of the Law are under a curse, because scriptures say that if they don't do EVERYTHING written in the Law, God condemns them. The only One who was able to obey the Law perfectly was Jesus, because He is God and therefore perfectly righteous. Yet Jesus took on Himself the sin of humanity, redeeming us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: *“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a stake.”* He paid the entire penalty for sin and redeemed us so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to us and that we might receive the Holy Spirit.

The Seed

Looking at the laws of inheritance, we can see that Abraham was given promises that were to be inherited by his Seed. The scriptures do not say 'seeds' (many descendants) but to one Seed (Jesus Christ). The Law came 430 years later but the first covenant promise still stayed in effect. The Law was added to curb Israel's sin, but it was only to exist until the Seed (Jesus Christ) came. Once He claimed His inheritance, there was no further need for the Law. It had been given through angels and entrusted to Moses (the mediator of the Law), but it was never intended to impart life. Righteousness (which qualifies for eternal life) cannot come through the Law. Before the early Christians (many of whom were Jews) came to faith in Christ, the Law was their custodian (guard), which kept them locked up. Like a jailer, it restrained their actions. But when faith came, the Law was no longer needed. As children of God who were spiritually baptized into Christ, they were clothed with Christ's righteousness. Now Jews, Gentiles, slave or free, male or female, we are all one in Christ Jesus and we are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Heirs are under a guardian if they are underage. They can only get the estate after they have attained the legal age set by the father. Until that time, they are actually like slaves to the trustee. It was kind of like that with the Covenants. Under the Old Covenant, God's people were in slavery to the Law's commandments until they 'came of age' at the time when God sent Jesus. Christ was born under the Law as well, but His mission was to redeem mankind from the Law and make us children of God. Now, because we are sons and daughters, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts and He teaches us to call God our 'Papa' because we are now full heirs in possession of our inheritance. Because God has given us such wonderful gifts, it is preposterous to turn back to the Law, as if we prefer to be controlled by weak rules that prescribe the observance of special days, seasons and years, and which can never be kept perfectly anyway. It's actually very perplexing that anyone would want to be under the Law. Obviously such a person is not aware of what the Law says, that those who live by the Law must obey it totally or face eternal destruction! They are ignorant of what the Old and New Covenants are all about.

The Bible describes two women, one being Hagar, a slave woman who bore Ishmael, a son according to the flesh, and Sarah, a free woman who bore Isaac, a son born as the result of a divine promise. The women represent the two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai, made with children who are slaves (Hagar's children). This corresponds to the physical city of Jerusalem. But the spiritual Jerusalem that is above is free, represented by Sarah and her children.

"Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." (Galatians 4:27)

Believers in Christ are the children of promise - the spiritual descendants of Sarah. At that time Isaac (born under the power of the Holy Spirit and representing spiritual Israel) was persecuted by Ishmael (representing physical slaves under the Law). Scripture plainly states: *"Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." (Galatians 4:21)*

Since we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman, we are to stand firm in the freedom that Christ has given us. We cannot let ourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. If we place ourselves under the Jewish Law, Christ can have no value for us. We are then alienated from Christ and have fallen away from grace. Those under the Law are obligated to obey the WHOLE Law, but under Christ, all that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Legalists try to tear believers away from freedom in Christ so as to put them in bondage. They are like yeast spreading through a lump of dough. Their false teaching infiltrates the Church until the whole congregation is thrown into confusion. Such agitators should be denounced and rejected as heretics, but instead they often condemn Christians who teach grace as being the heretics. Their favorite accusation is that teaching the grace gospel will lead to licentiousness. Obviously we as free people do not use our liberty to indulge the flesh. We don't live in the realm of the flesh and we are not IN the flesh. We are also not under the Law.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. (Romans 8:9)

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the Law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

We don't live in sexual immorality, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, etc. Unsaved people live like that and will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, we live by the Holy Spirit and exhibit love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. That's why Christians don't need to be under the Law anymore. In Christ Jesus, we have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, and now live and walk by the Spirit and exhibit His kind of fruit.

'Crucifying the flesh' is a term meaning to put to death the fleshly impulses that arise in our bodies to tempt us to sin. This involves believing that Jesus has destroyed our sin nature on the cross and set us free from any obligation to follow its old demands. Our faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross effectually 'crucifies' the flesh, stripping it of its power over our lives. Trying to suppress the flesh through rules, asceticism, or self-effort only gives the flesh more power, whereas refusing to be cowed by its demands defangs it.

Some in the Church do not walk by the Spirit and actually oppose God's grace. These may not even be true Christians. A person's actions reveal whether one is truly a believer in Christ. If a person sows to please his flesh, it reveals the true state of his heart. Living by the flesh only brings destruction. But as Christians, we have been chosen to be holy and blameless in God's sight, and so we are constantly sowing good deeds that are motivated from hearts indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We belong to God and live our lives for Him. That is why God has showered us with every spiritual blessing in Christ and adopted us as His very own children. All this, because God has predestined us from eternity and desired to pour out His love on us lavishly. He has made this mystery of His will known to us and commissioned us to bring this gospel of salvation to the world.

Chapter 4

(from Paul's Letter to the Bride Residing in Ephesus)

As Christians we can celebrate because our old sinful lives are gone. Once we followed the ways of the world. But we are now alive with Christ because of God's great love for us and because He is rich in mercy. He has raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. This is not just symbolic, but an actual spiritual reality. Christ is now in heaven seated at the right hand of His Father, and because we are in Christ and one with Him, we are there too. It is impossible to be lifted any higher than this. God has done this so that throughout the coming ages He might show the amazing riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us. That's what grace actually is - God's kindness. It is by His grace (kindness) that we have been saved, and the means of that grace was through faith— not from anything coming from ourselves, or by any works whatever. Grace is the gift of God; therefore no one can boast. We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do, and these are faith works, not those arising out of human effort. It doesn't matter what we were formerly, or how hopelessly lost we were in our former lives. Now the blood of Christ has brought us near to God. The Law's penalty was carried out on His flesh through His crucifixion on the cross and that means the penalty is paid in full. The Law cannot fault us any longer. Consequently we have peace with God. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has made peace between His Father and us. We are now God's people and also members of His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the Chief Cornerstone. In Christ we are building blocks joined together as the holy temple in which God dwells by his Holy Spirit.

Mystery

Other generations in the Old Testament didn't know this mystery of Christ, which has now been revealed through God's holy apostles and prophets. Through the gospel, we now know that the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one Body, sharing together in the promise in Christ Jesus. Paul, the apostle, was chosen to make this mystery plain to the Gentiles. God also intended that His wisdom be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (principalities and powers).

"For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him." (Colossians 1:16)

"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15)

Because of our faith in Jesus, we can now approach God with freedom and confidence. The Holy Spirit living inside us stirs up this confidence (faith) and we are strengthened with His power, as we understand the magnitude of Christ's love for us. As we glory in God's great love, we are filled to overflowing with the fullness of God, empowering the Lord to do through us so much more than we could ever ask or imagine. One of the greatest things God does is to bring unity to His people. There is one Body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. As the Spirit encourages us to grow in faith and love, we focus increasingly on one another's best interests, using the spiritual gifts He has given for the good of everyone in the Body of Christ. He gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (as gifts) to equip His people in the Church for Kingdom service on earth. These servants of the Church help to build up the believers, encouraging unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, so that the Church may attain maturity and experience the complete fullness of Christ. The Church no longer lives in the darkness of those who do not know Christ, who have lost all sensitivity, and have given themselves over to sensuality through indulgence in every kind of impurity and greed. But Christians have put off their old nature by faith in Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and have put on the new nature with a mind that seeks to be righteous and holy like God. We were once darkness, but now we are light in the Lord and we live as children of light. The Holy Spirit inside us produces the fruit of goodness, righteousness and truth. We reject all the fruitless deeds of darkness. In fact, we expose them. It's shameful what the disobedient do in secret but when the light exposes it, it becomes visible and is turned into light. This is why it says: *"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

So we are careful how we live, making the most of every opportunity to reflect the life of Jesus to the world. We can't be foolish. We need to understand what the Lord's will is and preach a true gospel. God has done such marvelous things but there are enemies of the gospel who seek to obscure and diminish what He has accomplished in Christ. We must be strong in the mighty power of the Lord when facing them. God has given us spiritual armor that enables us to stand against the devil's schemes. We know that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. God has provided us with spiritual weaponry to battle them - heavenly armor that protects us when evil comes, enabling us to firmly stand our ground.

Spiritual Armor

We have the **belt of truth** buckled around our waist. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" so this symbol speaks of the protection Jesus' words give us in the battle against the lies and deceptions of the enemy. Without understanding truth, we can be carried about by false doctrines and by the trickery of men.

We also have the **breastplate of righteousness**. This breastplate symbolizes the righteousness Jesus Christ has given us, making us new creations in Him. As Christians, we have a new identity and a divine nature that is free from condemnation and guilt. This protects us from the accusations of the enemy who seeks to destroy us by making us afraid of God and unsure of His love. Knowing that we are perfect in Christ is essential to gain spiritual victory over sin and guilt.

Our **feet are to be shod with the gospel** of God's grace, which symbolizes going out to reach the lost who have never heard of the salvation of Jesus Christ. Wherever we go, we are to have a ready answer for those who ask us the reason for our faith in Jesus. The Lord wishes to add many more to His Kingdom through the preaching of the Good News.

The **shield of faith** extinguishes all the flaming arrows of the evil one, protecting our hearts as we rest on the promises of God. Our faith resists the tormenting doubts and fears that can attack the mind when facing difficult circumstances.

The **helmet of salvation** symbolizes the renewed mind which guards and protects our thought life and replaces false ideas and thoughts with the spiritual reality found in Jesus Christ. Understanding our salvation releases us into freedom. We are able to come to God with bold confidence in seeking answers to our prayers.

The **sword of the Spirit** is our offensive weapon with which we resist the enemy, cutting through his lies and turning aside his attacks. It symbolizes the Word of God which has great authority to overcome any deception or oppression. With God's Word firmly anchored in our hearts, power is unleashed into our lives to overcome all obstacles. We can also pray with power in the Spirit, knowing that He hears us and delights to answer our petitions.

This gospel of God's grace in Christ needs to be fearlessly made known to the whole world. As ambassadors of Jesus Christ our greatest desire is to have courage so that Christ will be honored in our lives, even to the death. After all, to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's hard to choose which one is better. If we depart this life, we get to be with Jesus in heaven, but if we remain on earth, we get to preach the good news to the world. It's much better, of course, to be with Christ, but it's beneficial to other believers to encourage and uplift them in the Lord. Either way, we just want to boast in Jesus, and glorify His name.

Chapter 5

(from Paul's Letters to the Bride Residing in Philippi & Colossae)

Jesus has made everything new for the Christian. We have a new identity, a new heart, and a new life. Whatever gains we once derived from our old way of life are loss for the sake of Christ. In fact everything else on earth means nothing compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ. Next to Him everything else has no value. All that matters is that we are in Christ and have His righteousness, which makes us completely blameless in His sight. We attained that righteousness through faith and now all our desires are focused on knowing Christ. We rejoice as we experience the power of His resurrection working through us, forgetting what is behind and looking forward to all God has purposed for us.

Sadly, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ and their destiny is destruction. They live for temporal, earthly things and their glory is in their shame. But we focus on heaven where our citizenship resides. Heaven is where new creations in Christ are registered. We comprise the Temple of Jesus Christ and our membership is in the family of God. The Father is our Papa and Jesus is our King, sending us on missions as ambassadors to the world, proclaiming the wonderful news of what Jesus has done for humanity. We tell people that Jesus is the exact image of God, the firstborn of all creation. It is for Him that all things were created, both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. Everything has been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Jesus is the head of the Church, the first one resurrected (which is why He is called the firstborn from among the dead). He is supreme above everything else. God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus and to reconcile everything to Himself through Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind... He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-19)

The blood of Jesus shed on the cross has made peace between God and ourselves. Once we were alienated from God. Our minds, influenced by our sinful behavior, made God our enemy. Sin separated us from the Father.

But now He has reconciled us by Christ's physical body through death on the cross. We were represented in the body of Christ, and His death was reckoned as our own. When Jesus was resurrected, we were represented in His resurrected body and raised with Him as the New Creation, holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation. This is the marvelous hope held out in the message of the gospel, which we are bringing to the world. We desire that others may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they might have a complete understanding of this mystery of God, namely Christ. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him, and it is in Him that our lives are rooted and built up as He strengthens our faith and causes our hearts to overflow with thankfulness.

No Longer Slaves

What we have is amazingly precious, so it is crucial that we allow no one to take us captive through empty, deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than on Christ. Those elemental forces are fallen angels under Satan's control and they seek to control the human race through their wicked lies. But we know that Christ is all the fullness of Deity in bodily form, and He is the head over every power and authority. He is the One who really controls all things, having overcome all the demonic forces at the cross. It was at the cross where we were spiritually circumcised, i.e. the flesh part of our being was cut off from the old sin nature. The old sin nature was dead spiritually and had no power against the impulses of the flesh. However Jesus changed all that. The old man was buried with Christ in baptism (signifying our death with Him), and a new man came into being at Christ's resurrection (signifying our being made new creatures with Christ's divine nature). The flesh cannot control our new nature, although it tries to stir up sin through the weakness of our body. However the new spirit inside us, joined to the indwelling Holy Spirit, can overcome the stirrings of the flesh and refuse to give in to temptation. We are no longer slaves to sin. Jesus Christ forgave us all our sins, canceled the legal charge that condemned us, and took it away, nailing it to the cross. He defeated the powers and authorities, which enslaved us, and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. So don't be deceived by demonic ploys to enslave you through adding the Law and other manmade rules as requirements for salvation and/or sanctification. The Law has been fulfilled in Christ and we are free from its bondage. Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to religious precepts and traditions that were actually a shadow of things to come. The Temple festivals, ceremonies, and Sabbaths all pointed to Christ. He is the fulfillment of them all. It isn't up to us to save ourselves, although there are some who try. These kinds of people pretend to be humble and claim they have had revelations of angels, or special prophecies that give them greater authority than the apostles themselves! They do this in order to entrap and seduce others into accepting their authority and influence. Such people go into great detail about what they have seen and expect others to be in awe of them. Their unspiritual minds are inflated with arrogant notions, but they have actually lost connection with the Head, Jesus Christ, who supports the Church and causes it to grow.

True believers have died to the spiritual forces of this world, so we don't submit to worldly rules that forbid this or that. These rules are all destined to perish because they are merely based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations might appear to be wise, with their pretense of self-degradation, obeisance and asceticism, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

The Church has always had problems with people like this. One particular group, the Gnostics, were particularly problematic for the early Church. They are alluded to in Colossians, 1 John, 2 John, much of the gospel of John, 1 Timothy, and several other portions of the New Testament. The Gnostics blended their philosophy with existing religions, like Judaism and Christianity, claiming that those who followed their belief system could receive a special revelation of the truth, making them more enlightened than the ordinary Christian. They taught asceticism as the means of attaining spiritual communion with God, but they were also indifferent to licentiousness. The insidious danger of their doctrine lay in their hybridization of the gospel, mixing truth with error. This is still a problem today, over two millennia later. False religions of every kind attempt to destroy, weaken, and discredit the gospel. Because these religions teach the doctrines of demons, they are often clever and persuasive, causing great harm to the Church.

One way to keep ourselves separate from false teachings is to set our hearts on things above, where Christ is, always remembering that we have been raised with Christ and are seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms. Our minds should be on things above, not on earthly things. We have died, and our life is now hidden with the glorified Christ. That's why we put to death whatever belongs to the flesh (earthly impulses and inclinations of the body) such as sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed (which is idolatry). We used to walk in those ways, in the old life before we were saved, but now we reject things like anger, rage, malice, slander, and foul language. We have taken off the old nature with its practices (the sin nature died with Christ on the cross and we no longer give in to sin), and we have put on the new nature (we now live according to the divine nature that Christ has given us which is progressively being renewed into the image of its Creator). All of us are included, whether Gentile or Jew, slave or free, male or female. Christ is everything, and He is in all believers. Therefore, being God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, we clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with each other and forgiving one another. We can now forgive as the Lord forgave us. And over all these virtues we put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Chapter 6

(from Paul's Letters to the Bride Residing in Thessalonica)

God has chosen us for salvation, so we do not grieve like the rest of the world when a loved one dies. In fact, if they are Christians, they are already with the Lord. Just as the grave could not hold Jesus because He was without sin, neither can death hold anyone who has been born again with His righteous nature. When Christians die, they have merely shed their mortal bodies and are now living immortal lives in heaven with their God and Savior. In the early Church, believers in Christ who passed away were said to be 'asleep'. This was before the promised resurrection and second coming of the Lord. It was the hope of the living believers that when Jesus returned, their loved ones (who had passed away) would be resurrected from the grave. The apostle Paul told the Christians that Jesus was the firstborn from the dead, because He had been resurrected from the grave on the third day. (Scripture indicates that the Old Testament saints were taken out of Sheol by Christ at this time (Ephesians 4:8). They were taken to heaven, or perhaps to Paradise, the place Jesus mentioned to the thief on the cross. The apostle Paul was taken up to "third heaven" which could have been another reference to Paradise. Paul said that next after Christ (the first-fruits from the dead) it would be the turn of all the New Testament saints who had believed in Jesus as the Messiah but had died prior to His second coming. Paul said that at the Second Coming of Jesus, all those 'asleep' in the Lord would be caught up in the clouds to meet Him in the air. The Lord Himself would come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, and all the dead who belonged to Him would be resurrected to live with Him forever.

"Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.' (Matthew 26:64) Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. (Matthew 24:30-35)

Second Coming

The apostle Paul also promised that the Christians who were still alive at Christ's coming would be instantly changed (immortalized) as well. This would happen in a twinkling of an eye, although it would be unseen in the natural.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.(1 Corinthians 15 :51-53)

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then **we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.**....(1 Thessalonians 4:15- 17)*

These words greatly encouraged the early Christians, but of course they wanted to know when this wonderful resurrection would occur. All the apostles could tell them was that it would happen very soon. In fact, just as Jesus had said before He was crucified, it would happen within the lifetime of some of them hearing this message.

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (Matthew 24:42-44)

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:8-9)

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. (Philippians 4:5)

In just a little while He who is coming will come and will not delay.(Hebrews 10:37)

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. (1Peter 4:7)

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. (Matthew 24:33)

The resurrection would happen at the Second Coming of Christ, but so would the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Christ was coming to destroy Israel and it would be a time of great sorrow and lamentation. It would be completely unexpected because Jesus would come like a thief in the night. People would be thinking they were safe, with nothing to worry about, but that's when destruction would suddenly come, like the sudden labor pains a pregnant woman experiences. Those living in darkness would not escape God's wrath. Christians, however, are children of light and do not live in darkness, so that day would not surprise them. They wouldn't be asleep when the great event happened. Rather, they would be alert, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. They would be waiting, unafraid that they would suffer God's wrath, knowing they were appointed to receive salvation through Jesus Christ who died for them. Whether awake (living at the time of the resurrection) or asleep (passed away), they would all live together with the Lord. The Christians were told to encourage one another with this promise.

The apostle Paul prayed that God would keep the spirit, soul, and body of each believer blameless at the Coming of Christ. They were not to be dismayed that they were presently suffering persecution because God would pay back trouble to those who troubled them. He would bring relief when the Lord Jesus was revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He would punish those who did not know God and who did not obey the gospel of Jesus. They would be punished with everlasting destruction, shut out from the Lord's presence and from the glory of His might. On that day Jesus would be glorified and marveled at by all the Christians.

Then Paul added that the believers were not to be disturbed by a teaching that supposedly came from him, that the day of the Lord had already come. Apparently 2 believers, Hymenaeus and Philetus, were going around saying that Jesus had already come. This is interesting because many of the Christians believed these men. This would have been impossible if Paul had taught that Christ's second coming would be visible to the naked eye. Hymenaeus and Philetus would have had no credibility if that were the case. Obviously Paul had told the Christians that Jesus' second coming would be spiritual, taking place in the heavenly realm. This made it easier for these 2 false teachers to confuse the believers. Paul corrected this mistake and added that Christ's Coming would not occur until a 'man of lawlessness' led a great rebellion, opposing and exalting himself above God. In fact he would even call himself God and set himself up in the Jewish Temple. He had not yet been revealed to the early Church because the Holy Spirit was holding him back temporarily, until the proper time for the Lord's Coming. The rebellion was already happening at that time, but when Jesus came, the 'lawless one' would be exposed. Paul said that Jesus would overthrow Satan with the breath of His mouth and destroy the lawless rebel leader by the splendor of His coming. Satan would use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders to deceive the unbelievers who refused to love the truth and be saved. God would send them a powerful delusion so that they would believe the lie and be condemned for delighting in wickedness. Until the Lord came, the Christians were to stand firm and hold fast to Paul's teachings.

Paul ended by asking the believers to pray that he would be delivered from wicked and evil people, and he ended by praying that God would strengthen and protect the Church. Paul assured the Christians then living that they would see all these things happen, including the exposure of the 'man of lawlessness' and the resurrection of believers at Christ's coming.

"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. Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, **this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.** Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Matthew 24: 29-35)*

The only event that could have possibly included the Second Coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the living and the dead, and the destruction of Israel was in 70AD when the Roman general, Titus, besieged the city of Jerusalem. When the walls of the city were eventually breached, Titus commanded his army to put everything to the torch. Thousands of Jews were butchered and their Temple was desecrated and razed to the ground. Those who weren't killed were taken away as slaves. Interestingly, it is said that not one Christian perished with the Jews. They had heeded the warnings of Jesus and the apostles, fleeing to caves in the wilderness as soon as they heard that the Roman army was approaching. The Jewish historian, Josephus, gave a detailed account of this event.

Chapter 7

(from Paul's Letters to Timothy & Titus for the Bride)

A lot of people in the Church like to emphasize that the Law is necessary, if not for salvation, then certainly for sanctification. (Sanctification means setting apart for a special purpose or work and to make holy or sacred). Those who hold this view believe that Jesus paid the penalty for sin (which saves the believer if he has faith in Christ's atonement on the cross) but the Law is still essential in order to keep the Christian obedient to God. However they usually exclude the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant and the 5th commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. This insertion of Law-keeping into the gospel is widely taught in many churches even today, but it was not the message of Paul or the apostles of the early Church. They knew that the Law was good, but only if one uses it properly. The Apostle Paul told Timothy that the Law was made for lawbreakers, rebels, and irreligious people, not for the righteous in Christ. People who killed their fathers or mothers, murderers, the sexually immoral, practicing homosexuals, slave traders and liars needed the Law to restrain them from evil. Every society requires laws for this reason. A lawless society is a frightening place because when there is no restraint on evil, people harm one another and chaos reigns. The Law rightfully condemns wickedness and keeps sinful humanity under control. It also elucidates the need for God's mercy and salvation through Christ Jesus. This function of the Law is beneficial and it fits in with God's desire for all people to know the truth of the gospel. He desires just societies where people can live righteously in peace and quiet.

Christians are called as ambassadors of God to tell people that there is only one God and one mediator, Jesus Christ, between them and God. Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for mankind and this was well witnessed to at the time. What He accomplished is a great mystery, but it is not a secret. Jesus was seen in the flesh by hundreds after rising from the dead. He was vindicated by the Spirit at His baptism and seen by angels. His gospel was preached among the nations of the then existing world, before He was taken up in glory. Unfortunately it wasn't long before some in the early Church abandoned the faith and followed teachings taught by demons and spread by hypocritical liars. Some of these false teachers forbade people from marrying and ordered them to abstain from certain foods, even though God wants His children to enjoy His gifts with thanksgiving. Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with a thankful heart.

The Battle

Living for Christ Jesus is a battle and we are called to fight for the faith. The Spirit God gave us doesn't make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-control. Consequently we need never be ashamed to claim Christ as our Savior. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done, but because of His own purpose and grace.

That grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. It was always God's plan and it was fully revealed when Jesus came to earth as the Messiah and Redeemer of the world. Death was destroyed and Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. This gospel is a precious treasure that must be guarded with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives inside us. Often we Christians suffer for this gospel, but God gives us the strength to endure for the sake of the ones He has chosen who have not yet obtained the salvation and eternal glory that is in Christ Jesus. Since we belong to God and have died with Christ, so our lives belong to Him and we wish only to please Him. Whatever suffering and abuse we experience on earth because of our faith, we must remember that Christ has made us over-comers. Right now we are reigning with Jesus and He has already given us victory. The world may reject us, but Jesus will never forsake us. He will disown those who disown Him, but He will always remain faithful to His own.

We believe His Word, convinced that all Scripture is God-breathed. His Word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that we may be equipped for every good work. That's why we Christians preach the word with great patience and careful instruction. Some people don't listen to sound doctrine, but instead gather teachers around them who say what they want to hear. Such people turn from the truth and follow after myths. For Christians it is important to keep our heads in all situations, especially when we encounter hardship as we evangelize and do the work of ministry. At the end of our lives, we can be assured of a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to all who have longed for Him. The early Church certainly longed for Christ. They were awaiting the appearing of Christ's glory which they called the 'blessed hope'. At one time, they had been deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, but then the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. Jesus saved them, not because of anything righteous they had done, but because of His mercy. He has also saved us in the same way, through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, so that having been justified by His grace, we are now heirs to Christ's kingdom. This is a trustworthy gospel and we can devote ourselves to spreading this Word to everyone. However if people want to argue with us about it, we should walk away from their foolish arguments and quarrels. These are unprofitable and useless. Some of these wranglers are warped and sinful, and condemn themselves by their words and actions. If they continue to argue and oppose, it's best to just stay away. Our focus should be on doing whatever is good, peaceable and considerate, and we should always be gentle toward everyone.

Chapter 8

(From Paul's Letters to Philemon and Hebrews for the Bride)

The history of Israel is an illustration of God's great plan of salvation right from the beginning of time. In past millenniums, God spoke through prophets in various ways, but in the New Testament He spoke through His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He appointed heir of all things. God made the entire universe through His Son. He is the radiance of God's glory and exactly represents Him, sustaining all things by His powerful word. In fact, He is even called the 'Word'. After Jesus came to earth and had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. No angel has the authority or power that the Son does. Jesus Christ is far superior to any angelic being and He has inherited a name greatly superior to theirs.

God said to Jesus: *"You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Psalm 2:7)*

And again, *"I will be his Father, and He will be my Son" (2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles 17:13)*

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, He says, *"Let all God's angels worship Him." (Deuteronomy 32:43)*

God's angels are sometimes called 'sons of God' but their role is greatly inferior to Christ's. The word 'sonship' in Jewish culture can refer to someone who was "sired" by a person, or someone who is a servant under a teacher or leader. Jesus was different from the angels in that He was not only a servant of God during His earthly ministry, but also "begotten" by God, which no angel could claim.

"He makes His angels spirits, and His servants flames of fire." (Psalm 104:4)

But about the Son He says, *"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy." (Psalm 45:6,7)*

He also says, *"In the beginning, Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end." (Psalm 102:25-27)*

To which of the angels did God ever say, *"Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet" (Psalm 110:1)*

Since humans are made of flesh and blood, Jesus shared our humanity so that He could die in our place and break the power of Satan who holds the power of death. The devil held us in slavery all our lives through the fear of death, but Jesus has freed us from that fear by overcoming death.

Satan's power over us is completely broken. He cannot touch the New Creation. God never did this for the angels - only for Abraham's descendants. Jesus was made like us, fully human in every way, so that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in service to God, and thus be qualified to make atonement for our sins. Not only that, but He suffered when He was tempted, so He is well able to help us when we are being tempted. Consequently we now fix our thoughts on Jesus, our Apostle and High Priest. He was faithful to His Father who appointed Him, just as Moses was faithful to God, but Jesus has been found worthy of far greater honor than Moses. A builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself, and God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house, speaking God's words, but Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. The Son is always greater than a servant in the Father's house. Unfortunately the Israelites in the desert chose the servant over the Son (Jesus Christ).

The Holy Spirit spoke to Israel, saying, "if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried Me, though for forty years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known My ways.' So I declared on oath in My anger, 'They shall never enter My rest.'" (Psalm 95: 7-11)

When Jesus came to His own people, some of the Jews professed Him as their Messiah and joined the early Church, but some of them had sinful, unbelieving hearts that turned away from the living God. These were hardened by sin's deceitfulness, just like their ancestors were when they were led out of Egypt. They continually tested God and He was angry with them for forty years because they sinned. As a result, their bodies perished in the wilderness. God declared that they would never enter His rest (represented by the land of Canaan) because of their disobedience, and they never did. Their unbelief had disqualified them.

Rest

Today the promise of entering God's rest still remains. We have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as the Israelites in the desert did. However the message the Israelites heard was of no value to them because they had no faith. Only those who believe can enter God's rest, and true believers hold their original conviction firmly to the very end. The 'rest' of God is first mentioned in Genesis when God created the world. The Bible says: *"On the seventh day God rested from all His works."* This is symbolic of the spiritual rest of God which we are invited to enter into. This is the rest that the Israelites could not enter because of their disobedience. God then set another day, calling it 'Today', which He spoke about through David:

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (Psalm 95:7,8)

Both Moses and Joshua never gave the people the promised rest, and David's Psalm was written much later and still held out the promise of 'Today'.

So a promise remains of a Sabbath-rest. This rest is the key to having a relationship with God. Anyone who enters this Rest ceases from laboring to save himself, knowing he cannot meet God's high standard of perfect righteousness. Instead, he looks to Jesus to save him, because Jesus Christ is the Sabbath Rest foreshadowed in Genesis and in the fourth commandment. Those who rest (have faith) in Christ will never perish because the Lord gives His righteousness to them. They will live with God throughout eternity. Those who do not enter this rest will perish.

God knows those who really belong to Him. His Word is alive and active, sharper than a double-edged sword. Its penetration is so sharp that it even divides the soul and spirit. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart and nothing in all of creation can be hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. However this does not frighten us, even though we are frail in many ways. Our great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, can empathize with our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He did not sin. He is our Mediator and He has saved us through His own blood atonement. Therefore we hold firmly to the faith we profess, confident that we will always receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Melchizedek

Jesus did not take on Himself the glory of becoming a High Priest, but His Father gave Him that honor.

"You are my Son; today I have become your Father." (Psalm 2:7)

"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110:4)

While He was on earth, Jesus offered up prayers and petitions for His followers, and when about to be crucified, He prayed with fervent cries and tears to His Father, who could save Him from death. God always heard Him because of His reverent submission and obedience. Even when Jesus asked to have the cup of suffering removed, He made the qualification that His Father's perfect will came first. It was through Christ's suffering that He learned obedience, and, once His submission was complete, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who have faith in Him. These truths are difficult for some in the Christian Church today to understand. The spiritually immature are not familiar with the deeper teachings about God's great plan of redemption. They have the basic teachings of Christ, but in order to grow in faith, they need to move past the elementary teachings about repentance, resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment, etc. Professed Christians who have been enlightened (i.e. understood the gospel and even gave lip service to it); who have tasted the goodness of God and witnessed the miracles and spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the congregations; who have professed salvation and joined believers at the Lord's Supper; yet who eventually turn away from Christ as Savior, are crucifying Jesus all over again.

They can never be brought to repentance a second time after putting our Savior to open shame like that. They have seen the proofs of Christ's claims, but have rejected them. They will never be persuaded to accept them once again. They are like land that drinks in the rain but produces only weeds and thistles. Such land is worthless and is burned up in the end.

"It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and turned away from the holy commandment passed on to them."(2 Peter 2:22)

True believers remain firm in their faith and diligently follow the Lord, receiving their full inheritance as a result, the inheritance promised to Abraham. Abraham is the father of faith for us Christians. When God made His promise to Abraham, He swore by Himself that He would bless Abraham and give him many descendants, and God kept His promise. When people make an oath, they usually swear by something greater than themselves in order to assert the sincerity of their word. God swore on His own name in order to make it very clear that His purpose regarding heirs would definitely happen. As Christians (Abraham's heirs), we are greatly encouraged by this, knowing without a doubt that God will surely give us all He has promised. Spiritually we have already entered into the inner sanctuary (Holy of Holies) behind the curtain, where Jesus entered on our behalf as High Priest. He is of the order of Melchizedek, King of Salem and Priest of God Most High. His name means "King of righteousness" and "King of peace".

Melchizedek met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. In the Law, the descendants of Levi who became priests were to collect a tenth from their fellow Israelites. Melchizedek, however, was not a descendent of Levi, yet he received a tenth from Abraham and blessed him. It is always the case that the lesser is blessed by the greater, so the King of Salem was obviously greater than Abraham. The tribe of Levi, who later collected the tithe in the Tabernacle, was the genealogical descendent of Abraham, so one could say that when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. The priestly order of Melchizedek is therefore superior to that of Levi. Melchizedek is also described as being without father or mother, without genealogy, and without beginning of days or end of life. In this he resembled the Son of God, who remains a priest forever. In fact, many scholars believe that Melchizedek was a theophany of Christ.

If it had been possible to attain perfection through the Levitical priesthood (instituted by the Law), it would not have been necessary for another Priest in the order of Melchizedek to come. Since a new Priesthood has come, it means that the Law has been changed. Under the Law, no one from any other tribe except Levi was permitted to serve at the Temple (or Tabernacle), yet Jesus, High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, is from the tribe of Judah. That tribe has never served in the priesthood. Nevertheless Jesus serves as High Priest, not on the basis of His ancestry, but on the basis of an indestructible eternal life.

His divinity lifts Him far above any earthly priest. The Scriptures say: *"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."* (Psalm 110:4)

The former ruling about Levitical priesthood, as mandated in the Law, was set aside because it was weak and useless. Those priests offered up animal sacrifices that could not ultimately do away with sin. Their service in the Tabernacle could not purify the Israelites. In fact, the Law itself can make nothing perfect, so a better hope was introduced by which we now draw near to God. Levitical priests attained their positions without an oath, but Jesus became High Priest with an oath from the Father, when God said to Him: *"The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: 'You are a priest forever.'"* Because of this oath, Jesus has become the Guarantor of a better covenant. (A guarantor offers a pledged surety and assurance that it will be done). Earthly priests served temporarily because they died and could not continue in their office, but Jesus lives forever and has a permanent priesthood. Therefore the Lord is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them. This means our salvation is as securely eternal as the Lord Himself is eternal. We can only perish if Jesus Christ perishes. Jesus is the New Man and we are in Him, so if it were possible for Jesus to die, then we would too. However, being God, it is impossible for Jesus to ever perish, and neither can anyone who is in Him. Our eternal destiny is absolutely secure. As our High Priest, Jesus truly meets our need since He is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. Jesus' sacrifice for sin was once for all when He offered Himself, making us perfect for all time just as He is perfect (since we are identified with Him). Now He sits at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, serving in the true tabernacle set up by the Lord in the heavenly realm.

Better Covenant

Earthly priests offer both gifts and sacrifices prescribed by the Law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. Moses was warned to build the tabernacle according to the pattern shown to him on the mountain. However Jesus received a superior ministry to that of Moses. He mediates a superior covenant established on better promises. If nothing had been wrong with that first covenant, there would have been no reason for another one.

But God said: *'The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to My covenant, and I turned away from them. This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time. I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'* (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

By calling this covenant “new,” God made the first one obsolete. The first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up and in its first room, the Holy Place, there was a lamp-stand and the table of consecrated bread. Behind the second curtain there was a room called the Most Holy Place, where the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant were situated. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. On top of the ark were the golden figures of cherubim of God’s Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. The priests regularly entered the outer room to carry on their ministry, but only the high priest entered the inner room, and only once a year. The high priest never dared to enter without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people of Israel. However, as previously mentioned, the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper because they had to be repeatedly offered year after year. But when Christ came as High Priest, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not part of this creation. He entered the heavenly one. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves. He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption for us. Under the old covenant, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer were sprinkled on those who were ceremonially unclean in order to sanctify them so that they were outwardly clean. But the blood of Christ (who is the perfect, unblemished Heavenly Sacrifice), cleanses our consciences from all sin forever and delivers us from death. Jesus is the Mediator of a new covenant whereby those called by God may receive the promised eternal inheritance. We have been ransomed and set free from the sins committed under the first covenant, so that we can live with God as His beloved children forever.

Last Will & Testament

When speaking of a last will and testament, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made the will because a will is in force only when somebody has died. While the person is alive, it cannot take effect. This is why the first covenant couldn’t be put into effect without blood (death). When Moses had proclaimed every command of the Law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people with it. He said, *“This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.”* In the same way, he sprinkled both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies with the blood. In fact, the Law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Since it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these blood sacrifices, the heavenly things themselves had to have better sacrifices than these. Christ didn’t enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one. He entered heaven itself, in order to appear for us in God’s presence. And He didn’t enter heaven to offer Himself over and over again, the way the Jewish high priest entered the Most Holy Place every year with animal blood.

Christ didn't suffer repeatedly, but appeared once for all during the last days of the Old Covenant era, to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many, and then later He appeared a second time, not to bear sin, but to complete the salvation for those waiting for His coming.

The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. (Romans 13:11)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (1Thessalonians 5:8)

...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for you, who through faith are protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Peter 1:4, 5)

The Law was only a shadow of the good things that were coming. It was not the reality. The Law could never, by the same sacrifices repeatedly offered, make perfect those who drew near to worship God. The sacrifices had to be offered year after year without fail because the worshipers were never cleansed once for all, and continued to feel guilty for their sins. Those sacrifices were an annual reminder of the people's sins because it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

When Christ came into the world, He said: *"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings You were not pleased." Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about Me in the scroll— I have come to do Your will, my God.'* (Psalm 40:6-8)

The sacrifices and burnt offerings did not please God, even though they were offered in accordance with the Law, because they only temporarily covered over sin. These sin offerings did not do away with sin entirely. That is why the first covenant had to be replaced with the second, better one. Now we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Unlike the Levitical priest who had to perform his religious duties again and again, with sacrifices that never took away sins, Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, after which He sat down at the right hand of God. That one sacrifice made us perfect forever. Since that time Jesus waits for His enemies to be made His footstool.

The Holy Spirit testified about this. *"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."* (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

Where these 'sins and lawless acts' have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. In addition, the Law, which condemned these sinful acts, is no longer necessary. Righteousness has been internalized through the new creation, making the external Law unnecessary for the believer in Christ.

Now we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through His body. Jesus is our great High Priest over the house of God and that means we can draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings. Our hearts have been sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience through the pure water of the Word. Our salvation is assured because Jesus is faithful. However those who have received the knowledge of the truth about Jesus being the final Sacrifice for sin, but still trust in the Law for righteousness, need to be aware that after Jesus, there is no sacrifice left for sins. Outside of Christ's redemption, there is only a fearful expectation of judgment and raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Think how much more severely someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot by treating His blood as unholy and insufficient to sanctify. This is a huge insult to the Spirit of grace. God has said *"It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,"* and again, *"The Lord will judge His people."*(*Deuteronomy 32:35, 36; Psalm 135:14*) It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Thankfully, by God's grace, we are those who live by faith and that is why God takes pleasure in us. We have no fear of being judged or condemned by Him. God doesn't take pleasure in those who shrink back and are destroyed for lack of faith. But we have faith and so are saved.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. It is a supernatural knowing that goes way beyond mere imagination or intellect. It cannot be manufactured through force of will either. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is by faith that we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. It was by faith that Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. Abel trusted in the promise God made to his parents that a Seed would come who would crush Satan. Adam and Eve undoubtedly taught their sons about what they had learned in the Garden. They would have told them about how God made the first sacrifice for sin when He killed an animal and clothed them with its skin. Abel understood what these sacrifices meant and he trusted in God's promise. Consequently he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings. Abel's faith is still an example to us today. It was also by faith that Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death. He could not be found because God had taken him away. He was commended as one who pleased God and therefore God spared him from physical death, thereby giving this early picture of a resurrection of those God loves.

By faith Noah, when warned about God's coming judgment, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. The people living at that time mocked and ridiculed Noah and none boarded the ark with him. Noah's faith saved him, and condemned the world. He became heir of the righteousness that is by faith. Abraham was called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, and he obeyed and went, even though he did not know the destination. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country, living in tents. So did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs of the same promise.

Abraham was looking forward to the heavenly city whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was able to bear children because she trusted God to keep His promise. So from this one man came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. And it was by faith that Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had told him that it would be through Isaac that he would have numerous offspring. Abraham had faith that God could even raise the dead, and so in a way, he did receive Isaac back from death. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob as heir to God's promises, and by faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons. By faith Joseph, when speaking about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones in Canaan. By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after Pharaoh's edict, and because of their faith, God miraculously protected their baby. When Moses had grown up, he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but claimed identification with his people, the Hebrews. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin in an Egyptian palace. He regarded disgrace for the sake of the coming Messiah as having greater value than the treasures of Egypt. Moses was looking ahead, by faith, to his reward in heaven. By faith Moses left Egypt and persevered in faith because he knew God was faithful. He kept the Passover and the application of blood on the doorposts so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea on dry land, but when the Egyptians tried to do the same, they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around it for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab welcomed the spies and was not killed with those in Jericho who were disobedient.

There were others like Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised. Some shut the mouths of lions (Daniel), quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength and they became powerful in battle. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. And others were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain eternal glory. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawn in two (possibly Isaiah, according to one legend in the Talmud); the sword killed them. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. The world was not worthy of them. From these examples we can see that without faith it is impossible to please God. And anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. All these people had this kind of faith and they were still living by faith when they died, but they died without receiving the things promised. They saw them by faith from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth, seeking a country of their own. They desired a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God was not ashamed to be called their God, and He prepared a heavenly city for them.

He had planned something better for Christians, who would receive the fulfillment of the promise God had made to the Old Testament saints. Together with them, we have been made perfectly righteous in Christ. All the saints who have gone before are in heaven now - a great cloud of witnesses watching us. We have their example of faith to spur us on. That's why we throw off everything that hinders our faith, and like runners in a race, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before Him, (in bringing us to salvation and making us God's children), Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. He endured great opposition from sinners but persevered in His rescue mission. Because of His amazing love and courage, we are encouraged to never grow weary or lose heart.

The Israelites came to a mountain that could be touched and that was burning with fire. They were surrounded by darkness, gloom and storm. They heard a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words that terrified them. They were so frightened that they begged that no further word be spoken to them. They were told that if even an animal touched the mountain, it had to be stoned to death. The sight on Mt. Sinai was so terrifying that even Moses was trembling with fear. The holiness of God was a terrifying thing to those not purified from sin. However we, as Christians, have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. We have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. We comprise the Jerusalem Bride, the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. God, the Judge of all, is our Father who makes the spirits of the righteous - us - perfect. Jesus is the Mediator of a New Covenant and His sprinkled blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance after Cain murdered him, but Jesus' blood calls out for forgiveness of our sins and healing for our souls. We have nothing whatever to fear from God and can approach Him boldly and confidently.

In Him and through faith in Him we may enter God's presence with boldness and confidence. (Ephesians 3:12)

However this only applies to those who have heard God and heeded His warnings to flee to Christ for salvation. The Israelites in the wilderness did not escape when they refused God's words. They perished in the wilderness and their example serves as a warning to the world to not follow in their steps. The Jews were again warned by Jesus when He walked the earth, but again they refused to listen when God said: *"Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."*

They had forgotten that *"God is a consuming fire." (Deuteronomy 4:24)*. Thankfully we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken, so we can worship God with reverence and awe, without fear. God will indeed judge the faithless, but there is no condemnation for those who love Him. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He is our Helper and we need not fear anyone. With Jesus on our side, what can mere mortals do to harm us.

Chapter 9

(from James's letter to the Jewish Bride)

As Christians, we face various kinds of trials, which test our faith. Trials are not pleasant but through them we learn to persevere in faith and this leads to maturity. Besides we are never alone in our struggles. In the midst of difficulties and challenges, we have recourse to God's wisdom at any time, which He gives generously without finding fault, as long as we believe and do not doubt. But if we doubt, we are like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind. Doubters are double-minded and unstable in all they do. Consequently they do not receive anything from the Lord.

One area in which our faith is often tested is in the area of finances. Some of us live in humble circumstances and this can bring hardships and temptations that the wealthy do not have to contend with. However, the poor should remember their high position in the Lord and glory in the fact that they are deeply loved by God. The rich, meanwhile, should remember that their wealth will pass away like a wild flower, wilting in the scorching heat of the sun. Riches are unpredictable and can easily fade away. But whether we are rich or poor by this world's standards, we can be encouraged by the fact that all who persevere under trial will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him. When trials come and we are tempted, it is never God tempting us. Our fleshly desires can entice us to desire wrong things so that we are led into sin. Sin always leads to death. Those who lead consistently evil lives will surely die.

..if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)

*The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are **in** the realm of the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:6-8)*

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death (because of sin's curse), the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. (Romans 8:9-10)

God may use trials and temptations to mature us, but He never lays snares for us, and He never acts as the tempter. Rather, God gives good and perfect gifts, all of which have come to us through Jesus Christ. We were chosen through the Word of Truth so that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all He created.

Those who are poor in the eyes of the world have been chosen by the Lord to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised to those who love Him. It is often the rich who dishonor the poor and exploit them. They are also often the ones blaspheming the noble name of Jesus Christ.

Royal Law

All we need to be concerned about is keeping the royal law, which is to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. Regarding our neighbor, this means not showing favoritism, which is a sin. Favoritism breaks the law of love but it also breaks the Law of Moses. Think how easy it is to break the Law, because all of us have shown favoritism at one time or another. The Scriptures say that whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles in just one point, is guilty of breaking all of it. God said, "You shall not commit adultery," but He also said, "You shall not murder." Committing adultery but not murder still makes a person a lawbreaker. However, now that we are Christians, we speak and act as those who are not judged by the Law of Commandments, but by the law that gives freedom - the Law of Love. The Law of Moses is judgment without mercy. The Law of Love is mercy that has triumphed over judgment (through the atonement of Jesus Christ). Those who belong to Christ are those who have been shown mercy and who consequently live lives engendering mercy. It is the nature of followers of Christ to show the same love and forgiveness that He exhibits. That's not surprising since His nature is now our nature. Those who are not merciful do not have Christ's divine nature of love and mercy. The unmerciful will receive judgment without mercy. However we can praise God that because we have been placed into Christ and given His divine nature, we are examples of how mercy triumphs over judgment.

Some might think that faith and deeds can exist independently of one another. While it is true that works can stand alone without being motivated by faith, the opposite is not possible. Faith without deeds is a misnomer. Deeds actually illustrate faith's reality. In other words what we say (such as an affirmation of our faith in God) must be borne out in how we live. Furthermore, believing in Jesus Christ intellectually is not a definite sign that a person is a Christian. Even the demons believe in Christ's existence, but obviously that is not enough. Abraham was considered righteous for his faith, but his action of offering up Isaac on the altar of sacrifice illustrated the reality of his faith. That was an example of faith and actions working together. His faith was made complete by what he did. That's why scripture says, "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,*" (*Genesis 15:6*). That was why he was called God's friend. This shows clearly that a person is considered righteous by the outworking of faith, and not just by words expressing faith.

Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the Israelite spies and sent the soldiers in another direction. Her actions were prompted by her faith in Israel's God. Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

This matter of deeds backing up faith applies in the area of friendship with the world. The person who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. It's like spiritual adultery. Christians should be aware of this. Scripture says that God's Holy Spirit indwelling us jealously longs for communion with our recreated spirit. God wants us for Himself. He has chosen us in Christ to be His very own children, with hearts and minds focused on Him. Spiritually, He has taken us out of the world to dwell with Him in the heavenly realm. The world is all about pride and self-advancement, two things God hates. He opposes the proud and shows favor to the humble, so it's important for us to submit ourselves to God and resist the temptations of the world and the devil. If we resist Satan, he will flee from us. If we come near to God, He will come near to us. This is why we purify our hearts from worldly obsessions and live with one goal in mind - to humble ourselves before the Lord so that He might lift us up.

Prayer

When we are in trouble, we know we can pray. When we are happy, we can sing songs of praise. If we are sick, we can call for the elders of the church to pray and anoint us with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer offered in faith will make us well and the Lord will raise us up. If we have brought some sickness upon ourselves through sinning, God will heal us, both physically and spiritually. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

It may come about that a professing Christian wanders away from the faith through rebellion, thus bringing upon himself judgment in the form of sickness. We can pray for such a person and if he comes back to the Lord, then we will have turned that sinning person from the error of his way, saving him from physical death. If he will not come back to the Lord, then he just proves that he wasn't a Christian in the first place. He will die in his sins.

*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.
(1 John 2:19)*

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)

Chapter 10

(from Peter's Letters to the Bride)

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has shown us great mercy by giving us new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have an inheritance that can never perish (spoil or fade) and it is kept for us in heaven. God has also given us faith as a gift through which we are shielded by God's power. In all this we greatly rejoice, although for a little while we may suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Trials only serve to prove the genuineness of our faith, which is of greater worth than gold, and results in praise, glory and honor to our Lord Jesus Christ. Though we do not see Him, we love Him and believe in Him. Our hearts are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy because we have received the salvation of our souls. The prophets in the past predicted the time and circumstances of God's coming grace, the sufferings of the Messiah, and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but us, the New Covenant believers. They spoke of things that were told to us by the apostles who preached the gospel as the Holy Spirit led them. These things are all written in the Old and New Testaments for us to study - things which even angels long to look into.

It is amazing that we have been given so much in Jesus Christ! It seems such a small thing to give our lives back to God in thanksgiving. It should be our whole goal in life to set our hope, affections, and faith in Jesus Christ, no longer conforming to the evil desires that used to motivate us. Our Lord is holy, and so we also are holy in all we do, for it is written: *"Be holy, because I am holy."* (Leviticus. 11:44,45; 19:2) Since our Father evaluates what we do here on earth, we live out our time here as foreigners with a serious purpose. After all, we were not redeemed with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed for our sake. Through Him we believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so our faith and hope are in God. As we come to Jesus - the living Stone (rejected by humans but chosen by God) - we also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house. We are a holy priesthood and we offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

"See, I lay a Stone in Zion, a chosen and precious Cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame." (Isaiah 28:16)

To those who believe, the Stone is precious, but to unbelievers He is rejected.

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," ... "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14)

Unbelievers stumble because they disobey the gospel message, and to this they were destined. But we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. We are God's special possession, so that we might declare the praises of Jesus who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once we were without God's mercy, but now we have received mercy. Therefore we live as free people, yet as God's slaves. We respect everyone. We love the family of believers. We fear God. And we respect governments. Some of us may suffer for doing good, but we endure this because it is commendable before God. We were called to this because Jesus Himself suffered for us, leaving us His example that we should follow in His steps.

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth." (Isaiah 53:9)

When unbelieving people hurled their insults at Him, Jesus did not retaliate. When He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to His Father. He bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By His wounds we have been healed. We were like sheep going astray, but we have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Because of our glorious salvation, we have been made new creations who together make up the Body and Temple of Christ. The Holy Spirit inside us influences us to be like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble. We make it our aim to never repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, we desire to repay evil with blessing, because we were called to this. In this way we inherit a blessing from God, even though the world hurls insults and abuse at us.

"Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (Psalm 34:12-16)

People are not usually harmed if they desire to do good, although if we suffer for doing what is right, we are blessed. We need not fear man's threats. We focus on honoring Christ as Lord; always ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope we have in Him. However we do this with gentleness and respect, in good conscience, so that anyone who speaks maliciously against our good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It's better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

The Ark

Jesus also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring us to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, He went to Hades and proclaimed the victory message of God's grace to the imprisoned spirits there. These were the ones who had been disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. Only 8 people survived in that ark, saved through water (which symbolizes baptism into Christ's death). That spiritual baptism now saves us.

By being spiritually identified with Christ on the cross, the penalty for sin was applied to us, and our old selves died. In fact, we were crucified with Him. Then when Christ was resurrected and went into heaven, we were spiritually raised up with Him as new creations. Jesus now sits at God's right hand, with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to Him, and we are spiritually seated with Him because we are IN Him.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6)

We need to think of ourselves as being lifted above what we once were. We have done with sin because we died with Jesus, who saw His own death as dying to sin (the sin of humanity, not His own). That is why He cried out "It is finished."

The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. (Romans 6:10)

As a result, we do not live the rest of our earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. We spent enough time in the past doing what unbelievers do - living in sin, getting drunk at parties, behaving immorally, lusting after sex, and worshipping the things of the world. Those outside of Christ don't understand why we don't live like them, and they heap insults and abuse upon us for not following their example. They will be held accountable at the judgment of Jesus Christ. But not so for believers in Christ, including those who died before Jesus was crucified. After His resurrection, the Lord went into Sheol to preach the gospel to the dead believers there, so that even though they died physically (being judged physically because of Adam's sin), they would be made alive in spirit with Christ and ascend to heaven with Him. This happened at Christ's second coming in 70AD.

Discipline

In the time of the early Church, the apostle Peter warned the Christians that the end of all things was near. He was talking about the coming judgment on Israel that occurred in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. He told the believers to be alert and to pray. He especially wanted them to love one another deeply and serve others, using their gifts to build each other up. Peter knew that some of them would be insulted because of their faith in Jesus, but he reminded them that they were actually blessed because God's Spirit of glory rested on them. Suffering was not a bad thing, as long as they suffered for their faith, and not for being criminals. Being a Christian is nothing to be ashamed of. It is honorable to suffer for Jesus. The trials we face refine us and test our faith. In this sense, judgment (i.e. God's discipline) begins with the Church.

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him.

For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:4-11)

Christians being disciplined by God is not the same as God's judgment on the wicked.

"When we are judged . . . by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:32).

God uses discipline to correct and train us in righteousness. Because we all still struggle with the flesh, we periodically fall into sin and God encourages us to turn away (repent) from sin and draw nearer to Him. The ultimate, final judgment for unbelievers will be eternal separation from God but Christians will never be condemned or lose their relationship with Him. When the apostle Paul used the term "judgment" to describe the discipline to be practiced in the Church, he was not referring to the kind of condemnation that unbelievers will experience. He used the term 'judge' in the sense of evaluation.

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?" (1 Corinthians 5:12).

This kind of 'judgment' exists in the house of God, but it is not the same as what those outside the Church will experience. The outcome for the ungodly sinner will be destruction and great suffering. But if, as Christians, we suffer on earth according to God's purpose, we need only commit ourselves to Him and continue to do good. God will most assuredly provide us with all we need to live a godly life and to comfort us in our afflictions. He has already, through the knowledge of His Word and through His promises, given us a new divine nature, enabling us to escape the world's corruption caused by evil desires. That's why we make every effort to add to our faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. As these qualities increase, they will make us effective and productive in our Christian walk. If there are some in the Church who have forgotten that they have been cleansed from their past sins, and so still live consistently in the flesh, they need to examine themselves to make sure they are indeed saved. Consistent sinning is a sign of an unregenerate person. Living righteously will never allow us to stumble. Rather, by living in that way, we can be assured of a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition, we can be assured that our Christian faith is not based on cleverly devised stories about Jesus Christ. The apostles saw Jesus with their own eyes, and they heard God the Father say the words: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."* He testified again on the mountain at Christ's transfiguration. There is also the completely reliable prophetic message in the Bible, which shines like a light in a dark place and causes the morning star to rise in our hearts. No prophecy of Scripture ever came about by a prophet's own interpretation of things, or from his will, but prophets, although human, spoke as they were led by the Holy Spirit.

Fallen Angels Bound

Unfortunately there are many false teachers who give the truth a bad reputation because of their depraved behavior and fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction is certain. They will be dealt with even as God dealt with the angels at the time of Noah, who sinned by cohabiting with human women. He sent these fallen angels to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment. These rebel angels were seeking to corrupt the human bloodline so that the Messiah would not be able to rescue mankind by becoming human Himself. The progeny of these dark angels and the human women they impregnated were called Nephilim, giants who quickly spread over the face of the earth. Only Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others, were saved in the flood that God sent to destroy the rebellious inhabitants of that time. Then there were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were judged by God and turned into ashes, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. Lot, a righteous man, had been greatly distressed and tormented day after day by the depraved conduct of the lawless populace, but God sent angels to rescue him and his family. The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the Day of Judgment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and arrogantly despise authority. They have no respect for God's order. Neither did the rebellious angels in pre-flood times, or the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord's angels, who are stronger and more powerful than the fallen ones, never step out of line by heaping abuse on those they are sent to when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. They respect the order of authority God has instituted and they never act independently of His will. But these false teachers, who are often motivated by demonic forces, blaspheme in matters they do not understand. Many times false teachers are addicted to pleasures and sinful excesses. They are often greedy, behaving like Balaam who loved the wages of wickedness. They entice people who are interested in leaving sin behind, after having escaped the corruption of the world by learning that Jesus can save them. Then these false teachers come along and promise them freedom, when they themselves are slaves of wickedness. The false teachers entice the naive ones back into sin, making them worse off in the end than they were at the beginning. It would actually have been better for the naive not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it, only to turn their backs on Jesus Christ.

The proverb that says a dog returns to its vomit, and a sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud, is true of them. These false teachers will be held to account for this and they will perish like animals. Even though they scoff at facing judgment, God will pay them back for the harm they have caused. He did it in Noah's time, and He will do it again, when He ultimately destroys the ungodly. We don't know when that might happen, since time means nothing to God. With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. Although Jesus came in 70 AD like a thief in the night to fulfill His promise of judgment on Israel, a coming final Great White Throne Judgment is promised when God ends everything on the earth. As Christians, we live in a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells, so our focus is on living holy lives, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, unafraid of the future and confident in His love. We know that we are safe in His keeping. Yet our hearts desire to let the world know about God's wonderful grace in Jesus so that some may yet come to know His salvation and thus escape the final judgment which will come upon the universe at the very end.

Chapter 11

(from John's Letters for the Bride)

The apostles were eminently qualified to proclaim Jesus because they had personally seen and heard Him. They testified that Jesus was the Word of life - eternal life - and everyone who accepted Him was incorporated into Christ's Body. Because God is light, those who belonged to Him were expected to walk in light. Those who lived in darkness (sin) were seen as not having been purified by the blood of Jesus.

Gnostic Belief

In the early church, Gnosticism crept into certain congregations, causing division among many Christians. In Gnostic belief, the universe is made up of matter and light. Matter is considered evil by nature, whereas light is considered the realm of the divine. The Gnostics believed that humanity had an evil side, grounded in the physical body, and a good side grounded in the soul. These two natures were thought to be antagonistic to one another. If a person tended to dwell on their physical side, evil would result. Gnostics sought to minimize the physical side of their being in order to release their good side, characterized by the divine. Some Gnostic communities were ascetic and lived like monks. Others lived licentiously. It really didn't matter to the Gnostics because in their view, sin was not an issue. They believed that the problems in the world were due to ignorance, which produced sin. They also had the false idea that everything in the universe was an emanation from God. In other words, everything in the universe was, in essence, God Himself. They did not believe that God was distinct and separate from His creation. (This is also called pantheism, a doctrine that identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God). Gnostic belief held that humans have a spiritual component (divine spark), which is a fragment of the divine essence, but most humans were ignorant of the divine spark within them, causing them to remain attached to earthly things. Gnostics felt superior because they were 'enlightened to their divine spark, through the help of so-called 'Messengers of Light'. In fact, they considered Jesus to be such a Messenger, only they called Him the 'Soter'. Gnostics didn't believe that Christ's suffering and death saved them, but that His life of teaching (mysteries) provided liberation. They also taught that since Jesus was divine, He could not have been fully human since the physical was evil to their way of thinking. They stated that Christ's bodily existence had been an illusion and when He was crucified, His spirit merely fled.

Some of the early Church leaders, and even later Christian theologians and religious figures, were influenced by these beliefs, teaching that Jesus had not been truly human and had not actually died at the cross. Because of their elitist ways, the Gnostics attracted educated followers.

The division among the Christians grew until 325 AD when Emperor Constantine called a general Council, which denounced Gnosticism as heresy. The apostle John tackled this false belief system by stating that those who professed to have no sin did not have the Truth living inside them. Only those who confessed their sins could hope for Christ's forgiveness and purification from all unrighteousness. Any claimant who professed that he had never sinned was actually a liar and God's word was not in him. Receiving Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin necessitated a personal recognition of one's sins. Otherwise why would anyone call on Jesus as Savior and Redeemer?

False Religions Today

There are religions today that have some similarities to Gnosticism. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was not divine, but that He was Michael the archangel who was resurrected in spirit, but not bodily. Mormonism teaches that Christ was a separate god from the Father, created as the spirit child of the Father and Mother of heaven. When he came to earth, his body was created through sexual union between Elohim and Mary. The Mormon Jesus later married and when he died, his death did not provide full atonement for sin. Mormons believe they are saved by their own good works and by their faithfulness to the Mormon Church, after which they become gods. Christian Science teaches that Jesus was not God or the Christ, did not die on a cross, and was not resurrected physically. Christian Scientists do not believe that sin, evil, sickness, or death are real. The Unity School of Christianity holds that Jesus was a man, but not a Savior. They teach that Jesus was on a search for His own salvation and came to recognize His godhood, thus becoming 'perfect'. It is believed that everyone can attain this same knowledge and escape countless reincarnations as a result. They do not believe in sin, the devil, poverty, or old age. Scientology teaches that Jesus was not God, did not die for sin, and there is no sin or need to repent. New Age believers hold that Jesus was not the one true God or a Savior. They see Him as a guru who did not rise physically, but rather rose into a higher realm of consciousness. Through enlightenment of one's inherent godhead (self-awareness), meditation, spirit guides, and offsetting bad karma with good karma, a New Ager believes he can attain oneness with God. The Bahai teach that Jesus is one of many manifestations of God, did not rise from the dead, and salvation comes through following the Bahai teachings. Hinduism sees Jesus as a guru or avatar (incarnation of Vishnu) whose death did not atone for sins, and He did not rise from the dead. Salvation is through cycles of reincarnation until one is absorbed into the cosmic god consciousness (called Brahman). Good karma offsets bad karma and ensures a better reincarnation. Buddhism sees Jesus as an enlightened teacher, but not as God. The goal of life is 'nirvana' in order to escape all desire and suffering.

These are just a few of the false religious systems that abound in the world. Some of their false teachings have infiltrated the Christian Church in various ways, creating confusion and causing believers to stumble in their faith. It is crucial that the Church understand the truth that is in Christ and that she discerns false professing believers from authentic ones.

For instance, if we are true Christians, we will love God and desire to obey Him. Pleasing Him is important to us because **HE** is important to us. Consequently we seek to emulate Christ in our lives and live just as He did.

False Profession

If a professing believer claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister, its a sure sign that he is still in the darkness because love for the brethren is a characteristic of light. Love for the things of the world is another way to distinguish a true believer from a false one. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. Everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—will one day fade into nothingness. It is useless to pursue wealth, possessions, power, and fame because they do not last. Materialism is a sign that a person is focused on things that belong to the darkness. The trappings of fame and fortune will never fulfill anyone, which is why we Christians set our eyes on Jesus and eternity. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever and does not abandon the faith, thereby showing that he is a true believer in Christ. The ones who abandon their faith were never truly Christians in the first place. True believers have an anointing from the Holy Spirit, so we know the truth. Liars however deny the truth, saying that Jesus is not the Christ. Such a person is an antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father, but whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father and is assured of eternal life.

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (John 5:23)

So we need to watch out for those who try to lead us astray. We have the anointing we received from the Holy Spirit and He remains in us. Consequently we do not need anyone to teach us. His anointing teaches us about all things. We know that Christ is righteous, and we know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. Imagine! We are called children of God, having been born of Jesus Christ as members of His New Creation. This is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it does not know Jesus. The world does not understand that He came just as He promised when He appeared in 70 AD, not visibly to the human eye, but spiritually to all who were waiting for Him. The apostle Paul told the early Church that at Christ's coming, all the departed saints would be resurrected with spiritual bodies, fitted for heaven to live with Christ forever. He encouraged the believers to live righteously because Jesus would soon appear as a Judge to bring judgment to Israel. This judgment would involve all the nations of the world, but it had special significance for the Jews because God had chosen Israel to be His own people, His Bride, a chosen race through which He would bring redemption to the world. Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews and all the promises in the Old Testament had been given to them first. Israel had a long history of rebellion but their rejection of Jesus as their Savior was the final straw. God would not tolerate any more. Jesus came in 70Ad to destroy rebellious Israel and end the Old Covenant, but He also came to judge the dead of all the nations of the world since the time of Adam.

Jesus told His disciples that He would come in such a way that they would know it was happening, and some would even still be alive.

*.. 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, **this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.** (Matthew 24:29-34)*

The 'sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds' was an allusion to the apocryphal language used by Daniel in the Old Testament when describing the ascension of the Son of Man to stand before the Ancient of Days in heaven to receive Kingdom authority over all nations. Both Daniel and Jesus used allegorical language to describe this very real event that would occur in the spiritual realm.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. (Daniel 7:13)

Coming on the clouds of heaven was a common figurative description of God's glorious presence in the Old Testament. Jesus was telling His disciples that He was coming soon to fully establish His kingdom on the earth, and to execute judgment upon the world.

*Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "**The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed.**" (Luke 17:20)*

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (Matthew 25:31-34) And He said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." (Mark 9:1)

*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what they have done. Truly I tell you, **some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**" (Matthew 16:27-28)*

The first time Jesus came to earth, it was as a baby in Bethlehem. At that time, He came to take away our sins. He, Himself, was without sin, and the new life He offered to humanity was characterized by righteousness through the birth of a new creation. This is why everyone who becomes a follower of Jesus Christ turns away from sin. The new creation bears the righteousness of Christ. No one who lives in Christ keeps on sinning, and no one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him. It's important to remember that the one who does what is right is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

Jesus appeared in order to destroy the devil's work. Through the new creation, we are born of God and our new spirits are unable to sin because God's seed remains in us. The flesh can still slip up, and it sometimes does, but our recreated spirit is perfect in Christ and it always rejects sin. No longer does the flesh have the power to make us sin, as it did when we had the old sin nature. This is how we know who the children of God are, and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love the Christian brethren. Cain is a good example of this for he belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. He murdered Abel because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Just as there was enmity between those two brothers, we should not be surprised if the world hates us.

Loving one another proves that we have passed from death to life, while the one who does not love remains in death. Christ said that hatred is like murder, so anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and we know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. Such a person is dead spiritually and does not have the love of God in him. We can know what love is by taking a look at Jesus who laid down His life for us. We also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. We can do this in a practical way. For instance, if anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, the love of God obviously cannot be in that person. Love, if it's authentic, is not just with words but with actions too. If we live out the love inside our hearts, then we will have confidence before God. Our conscience will be clear and we will have the assurance that we will receive from God whatever we ask, because we keep His commands and do what pleases Him. His command is simple: to believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us. The one who does these things lives in Christ, and He in them, through the Spirit He gave us. However it's not always easy to tell who has God's Spirit, and who does not. This is why we must test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because as we have noted, many false prophets have gone out into the world. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God, but is rather the spirit of the antichrist. Thankfully we are from God, so we have overcome the antichrist forces in the world. The Holy Spirit inside us is greater than Satan. But the ones who are from the world listen to the evil forces (spirits of falsehood) and oppose the Spirit of truth.

As was mentioned, the love for others proves that we have passed from death to life, but this love doesn't originate with us. God first loved us and sent Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Since God loved us so much, it's natural that we also love one another, proving that the Lord lives in us through His Spirit. This gives us confidence so that we have no fear of the Day of Judgment. In this world we are as blameless and perfect as Jesus and we know we are not condemned. This is why we are not afraid for the future because God's love drives out fear. Fear has to do with punishment, but we know God loves us as much as He loves His Son, Jesus, and He will never condemn us. Consequently we have nothing to fear from God. The one who fears has not reached maturity in his faith, or perhaps he has not yet experienced God's love personally. However, those outside of Christ are right to fear God's judgment, but once a person is in Christ, the fear of judgment is gone. He is reconciled to God. He knows that nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ.

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39).

A spirit of fearfulness and timidity does not come from God.

"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"(2 Timothy 1:7)

The way to overcome fear is to have complete trust in God, even in the darkest times. This trust comes from knowing that God is good and is always on our side, and this is why we love Him. Of course, loving the Father means loving His child as well. This is actually the Royal Command - to love God above all, and to love our neighbor as our self. These two commands are not burdensome. The world may oppose us and present all sorts of challenges, but everyone born of God is an overcomer of the world. Our faith that Jesus is the Son of God gives us the victory in all things.

Jesus also called Himself the 'water of life', which brought salvation to mankind. This 'water' consisted of the words Jesus spoke during his ministry on earth, and these testified to His identity as the everlasting Word who existed as God before everything else came into being. Lastly, when Jesus shed His blood as a sacrifice on the cross, He cleansed us from all sin. Only God could satisfy the Law's requirements and make atonement for humankind. These three - the Spirit, the water, and the blood are three proofs, from a heavenly standpoint, that Jesus was the Son of God. They comprise a far greater testimony than any human testimony ever could. God's testimony, which He has given about his Son, is greatest of all. Therefore whoever believes in the Son of God accepts God's testimony, and whoever does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Sometimes it is difficult to know who has God's life, and who doesn't, especially when a brother or sister commits sin. Some sins lead to death and it's no use to even pray in that situation. A sin leading to death is like the one Ananias and Sapphira committed when they lied to the Holy Spirit (and to the early Church) about the amount of a contribution they had made. They were trying to impress the Christian community with their supposed generosity, and maybe they were hoping to gain influence and leadership in the Church by this means. They may not have been true believers. Many people were professing faith in Jesus at that time because it was becoming a popular thing to do. God may have taken the lives of these two because they were bringing corruption into the Church and it had to be stopped. God may also decide to cut short a believer's life due to willful sin. In such cases, it is a matter of discipline where physical death is the only solution. This is perhaps what Paul meant by "the destruction of the flesh".

When you are gathered in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, along with the power of the Lord Jesus, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:4,5)

This particular believer was having a sexual relationship with his stepmother. It was a serious sin, one that could have brought disfavor and ill repute to the Christian Church.

Disrespect for the Church, as Christ's Body, can also have serious consequences. The wealthier Corinthian believers were using the Lord's Supper as an opportunity to indulge in gluttony, oblivious to the fact that the poorer ones in the congregation had nothing to eat. As a consequence, some of these careless believers were falling sick, and even dying.

For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep (i.e. physical death). (1 Corinthians 11:29-30)

However there are times when Christians commit sins that do not lead to death. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. In those cases, praying for the erring brother or sister will cause God to lead them back to the path of righteousness. One thing to remember is that anyone born of God does not continue to sin, even if we should happen to err for a time. Jesus keeps us safe, and Satan cannot harm us. We are children of God, and unlike the world, are not under the control of the evil one. Jesus is the true God and eternal life, and He has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true and experience freedom from sin and its power.

Deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world and do not have God, no matter what they may say. If anyone comes and does not bring the truth, but rather attempts to misguide with lies, we must not even take them into our homes or welcome them because anyone who welcomes them certainly gives the impression that he shares in their wicked work. However anyone who does what is good and right is from God.

Chapter 12

(from Jude's Letter for the Bride)

The Church has always faced attack from ungodly individuals who pervert the gospel of God's grace into a license for immorality. God dealt with such people when He delivered Israel out of the immorality of Egypt, and later in the desert He destroyed those who were rebellious and disobedient. The extra-biblical book of Enoch (quoted by both Peter and Jude) mentioned angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling (perhaps referring to the breaking of God's moral order when they cohabited with human women in pre-flood times). God kept these rebel angels chained in darkness with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion and were ultimately destroyed by the Lord. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire for rebellious licentiousness. In the very same way, some ungodly people creep into congregations, polluting their own bodies and maligning authorities. However God's angels, who are more powerful than any human authority, never break rank. Even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to condemn Satan for slander. He merely said, "The Lord rebuke you!" and left it to God to deal with him. However these irrational people who trouble the Church slander whatever they do not understand, and are driven by their carnal instincts which will eventually destroy them. They are just like Balaam and Korah in the Old Testament, both of whom were destroyed for their rebellion. Like shepherds who feed only themselves, they leave the sheep to starve. They do not have the Holy Spirit, being empty and dead inside. They will most certainly be judged, just as Enoch, seventh son of Adam prophesied: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of His holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." The apostles, and Jesus Himself, warned that such grumblers and faultfinders who boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage, would come as wolves into the Church to divide believers. As Christians, we need to be aware of them, but we should not include in their number those who doubt. On doubters we should have mercy. And others we should snatch out of spiritual danger, careful to not allow their sin to trip us up, although Jesus is well able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

Chapter 13

(from John's Revelation for the Bride)

Revelation is called the 'The Apocalypse of John'. 'Apocalypse' is a Greek word meaning the unveiling of things not known before, which needs a revelation to be understood. When John was writing Revelation, he was speaking of events that would happen very soon, and he was also revealing the spiritual realities behind those events. Revelation was important to the early Church because although the believers were already facing persecution, even greater trials awaited them. They would need added encouragement as they faced the coming trials. The apostle John encouraged the believers by showing how the crisis they were in was not really the true picture. God was actually doing amazing things that the Christians couldn't see because it was happening in the spiritual realm. Revelation pulled back the curtain so that they could see the reality. This involved seeing Jesus as He now is, as King of kings and Lord of lords, seated with the Father in heaven in the full splendor of His divinity.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

This statement of eternity is saying that the Son of God has always existed and always will exist. It refers to Christ, as God incarnate, existing from everlasting to everlasting. Isaiah described this aspect of God in several places in the Old Testament.

"I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last I am He" (Isaiah 41:4). "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). "I am He; I am the first, I also am the last" (Isaiah 48:12).

Christ's existence is described from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation. He is the first and the last, the all in all of salvation. The book of Revelation is really a revelation of Jesus Christ. It was written while the apostle John was imprisoned for his faith on the island of Patmos around 68 or 69 AD. This remarkable vision explained many marvelous things that would happen in the near future. The letter is full of symbols and allegorical language, very similar to the language used by Jewish Old Testament prophets. In fact some passages mirror those found in Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. For instance, when John saw Jesus in his vision, he describes Him as having the appearance of a man with hair as white as snow, eyes like blazing fire, and a face shining with the brilliance of the sun. But this is how Daniel described God in a vision he saw in the second century BC.

As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of His head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was

flowing coming out from before Him. Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7)

Daniel went on to describe another Being who was presented before God's throne.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7)

In Daniel's account, the Ancient of Days has hair as white as wool. In Revelation, it is Jesus who has white hair, signifying His divinity. Both Daniel and Revelation describe a personage having the appearance of a man, pointing to the humanity of Jesus Christ. This is Jesus fully radiant in all His glory, very unlike the simple carpenter who walked the earth for 30 years. The apostle John was so stunned at seeing Jesus like this that he lost consciousness. This is when Jesus touched him and encouraged him not to be afraid, saying: *"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."*

Jesus instructed John to write down all he saw and to pass His message along to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

The Ephesus church was praised for her hard work and perseverance. This church was known for weeding out false teachers and tirelessly enduring various hardships for the sake of Christ. Unfortunately the church had grown cold spiritually, forsaking her 'first love'. She was told to repent and do the things she had done in the beginning or Christ would remove His Spirit from her midst.

The church in Smyrna received praise because she stood up staunchly to false Jewish brethren and refused to back down from the truth. Jesus forewarned this church that it would suffer persecution for a short time but Jesus would sustain her.

The Pergamum church was situated in a place that was ruled by Satan, but she had basically remained steadfast. However she had allowed some false teachers called Nicolaitans to influence the congregation by perverting grace and replacing liberty with license. Jesus warned this church to repent.

The church of Thyatira had love, faith, service, and perseverance, but tolerated a false prophetess to lead the congregation astray with idolatry and sexual immorality. Jesus promised to judge this prophetess, along with all those who were on her side, if they did not repent. However those who had not followed this 'Jezebel' and had not delved into the occult were encouraged to remain faithful.

The Sardinian church was reproofed sharply for being almost completely dead spiritually. Only a few were true Christians and these were commended, but Jesus warned that if the church did not repent, He would come like a thief in the night and remove His Spirit from her.

Philadelphia's church was given an open door to evangelize because she had kept Christ's word and had not denied His name. Some Jewish professing Christians, who were actually false brethren, were troubling this church, but Jesus promised that they would soon be humbled and the church would be protected from persecution.

Laodicia's church was wealthy and arrogant, deeming herself to be superior and lacking nothing. Jesus, however, rebuked her for being complacent, ignorant, and lukewarm. Jesus especially hated this kind of complacency and He warned that He would discipline her, and it would happen shortly. In fact, He was already standing at the door, knocking and waiting to be let in. If the church did not let Him in, she would receive the consequences.

Most of the churches had problems, and some of those problems were very serious. Gnosticism and other sects were influencing the congregations, causing confusion, division, and discouragement. Sometimes the believers were deceived by false doctrine with the result that the gospel was grossly distorted. The apostles spent much of their time attempting to correct the errors spreading through the Church, and in this final epistle by John, Jesus gives a direct rebuke to His Bride. However in every case where the Church was rebuked for her shortcomings, Jesus also gave reassuring promises of His love and grace to those who remained true to Him. He promised them the right to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God; they would receive a victor's crown; be immune from the second death; receive hidden manna; have authority over the nations; be given the morning star; have the privilege of walking with Him, dressed in white to show they were worthy; have Jesus acknowledge them before the Father and the angels; their names would never be blotted out from the Book of Life; a crown of victory would be theirs; they would be raised up as a pillar in the temple of God; they would receive a white stone with a secret name on it; Christ's new name would be written on them along with the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem; and amazingly, they would have the right to sit with Jesus on His throne! All of these wonderful things belonged to them as children of God and members of the New Creation. And they also belong to us today!

1. **Tree of Life** - signifies immortality. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they lost access to immortality, but in Christ, we have been given eternal life.

2. **Victor's Crown** - The apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to live out his Christianity like an athlete running a race in order to gain a victor's crown. Through Jesus Christ we have victory over sin and death, and over the power of the enemy. This crown belongs to every believer. (2 Timothy 2:3-10)

3. Second Death - The first death is a physical death when a person dies on this earth. The second death is spiritual and permanent, when a person is condemned to eternal destruction in a 'lake of fire'. Those who belong to Jesus are immune from the second death.

4. Hidden Manna - The manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness provided for their physical needs. This symbolizes Jesus as the Bread of Life. Those who eat of Christ's Body (receive His life into themselves) receive eternal life and are sustained spiritually.

5. Authority Over Nations - Jesus rules over all the nations, and those who are His, rule with Him. We do this by praying in faith for our governments and for the salvation of unbelievers, but especially when we advance Christ's kingdom over the face of the earth through the preaching of the gospel.

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

And to the one who is victorious and continues in My work until the end (70AD) I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter and shatter them like pottery—just as I have received authority from My Father....(Revelation 2:26)

6. Morning Star - Jesus Christ is described as the 'morning star' in 2 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 22:16. Just as the dawn star breaks forth out of darkness, bringing light to the earth, so Christ breaks the chains of darkness over His people by rising in their hearts as the Light of Salvation.

7. Dressed In White - *It was given to her (the New Jerusalem) to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Revelation 19:8)*

8. Book of Life - *"If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15)* The names of all Christians are written in the Book of Life and they will never be erased.

9. Temple Pillar - Christians are established (pillars) in the Temple of God.

10. White Stone with a New Name- A Jewish high priest's breastplate contained twelve stones, each with a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on it. The high priest bore the names of God's people into God's presence in this way. Similarly, the "white stone" with our name (or Christ's name) written on it could refer to our standing in God's presence. *'You have been raised up with Christ. So think about things that are in heaven. That is where Christ is. He is sitting at God's right hand. .. your life is hidden with Christ in God. Christ is your life. ..You have started living a new life. ..Christ is everything and He is in everything.*

You are God's chosen people. You are holy and dearly loved....(Colossians 3:1-14)

After receiving Christ's message for the churches, John saw a door standing open in heaven. A voice spoke to him that sounded like a trumpet, and he was immediately lifted to stand before a throne in heaven with God sitting on it. A shining rainbow encircled the throne, and 24 elders sat on other thrones. Flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder sounded. Strange creatures, reminiscent of those Ezekiel described in the Old Testament, were in attendance, and these never stopped praising God. Then John saw in God's right hand a scroll with writing on both sides. This scroll was most likely the same scroll mentioned in Daniel 12:4-9. Daniel was told that the words of the book were to be sealed until the time of the end. In Revelation 10:5-7 an angel says that there will no longer be a delay. The mystery of God would now be revealed and fulfilled. The book of Revelation is showing us that the revelation given to John is unveiling the sealed prophecy of Daniel. The scroll contains the mystery of God, which is all about Jesus Christ.

"... that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3).

John saw the angel ask "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" but no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll, or even look inside it. John wept because he knew the scroll contained God's plan to bring His promise of the Kingdom to fulfillment, but if it remained unopened, that meant His kingdom would be postponed. The scroll contained the will and testament of God (New Covenant) but it required an authorized Executor to legally open it. Much to John's great relief, One called the Lion of Judah was declared worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals. The Lion of Judah, of course, was Jesus, but in this vision He looked much altered with seven horns and seven eyes, symbolizing seven spirits. These seven spirits could be a reference to Isaiah 11:2-3 *"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and He will delight in the fear of the Lord."*

Jesus opened the scroll and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him, extolling Him as worthy to take the scroll because He was slain, and because He purchased with His blood people from every nation, making them a kingdom of priests to serve God and to reign on the earth. Millions of angels joined in praising and worshipping the Lamb, showing that Jesus is God, for only God is to be worshipped. John looked at the scroll of the New Covenant in the hand of Jesus Christ and was probably reminded of a similar scroll in Ezekiel 2:3-4; 9-10 which speaks of sorrow that was coming to rebellious Israel in the 6th century BC.

He said, "Son of man, I am sending you to speak to the family of Israel. Those people and their ancestors turned against Me many times. They have sinned against Me many times—and they are still sinning against Me today.

I am sending you to speak to them, but they are very stubborn. They are very hardheaded, but you must speak to them. You must say, 'This is what the Lord God says.'...Then I saw an arm reach out toward me. It was holding a scroll with words written on it. It rolled the scroll open in front of me. Words were on the front and on the back of the scroll. There were all kinds of sad songs, sad stories, and warnings.

Revelation is using this picture from Ezekiel 8-12, which described the destruction of the Temple in 587BC when the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, attacked Jerusalem. At that time national idolatry was widespread and God could only move in judgment against His people. Ezekiel was several hundred miles away when this was happening, but the Spirit of God caught him up by a lock of his hair and transported him to Jerusalem, so that he could see firsthand what was happening in the Temple. John too was transported by the Spirit of God and given this vision revealing the judgment that would come to unfaithful Israel in 70 AD. There are many remarkable similarities between these 2 events.

John saw the first six seals of the scroll broken open, each seal similar to Christ's prophecies warning of the destruction to come. The description of the seals was like the prophecies Jesus gave in Mark 13 and Luke 21 (the sermon on the Mount of Olives). They were also like the Covenant curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

- 1st seal - Revelation 6:1-2Coming of Antichrist
Mark 13:5-6Coming of deceivers and the abomination of desolation.
- 2nd seal - Revelation 6: 3-4 Peace is taken away
Mark 13:7wars and rumors of war
- 3rd seal - Revelation 6:5-6 ...Scarcity of food
Mark 13:8 ...Famines
- 4th seal - Revelation 6:7-8 ...Famine and sickness
Luke 21:11 ...Famine and sickness
- 5th seal - Revelation 6: 9-11...Souls of martyrs
Mark 13:9-13...martyrdom
- 6th seal - Revelation 6:12-17...Darkening of moon, falling stars
Mark 13: 24-27... darkening sun, moon, and falling stars

These events were aimed at those who rejected Jesus in the 1st century. Jesus said that some of those hearing His warnings would still be alive when He came in judgment.

In the same way, when you see all these things happening, you will know that the time is very near, already present. I assure you that all these things will happen while some of the people of this time are still living. (Mark 13:29-30)

The events are similar to Ezekiel 14:12-23.

Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, "Son of man, I will punish any nation that leaves me and sins against me. I will stop their food supply..."Or I might send wild animals through that country to kill all the people. .. If Noah, Daniel, and Job lived there, those three men could save their own lives.

But I promise by my own life that they could not save the lives of other people—not even their own sons and daughters! That evil country would be destroyed. “Or I might send an enemy army to fight against that country. The soldiers would destroy that country—I would remove all the people and animals from that country. ..“Or I might send a disease against that country. I will pour my anger down on the people. ...Then the Lord God said, “So think how bad it will be for Jerusalem. I will send all four of those punishments against that city! I will send enemy soldiers, hunger, disease, and wild animals against that city. I will remove all the people and animals from that country. ... Then you will see how bad those people really are, and you will feel better about all the troubles that I am bringing to Jerusalem. You will see how they live and all the bad things they do. Then you will know that I had a good reason for punishing them.” This is what the Lord God said.

This theme of coming judgment continues throughout Revelation. The events are described, bringing the reader to the Day of the Lord (Judgment). Then there is a pause, and then those events are repeated again, followed by another pause. This circular pattern increases in force.

John saw the whole Church (the great multitude), along with the faithful part of Israel, symbolically represented as a group of 144,000. After the 6th seal there was a pause with God’s people being sealed on their foreheads for protection, to show that they are protected from the destruction during the Jewish-Roman War (67-70 AD). It has been documented that when the Romans attacked Jerusalem in 70AD, the Christians had already fled the city and had hidden in nearby caves and catacombs (underground tunnels used as tombs). Josephus, a historian of that time, said that not even one Christian had been killed because the believers had listened to the warnings of Jesus and the apostles. This was similar to God’s protection of His faithful ones in 587 BC.

Then the Lord said to him, “Go through the city of Jerusalem. Put a mark on the forehead of everyone who feels sad and upset about all the terrible things people are doing in this city.” Then I heard God say to the other men, “I want you to follow the first man. You must kill all those who do not have the mark on their foreheads. It doesn’t matter if they are elders, young men or young women, children or mothers—you must use your weapon and kill everyone who does not have the mark on their forehead. Don’t show any mercy. Don’t feel sorry for anyone. Start here at my Temple.” So they started with the elders in front of the Temple. (Ezekiel 9:4-6)

It is natural to feel sympathy for people who face judgment and destruction, but the Lord told the angelic executioners in Ezekiel’s vision to feel no pity for these rebellious people. He had been long-suffering with the people of Israel, holding back His judgment for eons, but they refused to repent. God, Himself, does not enjoy having to punish mankind. In fact, it is because He is merciful and has pity on us that He devised the grand plan to come as Jesus to save us. However, His mercy does have a limit.

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? (Ezekiel 18:23)

John saw the seventh seal broken open. The New Covenant was fully established, and God's wrath upon rebellious Old Covenant Israel was fully poured out. John's visions then started over, to again show the event leading up to the Jewish-Roman War. Trumpet judgments happened. The first four trumpets were blown, symbolizing the destruction that took place in Judea through plagues, famines, false teachings, etc.

1st trumpet - hail and fire destroy a third (or a part) of the earth's plant life. The Romans threw flaming objects over the walls of Jerusalem when they surrounded the city. Also, the Roman general Titus ordered all the trees around Jerusalem to be cut down in order to make towers and weapons, as well as crosses for crucifixion.

2nd trumpet - a mountain of fire crashed into the sea, killing a third of ocean life. Symbolic of the Romans destroying the hilltop (mountain) of Jerusalem.

3rd trumpet - a falling star polluted a third of all fresh water. Symbolic of the Romans killing many Jews in the Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake that was a main source of drinking water. The bloated bodies of the dead Jews poisoned the water, making it unfit to drink.

4th trumpet - darkness blocked out a third of the light from the sun, moon, and stars. Symbolic of great destruction, sorrow, and loss of hope.

5th trumpet - a falling star drilled a shaft into the ground, releasing underground locusts. The pagan Romans are symbolized as locusts who invaded Judea. They tormented the Christ-rejecting Jews for five months (May-September 66 AD), until they rebelled against the Roman Empire.

sixth trumpet - four angels of death killed a third of the world's people, symbolizing the Roman armies in Syria as they marched on to Judea, straight to Jerusalem (66 AD) where they killed many Christ-rejecting Jews.

Next, John saw an Angel (clothed to symbolize Jesus) coming down from heaven. This Angel was similar to the Old Testament's 'Angel of the Lord' who met with Abraham when He was about to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar.

The Angel said, "You were ready to kill your only son for Me. Since you did this for Me, I make you this promise: I, the Lord, promise that I will surely bless you and give you as many descendants as the stars in the sky. There will be as many people as sand on the seashore. And your people will live in cities that they will take from their enemies. Every nation on the earth will be blessed through your descendants. I will do this because you obeyed Me." (Genesis 22:13-18)

Jesus being represented as an Angel does not mean He is a created angel, any more than being represented as a Lamb means He is a lamb. Many times in the Old Testament we read of the Lord taking on the form of an angel and accepting worship. Actual angels, however, never accept worship and this is one way to tell the difference between a theophany and an angel. A theophany is an appearance of God, sometimes as a pillar of light, an angel, or even a human being. One important thing to note however is that when Jesus came to earth as a baby, that was NOT a theophany. He was not just taking on the 'appearance' of a human being. Divinity actually joined with humanity to become Jesus Christ, the God-man.

The Angel described in Revelation as having one foot on land and one on the sea means Jesus has worldwide dominion. This symbolizes the uniting of the Jews (the Land) and the Gentiles (the Sea), into One people in Christ, and declares the "mystery of God" to be almost complete.

Then the Angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised His right hand to heaven. (Revelation 10:5) ... this is the secret truth: that by hearing the Good News, those who are not Jews will share with the Jews in the blessings God has for His people. They are part of the same body, and they share in the promise God made through Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 3:4-6)

John was told to measure the Temple of God, which is the Bride of Christ, the Church. The "outer court" of the temple and the city of Jerusalem (symbolic of apostate Israel) were to be left to the Gentiles (the Romans) to trample upon for 42 months (which happened in 70 AD). John saw two witnesses, but he did not identify them. They were persecuted by the beast (Rome) and by the great city Jerusalem (apostate Israel). This could refer to the time around 67AD when Christians were so detested by the Romans that Nero was easily able to cast blame on them for the fires he started that burned down most of Rome. The fires lasted for 9 days. Nero avoided responsibility for his pyromania by saying the Christians had done it. He ordered a wave of persecutions against them, devising gruesome punishments such as sewing animal skins to Christians and releasing wild dogs to eat them alive. He put shirts dipped in wax on some of them and then lit them on fire to light up his gardens for his guests. Paul and Peter died in this first round of persecution and may even have been the 2 witnesses John was speaking about. These 2 witnesses were shown as being conquered and murdered by Rome, but they were resurrected and taken to heaven after 3 days. The number '3' is reminiscent of Christ's resurrection, and so this could be referring to the resurrection of believers when Jesus came to airlift the believers from Sheol, and instantaneously change those still living on the earth. The 2 witnesses were taken up into heaven, which also fits the idea of a resurrection happening at this time. These 2 witnesses mentioned as having been overcome by the beast are also referred to as God's people in Daniel's prophecy in the Old Testament.

As I was watching, this little horn began attacking and making war against God's holy people and killing them. The little horn kept killing God's holy people until the Ancient King came and judged him. The Ancient King announced His decision about the little horn. This judgment helped God's holy people, and they received the kingdom. (Daniel 7:21-22)

7th trumpet - a victory blast signalled that the world was now God's kingdom. This last trumpet was like the 6th seal, bringing the Day of the Lord and the full establishment of God's kingdom. The number 7 symbolises completion.

The seventh angel blew his trumpet. Then there were loud voices in heaven. The voices said, "The kingdom of the world has now become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah. And He will rule forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

John's visions then started over. He saw a woman (spiritual Israel) giving birth to a male child (Jesus Christ was incarnated as a Jew). John also saw a red dragon (Satan) trying to destroy her. Christ was taken up to God's throne (symbolizing His victory on the cross and His ascension to heaven). Satan and the fallen angels were cast out of heaven because of the power of Christ's sacrifice (shown as a war between the righteous angels led by Michael, and wicked angels led by Satan). The dragon then tried to destroy the woman (spiritual Israel), but failed when she escaped into the desert. This wilderness represented the 40 years between Jesus' ascension to heaven in 30 AD to when the Jewish Temple was destroyed (the Old Covenant ended) in 70AD. This was similar to the children of Israel entering the Promised Land after Exodus. Next John saw Satan going on to make war on the rest of the woman's children (Christian Church). Satan gave his power to the Roman Empire and to its Emperors (symbolized by a sea-beast with seven heads). John described the persecution of the Christians by the Roman Empire, prophesying that it would last for 42 months. (November 64 - June 68 AD.) Apostate Israel (symbolized as an earth-beast disguised as a lamb) joined with the Roman Empire in this persecution. Apostate Israel's false prophets performed false miracles in order to deceive people into rejecting Christ and following Caesar (30-67 AD). The "mark of the beast" is described as a code for the number 666. The mark was not literal, but referred to how apostate Israel required the Christians to submit to the Roman Emperors or face persecution. Anyone who submitted (took the mark) was spared from the wrath of Rome.

John saw 144,000 people, representing the whole Church, standing on Mount Zion with Christ. This symbolized the Church's victory over the persecution of the Roman Empire and apostate Israel. John saw a "soul harvest" upon the earth by Jesus Christ, symbolizing His divine protection of His followers from the wrath of God. Another "soul harvest" took place, this time resulting in God's wrath being poured out upon apostate Israel, shown as a "great winepress of the wrath of God". John saw blood-wine flow out of the winepress, spreading the length of the land of Israel.

He will use a loud trumpet to send His angels all around the earth. They will gather His chosen people from every part of the earth...I assure you that all these things will happen while some of the people of this time are still living. (Matthew 24:31,34)

John's vision started over again. He saw seven bowls containing seven plagues, ready to be poured out upon apostate Israel. There was a plague of hailstones (which actually happened in 70 AD as documented by Josephus). The 7 judgments of Revelation mimic the 10 plagues of Egypt.

- 1- pestilence Revelation 6:8
- 2- locusts Revelation 9:1-3
- 3- boils.... Revelation 16:2
- 4- water into blood.... Revelation 16:4
- 5- darkness Revelation 16:10
- 6- frogs Revelation 16:13
- 7- hail....Revelation 16:21

The seven plagues or bowls were as follows:

1st bowl - Deadly skin sores and diseases were suffered by the Jews during the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

2nd bowl - A bloody sea symbolized the bloodbath of the fall of Jerusalem.

3rd bowl - Bloody rivers symbolized the streams of blood that flowed down the streets of Jerusalem.

4th bowl - A fiery sun that burnt the earth symbolized the misery that Roman rulers brought down upon the Jews of Jerusalem.

5th bowl - Darkness symbolized the confusion and terror that the inhabitants of Jerusalem experienced.

6th bowl - A drought at the Euphrates River prepared the way for 3 kings from the east to come together for war at a place called Armageddon. The word literally means "Mountain of Megiddo". Megiddo has a history of God's enemies being destroyed there. This is symbolic of Satan (the Roman Empire) and apostate Israel entering into war against God and His people, only to be utterly destroyed.

7th bowl - Earthquakes symbolized the final collapse of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The 7th bowl described the Day of the Lord in 70 AD as God's anger was poured out on the harlot Babylon (another name for apostate Jerusalem, or perhaps Rome). Jerusalem was split into three parts. This was also prophesied in Ezekiel.

"Son of man, after your famine, you must do this: Take a sharp sword and use it like a barber's razor. Shave off your hair and beard. Put the hair on a scale and weigh it. Separate it into three equal parts. Put a third of your hair on the brick that has the picture of the city on it. Burn that hair in that 'city.' Then use the sword and cut a third of your hair into small pieces all around the outside of the 'city.' Next, throw a third of your hair into the air and let the wind blow it away.

This will show that I will pull out my sword and chase some of the people into faraway countries. But then you must get a few of those hairs and wrap them up in your robe. Take some of those hairs and throw them into the fire. This will show that a fire will start there and burn throughout the whole house of Israel." Then the Lord God said to me, "The brick is a picture of Jerusalem. I put Jerusalem in the middle of other nations with countries all around her. The people rebelled against My commands. They were worse than any of the other nations! They broke more of My laws than any of the people in the countries around them. They refused to listen to My commands. They did not obey my laws." (Ezekiel 5:1-6)

Again John's visions started over. The harlot Babylon was described, which is another symbol of Jerusalem. The harlot was "drunk with the blood of the saints" showing Jerusalem's guilt of persecuting the Church. She was partners with the scarlet beast, showing her alliance with the Roman Empire. John was told that the seven heads represented seven kings; these were the first seven emperors of the Roman Empire, beginning with Julius Caesar. The sixth king was Nero Caesar.

The Caesars were:

1. Julius Caesar....49-44 BC
2. Augustus....3BC - 14 AD
3. Tiberius....AD 14-37
4. Gaius(ie Caligula) AD 37-41
5. ClaudiusAD 41-54
6. NeroAD 54-68
7. Galba....AD 68-69
8. OthoAD 69
9. VitelliusAD 69
10. VespasianAD 69-79
11. TitusAD 79-81
12. DomitianAD 81-96

The three Caesars after Nero were Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, but together they only had a rule of one and one half years. Consequently they were skipped over, and Titus (the nephew of Vespasian) was counted as the 7th Caesar. In Daniel 7:8, he was referred to as "a little horn" that was "different from the earlier ones" (Daniel 7:24). He was different in that he was still only a general at the time when he conquered Jerusalem. Concerning Titus, Daniel 7:25 warned that the saints would be handed over to him 'for a time, times and half a time.' Vespasian and Titus together led the Roman army against Israel, but Vespasian was called away and Titus led the actual attack against the holy city. After conquering Jerusalem, the Romans worshiped Titus and Vespasian in the Temple and then Titus completely demolished it. The scarlet beast (Rome) itself was the "eighth" king. The Roman Empire was described as trying to destroy the Church, (symbolically shown as the beast warring upon the Lamb), but failing to do so. This occurred from 64-68 AD.

In anger at failing to destroy the Church, the Roman Empire took revenge upon apostate Israel by destroying Jerusalem, the harlot. (70 AD)

You were beautiful in your gold and silver jewelry, and your linen, silk, and embroidered material. You ate the best foods. You were very, very beautiful, and you became the queen! You became famous for your beauty, all because I made you so lovely!” This is what the Lord God said. “But you began to trust in your beauty. You used the good name you had and became unfaithful to Me. You acted like a prostitute with every man who passed by. You gave yourself to them all! You took your beautiful clothes and used them to decorate your places for worship. ...Then you took your beautiful jewelry that I gave you, and you used the gold and silver to make statues of men, and you had sex with them too! Then you took the beautiful cloth and made clothes for those statues. You took the perfume and incense I gave you and put it in front of those idols. I gave you bread, honey, and oil, but you gave that food to your idols. You offered them as a sweet smell to please your false gods. You acted like a prostitute with those false gods!” This is what the Lord God said. “You and I had children together, but you took our children. You killed them and gave them to those false gods! But that is only some of the evil things you did when you were unfaithful to Me and went to those false gods. You slaughtered My sons and then passed them through the fire to those false gods. (Ezekiel 16:13-21)

God’s New Covenant servants rejoiced while the unfaithful Old Covenant people mourned. God said this would happen in Isaiah.

My servants will shout for joy, but you will cry out in pain. Your spirits will be broken, and you will be very sad. Your names will be like curses to my chosen servants.” The Lord God will kill you, and then He will call His servants by a new name. The Lord says, “People now ask blessings from the earth. But in the future they will ask blessings from the faithful God. People now trust in the power of the earth when they make a promise. But in the future they will trust in the God who is faithful. That’s because the troubles in the past will all be forgotten. They will be hidden from my sight....I am creating a new heaven and a new earth (symbolizing the New Covenant) The troubles of the past will be forgotten. No one will remember them. (Isaiah 65:14-17)

God stated that His New Covenant people would be established in a ‘new heaven and a new earth’. As mentioned before, this was not referring to the universe as such, but to a New Covenant spiritual kingdom after 70AD. A ‘new heaven and a new earth’ was Old Covenant language for a new age or new era. Isaiah spoke of this.

Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit. ... “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

Isaiah and John were both describing the New Jerusalem, a spiritual kingdom of God's people, the Bride of Christ, who would reign with Jesus in the spiritual realm once the New Covenant was fully in force. However, John described the physical city of Jerusalem much differently. John records a lament by the world over Jerusalem's death. He ends the lament with the statement that "in her was found the blood of all who have been slain on earth" linking it to Christ's statement that Jerusalem held the guilt for "all the righteous blood shed on earth".

John sees the Marriage Supper of the Lamb begin. Apostate Israel, God's former wife, had committed apostasy, which was the same thing as adultery (Ezekiel 16). According to Christ, divorce could be granted in cases of sexual immorality ([Matthew 5.31-32]). So God divorced His adulterous wife, Israel, by rejecting her and having her destroyed with fire. This was the Old Covenant death sentence for women who were sexually immoral if they were related to priests, which Israel was, (Leviticus 21.9). God divorced apostate Israel in order to marry the true spiritual Israel (which includes Jewish and Gentile believers).

The theme of Revelation 16-19 fits Christ's parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22.1-15), right down to the burning of "their city" which is immediately followed by the wedding feast.

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

This parable describes how God invited Israel to come into His kingdom, but they complacently went about their business, ignoring God's call. Some of them killed the prophets God had sent. God was enraged and sent His call out to the Gentiles instead. These came willingly and were given wedding robes (Christ's righteousness). Anyone who attempted to gain entrance into the Kingdom of heaven without Christ's righteousness was damned eternally. Only those chosen by God with a special invitation (regeneration by the Holy Spirit) were allowed into the Kingdom.

The second half of Revelation represents Christ's victory over the world, including the Roman Empire and apostate Israel, where the two are cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 19 and 20 show the full establishment of the kingdom of God, when thrones were put in place for the millennium. Those who came alive at the beginning of the millennium consisted of those who had been killed for not taking the mark of the Beast. These martyrs had gone through the great tribulation of 67-70 AD and were resurrected to reign with Christ. The saints took possession of the kingdom and the millennium began.

John then saw Satan bound, symbolic of Christ's power over Satan's deception so that he can't deceive the nations any longer. John mentions a "first resurrection" which refers to Jesus' resurrection as the "the first-fruits" (1 Corinthians 15.20) and the coming resurrection of the righteous dead who are described as already "sharing" in Christ's resurrection and rule.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2.6)

...having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through your faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2.12-13)

Although a spiritual resurrection of the redeemed in Christ occurred when the believer became born again, there was a future immortalization that would complete salvation.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ...But each in turn: Christ, the first-fruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him....I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (1 Corinthians 15.20, 23, 50-53)

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.(1 Thessalonians 4:15)

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Peter 1:4,5)

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. (Romans 13:11)

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.. (1 John 3:2)

Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. (1Thessalonians 5:5-8)

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with an inexpressible and glorious joy now that you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8,9)

The verses above indicate that the early Christians were waiting for the second coming of Christ so that they could receive the completion of their salvation. This would occur at the end of the Old Covenant age in 70 AD when Christ would resurrect the living and the dead for judgment and give immortality to all those who belonged to Him.

John next spoke of a "thousand years" millennium which is symbolic of the era of the Kingdom of God being established upon the earth.

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and He will reign for ever and ever."(Revelation 11.15).

The number 1000 is a symbolic number for "completion". It is not meant to be interpreted as a literal number. Thus, when the "thousand years" come to their end, the plan of God will be brought to completion. The view that most of the prophecy in Revelation has been fulfilled in the past is the Preterist view. Those Preterists who believe that everything in Revelation has already been fulfilled are called 'Full Preterists'. They do not see the 1000 year millennium as a literal time period. Other Preterists believe that some of Revelation has been fulfilled, but much of it hasn't, and these are called "Partial Preterists". They believe that Jesus came in judgment on Israel in 70AD, but much of Revelation still remains to be fulfilled. A third view (like that of this author) is called Pre-Millennial Preterism, which believes that most of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD, including Christ's second coming, the judgment, the resurrection of the living and dead, and the full establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. It also holds that the Christian Church is now living in the millennium (symbol of a lengthy indeterminate time), after which time the final end of the universe will come.

The rest of Revelation describes Satan's release from his prison for a short time after a long Church era of many years (the millennium). At that time he will bring about a great deception. The enemies of the world (symbolized as "Gog and Magog") will attempt to destroy the Church (symbolized as "'the city God loves' and 'the camp of the saints'"), but the Satanic powers will be prevented from doing so by fire from heaven (God's judgment). Satan will then be cast into the lake of fire (the place where the beast and false prophet of 70 AD already are), and a final Judgment will occur of all unbelievers who have lived during the New Covenant age. Close to the end of Revelation, John gives a beautiful description of the New Jerusalem, a symbol of God's perfect Church.

The New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide .

(The Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple, and in the Tabernacle in the wilderness, was shaped as a cube).

... The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

John saw 12 gates with 12 different stones, each with a name of one of the 12 tribes carved upon it. John also saw the New Jerusalem built on 12 foundations, each with a name of one of the 12 apostles carved upon it. This was a fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to His apostles.

"You men have stayed with me through many struggles. So I give you authority to rule with me in the kingdom the Father has given Me. You will eat and drink at my table in that kingdom. You will sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)

The New Jerusalem's description shows her to be spiritual Israel (built on the 12 Israelite tribes of the Old Testament) and the engrafted Church (New Testament Gentiles led to Christ by the 12 apostles). John stated that only "those who wash their robes" in the blood of Jesus may enter the New Jerusalem, corresponding to the fact that only those who believe in Christ and repent of their sins become members of the Body of Christ. The New Jerusalem has no temple within it, because the people of God are now the temple, and God lives within them. God and Jesus Christ (the Lamb) are also called the Temple. This indicates that God and His Bride are one in Spirit, joined in a heavenly spiritual marriage.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?...

*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16 and Revelation 21:22).*

..that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.(John 17:21)

The kingdom (new heaven and new earth) came in 70AD, not as a renewed planet, but as a new domain of God's covenant people. This kingdom spreads over the whole earth. In describing this kingdom in Chapter 21, John described still unsaved people milling about outside the Holy City of the New Jerusalem. This is because the kingdom of God is a spiritual reality that exists parallel to the earthly world. However only God's people, the New Covenant children, have access to the tree of life and the water of life in heavenly Jerusalem. Those who do not turn to the Lord and become part of the New Covenant Bride will end up in the lake of fire.

"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be My children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death."

What Happens Now?

If the Marriage Supper of the Lamb has already happened, and the Bride of Christ has come down to earth as the kingdom of God, what yet remains concerning prophecy? If Christians are now ruling with Christ over the nations during this millennium (1000 years symbolizing the completion of a lengthy new Covenant era), what happens after that?

The apostle John wrote that when the millennium ends, Satan will be released from his prison and he will go out to deceive the nations to gather them for battle against God's people. John termed these people as the 'camp of the saints' and the 'city that God loves'. Both terms refer to the New Jerusalem (Old Testament saints and the Church of mostly Gentiles), but there is an indication from the apostle Paul in Romans 11 that the Jews will one day be grafted back into the root of spiritual Israel.

Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!... For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

...If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. ...And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins." As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and His call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

This hasn't happened yet, and until it does, it would seem that Satan's agenda to gather up the world forces to attack God's people is still on hold. However a time is coming when the entire deceived world will 'surround' or besiege God's people. There will be a great spiritual battle that will take place, although the Bible does not tell us the details of what the last battle will look like. However we are told that God will send fire down from heaven to devour the enemies of Christ. Then the devil, who deceived the world, will be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown before the millennium, where they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

After this comes the Great White Throne Judgment where the dead stand before God, and books are opened, including the Book of Life. The dead will be judged according to what they have done. Christians will not be judged as their names are written in the Book of Life. Christians go immediately to be with the Lord after their bodies die, as indicated by the apostle Paul when he said: *I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better indeed. But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body....(Philippians 1:23)*

Because Christians have already been 'changed' (made immortal, imperishable, everlasting), they go straight to heaven after their physical bodies die, immediately donning their new spiritual bodies to enjoy eternity with Jesus forever. The unsaved dead must wait for the millennium to end before they are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. (The Old Testament unbelievers were judged in 70 AD at Jesus' second coming when He 'separated the sheep from the goats').

The unredeemed who died after 70 AD have been waiting in Hades for the final judgment and the end of the world. They will wait there until every enemy of Jesus Christ has been vanquished.

For He must reign until He has put all his enemies under His feet. (1Corinthians 15:25)

After they are judged, death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire.

The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years were complete. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:5)

Christians, living during this long Church era, have been given the task of bringing the gospel of grace to the world, persuading all who will listen to turn from unrighteousness to Christ for salvation. The task is a great one, as already forces of darkness have been moving mightily on the face of the earth to deceive the multitudes and gather them against God. These demonic forces work through governments and leaders to kill and destroy the nations. Abortion, wars, disease, sexual perversion, slavery, poverty, oppression of every kind, false religions, violence, etc. are systematically destroying the human race. Many Christians, no matter what eschatological view they hold, believe that the end of all things is at hand because of the increasing evil they see everywhere. Yet even as our hearts cry out for justice, we cannot help but feel pity and compassion for those destroying themselves and others. Christians are the only ones who can bring light to the lost through the message of Jesus Christ, and never in all of history has the need for the gospel been so great. If the Church does not courageously stand for truth and righteousness, the darkness will quickly close in and the end will come. The most important thing we can do to expand God's kingdom and rescue others in His name is to remember who we are in Christ Jesus. Knowing our identity in Christ will instill confidence to speak out even in the midst of persecution. We live in a new heaven and a new earth with God indwelling us. Through the resurrection of Christ, we have been given power over death and sin. The devil cannot touch us spiritually, neither can he enslave or subjugate us to his will. We are seated with Jesus on His throne, victorious over every obstacle, favored with every spiritual blessing, and called the children of Almighty God! **We are the Jerusalem Bride**, shining with His glory and walking in His light as we gaze adoringly into the face of Jesus Christ, our Savior! God's will is that we live out this amazing life and bring much glory to His name through sharing our love and faith in Him with the world. May Jesus be greatly glorified through His much-beloved Treasure, the Bride!

NOTE: God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and He has given us the ministry of this reconciliation. We must let others know that God is no longer counting people's sins against them.

They can have forgiveness through Christ and live with Him forever! This is the message He wants us to take to the world as Christ's ambassadors. Right at this present time God is making His appeal through us. Actually we are in a war but we do not wage war as the world does. Our weapons are far superior to swords and bombs. We have the power to demolish strongholds and arguments that pretend to be superior to the knowledge of God. We take captive people's thoughts to make them obedient to Christ. And our hope is that our message will go into the entire world and that people everywhere will be changed into Christ's likeness as we have been.