

This book is about

**The Two Worlds:
Past, Present, and Future**

It is also about

**Becoming
Sons of God
for Eternity**

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PREFACE

The scriptures I quote are from the ACV (A Conservative Version), which is my own translation. Also I use gender pronouns and other gender relevant words in their historic meaning.

This book contains many ideas from the word of God (the Bible) that I have accumulated over a long period time. And since I am now in my late-seventies, and I do not know how much longer that God is going to preserve my life and my mental faculties, I wanted to share those ideas with you now.

However, I must also warn you that the ideas I present in this book may challenge some of your beliefs and your ways of thinking. And there are many things in this book you will not understand unless you read it through from the beginning.

I also recommend that you read it more than once in order to understand it more clearly, because it gives an uncommon perspective of things natural and things spiritual. And perception is best achieved by examining things more than once. That is also an important reason everyone should study the word of God itself frequently. Indeed, the law of Moses commanded the kings of Israel to read the law often in order to help keep them righteous.

That command says, “And it shall be, when he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for him a copy of this law in a book, out of it before the priests the Levites, and it shall be with him. And he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them, that his heart not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left, to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his sons, in the midst of Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

I wrote this book for every man and woman who loves God’s truth and righteousness, and has an open mind to consider all the evidence about him. For my ideas are based upon the evidence of knowledge, knowledge about natural things, and knowledge about spiritual things that comes from the Bible. For the Bible is the only authentic source of knowledge about spiritual things, and over one-third of the words in the text of this book are quotations from it.

In this book I make many conjectures about God and man, and about the relationship between things natural and things spiritual. Nevertheless, I have written nothing that challenges or would cause doubt concerning faith in God and his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, or any of

the clear teachings in the Bible about our obedience to them. On the contrary, I have deliberately sought to encourage the reader to believe and obey them.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One describes what God is like. Part Two describes what he created. It also gives a very brief summary of the history of the world that is recorded in the Bible. Part Three is about the book of Revelation, which both describes and explains things that happen to us in the world, and what to expect for the future.

I begin Part One by explaining the great value and importance of knowing about things spiritual, even though they are invisible to us. I then describe the meaning of spirit, and I explain how spirits vary. For the world cannot be understood without knowing about the various spiritual forces that are continually working in it.

I also conjecture about the nature of God's body and his spirit. And I try to show how inconceivably great he is by using scientific knowledge we currently have about the world he created for us. I also explain how God uses great spiritual forces to continually control the world and interact with it. The most important of those forces for our eternal sonship is called the Holy Spirit. That spirit is given to every disciple of Christ as a gift for our salvation. And I describe what the Bible says about its influence upon us.

I also give a summary of what the Bible says about the various attributes of God's mind, such as his love and his hate, his patience and his wrath, his joy and his sorrow. There is so much information in the Bible about the nature of his mind, that the chapter I wrote about it is the longest one in this book.

I begin Part Two by conjecturing about what God was like before time began, when he decided to create things and have sons for eternity. And I speak about how he planned in great detail what and how he was going to create. I next conjecture about how he prepared to create the two worlds, the heavenly world and our earthly world. And I make many conjectures about his heavenly world. I also describe his enemies who arose in those two worlds, and I explain the astonishing way he exposes them. The way he combats them is explained in many parts of the book.

I describe the devil and the demons, who arose in his heavenly world, and I explain many things about them, including how they operate. I also tell about the various reasons why God created this world, which is now filled with sin, sorrow, and death. I write about the sin of Adam, and I explain how that sin caused great changes in human nature. And we cannot understand ourselves without knowing how

those changes influence our lives. For we are now all confined in disobedience and captive in the law of sin.

I give a short summary of the historical record contained in the Bible about God's interactions with the world. The New Testament is about Jesus Christ, and it describes his sinless life upon the earth. I explain how his victorious life condemned all who rebel against God, and qualified him to save the souls of all who believe and obey him. I also write a few words about the establishment of his church.

Part Three is my interpretation of the book of Revelation. That book is a record which the apostle John made of a great vision of heaven that he experienced. And it is filled with symbolism, which makes it very difficult to understand. However, it is rich with information about our world, and what to expect for our lives in it, both now and in the future. I omitted the first part of Revelation, which consists of messages Jesus gave for the seven congregations of Asia. That information is of great value for all congregations. However, for this book I only wrote about what John saw in his vision of heaven.

John first described seeing the throne of God, and those in and around it were praising and worshiping him. After that he said he saw a book in God's hand. That book had seven seals, and it seems to have been the plans that God had for developing sons for eternity. For when each of the seven seals was opened it revealed a different kind of basic activity that operates in our world for that purpose.

Most of the rest of Revelation is about the great super-cosmic war between God and the devil. And it describes how God interacts in our world, where that spiritual war is raging. It also tells how he acts to protect and reward those who strive with him for truth and righteousness, and to punish sinners with different kinds of curses against them.

It also describes the most prominent forces of evil in the world, how they persecute all who are becoming God's sons for eternity, and how he combats those evil forces. For those forces of evil predominate in this world of sin, and it is comforting to know that God protects our eternal souls from them. However, it also tells how Satan's kingdom will be destroyed, and he will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years, during which time God's righteousness will reign upon the earth. And I make many conjectures about that.

After that great time, most of mankind will again turn away from God, and the devil will use them to attempt to destroy God's kingdom in the world, which is Christ's church. However, God will intervene to save his people by destroying his enemies and bringing an end to

the world. That will be followed by the great day of judgment. And I explain many things about what that will involve.

Revelation then describes the new heaven and earth, and the new Jerusalem where God and Jesus will reign over the nations of that new world with all who become his sons for eternity. And I also make many conjectures about those things. The last part of Revelation consists primarily of words of encouragement to obey God, and words of warning about disobedience.

The last chapter in this book is a plea I make to accept God's testimony about our existence. That powerful testimony can only be found in the words of the Holy Bible. I added an appendix, which contains my conjectures about whether some sinners will ever be able to get out of hell, the great fiery furnace. And if (which is a very big if) some are able, I conjecture how they might.

I wrote this book to help you better understand God and the greater reality of things spiritual. And I am hoping that will encourage you to have a greater love for him and his holy word, and you will want to become one of his sons for eternity. If you truly commit your life to him he will transform you into a new creation. He will give you a new spirit while you live here upon the earth, and a new body in heaven when your life here is over. For the apostle Paul said, **“So then if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new.**

“And all things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. How that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore, ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were calling through us. We plead on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God” (Second Corinthians 5:17-20).

PART ONE:
GOD AND
THINGS SPIRITUAL



THINGS NATURAL AND THINGS SPIRITUAL

We live in a world of both natural things and spiritual things. The spiritual things are invisible to us, but the word of God says they are the greatest realities. And knowledge of those realities enables us to understand more about ourselves, more about the meaning and purpose of our world, and more about how to live successfully both for this world and for the one to come, than any other knowledge. Therefore, let no man discourage you from learning the truth about them.

Spiritual things may seem distant to us because they are invisible, but the Bible says that our very enduring identity is an eternal spirit. Our spirit is eternal because men are offspring of God (see Acts 17:28), offspring of his Spirit. And the evidence for the divinity of the spirit of men can be seen all around us. Our divine spirit is like the force of gravity, which is invisible but its effects are seen all around us. The effects of our divine spirit are seen all around us by our enormous intellectual and creative powers. And those things are becoming increasingly obvious all around us.

Things natural that are invisible

There are many natural things besides gravity that are invisible. Among those invisible things is the radiant energy outside the range of light. Light is only a very small part of the electromagnetic spectrum. All the other forms are invisible to us. Examples are the radio waves and the X-rays. None of those things of reality in our earthly world were known before the nineteenth century. They are completely invisible to our senses.

Therefore, even though many forms of that energy are everywhere around us, we are completely blind and deaf to them. And we can only know they are there when we use things like electronic devices to detect them. Examples are radio and television receivers, portable telephones and other wireless devices of all kinds. Some of those kinds of radiation can damage our health, even to the point of death. Examples are the X-rays, and the gamma rays that come from radioactive materials.

Another example of invisible things in nature is microorganisms. God has always known about those invisible creatures. Therefore, he warned his people, the sons of Israel, to be careful about cleanliness, especially about dead flesh and skin diseases. And he gave many commands in the law of Moses for the purpose of protecting them from the harmful germs that are a threat to our health.

God did not explain to his people about the invisible existence of the world of germs, but those who obeyed him were protected. It was over three thousand years later, after the invention of the microscope in 1675 AD, that microorganisms were discovered, some of which cause diseases and death. And the discovery of those creatures proved that cleanliness is the best way to protect ourselves against the dangerous ones. The invisible world of microorganisms was completely unknown to mankind for thousands of years. Yet it existed and was a real part of the world, interacting with it for good and for evil.

There are many other examples of invisible things and forces in our world. Indeed, invisible forces are what hold all things together, including our solar system and every atom within us. And all of those things are part of our earthly world. Modern science has been able to discover many of the invisible realities of our earthly world. And applying that knowledge has greatly improved our lives. Nevertheless, knowledge about things spiritual has the greatest potential to improve our lives. But it can only help us when that knowledge is recognized and applied, just as with knowledge of things natural.

The natural man and the spiritual man

Paul said that every man who refuses to recognize the truth about things spiritual is a “natural man,” and he is unable to understand the greater reality of things spiritual. Paul spoke of that when he was writing about the higher wisdom of God in contrast with earthly wisdom. He said, **“But we speak wisdom among the fully developed, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who come to nothing. But we speak a wisdom of God in a hidden mystery, which God predestined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age have known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

“But as it is written, What an eye has not seen, and an ear has not heard, and have not arisen in a heart of a man, are things that God prepared for those who love him. But God disclosed it to us through his Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of the man, except the spirit of the man in him? And so nobody knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

“But we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in things learned from mankind, in words of wisdom, but in things learned from the Holy Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things.

“Now the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is unable to understand because they are evaluated spiritually” (First Corinthians 2:6-14).

Spirit and flesh

The difference between the natural man and the spiritual man is more than just how they think. For that difference in mentality determines how men live. Every man has a body of flesh like the beasts, but we also have an eternal spirit. And God is giving every man the choice of living only for things natural like the beasts, or living primarily for things spiritual in order to become one of his sons for eternity. For those two ways of life are in opposition.

The apostle Paul wrote many things about that choice. Here is one thing he said about it: **“But I say, walk in the Spirit and ye will, no, not fulfill a lust of the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do”** (Galatians 5:16-17).

Walking in the Spirit, God’s Holy Spirit, means to believe and obey him. And Paul wrote more about that in this passage: **“For those who are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mentality of the flesh is death, but the mentality of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mentality of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not submissive to the law of God, for neither is it able. And those who are in flesh cannot please God.**

“But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him. And if Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up the Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwells in you.

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to flesh. For if ye live according to flesh, ye are going to die, but if in spirit ye kill the deeds of the body, ye will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye did not receive a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God” (Romans 8:5-16).

In the most general sense living according to flesh means living only for earthly things. We who love God walk not according to flesh, not only for earthly things, but according to the Spirit of God. And that makes us sons of God. (We are called children of God only in this life.) And after this life is over the eternal spirit of every child of God will be given a spiritual body, a masculine one. For Paul said, “**There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body**” (First Corinthians 15:44). Therefore, I urge you not to be a natural man and live only for your earthly life, but live primarily for things spiritual so that you can become a son of God for eternity.

Confirming the truth of things

Knowledge in this troubled world, whether about things natural or things spiritual, is something we must all struggle to acquire. Not only must we study carefully to learn, but we must be very discriminating about what we accept as knowledge. For our world is filled with intellectual darkness and error because men are constantly imagining many foolish things. Therefore, every wise man knows not to trust every claim of knowledge, whether of spiritual things or of natural things.

There have been many religions, philosophies, and theories invented to explain the nature of our world, and the meaning and purpose of existence. If you decide to study those things, do so with great caution, because that world of ideas is a jungle. It is a jungle thicket of bizarre and conflicting beliefs. Those religions, philosophies, and theories are filled with evil ideas that can lead you astray, causing you to become lost from the way of truth about God and his righteousness. Therefore, I urge you to first become skilled with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With that powerful sword you can hack your way through that jungle without becoming disoriented and confused.

Some of those false beliefs also make claims of visions of things spiritual. God occasionally made some spiritual things visible to a few men during Bible times, but he no longer does so. Therefore, I urge you to be wise and reject all extrascriptural claims of visions of spiritual things. They are either fabrications or hallucinations, because God no longer reveals spiritual things that way. He revealed them when the Bible was being written. But the Bible is now complete, and it is the only true testimony we have about things spiritual.

Therefore, just as in the scientific world of our natural things, we need to be very careful to confirm the truths of the spiritual things. Natural scientists have been enormously successful in discovering the laws of nature and many of its invisible realities. And the reason they

have been so successful is because they insist upon confirmed evidence. They have invented many methods to conduct their research. And they are all designed to discover knowledge of things of our earthly world, and to confirm the truth of that knowledge.

It is indeed important for scientists to confirm the truth of their knowledge of natural things, but it is even more important for us to confirm the truth of our knowledge of spiritual things. For our eternal souls are dependent upon the application of those truths. And the way we confirm the truth of what we know of spiritual things is to carefully research the word of God. For that is our only source of knowledge about them. We study the truths of spiritual things from what the Bible teaches, the way natural scientists study the truths of natural things from what the Creation teaches.

The Bible is far superior to any other book. Nothing even comes close to its wisdom, for it contains the word of God. It was written by many men inspired by his Holy Spirit over a period of about fifteen hundred years. And it is very important to search the truth of what it teaches. Here is an example of the superior spirit of men who searched the scriptures to confirm the truth of what other men said about it: **“And the brothers straightaway sent both Paul and Silas away through the night to Berea, who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews. But these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all willingness, examining the scriptures daily, if it has these things this way”** (Acts 17:10-11).

One of the most important principles of confirming the accuracy of what we think the Bible says, is that nothing we interpret can be contradictory. When men interpret some passage of scripture in a way that contradicts what other passages say, then that interpretation is false. For God, who wrote the Bible through the hands of his prophets, does not contradict himself. Only unbelievers and scoffers assume contradictions in the Bible, because they will not accept the divine origin of its testimony.

I must also emphasize that passages which teach things clearly and plainly must take precedence over passages that are less clear. And that is one of the most violated of the principles of correct interpretation that men make. They often interpret some ambiguous passage of scripture to say something that clearly contradicts other passages where the message is clearer. Some do it in ignorance, and some do it deliberately because they want to promote some favored doctrine, especially one that is popular.

Some foolish men make light of the importance of correct interpretation. They do not think it is necessary to be strict about what the Bible

teaches. False doctrines such as “Once saved always saved,” and “Salvation by faith only,” make it very easy and tempting for men to be casual about the commands of the Bible.

Other men even promote the idea that the Bible cannot be correctly interpreted the same way by everybody. Some do not even believe there is a correct interpretation. They say we should just make broad generalizations about the truths we think it teaches, and forget about trying to agree about all that God commanded.

That is like some scientists claiming the laws of nature cannot be correctly understood. Therefore, let us all agree to disagree about the laws of nature so we can all get along. Can you not see how ridiculous such an attitude is? No scientist would ever have any credibility remaining who suggested such an idea. He would no longer even be recognized as a scientist. Who would believe anything he published?

Consider this passage by Paul: **“Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows this he will also reap”** (Galatians 6:7). If the laws of nature are incorrectly interpreted, then what we reap when we apply them is going to be very different from what we expect. And that is even more true of our interpretations of the word of God, because they affect how we think and how we act.

Advantages of knowing about the spiritual

It is impossible to summarize all the great advantages of knowing the truths of spiritual things. I can only say a few words here to help you become more aware of the advantages of them. And the more you study the word of God, and apply its teachings to your life, the more you will be able to appreciate the great value of those advantages.

One advantage of knowing the truths of spiritual things is how they integrate with the truths of the natural things. And that gives us a very rich and powerful way of understanding our existence, and how best to live our lives. And the best part is that they offer hope of eternal life in the greater world of heaven.

The man who limits himself to the world of materialism is the natural man that Paul wrote about. Such men are unable to understand the greater reality of the spiritual things. And they are unable to see how the spiritual things interact with the natural things. Thus they are half blind to the realities of the world. That is especially true when trying to understand the minds and societies of men. For there are spiritual forces that influence us, and it is impossible to understand men without accounting for those major influences in their lives.

You may not be aware that modern science was invented by men who believed in the Bible. Since the Bible tells us that Jehovah is a God of law and order, then those pioneering men sought to find order in nature, and the laws that God imposed to produce it. One of those early discoveries was the orderly movements of our solar system and the laws that control them, which had been a great mystery for thousands of years. Isaac Newton, the greatest of those early scientists, said about them, "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being."¹ Newton was a devout Christian, and he was proud to proclaim it.

I grieve about how modern scientists, having chosen to forsake God, are foolishly committed to materialism only. They now claim the world developed without reason, and they look upon men as being simply another kind of animal. And that makes their knowledge exceedingly limited. For the greatest influences on the minds and behavior of men are things spiritual. Therefore, modern scientists cannot correctly understand many things about us. And that is the reason for the great contrast between the successful applications of knowledge from the natural sciences, and the feeble (and often harmful) results of the applications of what they proclaim as knowledge from the social sciences.

One simple example of that contrast is the fact that our well designed and constructed prisons are savage places that are overcrowded, and we have many of them. Applying what God commanded about justice would eliminate that problem quickly. Read my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ* to help you see how obedience to the word of God, whether willful or enforced, would greatly reduce evil behavior. And that would not only create more law and order, but it would allow righteous men more security and freedom to live independently and productively.

There is no greater source of wisdom about reality and how best to live our lives than what is found in the word of God, the Holy Bible. The book of Hebrews speaks of its power with these very poetic words: "**For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper, above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart**" (Hebrews 4:12).

1. Isaac Newton "Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy," in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 34 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952). p. 369.

THE MEANING OF SPIRIT

In a broad sense, the word spirit means energy, although it primarily refers to life energy. The word spirit occurs almost six hundred times in the Bible, half of which refer to God. Most of the others refer to the spirit of a man. Since the word spirit means energy, it also speaks of a weak or a strong spirit, which refers to how much energy a man has. Being dispirited means becoming depressed, as does a broken spirit.

The energy that activates our thoughts, including our knowledge and memories, is a type of spirit. Paul wrote of that when he said these words: **“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ ...”** (First Corinthians 5:4-5). When he said “my spirit” he was referring to their memories of him, which was part of the energy or spirit of their thinking.

The Bible also speaks of a man having things like a right spirit, a willing spirit, a haughty spirit, a quiet spirit, a troubled spirit, a humble spirit, a lying spirit, a greedy spirit, an excellent spirit. It also speaks of a man having a spirit of jealousy, of wisdom, of meekness, of prophecy. All of those things are examples of energy operating our minds.

Earthly spirits

There are many forms of energy in the world, and they can be called spirits—earthly spirits. The biochemical energy of animals is a type of spirit, and it keeps them alive. There are many other kinds of chemical energy, and they too can be called spirits. Fire is an example of a chemical spirit. When I took an introductory biology course in college, the professor said that fire has many characteristics of life: it consumes nutrients, it can move, it grows, it reproduces (with embers), it dies. The fire in an engine is the spirit that keeps it alive.

The electrical energy in a television set is another illustration of an earthly spirit. A television set is dead without electrical power within it. When it is given electrical power and is activated by an intelligent electronic signal it becomes live, and the sounds and pictures of the set can make the objects shown to seem astonishingly real. In fact my father, after he reached a certain stage in his Alzheimer’s disease, would not allow my mother to turn on their television set. He told her he did not want those people in his house. And when the electrical spirit of the set is gone, the set dies.

A computer will probably serve as a better illustration of the relationship between a living body and its spirit. Like a television set, a com-

puter is dead without electrical power within it. It is the electrical power that brings it to life and enables it to function. Computers can be very intelligent and skilled in the performance of certain tasks. And it is the highly organized electrical impulses within them that make it possible.

That electrical energy within the computer can be called its spirit. It is an intelligent spirit, and it varies in its abilities. And its functioning can be modified by an operator who controls it, somewhat like the rider of a horse can control the horse. Computer viruses are like evil spirits within them.

Perhaps the best illustration of the relationship between a living body and its spirit is a robot. For the brain of a robot contains a computer. And men, being made in the image of our Creator, are creating robots that behave almost like living things. What makes robots seem to be alive is the intelligent electrical spirit within them. And men can cause robots to perform differently by re-programing or reconstructing their computer brains to alter that spirit within them. And many of those robots can be controlled remotely by radiant energy.

Whether the object is an engine, a television set, a computer, or a robot, its spirit is the life of it. Such devices can exist without their spirits, but they cannot function or be alive without them. And that is also true of the life of an animal. The spirit of an animal consists of the biochemical activity of its body, and when that activity stops, the animal dies. For it cannot live without that spirit. Now the body of an animal can *exist* without its spirit (depending upon how it is preserved), but it cannot *live* without it because that spirit is its life. Although the body of an animal can exist without its spirit, its spirit cannot exist without its body. However, divine spirits are different.

Divine spirits

Every living man on earth has his own personal spirit of life energy that is earthly, because we have a body of flesh. And that earthly spirit is the functioning of earthly forces similar to those of the beasts. However, every man also has his own personal spirit that is divine, because we are offspring of God. For when Paul was preaching to the Athenians about their many idols, he said, “**Being therefore offspring of God, we ought not think the Divine to be like gold, or silver, or stone handiwork of the skill and thought of man**” (Acts 17:29). We are offspring of God’s Spirit, not of his body.

Our spirits are divine because they came from God. And every spirit that came from God is eternal because God is eternal. And unlike the earthly spirits of animals, the divine spirit of a man can exist without a body. For when our body of flesh perishes, our divine spirit contin-

ues to exist. It is like the energy of fire, but unlike earthly fire it cannot die. Therefore, the spirits of unrepentant sinners will be condemned to exist in the lake of fire that burns forever (see Revelation 21:8). It burns forever because it is not an earthly fire.

Solomon contrasted the divine spirit of a man with the biological spirit of a beast, when he asked, **“Who knows the spirit of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goes downward to the earth?”** (Ecclesiastes 3:21). What Solomon asked about the spirit of a man compared with that of an animal is impossible to answer with scientific observation. We can only know the truth of what happens to them from the testimony of the word of God. Therefore, materialists tend to scoff at the difference, and assume every spirit is earthly and eventually dies, going “downward to the earth.”

Earthly spirits are temporal because they all eventually perish. However, the spirit of every man is eternal because it cannot perish. It cannot perish because it came from God, and his Spirit is eternal. His Spirit is an entity of pure energy that is so highly structured and composed that it is the perfect and eternal form of life that is the ultimate source of every other form of life. Indeed, God is the ultimate source of everything. And since we are God’s offspring, our spirit is also eternal. But, of course, ours is infinitesimally weaker, less glorious, and less capable than his.

Consider Abraham. When his body died his spirit continued to exist. We know that from the testimony of Jesus, who told a story about him and a poor man, part of which says, **“And it came to pass for the poor man to die and be carried by the agents to Abraham’s bosom”** (Luke 16:22). The spirit of Abraham had been given a new body in the afterlife. The spirit of the poor man was also given a new body. And likewise will every soul that is faithful to God.

Spirits need bodies

Earthly spirits need bodies simply to exist. Divine spirits can exist without bodies, but they still need them. They need them the way we need clothes. Consider this example about demons that had possessed a man and made him crazy. **“And behold, they cried out, saying, What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God? Did thou come here before the time to torment us? Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding. And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, allow us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said to them, Go. And having come out, they went into the herd of swine. And behold, the whole herd of the swine stampeded down the slope into the sea, and perished in the**

waters” (Matthew 8:29-32). Those evil spirits were so wild they made the swine too crazy to keep from drowning themselves.

Here is another example that Jesus gave about a demon wanting to possess a body. **“When the unclean spirit departs out of the man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest. And not finding, it says, I will return to my house from where I came out. And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and having entered in, it dwells there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first”** (Luke 11:22-26). The expression “waterless places” probably symbolizes places without a living organism that the demon could inhabit. What makes organisms subject to demon possession probably depends upon many things, both mental and physical.

Divine spirits need bodies so they will not be naked. Here is what Paul said about our need for a body: **“For we know that if the earthly house of our tent were destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens. For also in this we groan, longing to clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven, if indeed also having put it on we will not be found naked. For also those who are in the tent groan, being burdened, not in that we want to undress, but to clothe ourselves, so that the mortal may be swallowed up by the life”** (Second Corinthians 5:1-4). Our body serves to house our spirit, and it can be considered a dwelling or a garment for that spirit.

Notice how Paul said it was not good to “be found naked.” And he meant our spirit without a body. Nakedness has always been associated with exposure and vulnerability. And that may be one reason divine spirits need bodies. Perhaps another important reason why they need bodies is to make them more functional. Remember, fire is a kind of spirit. And an open fire is not very functional. Indeed, a non-contained fire is dangerous. However, when fire is properly contained it can make many things very functional. The chemical fire in engines is what makes them functional. Electricity is a kind of spirit, and non-contained electricity is like non-contained fire; it is useless and dangerous. The contained electrical “fire” in our houses, factories, and businesses is what makes it very functional.

The Bible says that after Jesus lived his victorious life upon the earth, Satan was cast out of heaven. However, it took a war to defeat him and cast him out. The Bible also says Satan will later be cast into the abyss for a thousand years, but it will only take a single agent from heaven to cast him there (see Revelation 12 and 20). The difference in casting Satan out of heaven and casting him into the abyss indicates he was much more powerful in heaven. And that could mean he was

also cast out of his heavenly body. However, I do not believe that happened. Having many agents in heaven probably made him more powerful there, just as having many disciples here makes him more powerful in the world.

I believe Satan still exists in his heavenly body even while he roams the earth as an invisible force. He is not a naked and free roaming spirit like the demons seeking bodies to possess. Remember, nakedness involves exposure and produces vulnerability. Nakedness is always associated with weakness, but Satan is still very powerful in the world. Consequently, I believe he still has his body. I speak much more about his power and abilities in the chapter *The Devil and the Demons*.

Nevertheless, from those passages I quoted it seems clear that it is very important for divine spirits to have bodies. Indeed, even God has a body. I give scriptural evidence for that in the chapter *The Nature of God*. I also make many conjectures about his body in that chapter.

Natural and spiritual bodies

In the above passage where Paul spoke of **“the earthly house of our tent”** he contrasted the eternal identity of our divine spirit with the transience of our body. For our eternal spirit is our true identity. In the above passage Paul was speaking of our eternal spirit being given a new spiritual body in heaven. For he said later, **“There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body Nevertheless the spiritual is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual”** (First Corinthians 15:44-46).

Our divine spirit can have a spiritual body as well as a natural or earthly body (but not at the same time). However, a natural or earthly spirit can only have a earthly body. Also remember, our divine spirit and our earthly spirit often conflict in our earthly body. I say much more about that in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*. The faithful disciples of Christ will be given new spiritual bodies in heaven where there will be no conflicts of any kind. However, unrepentant sinners will not be given bodies, but will be “found naked.” Their eternal spirits will remain naked in the lake of fire, which is hell.

Until that time, however, our divine spirits and our earthly spirits are bound together in our earthly bodies. Therefore, when the Bible speaks of a man’s spirit, it can refer to one or the other, or sometimes even to both. And you must use the context to determine how the word is being used. Here is an example about Samson when the Bible refers only to his earthly spirit: **“And he was very thirsty, and called on Jehovah, and said, Thou have given this great deliverance by the hand of thy servant, and now shall I die for thirst, and fall**

into the hand of the uncircumcised? But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out there. And when he had drunk his spirit came again, and he revived” (Judges 15:18-19).

Here is an example of when the Bible refers to a man’s divine spirit only. Paul was advising the brothers at Corinth about one of them who was living in sin, and he said they should **“deliver such a man to Satan for destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (First Corinthians 5:5).

And here is a passage when the Bible uses the word spirit to refer to both the earthly spirit and the divine spirit of a man: **“And Abraham gave up the spirit, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people”** (Genesis 25:8). Abraham’s body perished when his earthly spirit failed. And that freed his divine spirit to depart from his body.

Developing our spirits

As I said earlier, I believe God’s Spirit is a living entity of pure eternal energy, with a mind of supreme intelligence. And I believe his Spirit has a structure composed of elements of divine energy that are organized into a perfect working system. For I cannot conceive of the Spirit of God being simply a bundle of raw energy.

If the Spirit of God has an organized structure, then our spirit also has an organized structure, because we are his offspring made in his image. And according to the teachings of the Bible we have the power to alter that structure. And from what I have learned in God’s book the major duty of every man on earth is to take the basic structure of the spirit that God gave us when we were born, work toward perfecting it in holiness by believing his Son Jesus Christ, and use it to bear fruit for righteousness.

Men can also take the good structure of the spirit that God gave them when they were born, and pervert it, corrupt it, and make it an evil spirit. And every man who rejects Christ and his righteousness makes himself an adversary of God and an evil spirit. Incidentally, the word soul does not refer to our divine spirit only. It seems to be a general term that refers to our life in whatever form. It usually refers to the combination of our spirit and our body, but sometimes it refers to our spirit only. Sometimes it simply means “person.”

Perhaps one reason God created so many different kinds of animals in the world was to give us models of the many different kinds of spirits that men make of themselves. Some take the pure spirit that God gave them and make themselves like unthinking cattle in a herd doing wherever the majority does, others make themselves like wandering

beasts in the wilderness, others make themselves parasites, and others make themselves dangerous predators.

Some make themselves big and powerful, some make themselves weak and foolish. But whatever they make of themselves, most men choose to live independently of God's commandments. Only a few strive to become his sons for eternity. For Jesus said, **"How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it"** (Matthew 7:14).

There is an interesting prophecy of Jesus in the book of Isaiah that contains figurative language comparing animals with men. Part of that passage says, **"And the Spirit of Jehovah 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 Jehovah. And his delight shall be in the fear of Jehovah. And he shall not judge according to the sight of his eyes, nor decide according to the hearing of his ears, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. And righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.**

"And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together. And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, and he who arises to rule over the Gentiles. In him shall the Gentiles hope, and his resting-place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:1-10).

The first part of that passage is about the greatness of Jesus and how he will be the judge of men. It also prophesies that he will (eventually) punish the earth and kill the wicked. The next part is about how he will change the lives of men who will accept him. And Isaiah used the figurative example of animals to show how powerful those changes would be. The wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the lion the calf and the fatling, the cow and the bear, all symbolize different kinds of men. And by the influence of Jesus, the spirits of men who had been predators and aggressors will live peacefully with the gentle ones. And their leaders will all be humble and lowly.

Paul spoke about the perfection of our spirit when he was writing about our resurrection. He said, **“Therefore we are not discouraged, but even if the outer man of us is perishing, yet the inner man is renewed day by day”** (Second Corinthians 4:16). The outer man is our body of flesh; the inner man is our spirit. And James encouraged us to work toward perfecting our inner man, when he said, **“Consider it all joy, my brothers, when ye encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have a perfect work, so that ye may be perfect and complete, falling short in nothing”** (James 1:2-4).

James was speaking of our eternal spirit being “perfect and complete,” not our body, which is the outer man that is perishing. And the perfection of our spirit (which we are expected to pursue) is to create in it a mind and heart modeled after that of our Lord himself—one that loves God and our neighbors, and is motivated to bear fruit promoting truth and righteousness. That should always be our goal.

THE NATURE OF GOD

The body of God

While God was formulating his plans for this creation (the wisdom he used that Solomon described), he designed how he wanted the body of man to be. And since some of them would be chosen to become his sons for eternity, I believe he wanted to make it easier for them to identify with him. I suspect, therefore, the first thing God did, before he created anything, was to transform his body into the form of a man, although of the most magnificent kind possible, and inconceivably more glorious than ours.

God has a body; he is not a naked spirit. Evidence of that is found in the following passage in the book of Revelation. In his vision of heaven John reports that he saw God sitting upon his throne: **“And straightaway I became in spirit. And behold, a throne was set in heaven, and him sitting upon the throne similar in appearance to a jasper and a sardius stone. And a rainbow was around the throne, like an emerald in appearance”** (Revelation 4:2-3). John also said, **“And I saw at the right hand of him who sits on the throne a book, written inside and outside, sealed with seven seals”** (Revelation 5:1). Thus, John testified that God has a body, which was sitting upon the throne, and his body has hands. And there is no reason to think that description was figurative and not literal.

The Bible also teaches that God’s body is in the form of a man, because that is the form his only begotten Son has in heaven, and his only begotten Son is the image of God. Indeed, the book of Hebrews says that the Son of God is **“the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence,”** which means the radiance and image of God the Father. And that also means he has the same form as God the Father. Remember however, although the Son is the exact image of the essence of the Father, he is not equal to the Father. For he is a Son of the Father.

The passage in Hebrews says that Jesus is the exact image of God’s essence, and Paul said that Jesus has a body of glory in heaven: **“For our citizenship exists in the heavens, from which also we await a Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our lowliness, in order for it to become similar in form to the body of his glory, according to the working of his power even to subject all things to himself”** (Philippians 3:20-21).

And in the book of Revelation John describes a few things about the appearance of that heavenly body: **“And in the midst of the seven lampstands, resembling a son of man, he who was clothed down**

to the foot, and girded about with a golden belt at the breasts. And his head and hair were white as wool, white as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet resembling highly refined metal, as in a furnace having been fiery hot, and his voice as the sound of many waters, and having in his right hand seven stars, and a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth. And the sight of him was as the sun shines in its strength” (Revelation 1:13-16).

That passage describes the heavenly body of Jesus as having a head, hair, eyes, a breast, hands, feet, and a mouth. His body was of immense power and glory, and of dazzling beauty, but he still had the form of a man. The sword coming out of his mouth was no doubt figurative, because Paul said the word of God is the sword of the Spirit. However, there is no reason to believe the description of his body was figurative, because John also said he was **“resembling a son of man.”** And since the Son is the exact image of God’s essence, then when John described the form of the Son, he was also describing the general form of God the Father.

Of course, unlike his only begotten Son, men are not the exact image of God’s essence. Nevertheless, we are made in his image, as the scripture says: **“And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them”** (Genesis 1:27).

The agents of heaven are also made in his image, because they have the form of men. For example, Daniel had a vision in which he saw a man with **“his face as the appearance of lightning ...”** (Daniel 10:6). And that man was no doubt an agent from heaven. Also here is what Matthew said about one of them who was at the tomb of Jesus: **“... an agent of the Lord, having descended from heaven, having come, he rolled the stone away from the door and sat upon it. And his appearance was as lightning and his clothing white as snow”** (Matthew 28:2-3). I say more about the heavenly agents farther in this book.

God seems to have created several different variations of the form of men. He created our body of flesh, which is made of dust. And he created the form of men different from the form of women. God created the heavenly agents, and they also look like men. However, they have a much more glorious body which is made of an imperishable substance. They probably vary in their appearance as much or even more than men upon the earth vary. Yet they all have the appearance of men. And of course, God and his only begotten Son have the most magnificent bodies in that form. God was the first to have that form, and his sons have it because they are made in his image.

God has put on the form of a man because we are his offspring with the potential to become his sons for eternity, and he wants us to identify with him, just as earthly sons should identify with their earthly fathers (unless those fathers are evil). Remember however, although God's outward appearance has the form of a man, the composition of his body within is completely different, for he does not have a body of flesh, nor will we have when we live in his world with him.

For Paul said, **“Now this I affirm, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability”** (First Corinthians 15:50). And remember, Paul said that Jesus would **“transform the body of our lowliness, in order for it to become similar in form to the body of his glory”** Also remember this passage about how we have God's spirit within us: **“And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul”** (Genesis 2:7). Man is the only creature on earth that was given the breath of God, which means of his Spirit. God put on the form of a man because that is the form he has given his offspring upon the earth. But as this world is temporary, so is that form temporary both for God and for us. I speak more about that farther in this chapter.

Seeing his body

We can learn a little about how the body of God is inconceivably more glorious than ours from a passage in the Old Testament about Moses, who had a very close relationship with Jehovah. And in the New Testament Paul said that Jehovah was the Christ: **“But I want you not to be ignorant, brothers, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all in Moses were immersed in the cloud and in the sea. And they all ate the same spiritual food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was the Christ”** (First Corinthians 10:1-4). Christ, the rock, was Jehovah who brought his people out of Egyptian bondage. And remember, Christ is the exact image of the essence of God the Father.

Now there was a time when Moses' brother Aaron and his sister Miriam challenged his authority. In response Jehovah said to them, **“Hear now my words. If there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so. He is faithful in all my house. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches, and he has beheld the form of Jehovah. Why then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?”** (Numbers 12:6-8).

Moses had even seen the form of Jehovah, for Moses said to him earlier, **“Show me, I pray thee, thy glory”** (Exodus 33:18). Here is how God answered him: **“I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and will proclaim the name of Jehovah before thee. I will be merciful to whom I may be merciful, and I will be compassionate to whomever I may be compassionate. “And he said, Thou cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. And Jehovah said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shall stand upon the rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand until I have passed by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen”** (Exodus 33:19-23).

No doubt the reason Moses needed protection just to see the back of Jehovah was because the body of God is so glorious and awesome that the full appearance of it would be too shocking to a human body. The excitement of it would be overwhelming, and the body would die from the experience. For Moses to even see the back of him he needed to be protected.

There were a few times when men in their unprotected bodies saw some of the glories of the greater heavenly world, and that experience was always traumatic. Daniel saw several awesome visions from God, and each time they were stressful to his body. However, Daniel never saw God himself. Remember Jehovah said a **“man shall not see me and live.”** Here is what Daniel said after one vision: **“And I, Daniel, fainted, and was sick certain days. Then I rose up, and did the king’s business. And I wondered at the vision, but none understood it”** (Daniel 8:27). Here is what happened at a later vision he had: **“And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great quaking fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone, and saw this great vision. And there remained no strength in me, for my fitness was turned in me into debility, and I retained no strength”** (Daniel 10:7-8).

Ezekiel also saw several visions. Here is what happened after one of them: **“So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away. And I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit, and the hand of Jehovah was strong upon me. Then I came to those of the captivity at Tel-abib, who dwelt by the river Chebar, and to where they dwelt. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days”** (Ezekiel 3:14-15).

Daniel said he was sick certain days after he had a vision, and Ezekiel said he was overwhelmed seven days after he had a vision. And nei-

ther of them saw the glory of Jehovah. The unprotected human body could not survive such an experience.

God must have protected the body of John in some miraculous way when he saw his vision of the heavenly body of Jesus. Nevertheless, John still fell as dead when he saw him. For the passage says, **“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, and he who lives. And I became dead, and behold, I am living into the ages of the ages. Truly. And I have the keys of death and of Hades”** (Revelation 1:17-18).

God may have shown the back side of his body of glory to Moses without giving him any supernatural protection so that he could record that experience for us. That would help us better appreciate how traumatic the full sight of him would be to our unprotected body. Without supernatural protection no man on earth could survive seeing the glorious body of God. We would all fall dead.

Although men cannot see God and live, there were times when Jehovah took on the form of a man of flesh so that men could see him that way. That must have been how he appeared to Abraham when God met him with two of his heavenly agents whom he was sending to investigate Sodom and Gomorrah. For when Abraham saw them, he said, **“My lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. Let now a little water be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and strengthen ye your heart. After that ye shall pass on, inasmuch as ye came to your servant”** (Genesis 18:3-5).

Jehovah may have appeared that way on mount Sinai when he showed himself to leaders of the Israelites to encourage them on their way to invade their promised land. For the passage says, **“Then Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up. And they saw the God of Israel. And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness. And he laid not his hand upon the nobles of the sons of Israel. And they beheld God, and ate and drank”** (Exodus 24:9-11). What they saw was Jehovah in the form of a man of flesh, and not the body of his glory, the back side of which he later revealed to Moses.

Also remember, Jehovah left the body of his glory in heaven, and was born into this world with a body of flesh. And he lived here as a man until his enemies crucified him. When Jehovah came into this world as Jesus of Nazareth it was only his spirit that came. He left his glorious body in heaven, which is implied by these words of Jesus: **“And**

no man has ascended into heaven, except he who came down out of heaven: the Son of man who is in heaven” (John 3:13).

His spirit was in a body of flesh, but his glorious body was left in heaven. For when Jesus was still on earth he said to the Jews he **“is in heaven.”** He no doubt meant his glorious body was still in heaven. Perhaps his heavenly body was in some kind of “suspended animation.” There are many mysteries about the various ways God appeared in the world. Jehovah took on the form of an man of flesh when he appeared to Abraham, and also when he appeared to Moses and to some of the Israelites on mount Sinai. However, when he came as Jesus of Nazareth it was to be born and live a complete life in the flesh as a poor and humble man upon the earth.

Thus God has the form of a man because he is our heavenly Father and we are made in his image. He even has feelings as we have. For example, the Bible says he grieves about the sins of his offspring: **“And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Jehovah regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart”** (Genesis 6:5-6). Also a passage in Isaiah tells how he will rejoice when he creates the new Jerusalem in heaven: **“For, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people. And there shall no more be heard in her the voice of weeping and the voice of crying”** (Isaiah 65:17-21). I speak much more about his feelings in the chapter *The Mind of God*.

The devil and those deluded by him want us to think of God as something much more alien and distant from us. And denying that God has a body, especially a body in the form of ours, is part of the devil’s attempt to create a psychological distance between us and God our heavenly Father.

Dear reader who loves God and his righteousness, always remember, God is indeed our eternal Father, and he not only made himself look like us but he loves us more than any earthly father ever could. Strive to be close to him, believe and obey him, for that is right and good and just. Be toward him like an infant that clings to his mother. For God said about himself and his people Israel, **“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet I will not forget thee”** (Isaiah 49:15). Many modern mothers forsake their babies, but God never will forget us as long as we cling to him.

God will never forget those who cling to him, but he is going to cast those who reject him into the eternal fires of hell. Be not like most of the generation of his chosen people that he rescued from bondage in

Egypt. God said about them, **“It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Therefore I swore in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest”** (Psalm 95:10-11). And do not forget this warning: **“Therefore, receiving an immovable kingdom, we may have grace, through which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and awe. For our God is also a consuming fire”** (Hebrews 12:28-29). He is gracious toward those who cling to him, but he is a consuming fire to all of his enemies, which includes all men who will not believe and obey him.

The magnificence of God

Not only is God from everlasting to everlasting, but he is incomprehensibly magnificent. It is absolutely impossible for us mere mortals to comprehend the wonderful greatness of God. And the grandeur of his appearance is but a tiny part of it. The far greater part of his greatness is his inner being, including his thoughts. And God said about himself, **“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isaiah 55:9).

How high are the heavens? Nobody knows. The size of our universe is a very controversial subject because it is so difficult to determine. It is so difficult that astronomers cannot even agree how to determine it. Nevertheless, they do agree that the heavens extend billions upon billions of miles above us, and that makes it exceedingly big. Indeed, this world is so big that it is impossible for our minds to comprehend how big it is. We can think and speak of it with words, and other symbols and ideas, but it is truly incomprehensible.

Did you know that our sun is over a million times larger than our earth? Yet it looks smaller than a tiny cloud in the sky. It looks small because it is so far away. And who is it that can look at the sun (never look directly without special eye protection) and see it as a million times larger than our earth? Our minds refuse to see it that way. We accept that knowledge on faith—faith based upon solid evidence. And that is how those who love God accept knowledge about him and his great promises.

Yet as big and far away as our sun is, it is very close to us compared with even the nearest stars. And God said his thoughts and his ways are as far above ours as the heavens are above the earth. It is impossible for anyone to comprehend the grandeur of God. We can only have a glimpse of his magnificence from analogies such as the one above from Isaiah, and by learning about the things he created. And those things simply give us an intellectual idea, and not real comprehension.

It is impossible for man to comprehend the grandeur of God. We cannot even comprehend the grandeur of the cosmos which he created. Indeed, we cannot even comprehend the grandeur of the very elements of which we are composed. For R. L. Gregory wrote,

Twentieth-century physics has largely abandoned the ages-old perceptual models of reality. The essential concepts of quantum physics, and some of the concepts of relativity theory, have no counterpart in even the physicist's own perceptual models, and so he has great difficulty in thinking "intuitively" in his subject. Partly for this reason mathematical formulation, and computer simulation, have become essential and dominate physics. This has led to a curious situation: the physicist in a sense cannot trust his own thought. He is reliant upon more or less accepted conventions of symbolic systems.¹

If scientists cannot even comprehend intuitively or trust their own thoughts about the enormous complexity of the elements of our world, how could we possibly comprehend the magnificence of God who made everything? We can only grasp what little we can from descriptions of him in his holy book the Bible, and also from our recognition of the glories of the world that he made for us. About those glories the psalmist said, **"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork"** (Psalm 19:1).

The wise man Solomon recognized the impossibility of fully comprehending God or anything he has created. For he said, **"When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth (for also there is he who sees sleep with his eyes neither day nor night), then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. Because however much a man labors to seek it out, yet he shall not find it. Yea moreover, though a wise man thinks to know it, yet he shall not be able to find it"** (Ecclesiastes 8:16-17).

Those words were written three thousand years ago. Since that time man has acquired enormous knowledge about our world. Yet man is still not able to completely understand the nature of even the simplest parts of it. Consider two of the most fundamental things: matter and light. Even with all our great tools of research, man still does not fully understand what they really are. For example, light seems to be both matter and energy, which seems contradictory. Now if men cannot fully understand the commonest things around us such as matter and light, how can they complain about not understanding the deep mysteries of God?

1. R. L. Gregory, *The Intelligent Eye* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970) p.150.

Regarding knowledge of our world, the scientist Phillip Lubin said, “Every generation thinks it has the answers, and every generation is humbled by nature.”¹ And that will always be true about our knowledge of the world. Consider this passage that Paul wrote two thousand years ago: **“If any man presumes to know anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know”** (First Corinthians 8:2). Paul also said, **“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God”** (First Corinthians 3:19). Of course, that does not mean our earthly wisdom and knowledge are useless. It means they will always be incomplete and require modification.

Only the unchanging word of God will endure. For Jesus said, **“The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away”** (Matthew 24:35). And Peter said, **“Because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as a flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower of it falls away, but the word of the Lord endures into the age”** (First Peter 1:24-25). (The words “into the age” mean forever.) Yet even for the unchanging word of God, our understanding of it will always be incomplete and require modification as long as we are in this world.

Conjectures about his body

Now the following conjectures about the grandeur of God’s body that I am offering to you are just that: conjectures. And I fully realize the impossibility of men on earth being able to comprehend his greatness. Nevertheless, based upon what we have learned about things of our world, I think it is proper for us to make comparisons with him. For remember, the psalmist said, **“The heavens declare the glory of God ...”** (Psalm 19:1). And God himself said, **“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isaiah 55:9).

Therefore, since the Bible has examples of comparing the glory of God with the world, I think it acceptable to make conjectures about him based upon our knowledge of his creation. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that they are only conjectures, which things should never be considered as factual.

In order to help you appreciate the magnificent body of God I need to say some things about our own bodies. Our bodies are super-complex, far beyond what we can comprehend. For every human body is composed of about a hundred trillion individual cells, which are the basic living things of all creatures. And in our body they function together in a highly coordinated way. Moreover, each cell is like a

1. <http://www.memorable-quotes.com/phillip+lubin,a196.html>

specialized factory, but far more complex than any human factory or even a city of factories. Consider some of the things the biochemist Michael Denton said about them:

To grasp the reality of life as it has been revealed by molecular biology, we must magnify a cell a thousand million times until it is twenty kilometres in diameter and resembles a giant airship large enough to cover a great city like London or New York. What we would then see would be an object of unparalleled complexity and adaptive design. On the surface of the cell we would see millions of openings, like the port holes of a vast space ship, opening and closing to allow a continual stream of materials to flow in and out.

If we were to enter one of these openings we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity. We would see endless highly organized corridors and conduits branching in every direction away from the perimeter of the cell, some leading to the central memory bank in the nucleus and others to assembly plants and processing units. The nucleus itself would be a vast spherical chamber more than a kilometre in diameter, resembling a geodesic dome inside of which we would see, all neatly stacked together in ordered arrays, the miles of coiled chains of the DNA molecules. A huge range of products and raw materials would shuttle along the manifold conduits in a highly ordered fashion to and from all the various assembly plants in the outer regions of the cell.¹

Denton continued to describe at length some of the enormous complexity of a living cell. And the organization of the trillions of cells that compose our body is even more complex than the organization within the cells. Nevertheless, as complex as our bodies are, they are mostly empty space. Indeed, the whole universe is mostly empty space. We can see the empty space in the heavens, but we only know of the empty space of matter, including that of our own bodies, from scientific studies. And it has been well proven that all matter is mostly empty space. What holds our elements together are invisible forces.

For example, what keeps our solar system a stable unit is the balance between the force of gravity of the sun that pulls the planets toward it, and the centrifugal force of their orbits that pulls them away from it. Different forces have the same effect at the atomic and sub-atomic levels by keeping systems together even though there is a relatively great space between their parts.

1. Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Adler&Adler, 1985). p. 328.

Regarding that space in atoms one website from Cornell University said, “To get an idea of the scale, if you were to magnify an atom until it was a mile across, the nucleus would be roughly an inch across, and the electrons would be even smaller.”¹ That means there is a huge amount of empty space in atoms, of which we are all composed. And to give you an idea of how much empty space there is in an atom, a sphere with a diameter of one mile has a volume that is 254,358,061,057,619 times greater than the volume of a sphere with a diameter of one inch.

His body compared with ours

Now the reason I am giving that information about atoms is to compare our body with that of God. First I must say that I cannot conceive there is any empty space in the body of God. And if God has a body the same size and general shape as a man, but with no empty space in it, using the above figures how much larger would he be if he had the same amount of empty space in his body that we have in ours? He would be over 254 million million times larger. And that is a great underestimate, because it does not consider all of the empty space in the nuclei of atoms.

There is perhaps an even better way to determine how much empty space is within each of us. And that is to conjecture from what men say to support the popular Big Bang theory. That can give us some idea about the proportions of matter and space. I did a brief search on the internet, and I found this comment from an article on the website of Case Western Reserve University, dated January, 2006: “The Big Bang model of the universe’s birth is the most widely accepted model that has ever been conceived for the scientific origin of everything. No other model can predict as much with as high accuracy as the Big Bang model can.”² Of course, like virtually all theories it is being continually modified. For example, inflationary universe theory was introduced to solve some of the problems with the Big Bang theory.

The Big Bang theory says our universe began when it started expanding from a very tiny super-condensed state. How tiny was it? One site said it was an “infinitesimally small point.” Alan Guth, originator of the inflationary theory, was more specific, when he said, “In the inflationary theory the Universe begins incredibly small, perhaps as small as 10^{-24} cm, a hundred billion times smaller than a proton.”³ Another site was also more specific, saying it was a “billion-trillion-trillionth

1. www.ccmr.cornell.edu/education/ask

2. http://home.case.edu/~sjr16/advanced/cosmos_bigbang.html

3. <http://nedwww.ipac.caltech.edu/level5/Guth/Guth3.html>

of a centimeter across,” and it “popped spontaneously into existence out of nothing.”

Well the Bible does say that our universe had a beginning, and that God stretched out the heavens: **“Thus says God, Jehovah, he who created the heavens, and stretched them forth, he who spread abroad the earth and that which comes out of it, he who gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to those who walk in it I have made the earth, and created man upon it. I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded”** (Isaiah 45:5, 12). What God used to make the universe we know not. However, it certainly did not pop out of nothing, because he created it.

Although I do not accept the Big Bang theory, nevertheless I am using what men say about the mass of our universe to help us appreciate how much greater God is than we are. Now if the mass of our world began as an infinitesimally small point, and it could be condensed again then it would be that small. Indeed, there is a theory in cosmology, called the Big Crunch, that says our universe will contract back to an infinitesimally small point again.

It is interesting that Jesus said something like that would happen at the end of the world: **“But straightaway after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. And the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky”** (Matthew 24:29-30). Perhaps that means the stars would fall toward each other in shrinking space. For Revelation says about the end of the world, **“And the sky departed as a scroll being rolled up”** (Revelation 6:14).

According to Big Crunch theory the mass of the universe, including that of our bodies, can be condensed to the way it was before the Big Bang occurred. That means if all the empty space were removed from our body to a completely condensed state, we would be far less than an “infinitesimally small point.”

Using that information, how big would God be if he expanded himself to have the same proportion of space in his body that we have in ours? He would be incomprehensibly larger than the whole universe, billions and trillions times larger.

To determine that mathematically based upon the Big Bang theory, we would first need to find the fraction of the volume of our body to that of the volume of the universe. And then we would need to use that fraction to determine our proportion of the 10^{-24} of a centimeter, or the billion-trillion-trillionth of a centimeter diameter from which

the world came. We would next need to determine how much to increase that super-small volume to become the normal volume of our body. And that quantity of increase from the super-small size to our normal size would suggest how much larger God would be if he had the same amount of empty space within his body as we have in ours.

I will let the mathematicians so inclined among you determine that number. But whatever the numbers are, how can any man so full of emptiness challenge God who created the world and everything in it? It is the ultimate of arrogance, madness, and folly.

Of course, the comparison I made is pure conjecture based upon what science tells us about space and matter. No doubt the reality of how we compare with God is much more complex, beyond our ability to comprehend. Nevertheless, that is one way I thought about to help me better appreciate how God could have a body with the same general form and size as ours, and yet still be immeasurably superior to us. And I offer it to you for the same purpose. But let me add this about my comparison: men have always underestimated the glory and grandeur of God. And I have no doubt that what I have suggested is another underestimate. For it only considers one aspect of his body.

The composition of his body

The above conjecture about the body of God dealt only with the quantity of his substance. Next I want to conjecture about the composition of his substance. First, we must remember that the body of God is not made of flesh. As Paul said, **“Now this I affirm, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability”** (First Corinthians 15:50).

God is composed of an entirely different substance totally unknown to us. And no doubt the elements of his substance have properties vastly superior to anything in the world. Moreover, the composition of those elements is super-astronomically more complex than those of our body. (Please accept my stretching the superlatives, for there just are no adequate words to describe him.)

Nevertheless, remember! All of what I am saying here assumes the body of God has elements, and of course that may not be true. Indeed, the composition of his body is no doubt of a kind that we cannot even conceive. I am just offering this conjecture as a way to help you better appreciate the glory and magnificence of God’s body, using knowledge about our world that we currently have.

The human body is a very complex organization of atoms, of which we have many. When I checked the internet for precisely how many I found this estimate from one website:

In summary, for a typical human of 70 kg, there are almost $7 \cdot 10^{27}$ atoms (that's a 7 followed by 27 zeros!). Another way of saying this is "seven billion billion billion." Of this, almost $2/3$ is hydrogen, $1/4$ is oxygen, and about $1/10$ is carbon. These three atoms add up to 99% of the total!¹

That is indeed a lot of atoms. Yet remember how many times more quantity of substance God has than we have. So if we think of the "atoms" of God's substance, he has an incomprehensibly greater number in his body than the huge number we have in ours.

Now the most important thing about the elements of a body is not how many there are, but how they are organized together. Consider two common atoms, hydrogen and oxygen. Hydrogen is the simplest atom of all. It consists of a single electron circling a single proton nucleus. Oxygen has eight electrons around a nucleus of eight protons and (normally) eight neutrons. Both hydrogen and oxygen are gases, although they can be frozen into a liquid at extremely low temperatures.

Both hydrogen and oxygen have certain properties, most of which are different from each other. What makes them different is the composition of the particles that compose them. Both have electrons and protons. Oxygen has eight times as many (plus eight neutrons), but that difference effects more than just its size and weight. That difference in the number of particles that compose it causes oxygen to have very different properties from those of hydrogen.

Moreover, when two or more different atoms are bonded together they make a new substance. For example, when two hydrogen atoms combine with one oxygen atom it produces the molecule H_2O , which is water. Hydrogen and oxygen are both gases. Yet water, which is made of them, is not. It is the common liquid we are all familiar with that covers most of the earth and comprises most of our body.

The fact that combining different things creates new properties in their composition is a normal principle of nature. That is why we can have the enormous variety of things in our world, all of which are combinations of about ninety different naturally occurring elements (The exact number depends upon how "naturally occurring" is defined.)

Many of the new substances that man creates with atoms have unpredictable properties. However, chemists have become quite skilled in predicting some of the properties of new molecules that have a similar composition to others they know about. Some molecules created

1. http://education.jlab.org/qa/mathatom_04.html

by organisms are very complex, having over a hundred thousand atoms. And remember what the man said about the number of atoms in our body; only three kinds of atoms compose ninety-nine percent of the total.

How is it possible that only three kinds of atoms (hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon) can compose ninety-nine percent of a human body? It is because every combination creates a substance with different properties. And our bodies are composed of many different combinations. There are many different molecules, cells, and organs within us, but how they are composed and organized determines what we are. Concerning the composition of our bodies, one website about a museum in New York City said this:

Guess how many, and what kind of, molecules arrange to create you. Believe it or not, our own molecular make-up—carbohydrates, fats, proteins and water—is actually similar to a wide array of life forms, including a cockroach, elephant, and even a piece of broccoli! This is what is meant by the shared chemistry of living things. Although we don't look like a cockroach or a bacterium, we are made up of the same molecules in similar proportions. ... The staggeringly large number of molecules [are] inside even the smallest item For example, a tiny seed is shown to contain 100 quadrillion molecules of starch (1 plus 17 zeros)! We are made up of an astonishing large number of molecules ... !¹

And what makes us different from a cockroach or an elephant or a piece of broccoli is how those molecules are arranged and organized. What is important is not just the chemicals we have in us, but how they are arranged and organized. For the more complex and highly organized those molecules within organisms are, the more complex the organisms can function and perform. And the increase is not linear, it is more logarithmic. A man may have most of the same kind of chemicals within him as a dog, and he may only weight twice as much, but he is far more than twice as superior in his overall capabilities to any dog.

Now the point of all that information about chemistry is to help us appreciate the immense superiority of God. For if a few pounds of dust with a few gallons of water can be organized to create a human body, with all its capabilities, think of how much greater are the capabilities of the body of God. For he has a body which is composed of almost infinitely more substance, which is of a far superior nature to

1. <http://www.nyhallsci.org/marvelousmolecules/ae-abouttheexhibit.html>

ours, and that is organized in an inconceivably complex way, all in perfect unity.

If a man is far superior to an animal, God is infinitely superior to a man, and indeed to all of mankind collectively. Can you not yet appreciate how magnificent and capable he is, and why he can do things such as create our entire universe in only six days?

Now all of those things, dear reader, are just about the body of God, which is the lesser part of him. For he is primarily a spirit, and there is evidence in the Bible that he will change his body after he brings an end to our world. And let no man accuse me of disrespect toward him by speaking of the lesser part of God. For Paul spoke of the weak thing of God, when he said, “... **the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weak thing of God is stronger than men**” (First Corinthians 1:25).

Perhaps what he meant by the weak thing of God was his body in the form of a man, which is far less magnificent than his original body. And the “foolishness” of God probably refers to many of the amazingly bizarre creatures he has created for our world.

His body and his Spirit

Regarding the nature of God’s Spirit, remember it is a living entity of pure eternal energy, with a mind of supreme intelligence. I believe his Spirit has a structure composed of elements of divine energy that are organized into a perfect working system. Nevertheless, as I reasoned previously, I believe God had a body before he transformed himself into the form of a man, because I believe he has always had a body.

Perhaps his body was made from his spirit. There are some scientists who believe that matter is a form of energy. When asked at a University of Chicago forum whether matter was energy, one panelist (Harvard physicist Lisa Randall) said, “Matter is a form of energy—in a sense.” Then she added, “We wish we knew that, but we don’t.”¹

What is agreed upon is that matter can be converted into energy and vice versa, which is expressed in Einstein’s formula $E=MC^2$. You may be interested in knowing that, contrary to popular belief, Einstein did not originate the idea of the equivalence of mass and energy, nor did he originate the idea of relativity in physics. Einstein’s fame among scientists is primarily because his theories about those things have made more successful predictions than others.

The formula $E=MC^2$ says that energy equals mass times the speed of light squared. I do not want to get technical, because I am not quali-

1. http://uchiblog.uchicago.edu/archives/2005/12/letas_talk_scie.html

fied, but mass is not exactly the same as matter. However, that is irrelevant to the point I am making here. Remember, man still does not know what matter is.

Nevertheless, for purposes of conjecturing about the body of God, perhaps his body before the beginning was composed of a special mass-like form of his Spirit, within which was the rest of his Spirit. That would give him his distinct oneness of identity, instead of some kind of ghostliness. No doubt God's body was such that it had the potential of doing anything. It would have been, of course, of such magnificent glory that it is impossible for us to even imagine it. And apparently that body had the capability of being transformed into the form of a man, which is what God now has. In so doing God may have suspended many of the capabilities of his original body when he took on the form of a man, which is now **"the weak thing of God"**; weak only relative to the infinite power of his original body.

He did that because his love for his sons is so great he was willing to temporarily transform his body into the form of a man, as well as create offspring some of whom he knew would become his enemies. He even created us with greatly inflated bodies, ones with an outward size about the same as his, so that we could better identify with him. THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **"If ye love me, keep my commandments"** (John 14:15).

Becoming his original self

There is a passage in the Bible that suggests God will change his body back to what it was before the beginning. When John was describing his vision of the end of the world and the new Jerusalem, he quoted God saying, **"I have become, I, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end"** (Revelation 21:6).

The word become in that passage is a translation of the Greek word ΓΕΓΟΝΑ, which root word is ΓΙΝΟΜΑΙ. And that word has no exact English equivalent. It is frequently translated to the word become, but other words are also used, such as happen, occur, make, do, arrive. Most other versions translate the word in that passage to "it is done," because the word is third person (ΓΕΓΟΝΑΝ) in the Greek editions they used. However, I used a version of the Byzantine-Majority Greek, which I believe is a more accurate edition, and the word there is first person: ΓΕΓΟΝΑ. Therefore, I translated the word to "I have become."

And that expression suggests to me that after the final judgment, God will become what he was before time began, in the sense of the form of his body. For his Spirit never changes, as the following passage

says, **“And thou, Lord, at the beginnings founded the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They will perish, but thou are permanent. And they will all become old as a garment. And thou will roll them up as a mantle, and they will be changed. But thou are the same, and thy years will not cease”** (Hebrews 1:10-12).

I believe God will change his form to what he had before he created anything, because John said about him, **“And he who sits upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he says to me, Write, because these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, I have become, I, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end”** (Revelation 21:5-6). Those words were about the future, after the end of the world and the final judgment. After all those things happened God said he would make all things new, and he would become.

When he said become, I believe that means he would become his original form. And if God changes his body to its original form, and makes all things new, that suggests we, his sons for eternity, will also be given similar bodies with a new form entirely different from what we now have (with its arms, legs, eyes, mouth, and hair) and vastly more beautiful and superior. Neither God nor men will have the human form that we now have. For God fashioned our familiar human form to serve the purpose of preparing our spirits here on earth for eternal sonship in heaven. And like our world it is only a temporary form.

The Bible also speaks of more than one Spirit of God. It not only speaks of his Holy Spirit, which is primarily mentioned in the New Testament, but the book of Revelation speaks of seven Spirits of God. I discuss those things in the next two chapters.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD

There is a passage near the beginning of the book of Revelation that says, **“John, to the seven congregations in Asia: Grace to you and peace from God, who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth”** (Revelation 1:4-5).

In that passage John called for a blessing of grace and peace (1) from God, (2) from the seven Spirits, and (3) from Jesus Christ. I believe the reason John included the seven Spirits with God and his Son was to introduce the reader to those Spirits, and to indicate how important they are. For those seven Spirits are mentioned in no other book in the Bible. They are important because they seem to symbolize the energy that God uses to enable the world to function, and to interact with it.

Remember, a spirit is energy, and God is the ultimate source of energy. He used his energy to create the world, and he is continually using his energy to keep it functioning. For example, the prophet Jeremiah said about him, **“He has made the earth by his power. He has established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding he has stretched out the heavens. When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightnings for the rain, and brings forth the wind out of his treasuries”** (Jeremiah 10:12-13). When God “utters his voice” things to happen, but not without his energy.

Energy is required for whatever happens, whether it is natural or supernatural. For example, energy was what enabled Jesus to perform his amazing miracles. For the record says, **“And all the multitude sought to touch him, because power came forth from him, and healed them all”** (Luke 6:19). It was power from God’s energy that healed them, because during the last supper, Jesus said to his apostles, **“the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10).

The great energy source

When John wrote about his great vision of heaven, and was describing the throne of God, he said, **“And out of the throne proceeds lightnings and voices and thunders. And seven lamps of fire burned before his throne, which are the seven Spirits of God”** (Revelation 4:5). And a later passage says those lamps of fire are **“the**

seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth” (Revelation 5:6).

Since a spirit is energy, I believe those seven lamps of fire symbolize a powerful kind of energy source that radiates out **“into all the earth.”** I believe God made that energy source as the means by which he created the world. And when the book of Genesis tells how God spoke and things were created, that probably refers to commands he gave to that energy source to produce what he wanted. When God “utters his voice” things happen, but not without his energy.

And I believe that God continues to use that energy source to keep the world functioning. He uses those seven Spirits to power the burning of our sun and all the other stars of the heavens, as well as everything else. If God were to withdraw that energy source, then everything in the universe would come to a complete standstill; everything would be dark and motionless.

Those seven Spirits are like the power plants of the world that transmit electrical energy to our houses, factories, and places of business. And just as we can use the energy of those power plants, so we can use the energy of those seven Spirits that God is sending into the world. And just as everything energized by those power plants of the world would stop functioning if they stopped transmitting, so also if God stopped transmitting the continuing energy provided by those seven burning lamps, everything in the world would stop functioning.

The only energy that would be left in the world would be the spirits of his offspring. But our spirits are so weak relative to his, that they cannot even sustain the lives of our bodies independent of the energy of his seven Spirits. For early in the history of man, God said, **“My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he also is flesh. Yet shall his days be a hundred and twenty years”** (Genesis 6:3). When God withdraws his Spirit from us, our body perishes.

I believe those seven Spirits of God also determine the laws of nature. They determine what kinds of things can happen in the world. And that is one way God sets limits on what men can do. Men have free will, and they can use the energy of those seven Spirits as they choose, but only within those laws of nature, which laws are determined by those Spirits. For in one sense, what men call the laws of nature are the predictable ways that those Spirits of God energize things to happen.

Now I need to say that the laws of nature are not so rigid that God cannot influence the world without always creating miracles. Scientists have discovered what they call uncertainty in their measurements. Therefore, they now explain things in terms of probability.

When that was first proposed Albert Einstein did not agree. And so he said, “I cannot believe that God would choose to play dice with the universe.” (His god was not God of the Bible, but what he called the force of order, or cosmic intelligence in the world.)

I do not believe there is pure chance in nature either, because the proverb says, **“The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah”** (Proverbs 16:33). When good things happen by chance, it is not just a chance of good luck; it is a blessing from God. The ideas of luck and fortune are myths. And those who indulge in gambling to trust their “luck” will be condemned. For Isaiah said, **“But ye who forsake Jehovah, who forget my holy mountain, who prepare a table for Fortune, and who fill up mingled wine to Destiny, I will destine you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter”** (Isaiah 65:12-12). What we call chance are simply things we cannot predict.

Now although those seven Spirits supply all of the energy of the world, God is the ultimate source of energy. He continually supplies their energy, which in turn supplies all the active energy of the universe. I believe that is what the lightnings and thunders coming out of the throne symbolize in that passage from Revelation. For lightnings and thunders indicate great power, and God is the ultimate source of power. The voices coming from his throne suggest the commands he utters to control that power.

And remember, only the book of Revelation speaks of the seven Spirits of God. Elsewhere in the Bible whenever it tells about how God used those Spirits to manipulate men and other things, it refers to the seven Spirits in the singular. Thus those “seven” Spirits of God are collectively God’s Spirit.

Those seven Spirits mentioned in Revelation are called one Spirit in other books of the Bible. However, the book of Revelation is much more informative about heavenly things. Therefore, it explains more fully why God’s Spirit is seven Spirits, completely comprehensive, enabling him to control anything at any time. And so in Revelation his energizing and controlling Spirit is said to be seven (symbolized by the seven radiating lamps before his throne), for the number seven symbolizes completeness.

God’s complete control

As you know, men have learned to control things remotely from great distances by radiant energy. They have even learned how to pilot aircraft that are many miles away from command centers on the ground. The Bible teaches that God can reach out and control anything anywhere. For example the psalmist said, **“Unless Jehovah builds the**

house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless Jehovah guards the city, the watchman wake but in vain” (Psalm 127:1). And I believe he reaches out that way by using the radiant energy of those seven Spirits, and that control operates instantaneously.

That seems to be another function of those seven lamps of fire that burn before his throne. The power plants of the world cannot control how their energy is used, but God can control anything. And I think he does it with those seven Spirits that supply the energy of the world. And perhaps the way God controls specific things for specific purposes is by “fine tuning” how much of that energy affects them. Perhaps that is how he does things such as arouse a man to action or cause his inaction.

There are numerous examples in the Bible of how the Spirit of God manipulated a man, sometimes to his benefit, and sometimes to his detriment. One example is when the Ammonite army went against a city of Israel. The Bible says, “**And the Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul when he heard those words, and his anger was greatly kindled**” (First Samuel 11:6). Saul then mustered an army and defeated the Ammonites.

There are also many examples in the Bible of how God did that with animals, such as opening or closing the mouths of lions. Here is an amusing one about how God manipulated a donkey: “**And Jehovah opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to thee, that thou have smitten me these three times?**” (Numbers 22:28). There are also many examples of how his Spirit manipulated inanimate things such as the sea, rocks, and the weather.

The normal way that the Spirits of God operate is within his laws of nature. When the Spirit of God came upon Saul, it was not for supernatural powers, because Saul never performed a miracle. However, sometimes in the past God did manipulate men and things by miraculous intervention.

Miracles are when God suspends his laws of nature and uses his Spirit to perform something supernatural, such as causing a donkey to speak. However, the normal way that the Spirits of God operate to energize and control the world is by his laws of nature. And although things operate by the laws of nature, it is still the seven Spirits of God that are at work energizing everything.

And remember, although those Spirits of God have the power to control everything, God has shared some of that control with his offspring. For he has suspended some of his absolute control, to allow men to control some of that power. They can even use their spirits to control some of that energy to violate his will. Moreover, God is

allowing the spirit of the devil to exert his control in some ways as well. God is allowing competing spirits to operate in the world for several reasons, which I explain in the chapter *The Nature of Our World*. Therefore, let no man blame God for the misuse of that energy. He created each one of us, but he is not responsible for our misbehavior. And neither is he responsible for the misuse of that energy.

God's complete awareness

I also believe those seven lamps of fire symbolize radiant energy that is not only sent out, but is also reflected back. When John was describing the throne of God, he also said, **“And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, like it had been killed, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth”** (Revelation 5:6).

Notice how that passage says the seven Spirits of God not only have horns, which symbolize power, but they also have eyes, which symbolize sensory ability. Thus, those seven Spirits not only provide the power by which God energizes, and can control everything in the world, but they are the means by which he is aware of everything.

And since seven is a figurative number for completeness, that means he has complete awareness as well as the ability of complete control. By means of the radiant energy of those seven Spirits, he is aware of whatever happens anywhere, as well as having the ability to manipulate anything. He can do all of that while remaining at his throne, which is his command center, about which I speak in the chapter *Preparing for Two worlds*.

I believe the way his seven Spirits provide awareness is done by the reflection of the radiant energy being sent forth into the world to energize everything. And every time that energy affects something, it sends a reflection back to God. Consequently, not only is God able to control anything he created in an instant from his throne, but he is also aware of everything that happens everywhere at all times. And he has shared that ability with the Lamb, which is his only begotten Son, about whom I speak under the next heading.

Therefore, although God allows his offspring to use their free will to apply some of his energy as they decide (within the limits he has set), nevertheless, he remains aware of everything they do, and he keeps a complete record of it. For in heaven there is a super-database with infinite capacity of storage, which is probably kept at his command center. And we will all be judged from that record.

Jesus told about God's control and awareness, when he said, "**Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall on the ground independent of your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered**" (Matthew 10:29-30). That was to teach them God has the power of complete control over, and the complete awareness of everything he created. And as often happened, what he said was an understatement. For I have no doubt that God has the power of complete control of every atom, and everything atoms are made of, and everything else he has ever created. And that is true of his awareness as well.

I believe God made those seven Spirits to give him the power of complete control and awareness, because he has taken on the form of a man, which is now his "weak thing." And those seven Spirits will not be needed when he transforms his body back to what it was at the beginning when this world is over. I speak more about his "weak thing" in other chapters of this book, including other reasons why he made himself that way

There is an interesting passage from the book of Daniel about the throne of God. Daniel said, "**I beheld till thrones were placed, and one who was ancient of days sat. His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels of it burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him**" (Daniel 7:9-10).

The ancient of days with the very white hair of his head was no doubt Jehovah, because that is how John described Jesus in his vision. And the fiery stream that "**issued and came forth from before him**" probably refers to his seven Spirits with radiant energy by which he energizes, can control, and is aware of everything in the world. All of that fire Daniel saw symbolizes great energy.

The only begotten Son of God

Regarding the Son of God, Jesus told his disciples, "**All authority in heaven and on earth was given to me**" (Matthew 28:18), and that includes control of the seven lamps of fire that burn before God's throne. Remember, John said, "**And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, like it had been killed, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth**" (Revelation 5:6).

The Lamb symbolizes Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was the sacrificial "lamb" used to save us from condemnation. A sacrificial lamb was used to save the firstborn sons of Israel from the last curse God brought against the Egyptians when he brought his people out of

bondage. That curse caused the death of the firstborn son of every Egyptian. It was a just retribution, because Pharaoh had forced the Israelites to kill their every newborn son in order to reduce their population. The blood of the lamb that was sacrificed by the sons of Israel was used to mark their dwellings so that the curse would “pass over” them. And Paul said, **“For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us”** (First Corinthians 5:7).

The description of the Lamb in the above passage in Revelation is somewhat of a challenge to interpret. The passage says the Lamb has **“seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth.”** Remember, an earlier passage said that the seven lamps of fire were the seven Spirits of God.

The seven Spirits of God are lamps of fire, which symbolize radiant energy; they have seven horns, which symbolize power and control; and they have seven eyes, which symbolize awareness. And since seven symbolizes completeness, that means they have maximum energy, power, and awareness. And since the Lamb has those horns and eyes of the seven Spirits of God, that must mean the Father and the Son share complete control of those Spirits.

And Jesus’ control of those seven Spirits of God explains how he is upholding all things, as mentioned in this passage about him: **“Who, being the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made purification of our sins through himself, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights”** (Hebrews 1:3).

That passage says Jesus is upholding all things by the word of his power. Words are a medium used to communicate and to activate, both to inform and to cause things to happen. That is probably what is meant when the passage says he is **“upholding all things by the word of his power.”** During the second world war president Truman was able to destroy two cities in Japan with atomic bombs by the word of his power. It was by the authority of his word that he was able to command such military action.

And Jesus upholds all things by the word of his power, which word is his authority over the seven Spirits of God. And perhaps another reason God made those seven lamps of fire was so that he and his Son would be able to share together the power of complete control and complete awareness of everything in the world.

There is a passage in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians that tells how Christ will reign over all things until the end of the world and the coming of the new heavens and earth. It says, **“For as by Adam all die, so also by Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own**

order. Christ the first fruit, then those of Christ at his coming. Afterwards the end, when he delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when he will abolish all rule, and all authority and power.

“For he must reign until he will put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy abolished is death. For he subordinated all things under his feet. But when he says that all things have been subordinated, it is clear that he who subordinated all things under him, is excepted. And when all things are made subordinate to him, then the Son himself will also be made subordinate to him who subordinated all things to him, so that God may be all in all” (First Corinthians 15:22-28).

God has given all authority to his Son Jesus Christ (of course, God **“is excepted”**). And Jesus will **“reign until he will put all his enemies under his feet.”** Remember however, this is a rebellious world, and so all things are not yet fully subordinate to him. For when the author of the book of Hebrews told how God subordinated all things to his Son, he said, **“Thou subordinated all things under his feet. For in subordinating all things to him, he left nothing not subordinate to him. But now we do not yet see all things subordinated to him”** (Hebrews 2:8).

Thus, even though all things are not yet subordinated to Christ, he still has all authority. And he will retain it until the end of the world and the coming of the new heavens and earth. After that God the Father will reign supreme. Even then, however, Jesus will reign with him on his throne (his command center) as his only begotten Son. For speaking of the new Jerusalem, the book of Revelation says, **“And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his bondmen will serve him.** (Revelation 22:1-3). We who are becoming his sons for eternity will be his bondmen to serve him, serving him with great joy and pleasure.

What God cannot determine

God can do anything with whatever he has created; his power over his creation is unlimited. However, God cannot control the character of the spirits of his offspring, nor will he ever be able. He cannot control the character of their spirits because their spirits were not created. He can certainly control their bodies and their spirits, and he can influence their will by imposing consequences, but he cannot control the character of their spirits. He cannot prevent them from making themselves evil spirits. He can only control his offspring against their will by overpowering them. And is what happens in hell; they are ruled with an iron rod (see Revelation 2:27).

The will of the spirits of his offspring cannot be controlled by him, because their spirits were not created. Those spirits have free will because they came from his own Spirit. He created our bodies, and he has the power of complete control of them, as well as complete awareness, but that is not true of the will of our spirits. God cannot make our spirits want to be righteous; he would indeed if he could. We alone have the control of the will of our spirits, although he can certainly overrule what they do. A father can overrule what his child does, but he cannot control the child's will.

God cannot control the character of our spirits, nor does he have complete awareness of our spirits either. That is why he must test us to see what kind of spirit we have. And that is one reason why God created this world. For it is a place where our spirits can develop and be tested. As one proverb says, **“All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but Jehovah weighs the spirits”** (Proverbs 16:2).

Another proverb says, **“The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, searching all his innermost parts”** (Proverbs 20:27). The innermost parts mentioned in that proverb refer to our heart and mind. And that proverb means God is informed about what kind of spirit we have by observing how our spirit controls the heart and mind of our brain. Only God has that power of direct observation.

Several times during the life of Abraham, God both strengthened his faith and tested it. And after his last and greatest test of faith, God said to him, **“For now I know that thou fear God, since thou have not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me”** (Genesis 22:12). God must test us to see what kind of spirit we have.

God wants each of his offspring to be worthy of becoming his sons for eternity, but he cannot make it happen. It can only happen by our own free will. And that is why we are going to be judged by our works (see Revelation 20:12). And those works include the thoughts of our minds as well as the deeds of our behavior.

God uses his seven Spirits to energize, have control over, and be aware of everything—everything except the character of the spirits of his offspring, because they were not created. They came from the Spirit of God himself. And his willingness to do that is another example of his tremendous love for us. THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

I waited to speak about the Holy Spirit to show how it differs from the seven Spirits of God that are before his throne. The expression “holy spirit” is only used three times in the Old Testament. And in each of those times the word “holy” seems to be used only as a descriptive adjective. In contrast, the expression “holy spirit” is used ninety-two times in the New Testament, and it is used as the name of a person. Therefore, translators capitalize the words to say Holy Spirit. The original Greek language had no lowercase letters to make such a distinction. Hebrew still has no lowercase letters.

Its personhood

Unlike the seven Spirits of God, the Holy Spirit is referred to as a living thing, a person. During the last supper Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the helper several times. Here is one example: **“But when the helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, that will testify about me”** (John 15:26).

Concerning the person of the Holy Spirit, there is much mystery about it. One of the interesting things is that the name Holy Spirit is always in the neuter gender. In contrast, the name of God and the name of Jesus are always in the masculine gender. That suggests the Holy Spirit has a kind of personhood that is different from theirs.

However, its personhood is not explained by the trinity theory, because that theory is both irrational and unsupported by scripture. There is no such oneness as being three separate persons and yet literally only one. The oneness of the Father and the Son is figurative. And the Holy Spirit is a special Spirit that serves as the helper. The Holy Spirit is like the seven Spirits, but unlike them it is a person.

Jesus is God's only begotten Son. He is his Son and not a part of God himself. The Father and the Son are one only in the sense of being in perfect unity. They are not one person, any more than a man and his wife are one person. When the Bible says, **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh”** (Genesis 2:24), that does not mean they literally become one physical body. It is a figurative oneness. And their oneness is an example of the oneness of the Father and the Son. However, the Holy Spirit seems to be a person who is a part of God himself, serving him as a helper and to be our helper.

In the book of Revelation the apostle John gave much detail about a great vision he had of heaven. He described things about God there,

things about Jesus there, things about men and heavenly agents there, and many other things there, but he never mentioned the Holy Spirit being there. The Holy Spirit is not even mentioned in the description of the new Jerusalem where all of the sons of God will spend eternity with him. It only speaks of God and Christ, as in this passage: **“And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his bondmen will serve him”** (Revelation 22:3).

There are a few passages in Revelation that tell about “the Spirit” speaking. For example, in the first part of Revelation Jesus gives instructions for the seven congregations of Asia. After each set of instructions, he said, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations”** (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22). And since Jesus was the one speaking, then he was that Spirit. That is more evidence that just because God is called a Spirit does not mean he does not have a body.

Since the Holy Spirit is only given to those who are becoming God’s sons for eternity, perhaps the Holy Spirit is an extension of God himself, enabling him to be within his children on the earth while he remains on his throne in heaven. Remember, Jesus said the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit) proceeds from the Father. And perhaps that is what Jesus meant when he said, **“... the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10). For the Holy Spirit is God’s Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit is an extension of God that is a unique kind of living force that he uses to unite himself with the spirits of his sons. And perhaps he will keep us united with him forever that way, both while we are here upon the earth and when we live with him in the new Jerusalem. For when the author of Hebrews was contrasting Christ with the blood sacrifices of the law of Moses, he said, **“... how much more the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself unblemished to God, will cleanse your conscience from dead works in order to serve a living God?”** (Hebrews 9:14).

What he meant by the eternal Spirit is no doubt the Holy Spirit. For remember, it was through the Holy Spirit that Jesus was begotten as a man in the world so that he could sacrifice his life here to become our Redeemer and cleanse our consciences. God’s eternal Spirit was in Jesus and it is in us. And since it is eternal, it will probably remain in all of us to keep our spirits united with him. For Paul said to his brothers at Corinth, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16). Those things may also be why there is no evidence the Holy Spirit has an independent body the way the Father and the Son have.

The Holy Spirit is the manifestation of God's Spirit that he uses to unite with his sons. Therefore, it is ranked in importance with both the Father and the Son, as stated in this passage: **“And Jesus having come, he spoke to them, saying, All authority in heaven and on earth was given to me. After going, make ye disciples of all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you. And lo, I am with you all the days, until the end of the age. Truly”** (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is our duty to honor and obey that Spirit which God has sent to reside within us, as well as God himself, and his Son Jesus Christ. For the Holy Spirit is an energizing force that God uses within his children to guide us and encourage us for truth and righteousness. Remember this passage: **“But we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God”** (First Corinthians 2:12). It is our helper and his helper, **“the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father.”**

Only for God's children

According to the Bible record, the Holy Spirit is only given to Christians, and it empowers them for truth and righteousness. Sinners do not have the Holy Spirit within them. Indeed, they cannot have it within them, because Jesus said to his apostles, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, so that he may dwell with you into the age, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see nor know it. But ye know it, because it dwells with you, and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17).

The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit, and Jesus said that sinners cannot receive it. They cannot receive it because they do not see it or know it. (We see it with the eyes of our minds.) They cannot see it or know it because they always resist it. That was what Stephen said about the religious leaders of the Jews who were persecuting the church.

Stephen said to them, **“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers, ye also. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold about the coming of the Righteous man, of whom ye now have become betrayers and murderers, who received the law at directions of agents, and did not keep it”** (Acts 7:51-53). And those men, having heard those true words and that justified rebuke, instead of repenting, they stoned him to death.

When sinners repent, and are immersed for the remission of their sins to put on Christ, that is when they receive the Holy Spirit to dwell in them. That is what Peter told those men in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost: **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38), which meant the Holy Spirit would be in them. For Paul said to his brothers at Corinth, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God?”** (First Corinthians 6:19).

Remember, the seven Spirits of God provide energy or power to the entire universe. And some of that power can be used by men in wrong ways. That does not happen with God's Holy Spirit. It cannot be used to energize anything wrong. When it is given it can only be used for truth and righteousness, which is probably why it is called the *Holy Spirit*. For holiness means purity.

That the Holy Spirit is only used for truth and righteousness is shown in the passage below where Paul wrote about living by the flesh versus living by the Spirit: **“For those who are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mentality of the flesh is death, but the mentality of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mentality of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not submissive to the law of God, for neither is it able. And those who are in flesh cannot please God.**

“But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him. And if Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up the Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwells in you.

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to flesh. For if ye live according to flesh, ye are going to die, but if in spirit ye kill the deeds of the body, ye will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:5-14).

Living by the flesh is living a worldly life, which means living sinfully. For John said: **“Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Because everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the arrogance of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”** (First John 2:15-16). In contrast to living according

to the flesh, living according to the Spirit means doing that which is good and right and just.

Only the children of God are led by the Holy Spirit of God. But his Holy Spirit only leads us when we live faithfully and righteously, for it cannot energize wrong behavior. That is further indicated by the following passage: **“Therefore I make known to you, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed, and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit”** (First Corinthians 12:3).

Now that passage does not mean anyone who mouths the words “Jesus is Lord” is doing so by the Holy Spirit, because sinners cannot receive it. It only refers to the child of God who has the Holy Spirit within him and allows it to guide him to live righteously. Those words apply to a man who is committed to Jesus as Lord, and proves it by his faith and his obedience. For Jesus said, **“Not every man who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of my Father in the heavens”** (Matthew 7:21).

Paul also said about some men who profess to know God: **“Truly to the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and worthless for every good work”** (Titus 1:15-16).

Such men may mouth the right words, but God's Holy Spirit does not reside in them. He is not in them because their hearts are far from him. As Jesus said about such men, **“This people comes near me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far distant from me”** (Matthew 15:8).

The Holy Spirit is in every genuine disciple of Christ, and Paul told how the Holy Spirit even helps us with our prayers to God. After describing the hope that God has given us, he said, **“And likewise also the Spirit helps our weaknesses, for we know not what we would pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. And he who searches the hearts knows what is the mentality of the Spirit, because it appeals to God for the sanctified”** (Romans 8:26-27).

The Holy Spirit is in all of the disciples of Christ, both men and women. And perhaps that is why it is in the neuter gender. God's Holy Spirit works to help all of us live as he wants us to live, including our respective gender roles. For God has given men and women different bodies that are suitable for the different roles he requires of

them. He has given women the role of bringing new souls into the world, and he has commanded them to be subservient to men.

As Paul said, **“Let a woman learn in silence in all subjection. But I do not allow a woman to teach, nor to have authority of a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, having been deceived, became in transgression. But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety”** (First Timothy 2:11-15). Those things may be one reason the Holy Spirit is referred to in the neuter gender.

Competing spirits in us

Now although we have the Holy Spirit within us, that does not make us immunized from doing anything wrong. For Paul warned his brothers at Ephesus not to grieve the Holy Spirit within them. He said, **“Let no corrupt speech go out of your mouth, rather if there is any good word for edification of a need, so that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in which ye are sealed for a day of redemption”** (Ephesians 4:29-30).

Therefore, never be overconfident. Take heed to these warnings by Solomon from his book of Proverbs: **“Pride is before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18), and **“There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”** (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25). And heed this warning by Paul: **“Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall”** (First Corinthians 10:12). The Holy Spirit helps our spirits (within the limits of our fallibility) as we strive to become sons of God for eternity, but we are ultimately responsible for what our own individual spirit chooses.

In this troubled life we are continually struggling between competing forces. The Holy Spirit of God works in us for truth and righteousness, but the evil spirit of the devil is continually seeking opportunities to influence us to sin. Remember, Paul said that our very flesh is competing against our spirit: **“But I say, walk in the Spirit and ye will, no, not fulfill a lust of the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do”** (Galatians 5:16-17). And Peter said, **“Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”** (First Peter 2:11).

Our body may want to indulge its lust in some sinful way, but we cannot do it when we are led by the Spirit of God. It is only when we

resist the influence of God's Holy Spirit within us that we can sin. And when that happens it grieves his Holy Spirit. And if we sin habitually, he will withdraw his Holy Spirit from us and we will be lost.

Yet because God loves us, he will not withdraw his Holy Spirit from us without a fight. His Spirit will struggle in our consciences to encourage us to repent and be faithful. For James said, **“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is hatred of God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or think ye that the scripture says vainly, The Spirit that he caused to dwell in us yearns with jealousy?”** (James 4:4-5). Spiritual adultery is loving the world and being unfaithful to God. And his Holy Spirit in us **“yearns with jealousy”** about our faithfulness. He will only give up on us when there is no remedy (see Second Chronicles 36:16).

As long as we allow God's Holy Spirit to guide us, we will not be unfaithful, and therefore cannot be lost. It is the pledge that God has given us to guarantee our salvation. For Paul said, **“In whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom also having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is a pledge of our inheritance, for the redemption of the acquired possession, for appreciation of his glory”** (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit within us is the pledge we have to become sons of God for eternity. And that pledge is a gift of God's grace. Therefore, all who become disciples of Christ receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to reside in us.

Its special gifts

The gift of the Holy Spirit is having it enter into our bodies as a pledge of God's promise of our salvation. Every Christian has that gift, and our continuing righteousness is a reminder to us of it. However, for a few of those early Christians, they received special gifts of the Holy Spirit that gave them some divine powers. And when the New Testament speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it refers to those special powers that some men were given. Those gifts of the Holy Spirit were given through the apostles when they laid their hands upon them for that purpose.

Here is what Paul wrote about them: **“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of services, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of functions, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each man toward that which is beneficial.**

“For to one, the word of wisdom is given through the Spirit, and to another, the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit,

to a different man, faith by the same Spirit, and to another, gifts of healings by the same Spirit, and to another, workings of miracles, and to another, prophecy, and to another, discerning of spirits, and to a different man, kinds of tongues, and to another, the interpretation of tongues. But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each man individually as it wills" (First Corinthians 12:4-11).

Those special gifts were only to be used to encourage faith in the good news of Christ while the New Testament was being written. Consider this example about Paul: **"And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so as to even bring handkerchiefs or aprons from his skin to those who were incapacitated and to free their infirmities from them, and the evil spirits to go out from them"** (Acts 19:11-12). Paul used that power to perform miracles only to prove he was a prophet from God. He did not use it for any other purpose. He did not even use it to heal his faithful servant Timothy who had many infirmities. For he said to him, **"No longer drink water, but use a little wine because of thy stomach and thy frequent weaknesses"** (First Timothy 5:23).

Moreover, none of those special powers of the Holy Spirit were given after the passing of the apostles. No man now receives the power of the Holy Spirit to prophesy of the future, or to perform miracles. Let no man claim he has any gifts of the Holy Spirit to perform anything miraculous. And that includes speaking in "tongues," which means having the ability to speak a foreign language never learned. All such claims are false, and can never withstand scrutiny. Which is what John commanded us to do about spirits: **"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but examine the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"** (First John 4:1). Those false prophets now include men who claim to have gifts of the Holy Spirit, including power to speak in "tongues."

Those special powers were only given while the church was beginning and the New Testament was being written. They are no longer given because they are no longer needed. We have the testimony of the New Testament to guide us. Those miraculous powers were used to prove to people that Jesus was from God, because they did not have the testimony of the New Testament. And that testimony is all that people now need. For Jesus taught that if a man will not believe the Bible, not even miracles will convince him (see Luke 16:31).

The Holy Spirit no longer enables men to work in miraculous ways. It works through the influence of our knowledge about God and his will for us. The dynamic knowledge in our minds of the will of God that we acquire from the Bible (which was written by the Holy Spirit

through the hands of men), is the Spirit of truth within us. And that is part of the influence of the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit within us also provides the energy (together with the seven Spirits) that we use to apply that knowledge to live righteously. But its energy now only operates within the laws of nature.

Before I leave this part about gifts of the Holy Spirit, I must say some things about the popular idea of spiritual experiences. For example, many churches teach the idea that a man cannot be sure he is saved until he has an emotional feeling of being saved. They claim that such a feeling is evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. That is a false and harmful teaching. It is even cruel to righteous souls who believe it, but have not experienced such a so-called "spiritual experience," even though they want to be a disciple of Christ.

Our salvation requires none of those things men call spiritual experiences. The authors of the New Testament clearly taught that salvation is a process involving faith in Jesus Christ, repentance of sins, and immersion in water for the remission of them. For example, when Paul was describing how we become a disciple of Christ, he said, **"We were buried therefore with him through the immersion into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in newness of life"** (Romans 6:4).

Like the birth that it is, salvation is a process. And it is during the process that we receive what Peter called the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that means it dwells in us as we **"walk in newness of life."** For remember, on that day of Pentecost, after those men believed what Peter said about Jesus being the Christ, he said to them, **"Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"** (Acts 2:38). Obedience to how the Bible commands us to become a Christian is all we need for assurance about our sonship. And the gift of the Holy Spirit is to have him reside in us as God's pledge for our salvation. No supernatural gifts are involved.

The degree of its Spirit

Our salvation for eternal sonship is an ongoing and lifelong process. And we begin as newborn babes in our knowledge of the will of God for us. As Peter said, **"Therefore, having put off all evil and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, long for the genuine intellectual milk, so that ye may grow by it, if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is excellent"** (First Peter 2:1-3).

That **“genuine intellectual milk”** comes from the word of God, which has been recorded for us in his Holy Bible. And as our spirit grows, we move beyond that milk to the solid intellectual food of the Bible. The author of Hebrews wrote about that, when he said, **“About whom, much subject matter from us is also difficult to explain, since ye have become sluggish in hearing. For also men who ought to be teachers because of the time, ye have need again for some man to teach you the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, and have become men who have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every man partaking of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is childlike. But solid food is for mature men, those having their sensibilities trained through practice for the discernment of both good and evil”** (Hebrews 5:11-14).

And the more our spirit grows by that intellectual food from the Bible, the better able the Holy Spirit can guide us. Thus, the degree that it can help us is dependent upon our knowledge of the word of God. And also remember, the Holy Spirit can help us only when we allow it. For although every child of God has the Holy Spirit as a helper in him, not everyone uses it to the same degree. That happens because the amount of knowledge we have of the will of God within us varies, and so does our willingness to apply it.

Remember, the actions of our mind are spirits. And the knowledge we have in our minds of the word of God is a manifestation in us of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. However, it is a manifestation only if that knowledge is integrated into our hearts by faith. Intellectual knowledge of the Bible alone is not a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, because sinners who have that kind of knowledge cannot receive it. Sinners isolate that knowledge in their minds as foreign to their thinking, and they do not accept it in their hearts. Therefore, that knowledge in them is sterile, having no power to perform anything righteous.

But for the faithful, as long as our earthly minds are alive and healthy, that information is a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us for righteous living. And how much it helps us varies according to how much of that knowledge we have. And not only does our knowledge of the word of God vary (which is the Spirit of truth within us), but we also vary in the degree to which the Holy Spirit energizes us for righteous living. Those variations are partly a result of the decisions our own spirits make to seek for God's truth and to apply those truths to our lives, and they are partly a result of circumstances beyond our control. For not everybody has the same resources, opportunities, and talents.

Thus, the Holy Spirit is both a Spirit of truth and a Spirit of life, a Spirit of truth for dynamic knowledge (a living knowledge in our minds) to guide us, and a Spirit of life to arouse us to live righteously. And it does those things now within God's laws of nature. And remember, although its Spirit works within us, we must do our part to allow it to do its work. And the more we do, the more it will be able to work with us and help us.

Its encouragement

Another wonderful thing about the Holy Spirit is that its presence within us provides us with great comfort and encouragement. We, the disciples of Christ, have that great comfort and encouragement because its presence within us is a constant reminder that it is God's pledge to guarantee that we are destined to be sons of God for eternity in heaven. Consider these beautiful words from Paul: **"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly things in Christ. Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, for us to be holy and unblemished before him in love.**

"Who predestined us for sonship through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the desire of his will, for appreciation of the glory of his grace, by which he blessed us in him who is beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, according to the wealth of his grace, which he abounded for us in all wisdom and intelligence.

"Having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his desire, which he purposed within himself for an administration of the fullness of the times. To gather together all things in the Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth, in him in whom also we obtained an inheritance. Having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the deliberation of his will, for us to be for appreciation of his glory, men who have first hoped in the Christ.

"In whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom also having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is a pledge of our inheritance, for the redemption of the acquired possession, for appreciation of his glory" (Ephesians 1:3-14).

First, some words about predestination that Paul mentioned. God did not predestine any individual souls for salvation. What he predestined was a *type* of soul. And any soul that conforms to that general type, which means living faithfully to him as he has commanded us, is destined for sonship. That is how souls are predestined. God predestined

the world such that all who choose to live faithfully are destined. And that choice to live faithfully is ours to make. For God is impartial (see Romans 2:11), and he wants every soul born into the world to become one of his sons for eternity.

Now the last statement in that passage by Paul says we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is a pledge of our inheritance. Remember, not only does the Holy Spirit work with the living knowledge about God that we have in our minds, but it also provides motivating energy (together with the seven Spirits) for us to live right. Our every righteous thought, word, and deed is energized by the Holy Spirit of God within us. As Paul said in this example, “... **no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit**” (First Corinthians 12:3).

Therefore, as we learn more about God's truth and live righteously, that is a constant reminder to us of its presence within us; which is also a reminder of our guarantee of God's great promise, his promise to make us his sons for eternity. As John said, “**And this is the promise that he promised us: the eternal life**” (First John 2:25). Our righteous living, guided by the knowledge we have of his will for us from the Bible, proves that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Together, our faith in him, our love for him, and our obedience to him, guarantee that we are destined to become his eternal sons.

Also consider our conscience. When Jesus was speaking about how we are begotten again, he said, “**The wind blows where it will, and thou hear the sound of it, but know not from where it comes, and where it goes. So is every man who is begotten from the Spirit**” (John 3:8). Although we cannot see the Holy Spirit, I believe we can feel it. I believe we feel it through our conscience, because the Holy Spirit apparently becomes a part of our conscience. For Paul said about himself, “**I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience testifying to me in the Holy Spirit ...**” (Romans 9:1). That is probably another way it works with us for righteousness. And pleasing our conscience gives us a wonderful and encouraging feeling.

Infallibility

Jesus lived infallibly because he never sold himself under sin to become captive in the law of sin. Also God inspired his holy prophets to prophesy infallibly, and he inspired the authors of the Bible to write the holy scriptures infallibly. However, those were for special circumstances long past. Every man has otherwise lived and spoken fallibly. For only Jesus lived without sin. I speak much more about our bondage to the law of sin in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*.

The Holy Spirit guides us to live right, but *not* to be infallible. It is a helper for us. Our own spirit has control of our living. And we cannot live infallibly because we have all sold ourselves under sin to be captive in the law of sin. Therefore, we must be ever vigilant about what we think we know and what we are going to do. This is a dark world filled with many things to deceive us—things around us and within us. Be not deceived into thinking the Holy Spirit of God within you will not allow you to fall. For there are competing spirits for our souls.

Paul said the devil was “**the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience**” (Ephesians 2:2). His spirit works in the sons of disobedience to help keep them alienated from God. In complete contrast, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the sons of obedience to help keep them united with God. Which of those two spirits works within a man is determined by his own spirit. God is allowing us to have that choice because he is testing our souls.

THE MIND OF GOD

This is the longest chapter in the book, and yet it is only a brief description of some of the characteristics of the magnificent mind of God. As with everything else about him it is impossible to fully appreciate the immeasurable beauty, glory, power, and grandeur of his mind. For it is at least as high as the heavens. Remember what God said in the book of Isaiah: **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isaiah 55:8-9).

If you sincerely want to know about the mind of God, then learn the Bible. For that is the word of God, and it reveals more about him than anything else in the world. However, I must warn you that you cannot simply trust what men say about it. You must read the Bible itself, a sound translation of it. I must also emphasize that you cannot merely read the Bible, you must study it. Indeed, you must live with it and make it a part of your life. For the deeper you immerse yourself in that supreme book, by studying it and applying what it teaches, the more he will reveal himself to you.

The Bible is like a window into his mind. But it is not a clear window, because Paul said our vision of spiritual things was very limited: **“For now we see by polished metal, in dimness, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know just as also I was known”** (First Corinthians 13:12). Therefore, you must carefully study it, and strive to perceive the wonderful grandeur and beauty of his mind from what is shown in that dim window. For that is what he expects of us. As Paul said to the Athenians, **“And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us”** (Acts 17:26-27).

God wants us to search for him. And the more you grope to find him, learning more about him, and growing in your love for him, the more your own mind will become like his mind. You will be able to see more the way he sees, and feel more the way he feels, and the more you will be able to live wisely and righteously the way he does. Your mind and your spirit will gradually be transformed more in his image.

And the most important sources of information in the Bible about God are the things written about Jesus Christ. For when the apostle Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, he replied, **“Have I been**

so long a time with you, and thou do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. And how can thou say, Show us the Father? Do thou not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works" (John 14:9-10).

The whole Bible is a testimony of what God is like, but the story of Jesus reveals more about him than any other part. For the Father was in Jesus, manifesting himself in the teachings and in the works of his only begotten Son. Jesus was like a mirror reflecting the mind of God. It was not his outward appearance that reflected the mind of God, it was his sayings and his works.

When Peter boldly confessed the outlawed belief that Jesus was the Christ (see John 12:42), Jesus said to him, **"Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-jonah, because flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father in the heavens"** (Matthew 16:17). His Father in the heavens revealed it to Peter through the words and the works of Jesus. Therefore, never stop studying the Holy Bible, especially the New Testament, where it teaches about Jesus Christ. By studying the word of God you will be able to see far more of the beauty, glory, power, and grandeur of what he is.

And that will also help protect your soul from being captured by the devil. For Paul said about sinners, **"Perhaps God may grant them repentance for recognition of the truth, and they may sober up out of the snare of the devil, having been captured by him for his will"** (Second Timothy 2:25-26). That is why the devil and his allies hate the Bible and strive to destroy it. When they cannot destroy it completely, they try to destroy its credibility. When men are separated from the word of God they become easier prey, like sheep separated from their shepherd.

Nevertheless, you should also be prepared to expect this: That the more you see the way he sees, and the more you think and feel the way he does, the less you are going to love this world. The more your mind becomes like his mind, the more you are going to be troubled and angry, disgusted and dismayed, horrified and repulsed by all the sins, evils, and injustices of this world.

As Solomon said, **"For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow"** (Ecclesiastes 1:18). And the apostle John said, **"Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"** (First John 2:15). The more your mind becomes like his mind, the less you will love this world, although you will still love your fellow man.

When Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ...”** (John 3:16), he was speaking of the offspring of God who had the potential to become his sons for eternity. When John warned not to love the world, he was referring to the character of the world, the whole corrupt system, which is ruled by the devil, and is so dominated by sin.

Nevertheless, even though knowledge of God and his truth increases your sorrow about the world, the joy of knowing about him and his promises for us, and seeing yourself developing a mind and spirit like his, greatly outweighs such grief and sorrow. As Peter said, **“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begot us again according to his abundant mercy for a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for an inheritance imperishable, and undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heavens for you, men being kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

“In which ye greatly rejoice, although made sorrowful in various trials. Since it is now necessary for a little while, so that the proof of your faith, much more precious than gold that perishes, and though proven by fire, may be found for praise and honor and for glory at the revealing of Jesus Christ. Whom, not having seen, ye love, in whom, not now seeing but believing, ye exult in inexpressible and glorified joy, receiving back the outcome of your faith, the salvation of souls” (First Peter 1:3-9).

His feelings

Regarding God’s feelings, he has feelings just as we have feelings, because we are made in his image. Perhaps when he made us in his image he included giving us the ability to feel the way he feels. For what animal has the richness of emotions that we have? However, one emotion that God does not have is fear. His Son Jesus had it when he was in the flesh, but only when he was about to be betrayed and crucified. Jesus felt a powerful dread of that terrible ordeal because it caused him to suffer more than any other man ever will. And having to endure that ordeal voluntarily was perhaps the most difficult part.

Here is a passage that shows the dread he had just before that terrible ordeal: **“And having become in agony he prayed more intensely, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground”** (Luke 22:44). The constant abuse he was given, the great fatigue he had to endure, and the extreme pain of being flogged and being nailed and hung on the cross were all insignificant compared with the requirement that he who is the eternal King of kings, Lord of lords, and the very author of life had to allow himself to be humiliated

and killed. Moreover, the man of perfect justice who never sinned had to allow the injustice against him of being put on public display and executed as a criminal. As the author of Hebrews said, Jesus **“endured a cross, having despised the shame ...”** (Hebrews 12:2).

No degree of suffering by anybody can come close to being as severe as his was—it was unique. That was why he was in such agony before it happened. That was why he prayed three separate times, saying, **“My Father, if it be possible, may this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I want, but as thou”** (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44). Yet he endured it all willingly so that he could become our Redeemer to save our souls, and that was because he loves us. THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

His love

God made us because he loves us. And love is both a way of behaving toward others and a way of feeling toward them. Love is no doubt the greatest characteristic of the mind of God. For John said about it, **“Beloved, we should love each other. Because love is of God, and every man who loves has been begotten of God, and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, because God is love”** (First John 4:7-8).

And again he said, **“Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we know, and have believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:15-16). John did not say that God had love, he said that God is love. For love is a part of his very nature.

There are three different Greek words that are translated love. All three are translated love because the English language lacks specific words that make those distinctions. One of those Greek words for love is ΕΡΟΣ, transliterated eros, which refers to sensual or erotic love. And that word is not found in the Bible, although it certainly contains teachings about it.

Another word for love is ΦΙΛΕΟ, transliterated phileo, which refers to brotherly love. The third word for love is ΑΓΑΠΗ, transliterated agape, which seems to refer to a broader and grander kind of love, in contrast to phileo which is more personal. The King James Version sometimes uses the word charity for agape.

When Paul was describing love, he used the word agape. Here is that beautiful description: **“If I speak with the tongues of men and of agents, but have not love, I have become sounding brass, or a**

clashing cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And if I dole out all things possessed by me, and if I deliver my body so that I may be burned, and have not love, I benefit nothing.

“Love is patient and is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not brag, and is not puffed up. It does not behave improperly, does not seek the things of itself, is not made sharp, does not contemplate evil, does not rejoice in wrong but rejoices in the truth, covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

“Love never fails. But whether prophecies, they will be abolished, whether tongues, they will cease, whether knowledge, it will be abolished. But we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, then what is in part will be abolished. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I reasoned as a child, but when I became a man, I abolished the childish things.

“For now we see by polished metal, in dimness, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know just as also I was known. And now remain faith, hope, love, these three, but the greater of these is love” (First Corinthians 13:1-13).

And Jesus used the word agape when he was asked what was the great commandment of the law. He replied, “**Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets**” (Matthew 22:37-40). The two great commandments of the law both command to love.

Just before his crucifixion, when Jesus met with his apostles during the last supper, there was nothing he emphasized more for them than to love. For example, he told them, “**As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Dwell ye in my love**” (John 15:9), and, “**By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other**” (John 13:35). And the word for love that he used in these passages was agape.

Agape is used both as a noun and a verb, and it is used in the New Testament ten times more than phileo, which is only a verb. Agape is used almost three hundred times in all of its various forms, while phileo is used only about thirty times. And agape was the word John used when he said that God is love.

Nevertheless, the word *phileo* is also a noble word that was also used for the love that God has for us and for his Son Jesus Christ, and for the love we have for them. For example, Jesus said to his disciples. **“For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he himself does. And he will show him works greater than these, so that ye may marvel”** (John 5:20). And he said to his apostles during the last supper, **“... for the Father himself loves you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God”** (John 16:27). In each case, the word love in those passages was *phileo*.

John said that God is love. And his love for us is very great. Remember the passage from Isaiah that told how much greater are the thoughts and ways of God than ours: **“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isaiah 55:8-9). So also is the love of God for us, because the psalmist said, **“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his loving kindness toward those who fear him”** (Psalm 103:11). Not only are his thoughts and ways astronomically higher than ours, so also his love is astronomical toward those who fear him.

Those words from that psalm are part of a greater passage about his love for us. It says, **“Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness. He will not always chide, nor will he keep *it* forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his loving kindness toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.**

“Like as a father pities his sons, So Jehovah pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the loving kindness of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him, and his righteousness to son’s sons, to such as keep his covenant, and to those who remember his precepts to do them” (Psalm 103:8-18).

Notice those words say that his loving kindness is everlasting to those who obey his will. Throughout the Bible there is an emphasis upon our obedience, and not just our faith in him. The love of God for us is not unconditional. The idea of the unconditional love of God is a false teaching perpetrated by this most permissive generation of Americans, and it is leading many souls astray.

God's love is not unconditional, whether in heaven or upon the earth. For he is going to cast sinners into the eternal fires of hell, whether they were his offspring in heaven, or his offspring upon the earth. They will be cast into hell because of how they lived. The love of God is definitely conditional.

Nevertheless, although God's love is not unconditional, he is enormously loving and patient with us. He loves us so much that he is enduring with much longsuffering our sins and our failures. Remember what Paul said about the longsuffering of God: **“And if God, wanting to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, even that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he previously prepared for glory, namely us whom he called, not only from Jews but also from Gentiles”** (Romans 9:22-24).

God has been suffering with his offspring from the beginning over six thousand years ago, suffering far more than we endure the pains of bearing and rearing our own children. For our suffering is like a drop in the ocean compared with his. Sin is very painful to God. It was Adam, a son of God, who brought sin into this world, and every man has contributed more or less to it. Nevertheless, because God loves us, he is patiently enduring, giving us many opportunities to repent and become one of his sons for eternity.

Remember this very beautiful passage from the New Testament about the greatness of God's love for us: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that every man who believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not that he might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned. He who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”** (John 3:16-18).

Truly God is love. Other expressions used in the Bible that can be considered part of God's love are the kindness of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, the favor of God. All of those things are aspects of the love of God, his immeasurable love. For John said, **“Behold what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God”** (First John 3:1).

Nevertheless, if men will not repent and obey Christ they will be lost and cast into the furnace of fire that burns forever. God will love them no more, which is what he said about his people Israel when they became so wicked: **“Because of the wickedness of their doings I**

will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more. All their rulers are rebels” (Hosea 9:15).

His jealousy

The second of the ten commandments says, **“Thou shall not make to thee a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God ...”** (Exodus 20:4-5). And a little farther in the book of Exodus, it says, **“... thou shall worship no other god. For Jehovah, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”** (Exodus 34:14).

Jealousy is a virtue, unless it becomes unreasonable. For jealousy is the feeling aroused when a personal relationship is threatened. It is right and good and just for a husband to be jealous of his wife and children. It shows his love for them. It arouses him to protect that relationship when it is threatened. Envy is never right because it is wanting what another man has. Envy does not mean wanting something like it, but rather wanting what he actually possesses. And that desire was condemned in the tenth commandment.

Jealousy is a natural feeling, seen even in very young children. Its purpose is to protect lawful relationships. Many people in this adulterous generation of Americans have begun to condemn jealousy in all its forms. They no longer approve it because they have become so selfish and treacherous in their relationships that they want nothing to oppose their infidelities.

There are numerous other passages in the Bible that speak of the jealousy of God. Here is one from the book of Nahum: **“Jehovah is a jealous God and avenges. Jehovah avenges and is full of wrath. Jehovah takes vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies. Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means clear the guilty. Jehovah has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet”** (Nahum 1:2-3). And here is one from the book of Zechariah: **“Thus says Jehovah of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath”** (Zechariah 8:2).

God is a jealous God because he loves those who belong to him. And it is one of the things that will arouse his wrath. Moses even said, **“For Jehovah thy God is a consuming fire, a jealous God”** (Deuteronomy 4:24). When his jealousy is aroused he becomes a consuming fire. What righteous man would not be aroused by jealousy, to fight against a threat to his relationship with his wife and children?

And any man who would not fight (in whatever way he can), is either a wretched coward or he does not love them.

Here is a passage from Proverbs about the righteous jealousy of a husband: **“He who commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding. He who would destroy his own soul does it. Wounds and dishonor he shall get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is a man’s fury, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance”** (Proverbs 6:32-34).

Vengeance belongs to God, but righteous men call upon him for vengeance, as did the martyrs in heaven (see Revelation 6:10). If jealousy is a man’s fury, what about the jealousy of God? Remember what the prophet Nahum said: **“Jehovah is a jealous God and avenges. Jehovah avenges and is full of wrath. Jehovah takes vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves *wrath* for his enemies.”**

There is even a passage that speaks of the apostle Paul having a jealousy of God: **“For I am jealous for you with a jealousy of God. For I betrothed you to one husband, a pure virgin to present to the Christ. But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent enticed Eve by his craftiness, so your thoughts might be corrupted from the simplicity in the Christ”** (Second Corinthians 11:2-3). He was defending himself against false apostles who had come among them. Jealousy is a virtue, unless it becomes unreasonable.

His patience

Remember the passage that says God is patiently enduring sin against him. He is enduring for the sake of those who will become his sons for eternity. And remember what the martyrs in heaven were told when they asked God how long it would be before he avenged their blood. They were told to be patient and wait. About that vengeance, Jesus said, **“And God, will he, no, not do the vengeance of his chosen who cry out to him day and night, and yet being patient toward them?”** (Luke 18:7).

God is love, and remember what Paul said about love: **“Love is patient and is kind”** (First Corinthians 13:4). And God is indeed patient and kind. The history of the Israelites that is recorded in the Bible gives numerous examples of the patience of God. He was enormously patient with his people after he rescued them from Egyptian bondage. They challenged him many times, and even forsook him for an idol of a calf they made to worship. Yet he still blessed them and protected them on their way to the promised land. It was their refusal to enter into the land to conquer it that finally exceeded his patience. And he condemned his people to wander forty years in the wilderness until all of that faithless generation perished there.

Even after God gave the sons of Israel victory and settled them in their land of promise, they frequently forsook him. Often throughout their history God had to urge them to repent and obey him. Here is one plea he made that is recorded in the book of Isaiah illustrating his great patience:

“Hear the word of Jehovah, ye rulers of Sodom, give ear to the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says Jehovah. I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts. And I do not delight in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of he-goats.

“When ye come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand—to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot bear iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They are a trouble to me. I am weary of bearing them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood.

“Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

“Come now, and let us reason together, says Jehovah, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye are willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it” (Isaiah 1:10-20).

God sent many prophets to his people Israel to warn them whenever they forsook him. And he endured their continual backsliding for a thousand years. He patiently endured it because he did not want to destroy them. However, the time came when there was nothing left he could do to persuade them. Their hearts were too hardened. For the Bible says, **“Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.**

“And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his

prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy” (Second Chronicles 36:14-16). Although God had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place among them (the temple), they finally exhausted his great patience. Therefore, he destroyed them.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are filled with examples of the great patience of God. Nevertheless as the above passage illustrates, his patience does not last forever. And that principle will always apply. For Paul warned, **“Or do thou despise the wealth of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God guides thee to repentance?”**

“But according to thy hardness, and thy impenitent heart, thou store up wrath to thyself in the day of wrath, and revealing, and righteous judgment of God, who will render to each man according to his works, to those who indeed seek by perseverance of good work, glory and honor and immortality—eternal life—but to those of self-interest, and who indeed disobey the truth but have confidence in unrighteousness—anger and wrath, pressure and restriction, upon every soul of man who produces evil, both of the Jew first, and of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who works good, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:4-11).

His joy

When the psalmist was writing about things that God created, he said, **“Let the glory of Jehovah endure forever. Let Jehovah rejoice in his works, who looks on the earth, and it trembles. He touches the mountains, and they smoke”** (Psalm 104:31-32). The psalmist was calling for all the works of God to be such that God would rejoice over them. What man does not want to rejoice over the things he made? And God wants to rejoice over the things he creates.

There is a passage in Isaiah about how God will rejoice in the new heaven and earth that he will create. Jehovah said, **“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.**

“For, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people. And there shall no more be heard in her the voice of weeping and the voice of crying” (Isaiah 65:17-19). God said he would rejoice in the Jerusalem of the new heavens and earth, and he would joy in his people. Therefore, let us all seek to become his sons for eternity, so that we can rejoice with him.

There is also a passage in the book of Luke that shows how Jesus enjoyed the companionship of his disciples. For he said to his apostles during the last supper, **“With desire I have desired to eat this Pass-over with you before my suffering”** (Luke 22:15). And during that supper, when he prayed to God, he said, **“Father, whom thou gave to me, I desire that where I am, they also may be with me, so that they may see my glory that thou have given me, because thou loved me before the foundation of the world”** (John 17:24).

Jesus also said previously to his disciples, **“Thus I say to you, there becomes joy in the presence of the agents of God over one sinner who repents”** (Luke 15:10). If the agents of God rejoice over sinners who repent, I have no doubt that God and his Son Jesus rejoice even more. For as we rejoice in our obedient children, so God rejoices when we love, trust, and obey him. And we will all rejoice together in heaven.

His grief and sorrow

God rejoices in our righteousness, but he also grieves about our sinfulness. Remember what the Bible says about the antediluvian world: **“And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Jehovah regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart”** (Genesis 6:5-6). And there are many other examples in the Bible about God grieving.

Centuries later, when some foreign nations were afflicting the sons of Israel, they pleaded with Jehovah to rescue them. He answered by saying he had rescued them many times in the past. Then he said to them, **“Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods. Therefore I will save you no more. Go and cry to the gods which ye have chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress.”**

Then the text says, **“And the sons of Israel said to Jehovah, We have sinned. Do thou to us whatever seems good to thee, only deliver us, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the foreign gods from among them, and served Jehovah. And his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel”** (Judges 10:13-16). The soul of Jehovah was grieved for the misery of his people Israel.

Consider when Jesus wept. The New Testament mentions two times when he wept, and neither of them happened during the time of his agony, betrayal, and crucifixion. The first instance was when Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, were close friends with Jesus. They lived in Bethany near to Jerusalem, and Jesus had gone away beyond the Jordan. When Laz-

arus became seriously ill his sisters sent for him. Jesus deliberately delayed, and while he waited Lazarus died.

When Jesus finally arrived at the tomb, Martha came to meet him, followed later by Mary. There was also a large crowd of mourners. Describing what happened, the text says, **“When Jesus therefore saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who gathered with her, weeping, he groaned in the spirit, and was himself troubled. And he said, Where have ye laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. The Jews therefore said, Behold how he loved him”** (John 11:33-36).

Jesus then raised Lazarus from the dead. That was why he delayed coming; it was so that he could create that great miracle in the sight of the people. For Lazarus had been in the tomb three days. He knew that he would bring Lazarus back to life, so why did he weep? He wept when he saw all the people weeping. And the passage says that when he saw them weeping **“he groaned in the spirit, and was himself troubled.”** Jesus, the Son of God, Jehovah of the Old Testament who led his people out of Egyptian bondage, groaned in the spirit and was troubled. Who can say that God does not sorrow with us about things such as death?

Jesus had a great love for Mary and Martha, and for his people. And he wept when he saw them mourning over the righteous man Lazarus. What loving father and mother does not groan in their spirit and is troubled when their children are weeping for sorrow? God grieves with us, because he loves us. And it is right and good and just for us to grieve over the death of our loved ones, because that shows our love for them.

When Martha and Mary first came to Jesus, they both said that if he had been there Lazarus would not have died. Some wretched men claim the sisters rebuked Jesus. Not so! Those words were an expression of their great faith and confidence in him. It was because they believed in him so much that they said Lazarus would not have died. They never imagined he would raise him from the dead after so long.

Never criticize God for anything, including times when you or your loved ones suffer great sorrow, even when it involves something as terrible as a death. For he sorrows with us, and you would just add to his sorrow. Who would be so cruel as to rebuke an innocent father and mother about the death of their child? God is the heavenly Father of all the sanctified of Christ, and the psalmist said of him, **“Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his sanctified”** (Psalm 116:15).

Be like Mary and Martha, and always have faith and confidence in God. For he does not let any harm befall those he loves, unless he has a great purpose for it. Consider the suffering of the man Job. And remember how God commanded his own beloved Son Jesus to suffer and be crucified. For remember also, God has promised to wipe away every tear from our eyes when this troubled life is over. Always love and trust him, no matter how much you sorrow, because he sorrows with us. And he always knows what is best for us. He has proven that to me countless times in my life. O that I had been more obedient!

The second instance of when Jesus wept was when he was entering Jerusalem for the last time, and a great multitude came out from the city to praise him. The passage says, **“And when he came near, having seen the city, he wept over it, saying, If thou knew, even thou, indeed even in this thy day, the things for thy peace. But now they are hidden from thine eyes. Because the days will come upon thee, and thine enemies will build a barricade around thee, and will surround thee, and enclose thee on every side. And they will raze thee and thy children within thee. And they will not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou knew not the time of thy visitation”** (Luke 19:41-44).

Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of what the sinful Jews had done to it. It was like this description by the prophet Isaiah: **“How the faithful city has become a harlot! She who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers”** (Isaiah 1:21). Jerusalem was the city God chose to be the capital of his people, and it contained the beautiful house they made for him. But when Jesus came, it had become a harlot, and was filled with murderers. Jesus wept because of what wicked men had done to that once righteous city filled with justice. In fact when Jesus was brought before Pilate the governor, the chief priests and the people cried out for Pilate to release Barabbas a murderer and crucify Jesus the innocent Son of God (see Mark 15:6-13).

His pity

Pity is a form of sorrow about the suffering of others. Remember the passage that told how Jehovah has pity on those who fear him: **“Like as a father pities his sons, So Jehovah pities those who fear him”** (Psalm 103:13). Another psalm says, **“He will have pity on a poor and needy man, and he will save the souls of the needy”** (Psalm 72:13). And God rewards those who show pity to the needy. For the proverb says, **“He who has pity upon a poor man lends to Jehovah, and he will repay him his good deed”** (Proverbs 19:17).

There is a passage in Isaiah that speaks of the loving kindness and pity Jehovah had for his people, and it also speaks of his grief about their rebellion. It says, **“I will make mention of the loving kindnesses of Jehovah, and the praises of Jehovah, according to all that Jehovah has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he has bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses. For he said, Surely, they are my people, sons that will not deal falsely. So he was their Savior.**

“In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the agent of his presence saved them. In his love and in his pity he redeemed them. And he bore them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and grieved his holy Spirit. Therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them” (Isaiah 63:7-10). Notice that passage says, **“In all their affliction he was afflicted.”** Who can deny such scriptures and say that Jehovah does not suffer with us in our afflictions?

Read the short book about the prophet Jonah, and you will see how Jehovah showed pity to the people of Ninevah, which was a Gentile city. God showed pity to them even when the prophet wished he would not. God showed them pity because they repented: **“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. And God relented of the evil which he said he would do to them, and he did not do it. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry”** (Jonah 3:10-4:1). Jehovah pities those who fear him, no matter who they are and where they live.

Jonah probably considered Ninevah to be a potential threat to Israel. Ninevah was the capital city of the Assyrians. And they did eventually conquer and carry away captive the ten northern tribes of Israel. That happened because those tribes became so sinful and unrepentant. Jehovah shows no pity to those who rebel and live wickedly no matter who they are and where they live.

In the law of Moses, God commanded his people how they should punish the guilty so they could have peace and security in their country. And he said those punishments should be without pity. For example, he said, **“And thine eyes shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”** (Deuteronomy 19:21). And when he commanded them to use capital punishment for murderers, he said, **“Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shall put away the innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee”** (Deuteronomy 19:13).

Enforcing the law of an eye for an eye, and capital punishment for murderers brings more peace and security to any country. And those

who oppose such applications of justice cause more grief and sorrow to it. But never forget, in order for the applications of justice to be effective, they must be swift. That is why disciples of the devil hate swift justice, and they fight against it.

There are many other passages that speak about how God will show no pity to unrepentant sinners. Here is one from the prophet Jeremiah: **“And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, says Jehovah. I will not pity, nor spare, nor have compassion, that I should not destroy them”** (Jeremiah 13:14). And here are some from the book of Ezekiel:

Therefore, as I live, says the lord Jehovah, surely, because thou have defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore I also will diminish thee, nor shall my eye spare. And I also will have no pity (Ezekiel 5:11).

And my eye shall not spare thee, nor will I have pity. But I will bring thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah (Ezekiel 7:4).

And my eye shall not spare, nor will I have pity. I will bring upon thee according to thy ways. And thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee. And ye shall know that I, Jehovah, do smite (Ezekiel 7:9).

Then he said to me, Have thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have turned again to provoke me to anger. And, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I will also deal in wrath. My eye shall not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet I will not hear them (Ezekiel 8:17-18).

His hatred

God will not show pity to unrepentant sinners because he hates sin and wickedness. He hates it because it is the cause of all trouble and sorrow. Most men commit sin in ignorance and lack of faith. They do not see far enough ahead to see all the trouble and sorrow their sins will create. They want the pleasures that sin gives them, and they usually think it will cause little or no sorrow. Of course, some men create trouble and sorrow against innocent souls deliberately because they are evil cursed men who have a morbid pleasure in the suffering of others. I have no doubt the severest punishment in hell is reserved for such men.

But whatever is the reason men commit sin, God hates it. The book of Hebrews says about Jesus, **“And indeed toward the agents he says, He who makes his agents spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But toward the Son, Thy throne, O God, is into the age of the age. The scepter of thy kingdom is a scepter of straightness. Thou have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Because of this, God, thy God, anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions”** (Hebrews 1:7-9). Jesus not only loved righteousness, but he hated lawlessness.

Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament who commanded the sons of Israel to defeat the morally corrupt nations of Canaan. And about those nations, Moses said to the people, **“For every abomination to Jehovah, which he hates, they have done to their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods”** (Deuteronomy 12:29-31). Moses said that Jehovah hated the abominations of those condemned nations. And Jehovah hates the abominations that men commit now.

Hate is an unpopular concept during these lawless times, and men loudly condemn it (although they are also very hypocritical about it). And most Christians now claim that God loves everybody and hates nobody. They love to quote the proverb that says, “Hate the sin, but love the sinner.” Those words are not in the Bible. Men who say we should love those who do evil, should read these words: **“Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words. Yet ye say, How have we wearied him? In that ye say, Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delights in them ...”** (Malachi 2:17). Men weary Jehovah when they say he even loves men who do evil.

There are several passages from the psalms that tell what kinds of men God hates. Here is one of them: **“For thou are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness. Evil shall not sojourn with thee. The arrogant shall not stand in thy sight. Thou hate all workers of iniquity. Thou will destroy those who speak lies. Jehovah abhors the blood-thirsty and deceitful man”** (Psalm 5:4-6). It is the blood-thirsty and deceitful man that God hates. Indeed, it says he hates all workers of iniquity, which means habitual sinners.

Here is another similar passage: **“Jehovah is in his holy temple. Jehovah’s throne is in heaven. His eyes, behold, his eyelids try, the sons of men. Jehovah tries the righteous man, but his soul hates the wicked man and him who loves violence”** (Psalm 11:4-5). God hates the wicked man and him who loves violence.

Here is a passage about his people, the sons of Israel: **“Yet they challenged and rebelled against the Most High God, and kept not his testimonies, but turned back, and dealt treacherously like their**

fathers. They were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard, he was angry, and greatly abhorred Israel, so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men, and delivered their strength into captivity, and their glory into the adversary's hand” (Psalm 78:56-60).

That last passage from the psalms says that God greatly abhorred Israel because they rebelled against him. Here is what God said about his people in the book of Jeremiah: **“I have forsaken my house. I have cast off my heritage. I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. My heritage has become to me as a lion in the forest. She has uttered her voice against me. Therefore I have hated her” (Jeremiah 12:7-8).**

And remember what God said about his people in the book of Hosea, **“All their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I hated them. Because of the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more. All their rulers are rebels” (Hosea 9:15).**

God hates wicked men, and it is not wrong for us to hate them. Indeed, one of the psalmists said, **“Surely thou will kill the wicked, O God. Depart from me therefore, ye bloodthirsty men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take *it* in vain. Do I not hate them, O Jehovah, who hate thee? And am I not grieved with those who rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred. They have become my enemies” (Psalm 139:19-22).**

When Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, he was referring to our law-abiding competitors and adversaries. He was referring to men who compete in business, politics, sporting events, and the host of other activities where men contend lawfully against each other. And he was no doubt also referring to captured prisoners of war, and other men who become our enemies without violating laws. He was also referring to decent men who may resent us or persecute us because of their ignorance. A good example of that is the apostle Paul before he was converted to Christ. Indeed, Paul was more than just a decent man; he was a very righteous man, full of zeal for God. Which is why he persecuted the church before Jesus revealed himself to him.

We are not commanded to love and bless worthless wicked men, the kind that Jehovah said he loathed and hated. For Jesus said, **“Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them by their feet, and having turn back may lacerate you” (Matthew 7:6).** It grieves my soul to see righteous

men so deceived by the devil, that they love and forgive vicious men who are guilty of the most heinous crimes imaginable.

Those who forgive that way are poor deluded souls. My heart goes out to them because they think their forgiveness pleases God. But the Bible teaches instead that it grieves God and pleases the devil. They have misinterpreted what Jesus commanded. The martyred souls in heaven call upon God for vengeance against their murderers, not forgiveness. And the book of Psalms is filled with pleas to God for punishment and justice against wicked men.

His anger

The Bible is filled with examples of the wrath of God. For that is why he sends curses upon the earth. That is why he destroyed the antediluvian world with a great flood. That is why he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone. That is why he brought ten plagues against the land of Egypt. That is why he commanded the extermination of the peoples of Canaan. That is why he even caused the destruction of the nation of his own people. And that is why he is eventually going to destroy the whole world. Therefore, dear reader, repent of your sins, and be ready lest you too suffer his wrath.

God does not enjoy bringing sorrow and destruction to the things he created. Only a foolish child likes to build something, then take pleasure in tearing it down. God takes no pleasure in causing the suffering and death of his offspring. God takes no pleasure in destroying things he made. Consider these words from Ezekiel: **“Have I any pleasure in the death of a wicked man? says the lord Jehovah, and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?”** (Ezekiel 18:23). But when God is provoked by unrepentant sin and wickedness, he will eventually respond against it. What man who made anything, would not be angry if what he made proved to be useless and caused nothing but trouble for him?

Consider this parable that God gave to his people, the sons of Israel: **“Let me sing for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he dug it, and gathered out the stones of it, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress in it. And he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.**

“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes?”

“And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge of it, and it shall be eaten up. I will break down the wall of it, and it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste. It shall not be pruned nor hoed, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant. And he looked for justice, but behold, oppression, for righteousness, but behold, a cry” (Isaiah 5:1-7).

In that parable God not only referred to his people as his beloved, they were his well-beloved. Yet he still destroyed them because of their wickedness. Indeed, there is one entire book in the Bible that describes what happened when God turned his wrath against his people because they were so sinful. That book is called Lamentations. It is called that because it is one continuous lamentation over the destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple of God. It consists of about six pages in a modern Bible, and below are the first words in it.

“How the city sits solitary, that was full of people! She has become as a widow, who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become tributary! She weeps bitterly in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her loved ones she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies. Judah has gone into captivity because of affliction. And because of great servitude she dwells among the nations.

“She finds no rest. All her persecutors overtook her in the distress. The ways of Zion mourn, because none come to the solemn assembly. All her gates are desolate. Her priests sigh. Her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is in bitterness. Her adversaries have become the head. Her enemies prosper.

“For Jehovah has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions. Her young sons have gone into captivity before the adversary. And from the daughter of Zion all her majesty is departed. Her rulers have become like harts that find no pasture. And they have gone without strength before the pursuer. Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that were from the days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the adversary, and none helped her, the adversaries saw her; they mocked at her desolations.

“Jerusalem has grievously sinned, therefore she has become as an unclean thing. All who honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness. Yea, she sighs, and turns backward. Her filthiness was in her skirts. She did not think of her latter

end. Therefore she has come down astonishingly. She has no comforter.

“Behold, O Jehovah, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself. The adversary has spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things. For she has seen that the nations have entered into her sanctuary, concerning whom thou commanded that they should not enter into thine assembly.

“All her people sigh. They seek bread. They have given their pleasant things for food to refresh the soul. See, O Jehovah, and, behold, for I have become abject. Is it nothing to you, all ye who pass by? Behold, and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which is brought upon me. Therewith Jehovah has afflicted in the day of his fierce anger” (Lamentations 1:1-12).

The book goes on to describe in vivid and horrifying detail how much the people were suffering. Their ranking men had a visage that was **“blacker than a coal.”** It says their priests **“wander as blind men in the streets.”** It says servants ruled over them, their women were ravished, and they got their bread at the peril of their lives.

It says further, **“The daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child clings to the roof of his mouth for thirst. The young sons ask bread, and no man breaks it to them. Those who fed luxuriously are desolate in the streets. Those who were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills”** (Lamentations 4:3-5). It even says, **“The hands of the pitiful women have boiled their own children. They were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people”** (Lamentations 4:10).

As the book says, they did those things because they were so sinful. Lamentations frequently tells how sinful they were. Here is another example: **“It is because of the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, who have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her”** (Lamentations 4:13). God probably mentioned the prophets and the priests in that passage because they were supposed to be the most righteous men. But it was not just their prophets and their priests who were guilty, it was the whole population: **“For the iniquity of the daughter of my people [a figure of the population] is greater than the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands were laid upon her”** (Lamentations 4:6).

Do you wonder about the righteous souls that remained in the city when it was destroyed? There were none. Jeremiah was one of the last prophets who warned the people of Jerusalem to repent. Here is what Jehovah said by him to the people there: **“Run ye to and fro through**

the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places of it, if ye can find a man, if there is any who does justly, who seeks truth, and I will pardon her” (Jeremiah 5:1).

God warned his people many times they would suffer his wrath, but they ignored him and persecuted those he sent to them. As Jehovah also said to them through Jeremiah, **“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened not to me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff. They did worse than their fathers”** (Jeremiah 7:25-26).

Micah gives a brief description of how wicked they became: **“The devout man has perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood. They hunt every man his brother with a net. Their hands are upon that which is evil to do it diligently. The ruler asks, and the judge asks for a bribe. And the great man, he utters the evil desire of his soul. Thus they weave it together.**

“The best of them is as a brier. The most upright is worse than a thorn hedge. The day of thy watchmen, even thy visitation, has come. Now shall be their perplexity. Trust ye not in a neighbor. Put ye not confidence in a friend. Keep the doors of thy mouth from her who lies in thy bosom. For the son dishonors the father. The daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man’s enemies are the men of his own house” (Micah 7:2-6).

And after their city was destroyed they continued to be selfish and cruel even to their children. They let them starve, and their mothers even killed and ate them. I would suffer and die before I would eat any part of the body of another human being, much less murder a child to feed upon it. Cannibalism was even a capital offense in communist Russia when the people were starving during WW II. And it brought immediate execution. Only wicked men excuse it.

There are many other examples in the Bible that describe God’s wrath against a sinful people. The book of Nahum is another one. It is about the destruction of Nineveh when its people finally became too sinful and unrepentant.

Part of that book says, **“Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and rapine. The prey departs not. The noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels, and prancing horses, and bounding chariots, the horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, and the glittering spear, and a multitude of slain, and a great heap of**

corpses, and there is no end of the bodies. They stumble upon their bodies, because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, who sells nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.

“Behold, I am against thee, says Jehovah of hosts, and I will uncover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will show the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing-stock. And it shall come to pass, that all those who look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste. Who will bemoan her? From where shall I seek comforters for thee?” (Nahum 3:1-7).

God indeed shows love and pity, but he also shows wrath, fierce wrath. He shows wrath because he is a God of justice, and he hates sin because it is so destructive. Speaking of the end of the world, the book of Revelation says, **“And the twenty-four elders who sit before the throne of God, on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying, We thank thee, Lord God Almighty, who is and was, because thou have taken thy great power and reigned. And the nations were angry. And thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to thy bondmen the prophets, and to the sanctified, and to those who fear thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth”** (Revelation 11:16-18).

Notice the passage says the wrath of God came to destroy those who destroy the earth. Sinners do not realize it, but every one of them contributes something to the destruction of the earth. For sin is the cause of all troubles. And that is just one more reason unrepentant sinners deserve to suffer the wrath of God.

His wisdom

As with everything about him, the wisdom of God is deep and unsearchable. As Paul said of him, **“O the depth of wealth, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who became his counselor? Or who first gave to him, and it will be repaid to him? Because from him, and through him, and for him, are all things. To him is the glory into the ages. Truly”** (Romans 11:33-36). Remember the passage from Proverbs about how God used his wisdom to fashion the world. And that wisdom is so unsearchable that man will never be able to fully understand all that he created here.

Our world is filled with creatures he made that are foolish things in his sight. Yet even the lowliest of them are marvels of design and construction that surpass what men can make. And even the smallest of them are beyond our comprehension. Remember how enormously complex is the microscopic cell, of which all living things are composed. And science books are filled with other examples of the immeasurable wisdom of God that can be seen in what he created—for those who have eyes to see. And there are numerous examples in nature of how **“the foolishness of God is wiser than men.”**

It was with wisdom that God made the world, and it is through wisdom that he saves our souls. There are many places in the Bible that encourage us to gain wisdom. For example, Solomon said, **“Get wisdom, get understanding. Do not forget, nor decline from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve thee. Love her, and she will keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing. Get wisdom, yea, with all thy getting get understanding”** (Proverbs 4:5-7). And that includes getting wisdom of both things natural and things spiritual.

However, we are not saved through the wisdom of men, because the way of salvation is foolishness to the world. Paul wrote about that when he said, **“For the message of the cross is of course foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is a power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will frustrate the understanding of those of understanding.”**

“Where is a wise man? Where is a scholar? Where is a researcher of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

“And because Jews demand a sign and Greeks search for wisdom but we proclaim Christ crucified, it is truly to Jews a stumbling-block and to Gentiles foolishness. But to them, to the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weak thing of God is stronger than men” (First Corinthians 1:18-25).

Having worldly wisdom is not necessary for our salvation. What God requires is a love of truth and righteousness. Remember what Jesus said about truth: **“Every man who is of the truth hears my voice”** (John 18:37). And worldly wisdom is not concerned with the truth of God and his righteousness. That is why Paul said, **“... it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.”**

Preaching is considered foolishness to sinners, but preaching about Christ is the power of God for our salvation.

God loves men with spirits that are worthy of becoming his sons for eternity. And in his great wisdom, such men are the humble and lowly of the earth. We know that, because Jesus said in a prayer to God, **“I thank thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, that thou hid these things from the wise and astute, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because it became pleasing this way in thy sight”** (Luke 10:21).

Therefore, the followers of Jesus are not the wise and leading men of the world. That is true now and it was true when he was upon the earth. For example, when the religious rulers of the Jews sent subordinates to arrest Jesus, here is what the record says happened: **“The subordinates therefore came to the chief priests and Pharisees. And those men said to them, Why did ye not bring him? The subordinates answered, A man never so spoke like this man. The Pharisees therefore answered them, Have ye not also been led astray? Have any of the rulers believed in him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude that does not know the law are accursed”** (John 7:45-49). It was not the leading men who believed in Jesus.

Those whom God chooses are not the wise and leading men of the world, but the righteous men of the world; men who are of the truth about things spiritual; men who are childlike in their humbleness toward God, and in their openness to learn about him; men who pursue that which is right and good and just.

Indeed, Paul said, **“For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent. But God chose the foolish things of the world, so that he might humiliate the wise, and God chose the weak things of the world, so that he might humiliate the powerful. And God chose the common things of the world, and the disdained things, and the things that are not, so that he might make useless the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before God. But ye are his, in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, just as it is written, He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord”** (First Corinthians 1:26-31).

Regarding Paul’s words about the weak things of the world, it is remarkable that the greatest source of energy that man can utilize comes from things much too small to see: the nuclei of atoms. Energy from the nuclei of atoms is what we call nuclear energy. Indeed, scientists believe that the actions of atomic nuclei in the sun and all of

the stars are what keep them shining. And yet they are extremely tiny things, too tiny to be seen by even the most powerful microscopes.

And God gives the humble and childlike of the world the greatest power to promote his truth and righteousness. Indeed, Jesus said, **“Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:5). Have you noticed it is not the predators and the other aggressive creatures of the earth that are the most numerous? The peaceful domesticated animals far outnumber them. And it is not the human predators and other aggressive men who are the most numerous. It is the meek that inherit the earth, although most of them are like lost sheep.

Paul even said the power of God is made fully perfect in weakness. He spoke those words when he was describing an affliction that Satan had sent against him. He said, **“And so that I might not be over exalted by the extraordinariness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an agent of Satan so that he would buffet me, so that I would not be over exalted. I besought the Lord thrice about this, that it might depart from me. And he said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made fully perfect in weakness.**

“More gladly therefore I will boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of the Christ may reside in me. Therefore I am pleased in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in restrictions, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (Second Corinthians 12:7-10).

A good example of the perfection of power in weakness is the difference between the young of animals and the young of mankind. Our offspring are born with capabilities less than any other creature, and they remain very weak and dependent for many years. God endows the animals with instinctive abilities, but not our children. Yet that is actually a blessing, because it helps give us the potential to develop knowledge and skills that animals cannot. For instincts are rigid and blind. Without the rigidity of instincts we are free to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for any situation. Our initial weakness is necessary for God’s power to be perfected in us.

Paul spoke further about the power of being humble and lowly toward God over the power of worldly wisdom, when he said, **“And I, brothers, when I came to you, came not in eminence of speech or of wisdom proclaiming the testimony of God to you. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, even this crucified man.**

”And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not be in wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (First Corinthians 2:1-6).

Paul said he was with them in weakness, fear, and much trembling. Paul was in fear and in much trembling because he faced so much cruel persecution as a result of his work. Paul had good reason for his fear and trembling, but he was never a coward. For he never backed down and quit working vigorously for his Lord Jesus Christ. It is not cowardly to have fear; it is cowardly to let fear defeat you. Paul also said he did not use persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. He demonstrated the Spirit and power of God by performing miracles of healing, by showing his love for them, and by teaching about God’s great love.

Nevertheless, Paul was not belittling all wisdom. For although he did not use human wisdom with them, he did use the wisdom of God. He was using wisdom about spiritual things. He wrote more about that when he said, **“But we speak wisdom among the fully developed, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who come to nothing. But we speak a wisdom of God in a hidden mystery, which God predestined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age have known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”** (First Corinthians 2:7-8).

Most of the wisdom that men had during the time of Jesus passed away long ago. Most of it has not even been recorded in history. In contrast, the wisdom that Jesus taught continues to endure, and it has spread its power throughout the world. That wisdom is about spiritual things, and it has been permanently recorded in the words of the Holy Bible. That wisdom, which sinners call foolishness, has contributed more good in the world than any human wisdom ever will.

PART TWO:
PAST AND PRESENT



BEFORE TIME BEGAN

Jehovah¹ is the name of our Creator God, and he is the only true and living God. Jehovah was before time began because he is eternal, the supreme and ultimate perfect being having neither a beginning nor an ending. As one of the psalmists said of him, **“Jehovah, thou have been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or thou had ever formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou are God”** (Psalm 90:1-2).

God had no beginning, nor will he have an ending; he is **“from everlasting to everlasting.”** The book of Isaiah expresses it another way: **“For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite”** (Isaiah 57:15).

The eternal being of God is indeed a great mystery, but it is only one of many mysteries about him. Nevertheless, knowing about him is the most rational and enriching explanation of existence. Knowledge about him and his will for us is the foundation of all true wisdom, and it enlightens our way to have life with him in the greater world of heaven where we can be his sons for eternity.

The desire of God

Since God is perfect and needs nothing, then it is reasonable to ask why God created anything. Although he needs nothing he does have motives. He has motives because he is alive, for having motives is part of being alive. The word motive is related to the word motion, and there is no life without motion. Having desire is part of having motives, and God has desire. The apostle Paul spoke about God’s desire when he told a little about God’s great plans for us: **“Having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his desire, which he purposed within himself ...”** (Ephesians 1:9).

God made us because it was his desire to share his life with us and show his love for us. One day when my granddaughter was six years old she asked me why God made us. I said, “Why did your father and mother have you?” She thought for a second, and then answered, “Because they love me?” I said, “Yes! And that is why God made us. Therefore, we should love him.” She replied, “I do.” O that every-

1. The name Jehovah is only used in the Old Testament, and it sometimes refers to the Father, sometimes to his only begotten Son, and sometimes to them both. And which applies in a particular scripture is usually not possible to determine. Nevertheless, it rarely makes a difference, because they are both God, and that is all that matters.

body would! God loves us to the extent that he has made us his offspring, with the potential to become his sons for eternity, to share his nature, his authority, and his glory.

The apostle John said, **“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:16). God wanted to share himself because he is love. He made us because he loves us, and he wants us to dwell with him as his sons forever.

Some evil men say that God is an egotist who only made us so that we would glorify him. They are lying devils who hate him. Why do fathers and mothers want their children to honor and obey them? It is for their benefit. Glorifying God is absolutely necessary for us, because he alone can preserve and benefit our lives. It is because he loves us that we are commanded to glorify him.

The apostle John told how he is even going to dwell with us after this world is over: **“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having been 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 will be his people. And God himself will be with them”** (Revelation 21:1-3). He will dwell with us because he loves us.

The plans of God

Like every master builder, God planned ahead before he made the world. That is taught in the book of Proverbs, which I say more about farther on. Indeed, I have no doubt that God planned ahead before he made anything. For he is supremely rational, and does nothing without forethought. Therefore, before the beginning God began to formulate in his mind how he was going to have sons.

All of his offspring would be made in his image, but not all would become his sons for eternity. Not all would be sons for eternity, because not all of his offspring would be worthy of it. All of his offspring would have the power of free will, because they would come from his own Spirit. And they would also be given knowledge of good and evil, which is necessary to be creative. That means not only would they be able to choose what is good, they would also be able to choose what is evil.

God is perfect in every way, and he only creates that which is right and good and just. For the Bible says, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). Even when God

causes evil (in the sense of harm) it is always right and good and just. For example, sending evil against wicked men is right and good and just. Therefore, the very meaning of righteousness is whatever conforms to the will of God, and unrighteousness is whatever violates it. And his offspring would all have the potential to create good and evil.

When God placed Adam in the garden of Eden he commanded him not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was not there to tempt Adam, because the scriptures say, **“God is without temptation of evils, and he himself tempts no man”** (James 1:13). It was there to test Adam. Tempting means to entice or encourage to sin. Testing merely makes sin possible. I speak much more about knowledge of good and evil in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*.

Having free will meant that God’s offspring would have the potential to doubt, criticize, challenge, and disobey him. God knew before the beginning that some of his offspring would reject him in those kinds of ways. And he could not keep them from making themselves evil spirits. He even knew that some of them would become so proud that they would compete against him and oppose him. He also knew that disobedience and opposition to him would always be destructive, because he alone is, and always will be, supreme in wisdom and perfection.

Therefore, faith in him and obedience to him would always be required to prevent evil. Those who would doubt and disobey him would always contribute to destructiveness, but that destructiveness would not always be swift and obvious to his offspring. Their failure to foresee the deadly consequences of disobedience meant that those who opposed and competed with him would be a dangerous threat to his desire to have sons. For he would accept none as sons for eternity who did not have complete faith in him.

Consequently, his plans to have sons were necessarily more complicated because of those risks. Nevertheless, because of his love for those who would prove themselves worthy to become his sons for eternity, he was willing to suffer opposition for their sakes. For the apostle Paul said, **“And if God, wanting to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, even that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he previously prepared for glory, namely us whom he called, not only from Jews but also from Gentiles”** (Romans 9:22-24).

For those reasons, part of his plans for sharing life included how he would respond to souls who would doubt and disobey him. And a vital part of that response was to be the creation of this world. For it is in this world that his enemies are given freedom to oppose him. It is

also in this world that his offspring can prove themselves worthy to become his sons for eternity.

In his vision of heaven the apostle John told about the final judgment of all men, some for eternal sonship and some for condemnation. (I discuss those things in the chapter *The Final Judgment*.) Therefore, this world is a place of testing or a “proving ground” to determine which of God’s offspring will make themselves worthy to be his sons for eternity (the vessels of mercy), and which will make themselves unworthy (the vessels of wrath).

The essence of God’s plan for us

God would have offspring both in the heavenly world and in our earthly world. Those in our earthly world would be men, and only they could qualify to become his sons for eternity. And it would also be the place where God would allow sin against him while that was happening.

And because our earthly world would be so filled with temptations, all men would eventually disobey him by failing to obey all of his laws of righteousness, the fundamentals of which would be known instinctively to every man. And their disobedience would keep them from being sons of God for eternity.

All men would fail because all men lack the character and quality of their spirit to resist every temptation. And living in this world filled with God’s enemies would prove it. Only Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, has that character and quality of his spirit, and his life in this world would prove it. And that sinless life would earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him.

And so the only hope of eternal sonship with God would be faith in Jesus, God’s only begotten Son. God’s great plan to defeat his enemies and save those of his offspring who love him and his righteousness was for his Son to become our Redeemer. By the grace of God, his only begotten Son Jesus Christ would come into this world, prove his moral and spiritual superiority, and redeem all who repented, believed, and obeyed him. Thus, God would adopt all such to become his sons for eternity.

Therefore, those who would patiently endure the sorrows of life in this rebellious world, which would be dominated by God’s enemies, and who would choose to love, trust, and obey him, would be given salvation from condemnation, through Christ the perfect man of righteousness, to become his sons for eternity in heaven.

Remember what John wrote about God dwelling with us: **“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 will be his people. And God himself will be with them.”

John said further, **“And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will not be any more death, nor grief, nor crying, nor will there be any more anguish, because the former things are gone. ... He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to me”** (Revelation 21:3-7).

That marvelous salvation would be called the good news of Christ, made possible by his sinless life of obedient self-sacrifice. All who rejected God, disobeyed him, and remained his enemy would be condemned to hell, which would be a lake of fire that burns forever.

It would be in this world that God would (1) expose how evil his enemies are, (2) show the destructiveness of sin against him, (3) prove the moral and spiritual supremacy of his only begotten Son, (4) defeat his enemies by proving they deserve eternal condemnation, and (5) give those of his offspring who would love, trust, and obey him the opportunity to become his sons for eternity.

There is much more to say and explain about those things, but that is a brief summary of what God planned, and what is coming to pass.

His plan for us revealed

God kept secret his great plan to defeat his enemies and save those of his offspring who trust and obey him, until he sent his Son into the world to fulfill it. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and below is a passage where he tells them how the mystery of God's plan was hidden until the coming of Christ:

“I now rejoice in sufferings for you, and make complete in my flesh things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, which is the church. Of which I became a helper according to the administration of God, which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, the mystery that was hidden from the ages and from the generations, but has now been made known to his sanctified.

“To whom God wanted to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. For which also I labor, striving according to his working, which works in me with power” (Colossians 1:24-29).

God's great plan for Christ and his church was even kept a mystery to the higher powers in heaven, as this passage says: **“So that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things, through the church, according to the purpose of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord ...”** (Ephesians 3:10-11).

Although God's plan for our salvation was hidden before Christ came, the Bible did tell how God planned in detail, before the beginning, how he was going to create our world in a passage from the book of Proverbs. That book was written about a thousand years before Christ. Solomon the author of that book was describing wisdom, which he personified as a noble woman. Solomon's meaning of wisdom includes the master plans that God developed before the beginning. That information is given in the following passage:

“Jehovah possessed me [wisdom] in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was, when there were no depths. I was brought forth when there were no fountains abounding with water, before the mountains were settled, before the hills. I was brought forth while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world.

“When he established the heavens, I was there. When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when the fountains of the deep became strong, when he gave to the sea its bound that the waters should not transgress his commandment, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was by him, a master workman. And I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in his habitable earth. And my delight was with the sons of men” (Proverbs 8:22-31).

Wisdom's delight was with the sons of men because God was going to give them the potential to become his sons for eternity, a gift so marvelous there is no greater.

There is evidence that those plans of God even included the potential history of all events. He designed the laws of the world so that **“all things [would] work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). And that purpose was for us to become his sons for eternity.

He created the world so that all things would work together for our good, even though the free will of his offspring would prevent him from predicting precisely what each one of us would do. For there are numerous examples in the Bible that tell how God cannot foresee

exactly what we will do, because we are his offspring, each being a spirit with its own free will.

Thus God does not know everything that each one of us will do, but he does know exactly what will result whatever we do. For that was included in his great master plans for the world, the laws of which establish every possibility with its potential outcome.

Remember however, not every possibility becomes a reality. Indeed, most possibilities are never realized. There are many things I could have done in my life that I wish I had, and no doubt every soul feels the same way about himself.

Paul spoke of how we have all failed to live to our full potential, when he said, **“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ...”** (Romans 3:23). In his great master plans before the world began God established the potential identity of every individual soul, and he determined how they could best live their lives. He knew me (my potential existence) before the world began, and he knew all of the different lives I could have lived, from the worst of them to the best of them. And the very best would have fulfilled **“the glory of God.”** But I failed to achieve it, just like every other man, except for his Son, Jesus Christ.

You can read much more about those great plans and how they are being applied throughout history in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

PREPARING FOR TWO WORLDS

With God's desire to have sons he formulated plans about how he was going to have them. For he wanted to have sons who would willfully love, trust, and obey him. That was absolutely necessary for them because they would be made in his image, having free will with knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, he planned to have offspring who would first be given the potential to become his sons for eternity, so that he could choose those who would be worthy of it. For God knew that many of his offspring would have no faith in him and would become rebellious.

For that purpose he planned to create two worlds: a heavenly world and an earthly world, both of which would be inhabited by his offspring. He would reside in the heavenly world where he would tolerate no rebellion, because rebellion against him always creates evil. In his heavenly world he would tolerate challenges to him, but *not* rebellion. We know he tolerates challenges because when Satan was in heaven he challenged God about Job (see Job 1). I say more about those things in the chapter *The Devil and the Demons*.

It was to be in our earthly world that God would tolerate rebellion, and that is why there is so much evil here. It was also to be in our world where his offspring would have the potential to become his sons for eternity. For it is in our world that his offspring can prove themselves worthy. They can choose to ally themselves with him, or they can join his enemies and rebel against him. As the apostle John said about Jesus, **“He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, and the world knew him not. He came to his own, and his own did not accept him. But as many as did accept him, to them he gave power to become children of God ...”** (John 1:10-13).

There is even evidence that every man is assigned a heavenly agent to personally monitor him. For when Jesus was speaking of children, he said, **“See that ye not disparage one of these little ones, for I say to you, that in the heavens their agents do always behold the face of my Father in the heavens”** (Matthew 18:10). Perhaps, since each of us is born a son of God, our personal agent is allowed direct access to him. However, when we sin that defiles us and we lose our eternal sonship. Thus, our agent no longer has privileged access to him for us.

We can only be reconciled to become his sons again by repenting and committing our lives to his righteousness, which is only through Jesus Christ. And when that happens there is joy in heaven. For Jesus said, **“I say to you, that thus there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous men who have no need of repentance”** (Luke 15:7).

Since our earthly world has so much evil it is also a place of sorrow and suffering. However, for the children of God the suffering we must endure in this life works for our benefit. For God’s great plans are so perfect and complete that he arranged everything for the ultimate welfare of his children. As Paul said, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28).

Even our inescapable sorrows and suffering work for good, to those who love God and obey him. Even the sufferings of Jesus worked good for us. As the author of Hebrews said, **“For it was fitting for him, through whom are all things, and because of whom are all things, having brought many sons to glory, to make the Pathfinder of their salvation fully perfect through sufferings”** (Hebrews 2:10). Jesus was never imperfect. He was made fully perfect in his service to God by becoming our Redeemer, which could only happen by his obedient suffering. For it is only by his redemption that we can escape being condemned with the devil and the demons.

His only begotten Son

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and he was made in his exact image. The book of Hebrews tells how Jesus is exactly like God in its first words: **“God, who formerly spoke in many portions and in many ways to the fathers by the prophets, spoke to us in these last days by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the ages. Who, being the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made purification of our sins through himself, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights.”**

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God and in **“the exact image of his essence.”** There are no others nor will there ever be. Nevertheless, he is not equal to the Father, as he himself said numerous times. For example: **“I can from myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I seek not my will, but the will of the Father who sent me”** (John 5:30).

And when he was speaking with his apostles during the last supper he said to them, “**He who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s who sent me**” (John 14:24), and “**... my Father is greater than I**” (John 14:28). He is only equal to the Father in the sense of being equally God, just as a child is equally human with his father.

The nature of the Son has been debated for many centuries. Most people believe the passages that refer to him as being begotten from God refer only to his earthly body, what they call his incarnate self (an expression not found in the Bible). Regarding that earthly body, the heavenly agent told Mary how she would bear a son when she was still a virgin. He said to her, “**... the Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the Most High will overshadow thee. Therefore also the holy thing that is begotten will be called the Son of God**” (Luke 1:35).

The earthly body of Jesus was indeed begotten by the Holy Spirit of God. But was Jesus begotten in heaven before he came to this world? I believe he was, because the scriptural evidence is strong. For example, the passage in Hebrews about Jesus being the exact image of God’s essence is evidence. For every son is the exact image of the essence of his father.

Here is another supporting passage: “**By this the love of God was made known in us, because God sent his Son, the only begotten, into the world so that we might live through him**” (First John 4:9). Notice the passage says that God sent his only begotten Son into the world. It does not say that God sent Jesus to become his only begotten Son here. It says Jesus was his only begotten Son before he came. And when he was conceived, to live a life in the flesh upon the earth, he was begotten by no man, but by the Holy Spirit of God. Thus he was the only begotten Son of God both in heaven and on the earth.

And consider these words: “**For as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to the Son to have life in himself. And he also gave him authority to execute judgment because he is a son of man**” (John 5:26-27). It was the Father who gave life and authority to the Son. For remember, Jesus said, “**... my Father is greater than I**” (John 14:28). Not only did Jesus refer to God as his Father, he called him his God as well. One example is when he spoke to God on the cross: “**Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?**” (Matthew 27:46). God forsook him on the cross so that he could become our Redeemer.

It is my belief that, after formulating his plans for Creation and taking the form of a man, the next thing God did was to beget his Son. How his Son was begotten, I will not conjecture, because that knowledge is

only for God and his Son. Nevertheless, his Son came before anything else, because John told how God used Jesus to create all things. Speaking of the Son, he said, **“All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be”** (John 1:3).

Therefore, his only begotten Son was to come before anything was created. And his only begotten Son would be a kind of elder brother for all the future sons of God. Moreover, his only begotten Son would work with him to create all things, and he would be like an “executive officer” in command of all things. Furthermore, God was going to use him to defeat all who would become his enemies, and his Son would bring deliverance and salvation to all who would love and obey him.

That Son would be the prime factor to make all that God created worthwhile. For without him there would be no other sons for eternity. For Jesus said of himself, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6). And Peter said of him, **“And salvation is not in any other man, for there is no other name under the heaven, that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

And for that to happen it was necessary for God’s only begotten Son to be born into this world and live as a man. Remember these words: **“For as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to the Son to have life in himself. And he also gave him authority to execute judgment because he is a son of man”** (John 5:26-27).

And when the book of Matthew was describing what happened just before Jesus ascended into heaven, it says, **“And Jesus having come, he spoke to them, saying, All authority in heaven and on earth was given to me. After going, make ye disciples of all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you. And lo, I am with you all the days, until the end of the age. Truly”** (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus was given all authority to execute judgment (including our salvation) **“because he is a son of man.”** He was born as a man in the world, but unlike any other man, he lived without sin. He lived without sin, but he was still tempted in all things the same way we are. For the author of the book of Hebrews said about him, **“Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us take hold of the affirmation. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but who was tempted in all things in the same way, without sin”** (Hebrews 4:14-15).

Jesus saved us by becoming our Redeemer. He became our Redeemer by living without sin as a man on the earth, which earned him the right to redeem for sonship all who belong to him. For Paul said, **“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born from a woman, born under law, so that he might redeem those under law, so that we might receive the sonship. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou are no longer a bond-man but a son, and if a son, then an heir through Christ”** (Galatians 4:4-7).

In another passage Paul said, **“Awaiting the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a special people, a zealot of good works”** (Titus 2:13-14). The sinless life on earth of God’s only begotten Son was absolutely necessary for God to have other sons for eternity. For that is the only way we can be redeemed from the condemnation caused by our guilt. You can read more about how and why Jesus became our Redeemer in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Co-creators

The Bible teaches that the Father created all things. For example, in his great vision of heaven John heard the twenty-four elders saying to the Father on his throne, **“Thou are worthy, our Lord and God, the Holy, to take the glory and the honor and the power, because thou created all things, and because by thy will they are, and were created”** (Revelation 4:11). However, God used his Son to work together with him, both of whom were guided by the plans that God had earlier formulated (described in Proverbs 8:22-31).

The story of Creation at the beginning of the Bible states that they worked together to create mankind in our world. The passage says, **“And God said, Let us make mankind in our image—after our likeness—and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”** (Genesis 1:26). His Son is mentioned indirectly when he said, **“Let us make mankind in our image”** God did not reveal much about his Son before he came to the earth.

Other indirect evidence in the Old Testament that God and his Son are both God is the fact that the Hebrew word for God (transliterated Elo-him) is plural, and it occurs twenty-six hundred times in the Bible. More direct evidence is from the second Psalm, which says, **“Why do**

the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, *saying*, Let us break their bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will have them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his great displeasure.

“Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree. Jehovah said to me, Thou are my Son, this day I have begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give *thee* the nations for thine inheritance, and the outermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shall break them with a rod of iron, thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.

“Now therefore be wise, O ye kings. Be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve Jehovah with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way, for his wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.”

The early Christians, in a prayer they spoke after being persecuted, they said those words referred to Jesus: “**Thou Master, the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all things in them. He who said through the mouth of thy boy David, Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord, and against his Christ**” (Acts 4:24-26).

The word Christ is a transliteration of the Greek word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ, which means “The anointed one.” Therefore, when the psalmist used the word anointed, he was referring to the Christ. That psalm tells how God begot his Son and gave him the nations as an inheritance. And he will punish them with a rod of iron because they were rebellious. It also warns the rulers of the world to “**serve Jehovah with fear, and rejoice with trembling,**” and “**kiss the Son**” lest they perish from his wrath. And that warning will always be valid.

The apostle John told how God used his Son to be his co-creator: “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This man was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be**” (John 1:1-3). The Word was the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He was with God the Father, and he was also God (God the Son). And all things came to be through him.

Paul also spoke of how God created all things through Christ, when he said, “**To me, a man less than the least of all the sanctified, this**

grace was given to preach good news among the Gentiles, the unsearchable wealth of Christ, and to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery hidden from the ages in God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:8-9).

Paul also taught the same thing to the Colossians when he said, **“Giving thanks to the Father who made us qualified for the share of the portion of the sanctified in light. Who rescued us out of the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, who is an image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**

“Because in him all things were created, things in the heavens and things upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or lordships or principal offices or positions of authority, all things have been created through him, and for him. And he is before all, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:12-17).

It is also possible that God and his Son even worked together to finalize his great master plans for all things. God may have waited until he begot his Son so that they could use their minds jointly to reason further about what he was going to create. No doubt he revealed to his Son much about his great plans for creating things and having more sons for eternity. However, the Bible indicates God did not reveal everything to him. For when Jesus was speaking about the end of the world, he told his disciples, **“But about that day or that hour no man knows, not even the agents in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father”** (Mark 13:32).

Since both the Father and the Son have knowledge of good and evil, they must have weighed in their minds the many possible circumstances about what they would create. And no doubt God warned his Son about future enemies. I also believe God revealed his plans to use him to defeat those enemies. For the obedience and suffering of his Son in the world would be the solution to that great challenge. And he no doubt wanted his Son’s full acceptance of that difficult requirement. For the book of Revelation says that the suffering of the Son was determined from the beginning of the world: **“... the Lamb [Jesus] who was killed from the foundation of the world”** (Revelation 13:8).

I thank God that the Son was fully willing because of his great love for his Father and his love for us, the future sons of God for eternity. For he told his apostles at the last supper, **“I will no longer speak many things with you, for the ruler of the world comes. And he has nothing on me, but that the world may know that I love the**

Father. And as the Father commanded me, thus I do” (John 14:30-31).

He also said to them, **“A new commandment I give to you, that ye should love each other, just as I loved you, so that ye also should love each other”** (John 13:34). And remember, at that supper, during a prayer to God, Jesus said, **“Father, whom thou gave to me, I desire that where I am, they also may be with me, so that they may see my glory that thou have given me, because thou loved me before the foundation of the world”** (John 17:24).

He wanted them to be with him in heaven because they were his spiritual brothers. For after his resurrection he told the women disciples who went to his tomb, **“Fear not. Go notify my brothers that they should depart into Galilee, and there they will see me”** (Matthew 28:10). And the marvelous thing is that all who believe in the Son are his spiritual brothers, because God has adopted us to be his sons for eternity—if we remain faithful. For Jesus said, **“But he who endures to the end, this man will be saved”** (Matthew 24:13).

The throne of God

I believe the first thing the Father and his Son created was the throne of God. I believe his throne is far more than a mere seat. It is a command center from which he sees and controls everything. That is told in very figurative words in the book of Revelation, which was written by the apostle John to describe his great vision of heaven. And the throne of God is the first thing he saw in that vision.

Remember what he described about it: **“And behold, a throne was set in heaven, and him sitting upon the throne similar in appearance to a jasper and a sardius stone. And a rainbow was around the throne, like an emerald in appearance”** (Revelation 4:1-3). John did not describe the appearance of God the Father as he did of Jesus in the first part of Revelation. He simply said he saw him sitting upon the throne. The throne was of great beauty, and was surrounded by a rainbow, which symbolizes every pure and beautiful color.

God always remains in control of everything from his command center and he always remains there. Nevertheless, his Spirit goes everywhere (through his Holy Spirit and his seven Spirits). That is no doubt what Solomon meant when he said that nothing could contain him. He said those words at the dedication of the temple, which was called the house of God. Solomon said, **“But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee. How much less this house which I have built!”** (Second Chronicles 6:18).

About God's throne, John said further, **"And around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones were sitting twenty-four elders clothed in white garments, and golden crowns upon their heads"** (Revelation 4:4). There were twenty-four of those elders, and they were later described as men who had become sons of God for eternity. For when they praised Jesus, they said he had **"purchased us from God by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation"** (Revelation 5:9).

Jesus earned the right to redeem (purchase) all who belong to him. Twenty-four is twelve plus twelve. And since twelve symbolizes a complete number, then those elders may symbolize men who lived before Christ plus men who lived after him. Of course, those elders were not there at the beginning; they were established after they were redeemed by Christ.

The seven Spirits

John then said, **"And out of the throne proceeds lightnings and voices and thunders. And seven lamps of fire burned before his throne, which are the seven Spirits of God"** (Revelation 4:5). I believe those seven Spirits symbolize the great energy source God made to create not only our world but also the heavenly world. And he uses them to keep both of those worlds functioning. Those seven Spirits are also the means by which he has the power of complete control and awareness. And he will need to use them as long as his body continues in the form of a man, which is his "weak thing." I speak more about that farther in the book.

The living creatures

John also said about God's throne, **"And before the throne was like a glassy sea similar to crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and all around the throne, were four living creatures containing eyes in front and back. And the first living creature was similar to a lion, and the second living creature was similar to a young bull, and the third living creature having a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was similar to a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, one by one, each having six wings, are full of eyes around and inside"** (Revelation 4:6-8).

That passage is similar to one in Isaiah, which may also be about those living creatures: **"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another, and said,**

Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:1-3). Seraphim may be another kind of cherubim. I speak more about cherubim in the chapter *The Heavenly World*.

The description of those living creatures is no doubt figurative. Perhaps they are bodyguards for his command center. For the Bible says they are **"in the midst of the throne, and all around the throne."** And they are creatures of great power and ability. For they are described as having features similar to a lion, a young bull, a man, and a flying eagle. Lions and young bulls symbolize strength and power; men symbolize intelligence; and flying eagles symbolize the ability to travel swiftly.

Hence, they are creatures (1) that can attack and defeat other creatures, (2) that have great strength and endurance, (3) that have great intelligence, and (4) that can move about swiftly. In other words, they have the best abilities of all other creatures. Moreover, they **"are full of eyes around and inside,"** which means they have great sensory powers. And having all of those abilities makes them perfect bodyguards to protect his command center from any kind of threat.

Nevertheless, the seven Spirits of God have seven eyes and seven horns, which means they have the power of complete awareness and control. The living creatures have great sensory ability, but not the power of complete awareness as do the seven Spirits of God.

God may need bodyguards for his command center because he has taken the form of a man, which is his "weak thing." That is probably the reason for the living creatures being there to surround his throne. God could easily defeat any kind of threat to him and his throne by transforming himself into his original form. However, he does not want to do that until the end of the world.

Now it is reasonable to wonder what could ever be a threat to God's throne. Remember, Satan had been allowed to exist in heaven. And being God's adversary, as long as he was there he was a potential threat. And that threat was realized by what happened when Satan was condemned after the victorious life of Jesus upon the earth. Satan was condemned to leave heaven, but it took a war to cast him out.

In the book of Revelation John tells how that happened. He said, **"And war developed in heaven: Michael and his agents to fight with the dragon. And the dragon and his agents fought. And he did not prevail, nor was a place found for him any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray. He was cast out to the earth, and his agents were cast out with him"** (Revelation 12:7-9). Some men believe those words about war

in heaven are figurative, but I believe they are literal. For Satan is a proud and aggressive creature.

Since wars are destructive, damage might have been caused to God's command center if there was no special protection for it. Remember, Satan was a powerful dragon in heaven. And even though he was God's enemy, he was allowed to be there before he was condemned. And since evil creatures are dangerous, it is possible that Satan might have been tempted to attack God and his command center if God did not have special protection around his throne.

Now I realize that what I have written about God's need for body guards sounds very strange when we consider his enormous power. It may even sound blasphemous to some people to think that God could ever be threatened. However, I explain more about those things in the next three chapters. Therefore, I ask that you reserve judgment until you have read all that I say there.

THE HEAVENLY WORLD

Its creation

After formulating his plans, begetting a Son, and creating a command center for them, God was ready to create his heavenly world. That was done together with his Son, for remember the Bible says of Jesus, **“All things came to be through him, and apart from him not even one thing came to be that has come to be”** (John 1:3).

God has not revealed to us much about the heavenly world where he now resides on his throne. However, I am inclined to believe that the greater heavenly world is somewhere beyond the boundaries of our world, and is not simply in a different dimension of space. I believe that world even surrounds our world, so that our universe is a mere district—a sub-district with a different substance—in that greater world. Although in the sight of God it is a very precious district, because it is where some of his offspring are becoming his sons for eternity.

Evidence that the spiritual heaven surrounds our earthly heaven is found in this passage: **“Behold, to Jehovah thy God belongs heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth, with all that is in it”** (Deuteronomy 10:14). I believe the heaven of heavens refers to the heavenly world where God resides, which surrounds our heavens. And when God created our world, he simply set aside a temporary district somewhere inside that greater heavenly world to house our material heaven and earth.

Consider this passage from Isaiah: **“Thus says Jehovah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool”** (Isaiah 66:1). That also suggests our universe is a minor part of the greater world where God resides. However, it is of a different nature and is a temporary district. Remember, our world is going to pass away, as Jesus said to his disciples: **“The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away”** (Matthew 24:35). Nevertheless, our world is very important to God. For it is where his offspring can qualify to become his sons for eternity. Therefore, I believe our earthly world is centrally located in his heavenly world, although it is a sub-district with a different nature.

Regarding the creation of the heavenly world, I believe God also used those seven lamps of fire that burn before his throne. They are his seven Spirits, and as he did in our world, he used them to create it. And as he does in our world, he uses their energy to keep it functioning. However, the heavenly world is not made of any kind of earthly

material, which is perishable. It is a world made of an entirely different substance, one which is imperishable.

It is not a world of tribulation in the bondage of corruption as Paul said was our world: **“For the eager expectation of the creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. Because the creation itself will also be freed from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation is groaning and travailing together until now. And not only so, but also ourselves who have the first fruit of the Spirit. And we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body”** (Romans 8:19-23).

Remember, Jesus said about those who are considered worthy to be resurrected to heaven, **“... neither can they die any more”** (Luke 20:36). And Paul said the heavenly body we are going to be given is a spiritual body that will be imperishable. For when he was speaking of our resurrection, he said, **“It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. ... As is the earthly, such also are the heavenly. And as is the heavenly, such also are the earthly. And just as we have worn the form of the earthly, we will also wear the form of the heavenly. Now this I affirm, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability”** (First Corinthians 15:44-50).

Also the materials of the heavenly world probably did not begin **“without form and void,”** as they did in our world. And because the materials of the heavenly world are imperishable it has no dust and dirt, which in our world requires constant cleaning. Nor do I believe they have such things as waste products, including body waste. And there are no doubt many other major differences between the heavenly world and our world. There are many wondrous things about that heavenly world that we are only given glimpses of. And our human limitations probably make it even more difficult for us to understand that world, than for a two-year old child to understand our own world.

God’s offspring there

The Bible says that God created offspring in our world and commanded them to further its development: **“And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea,**

and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:27-28).

At sometime during the creation of the heavenly world God also created offspring. We know they are his offspring, because they have free will, and only offspring of God have free will. We know they have free will because they can sin. That is told in this passage by Peter: **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into hell being reserved for judgment ...”** (Second Peter 2:4).

However, I do not believe he created any of his offspring there the way he created Adam. God created Adam in a much more personal way. For the Bible says, **“And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul”** (Genesis 2:7). (In the Bible there is a difference between offspring and children. Children are the highest ranking offspring. I speak more about that in the chapter *The Beginning of Our World*.) God created Adam in a more personal way. I believe God created Adam that special way because Adam was the second son of God. For Luke said of Adam: **“And Jesus himself was beginning to be about thirty years old, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli ... the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God”** (Luke 3:23, 38).

The inhabitants of heaven were probably created the way the men and women in the world were created on the sixth day, which was the same way he created the birds and the beasts. It was not personal. I also say much more about those things in the chapter *The Beginning of Our World*. When God created those heavenly offspring, he may have also given them a command to further the development of his heavenly world.

Regarding his offspring in heaven, there are no females among them, because remember Jesus said, **“For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as agents of God in heaven”** (Matthew 22:30). And there is no record in the Bible of the existence of female agents; they are all males. Being a male is much more than having the ability to reproduce, because if a man loses that ability he is still a man.

Since God’s offspring in heaven do not reproduce, God apparently creates additional ones similar to how he created them at the beginning. Which was probably like the way he created the beasts and the men and women on the sixth day of Creation. God has given his offspring on the earth the power to reproduce so that we can become a father or mother, and experience what he does by having offspring. However, his offspring in heaven are not given that privilege. For it is

a great privilege and blessing to bear children of God, because every child is born that way. We are born that way because we are sons of Adam, and he was a son of God.

The agents

Most of the offspring of God in the heavenly world are in the form of men, because that is the form God has taken. The agents of heaven are offspring of God made in his image, but they are not sons of God. Therefore, they are called agents to distinguish them from men on earth, who are sons of God. And their bodies are not of flesh, but are of a far superior substance, an imperishable substance.

The men of the heavenly world are also called agents because they serve a supporting role for God's offspring in our earthly world, those with the potential to become his sons for eternity. As the author of Hebrews said of them, **“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for service for the sake of those who are going to inherit salvation?”** (Hebrews 1:14).

Although none of the offspring of God in the heavenly world are sons of God, perhaps God gives the qualified among them the opportunity to be born into this world so they can also strive to be his sons for eternity. That would conform with the fact that God is always just and impartial. Nevertheless, I am certain such a choice would be very difficult for them. Just knowing such things as being required to live in frail bodies containing foul smelling filth to be removed and disposed of daily might be enough to deter most of them. And yet that is an insignificant part of our lives. For living in this world requires much suffering, and living right toward God requires the most.

Moreover, it would be impossible for any of them to have any memory of their former existence, and they would be no different from other men—if such a thing ever happens. Regardless either way, the Bible is completely silent about the matter, and we have no right to say that such opportunities are true. And anybody who does so, sins by being presumptuous. It is only conjecture.

We know those heavenly agents have much more power and abilities than any creature on earth, because there are numerous examples of mighty things they have done here. One such example is when the Bible describes how an agent of God saved Jerusalem from a great army: **“And it came to pass that night, that the agent of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred eighty-five thousand. And when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies”** (Second Kings 19:35). That was done in one night by a single agent from the heavenly world.

Although we have great ignorance about that heavenly world, the Bible indicates there is a great civilization in it. For it speaks of a large population of agents there, as in this passage: **“But ye have come to mount Zion, and to the city of a living God, a heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of agents ...”** (Hebrews 12:22). And that population has a structured government of leaders, as this passage says: **“So that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things, through the church ...”** (Ephesians 3:10).

Thus, the heavenly world has a population of myriads of agents, and they are governed by principle offices and positions of authority, just as the citizens of our civilizations are here on earth. And I have no doubt the citizens of that heavenly world are expected to obey statutes and ordinances to maintain order just as in every civilization on the earth. Also I have no doubt their civilization is of enormous organization and complexity compared with ours. And they are far more advanced in their development and technology.

Of course, God reigns supreme as the King of kings in that world, and no sin against him is tolerated. For when Jesus spoke what we call the Lord’s prayer, he said to the Father, **“May thy will happen on the earth as also in heaven”** (Matthew 6:10). Although his offspring in heaven can sin against him, in contrast to this world only a minority of them do. I conjecture about that in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*, when I talk about the knowledge of good and evil.

God’s agents in our world

God does not always use his Spirit to do things directly. Sometimes he uses men and sometimes he uses his agents from heaven. For example, Jehovah said to Moses at mount Sinai: **“Behold, I send an agent before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared”** (Exodus 23:20). Also consider the example of Sodom. God sent two of his agents there to investigate how sinful that city was. Although nobody recognized them for who they were, Lot invited them to lodge with him. Later that night the men of the city demanded Lot send those men out so they could rape them. The agents saved themselves, and very early the next morning they saved the lives of Lot and his family by bringing them out of the city. The Bible says that after those men escaped, **“Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven”** (Genesis 19:24). That is an example of how God sends his agents to test men.

There are many examples in the Bible that tell how God sometimes sent his agents into the world when he interacted with it. Sometimes

they came in their heavenly glory, and sometimes they came in the appearance of ordinary men. They no longer come in their heavenly glory, but they still come as ordinary men, because the author of Hebrews said, **“Do not forget love for strangers, for by this some lodged agents, unaware”** (Hebrews 13:2).

And although God still sends his agents from heaven they are now always “unaware.” For the author of Hebrews said, **“God, who formerly spoke in many portions and in many ways to the fathers by the prophets, spoke to us in these last days by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the ages”** (Hebrews 1:1-2). The only communication from God we can be aware of now is through the words of the Bible. Heavenly creatures like God’s agents are now always unaware to us. And every claim otherwise is false and can never be verified. Therefore, reject them.

The cherubim

God also created cherubim in his heavenly world, and they also seem to be his offspring having received of his Spirit. However, they are very different from the agents of heaven because they are not made in God’s image. I believe they are his offspring because they are neither robots nor beasts. Remember, the book of Revelation describes the four living creatures around the throne of God. And those living creatures are probably cherubim because they are similar to the ones Ezekiel saw in visions he had, which I discuss a little farther on.

Also remember, those living creatures may be the seraphim mentioned in this passage: **“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who cried, and the house was filled with vapor**

“Then I said, Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar” (Isaiah 6:1-6). That is the only place they are mentioned in the Bible. Seraphim are probably a type of cherubim.

There is a myth perpetrated by artists that depict cherubim as women and plump little children, but real cherubim are nothing like that.

They are mighty creatures that seem to serve as guards. Real cherubim are awesome creatures of the heavenly world. And Satan may have been one of them originally.

The Bible first speaks of cherubim when Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden of Eden. It says, **“So he drove out the man. And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life”** (Genesis 3:24). The appearance of those cherubim is not described, but they were used to guard the way of the tree of life.

Cherubim are mentioned next in the Bible when God told Moses how to build the house of God in the wilderness, the house called the tabernacle. God said to him, **“And thou shall make two cherubim of gold; of beaten work shall thou make them, at the two ends of the mercy-seat. And make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the mercy-seat ye shall make the cherubim on the two ends of it.**

“And the cherubim shall spread out their wings on high, covering the mercy-seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy-seat. And thou shall put the mercy-seat above upon the ark. And in the ark thou shall put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee.

“And I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 25:18-22).

That passage also suggests cherubim are guards, because images of them were placed on top of the ark of the testimony with their wings outspread. There were also pictures of cherubim on the curtains that covered the inner walls of the tabernacle, and the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place.

The temple of God that David planned and Solomon built also contained cherubim over the ark of the covenant. However they were very large, each one standing fifteen feet tall, with their wings spread out another fifteen feet. And they were gold plated wood instead of being solid gold, probably because gold is too heavy and soft to support such a large outspread figure.

There were also pictures of cherubim engraved on the inner walls of the temple, and on the door that separated the two holy rooms. Also the bases that supported the portable water containers outside of the temple had pictures of cherubim engraved upon them.

The ark of the testimony was the most precious possession of the Israelites because it contained the stones engraved with the ten commandments. It was also called the ark of the covenant, because those stones with the ten commandments engraved upon them symbolized God's promise to bless them if they obeyed his commandments. That was the covenant he had with them. And it was a precious covenant, much more precious than the ark and the stones that represented it.

Regarding the most holy place (of the tabernacle and of the temple which replaced it), only the high priest was allowed to go in there, and that could only be once each year, on the day of atonement. Therefore, those cherubim were never to be on public display. Nobody now knows what those images looked like, besides that description in the Bible. Those cherubim no longer exist, and the high priests who saw them have been dead for over two thousand years. Therefore, all visual representations of them are false and deceitful, because all the Bible says about their appearance is that they had wings and faces.

The most lengthy descriptions of cherubim are in the book of Ezekiel. The prophet Ezekiel had several visions of cherubim, and here is part of what he said about one of them: **“And the glory of Jehovah mounted up from the cherub, over the threshold of the house. And the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Jehovah's glory. And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.**

“And it came to pass, when he commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim, that he went in, and stood beside a wheel. And the cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and took, and put it into the hands of him who was clothed in linen, who took it and went out.

“And there appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings. And I looked, and, behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub. And the appearance of the wheels was like a beryl stone.

“And as for their appearance, those four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been within a wheel. When they went, they went in their four directions. They did not turn as they went, but to the place where the head looked they followed it. They did not turn as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round

about, even the wheels that those four had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, O wheel. And each one had four faces. The first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third face the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the cherubim mounted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar” (Ezekiel 10:4-15).

That description is very mysterious and extremely difficult to understand. Perhaps the lesson of that description is that there are many things in heaven that we cannot understand, even when they are described to us in the words of men. Consider a modern airliner. How could it be described to men of over 2000 year ago? It is a gigantic bird that can carry hundreds of people inside of it, and it stands on many wheels. However, there are other wheels under its wings that do not touch the ground. Those wheels are shaped like pillars and they have other wheels inside them. Although they do not touch the ground, when the wheels within those wheels turn, then those wheels spew out fire with a great roar like thunder. When that happens the bird runs and leaps high into the air at very high speed, and it flies so high it goes out of sight. It carries people hundreds of miles swiftly to their destination in comfort and safety, even though they had been swallowed by it during the trip.

Nevertheless, from Ezekiel’s description in that passage you can see how similar the appearance of those cherubim were to the living creatures described in the book of Revelation. The function of those cherubim that Ezekiel saw is not told, but here are two passages that tell what they did that involved the glory of God. The first says, “**And the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub, upon which it was, to the threshold of the house [of God]”** (Ezekiel 9:3). And the second one says, “**And the glory of Jehovah mounted up from the cherub, over the threshold of the house. And the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Jehovah’s glory”** (Ezekiel 10:4).

What is meant by the glory of God in those passages is not clear. It could mean some kind of form that Jehovah took, which the cherubim supported and carried. That Jehovah appeared on the earth in different ways is told by a passage which described how Jehovah went with his people after bringing them out of Egyptian bondage. It says, “**And Jehovah went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might go by day and by night”** (Exodus 13:21). Here is another passage: “**And Jehovah said to Moses, Lo, I come to thee**

in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee forever” (Exodus 19:9).

The Bible does not say much about cherubim, and so we know very little about them. However, what it does reveal is that there are very intelligent, powerful, and awesome creatures in God’s heavenly world besides his agents who are in the form of men. There are probably many other amazing creatures in God’s heavenly world. However, the Bible is completely silent about such details.

Indeed, Paul said that detailed information about things in heaven is not permitted to be known to men on earth. Paul spoke about that when he said, **“I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in body, I know not, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) such a man was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in body, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) that he was caught up into the paradise, and heard inexpressible sayings that are not permitted for a man to utter”** (Second Corinthians 12:2-4). The first heaven is our atmosphere, the second heaven is the outer space of our universe, and the third heaven is beyond that outer space, in the world where God resides.

What God has revealed to us is sufficient. Detailed information about heaven will be revealed to all who are resurrected to become his sons for eternity. But while we are here on earth it is enough for us to accept what he has told us, and spend our time learning what we need to know to live for him in this world of tribulation.

Its imperfection

When people think of heaven as a place of perfection, they are thinking of the new Jerusalem where all of God’s sons will live with him for eternity. However, that will be in the future because it is still being prepared. As Jesus said to his apostles, **“In my Father’s house are many dwellings, and if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you”** (John 14:2).

And remember what John said that he saw in heaven: **“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having been 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 will be his people. And God himself will be with them”** (Revelation 21:2-3).

That description was about the coming of the new Jerusalem. And that will not happen until the end of the world and the final judgment.

That holy city will be a place of perfection because it will only be inhabited by offspring of God who proved themselves worthy to be his sons for eternity. There will never be an adversary of God in the new Jerusalem. I speak more about those things in the chapter *The New Heaven and Earth*.

However, the heaven that now exists is not a place of perfection, because the Bible tells about adversaries of God there. Remember, all of God's offspring have the potential be his enemies, even those in heaven. For all of God's offspring begin as pure spirits. And the only difference between men and the agents is the bodies we are given and the world we live in. Our spirits are equally pure at the beginning.

The only offspring of God who have no potential to become his enemies are those who have become his sons for eternity. Indeed, that is the very reason God created this world for us, to purge us of that potential permanently. I also explain more about that in the chapter *The New Heaven and Earth*.

The agents of heaven have the potential to become enemies of God, and some of them did turn against him. The demons of the world were former offspring of God in heaven who were exiled to the earth because of their opposition to him. Consider what some of them said to Jesus when they saw him: **“Oh no! What is with us and with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Did thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou are, the Holy man of God”** (Mark 1:24).

Other evidence of sin in heaven is told in this passage: **“And the agents who did not keep their own principality, but left their own habitation, he has kept reserved in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day”** (Jude 1:6). And apparently even in the new heaven and earth after this world is over, agents will sometimes have need for judgment. For Paul told his fellow Christians that we would judge them: **“Know ye not that we will judge agents? Then why not mundane things?”** (First Corinthians 6:3).

The only thing that makes the agents in heaven superior to us is the bodies that God gave them. For their spirits are not superior to ours. Their sinlessness in heaven is only because they do not live in this world filled with temptations. If any of them happened to be born here to live as men, they would be no more immune from sin than we are. Only Jesus the Son of God has the strength of his Spirit to live a sinless life in this world of tribulation. Not even the best of the agents in heaven have that strength of spirit. Of all the spirits in heaven, only Jesus was able to become our redeemer.

The heaven that now exists is far superior to this one, because sin against God is not tolerated. Nevertheless, it is not a place of perfec-

tion, and none of the inhabitants there are perfect. Only God and his Son Jesus Christ are perfect. The place of perfection is yet to come. For Paul said, **“But we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, then what is in part will be abolished”** (First Corinthians 13:9-10).

Peter also said, **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13). Notice that Peter did not say the present heaven is where righteousness dwells. Righteousness certainly prevails there, unlike this world, but the place of complete righteousness will be the new Jerusalem in the new heavens and the new earth.

The perfect place is going to be the new Jerusalem. And it will only be inhabited by God, by his Son Jesus Christ, and by his other sons who proved themselves worthy by their lives in this world. (I must say, however, that God may select his most worthy agents in heaven to be there also.)

We prove ourselves worthy by our faith and obedience to him, while enduring much suffering in this troubled world. And we too will be perfect, because when Paul was speaking of Jesus, he said, **“Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”** (Colossians 1:28).

Whether the world of heaven outside of the new Jerusalem will ever be one of perfection, I know not. It will not be a place of perfection as long as the nations there will need healing. For when John was describing the new Jerusalem, he said, **“And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations”** (Revelation 22:2). And he meant the heavenly nations.

Satan

Satan was an adversary to God in heaven, because when he was there he continually challenged him. For example, when Jehovah asked Satan in heaven if he considered how righteous a man Job was, Satan replied, **“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has, on every side? Thou have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce thee to thy face”** (Job 1:9-11).

And when John told how Satan was finally cast out of heaven, he said, **“And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God,**

and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night Rejoice because of this, O heavens, and ye who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has little time” (Revelation 12:10-12). Satan was a troublesome adversary of both God and his sons while he was in heaven, and he continues to be our chief adversary while he remains in the world.

Probably the greatest time of opposition to God in heaven was when war developed there. Remember, that was when Satan was being cast out, and he and his agents fought. They fought with Michael the arch-agent and his agents. Satan had many allies in heaven, some of whom are probably demons in the world. For consider this passage: **“And another sign was seen in heaven. And behold, a great fiery red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. And his tail drags the third part of the stars of the heaven, and cast them to the earth”** (Revelation 12:3-4).

Notice how the passage says a third of the stars was cast to the earth. A third is a substantial minority, and since the stars probably symbolize heavenly agents I believe that passage indicates a substantial minority of them had been God’s enemies in heaven, and by the influence of the devil they are now evil spirits here upon the earth.

Therefore, just being in the greater world of heaven is not enough to cause all of God’s offspring there to want to trust and obey him. Remember, the devil has even spoken with God in heaven, and yet he is still an adversary who hates him. Also remember, heaven is the place of the origin of the devil and the demons. Therefore, it is not a place of perfection—at least not yet. I speak more about the imperfection of heaven, and the devil and the demons in the next two chapters.

THE ENEMIES OF GOD

An enemy is someone who opposes someone else. God knew before the beginning that he would have enemies among his offspring. He also knew how destructive they would be. Disobedience to God is opposition to him. And disobedience to him is the cause of all harm and sorrow. Continual disobedience to him also leads to death, which is the greatest harm and sorrow. And the greatest death is the second death of hell. For John said, **“This is the second death, the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14), and the lake of fire is hell.

When Paul was speaking of Jesus, he said, **“For he must reign until he will put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy abolished is death”** (First Corinthians 15:25-26). When Paul said death would be abolished, he meant every cause of death would be abolished. Death is the enemy of all who love truth and righteousness, and those who hate God’s truth and righteousness love death. For Solomon said about God’s wisdom, **“All those who hate me love death”** (Proverbs 8:36). When all of God’s enemies are destroyed in the living death of hell there will be no more death anywhere else.

Exposing his enemies

Now what I say in this chapter involves many conjectures, but they are all supported by the word of God from the Bible. I make these conjectures in order help us better understand many things about God and his Christ that seem strange and paradoxical. Yet those strange and paradoxical things are all very rational and understandable when explained by my conjectures. Therefore, I ask for your patience while you read what I say.

First remember, God cannot determine directly the character of the spirits of his offspring. When they are first created he cannot identify which ones will become his enemies. For they are all created pure and undefiled spirits. It is by their own free will that they become his enemies. If God could predict from their beginning which ones would do that, then there would have been no need for testing; there would have been no need for this world of tribulation; there would have been no need for Jesus to suffer to become our Redeemer.

Therefore, God needed a way to test his offspring in order to determine which ones would be worthy to become his sons for eternity, and which ones would become his enemies. And since many of his enemies would be very crafty and stealthy, he also needed a way to expose them. For the stealthy ones would be especially dangerous to his righteous offspring.

They would be dangerous because many of them would make themselves predators, concealing themselves so they could more easily prey upon the innocent. Therefore, God's righteous offspring would be very vulnerable to the evil ones unless he could expose them. For hostile creatures are much less dangerous when they are exposed.

Stealthy predators even try to infiltrate the church to prey upon it. Paul warned about them, when he said, **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for even Satan disguises himself into an agent of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his helpers also disguise themselves as helpers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”** (Second Corinthians 11:13-15).

Therefore, God needed a way to expose his enemies both to himself and to his righteous offspring. And he chose a very astonishing way to do that. A way that seems very paradoxical to us. His way of exposing them is rarely understood because it seems so unreasonable. For I believe the way God chose was to establish conditions where they would expose themselves.

And the way he did that was to make himself appear to be weaker than he is. That was apparently another reason why he changed his appearance to the form of a man before he created anything. That form is his “weak thing.” And by making himself appear to be weaker than he is, that caused his enemies to have less fear of him. Consequently, his appearance that way emboldened them to expose themselves.

Appearing weak

Why was the Son of God born into poverty and obscurity? Why did he come into the world to live as a humble and lowly man? Should not the Creator of all things have lived a life of honor, power, and glory like the Roman Catholic popes? That is what the world expects of their leaders. The Jews expected their Messiah to be a warrior-king. And most believing Jews (the few among them that remain) are still waiting for such a man. Even some Christians are.

Would not Jesus have attracted many more followers if he had lived on the earth the way men expect a king to live? He even allowed himself to be persecuted and killed, which the world sees as weakness. Indeed, the Son of God is called a lamb even in heaven. The world also thinks of God himself as being weaker than he is. Why else would they prefer to be in the devil's kingdom instead of God's kingdom? God and his Son have made themselves appear to be much weaker than they are.

Now when I say they appear weak, that means they seem to be weak relative to the expectations of the observer. For God seems to be weaker than what men expect of him. For examples, he keeps himself obscure, he does not enforce his will upon men, and the world thinks he can do nothing to end any of the sorrows here.

The world did not see Jesus as a weak man in his body, he just appeared much weaker than what men expected of him. He had no worldly power. Therefore, king Herod and the Roman soldiers ridiculed him about his weakness, mocking his claim of kingship. They even made a crown for him, a crown of thorns. Would they have done those things if they knew about his true strength? And many souls either ignore God or make light of him because he does not make himself and his great power obvious to the world.

Most people have no real interest in God, the true God and his Holy Bible, because they consider him to be weak or unimportant. Thus, they have no fear of him, and they think nothing of disobeying him. Even many who believe he had something to do with creating the world think of him as impersonal and indifferent. Hence, they see him as irrelevant for their lives, and not a strong force to consider.

Some evil men not only disobey him, but they even curse him and fight against him. Would they do those things if they knew about his true strength? Faithless men worship strength, and they disdain things they see as weak. Therefore, they expose themselves as his enemies.

Only to his enemies

Now although God made himself appear weak that way, it is only to his enemies. He does not show himself to those who love him the way he does to his enemies. Consider the following psalm: **“With the merciful thou will show thyself merciful. With the perfect man thou will show thyself perfect. With the pure thou will show thyself pure. And with the perverse thou will show thyself contrary”** (Psalm 18:25-26). God shows himself contrary to the perverse in many ways, including his appearance of being weak. Which is contrary to what they think an all powerful God should be.

God only appears weak to his enemies. For those who love and obey him never see him as weak. No righteous soul has ever seen him as weak. Only the perverse and the wicked see him as weak, which is what this psalm says: **“Surely God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone. My steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ... They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men.**

“Therefore pride is as a chain around their neck. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness. They have more than heart could wish. They scoff, and in wickedness utter oppression. They speak loftily. ... And they say, How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?” (Psalm 73:1-11). Wicked men think God is ignorant, having no knowledge. They think he is weak. Consequently, they expose themselves.

Whether God is seen directly in heaven or whether he is seen indirectly and conceptually as on the earth, he is seen differently by different men. He appears differently, in the eyes of those who behold him, depending upon their different mentalities and character of their spirits. The fact that he is seen differently by different people of the world is obvious to anyone who makes even a cursory examination of how they perceive God and understand him.

God certainly has the power to make himself appear differently to his different offspring that way. For consider these words of Paul about how God manipulates the way men see things: **“And because of this God will send them the force of a delusion, for them to believe a lie, so that they might be condemned—all those who did not believe the truth, but who delighted in unrighteousness.** (Second Thessalonians 2:11-12). God causes all who do not believe the truth, but delight in unrighteousness, to believe a lie. God deludes his enemies into thinking he is weak. And that emboldens them to expose themselves and prove they deserve condemnation.

His enemies in heaven

God also appears weaker than he is to the inhabitants of heaven. He does not appear to them as all powerful, because he has the form of a man and he uses bodyguards. Now remember, I am speaking of how he appears to them relative to their expectations. In the chapter *The Nature of God* where I wrote about the awesomeness of his appearance, that was relative to mankind. His creatures in the heavenly world are much more powerful.

Indeed, God made himself appear so weak to some of his most powerful offspring in heaven that they even attempted to compete against him. And the leader of them is the devil. Why else would he have revealed himself as such an adversary if he did not think God was weak and vulnerable?

Remember, the devil has even been in his presence, yet he was definitely not awed by God’s appearance, nor has he been deterred by it. He has no fear of God. And there were many of the agents in heaven who did not fear God but joined with the devil. Those agents are now

the demons of the world. Remember the war in heaven when Satan's agent fought against God's agents.

The devil is allowed to roam the earth. And some of the demons are allowed to roam the earth with him because they are part of his kingdom (see Matthew 12:26). Some of the demons have been allowed to roam the earth until the time of the great judgment. For remember what some of them said to Jesus when they saw him: **"What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God? Did thou come here before the time to torment us?"** (Matthew 8:29). The time they referred to was the day of judgment. I say much more about God's enemies in heaven in the next chapter *The Devil and the Demons*.

His enemies among men

God's enemies are not only those who are hostile spirits. Jesus taught that everyone who does not love and trust God is his enemy. For he said, **"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters"** (Matthew 12:30). Everyone who is not with Jesus is against him, which makes them his enemy. And every enemy of Jesus is an enemy of God, and every enemy of God is an enemy of all who love and obey him. For Jesus said to his disciples, **"He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me"** (Luke 10:16). God is he who sent Jesus.

Since most of God's offspring in the world are not with Jesus, then most of them are his enemy. Remember what Jesus said about the broad way: **"Enter ye in by the narrow gate, because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they who enter through it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it"** (Matthew 7:13-14).

All anybody needs to confirm what I say about that is to open his eyes and he can see how very few people of the world are with God. Indeed, the world as a whole even hates him. For Jesus said, **"The world ... hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil.** (John 7:7). Most people would deny they hate him. But when you see the kinds of things they love and the kinds of things they hate, that shows how they hate him. For the world hates what he loves and loves what he hates. As Jesus said, **"... what is lofty among men is an abomination in the sight of God"** (Luke 16:15).

Great crowds followed Jesus as he traveled about preaching. They followed him, not because they loved him and what he was saying, but for worldly reasons. John even tells how Jesus rebuked the people

because of that. Jesus said to the multitude, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, ye seek me not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled”** (John 6:26). That was the day after he had fed five thousand men (not counting women and children) with five barley loaves and two fishes. Then he gave them a hard lesson that drove most of them away from him. For John said about that lesson, **“From this, many of his disciples went back at these things, and walked no more with him”** (John 6:66).

Jesus was continually persecuted by his enemies while he was upon the earth. Anyone who reads the biographies of him in the New Testament can see that. And he was crucified after only three years in his ministry. The world as a whole could not tolerate his presence. He was too controversial and critical for them. It was a mob of the population provoked by their rulers that demanded the Roman governor Pilate crucify Jesus. And there was no great crowd to protest when he was being crucified. Jesus only had a few of his faithful disciples there to grieve helplessly with sorrow. All of his apostles had fled when he was arrested. And all but one of them remained in hiding because their lives were threatened.

Of all the apostles only John was there at his crucifixion. He was probably in less danger because he was known to the high priest. For a passage about him says, **“So the band, and the chief captain, and the subordinates of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound him, and led him away first to Annas. For he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ... And Simon Peter followed Jesus, also the other disciple. But that disciple was known to the high priest, and he went in with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest”** (John 18:12-15). That “other disciple” was John.

And when Jesus’ church was established, after his ascension back to heaven, his disciples continued to be persecuted, sometimes very severely. For example the book of Acts says, **“Now about that time Herod the king threw on hands to harm some of those from the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And after seeing that it was pleasing the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also ...”** (Acts 12:1-3).

And authentic disciples of Jesus are still persecuted. There is not another religion on earth that suffers more persecution. Of course, as it did with the early Christians persecution cycles from mild to severe, depending upon various conditions. However, full obedience to the commands of Christ is never popular. And we who promote it will always suffer some persecution.

During the last supper Jesus warned his apostles to expect persecution. He said to them, **“If the world hates you, know that it has**

hated me before you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but because ye are not of the world (instead I chose you out of the world), because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, A bondman is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18-20).

Notice what he said about the world hating him and hating them. They hate him and they hate us because we do not belong to the world. We do not join the world in their sinful living, but instead we rebuke them. Therefore, they hate us. And that makes them God’s enemies. Anyone who tries to follow Jesus faithfully and openly will soon see how many enemies God has in the world.

Most of his enemies can be recognized because they have no fear of him. And the hypocrites who cannot easily be recognized can be identified by their works. As Jesus said about the false prophets, **“But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are predatory wolves. From their fruits ye will know them. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:15-16).**

His complete control

Now although God appears much weaker than he is, he is eternally invincible. And he always remains in complete control. For nothing can happen unless he allows it. For example, Satan could do nothing against Job without first getting God’s permission (see Job 1-2). Here are a few more examples:

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me. I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal. And there is none that can deliver out of my hand (Deuteronomy 32:39).

Unless Jehovah builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless Jehovah guards the city, the watchman wake but in vain (Psalm 127:1).

The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but victory is from Jehovah (Proverbs 21:31).

Go now, men who say, Today and tomorrow we will go into this city, and will operate one year there, and will engage in trade and will get gain—men who know not of the morrow. For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away—in place of your saying, If the Lord should will, then we will live and do this or that (James 4:13-15).

In heaven they can see God's complete control, because he tolerates no sin there. Therefore, most of God's heavenly offspring obey him. For Jesus said in what we call the Lord's prayer, "**May thy will happen on the earth as also in heaven**" (Matthew 6:10). Only the worst of God's offspring in heaven have no fear of him. They are the devil and the demons, and his weaker appearance emboldened them to expose themselves.

God does not make himself appear nearly as weak to his offspring in heaven as he does to us here on the earth. That means they are not tested as severely as we are. Therefore, most of them are obedient. They are not tested as severely, because only we can qualify to become his sons for eternity.

God has made himself obscure to us, and he does not stop all the sin and sorrow in the world. Those things make him appear weak to men. And his appearance of weakness and irrelevance emboldens his unworthy offspring here to rebel against him, which exposes them. God and his Son made themselves appear to be much weaker in the world than they are because they are testing our souls.

God wants to make a clear distinction between those who love and trust him, and those who do not. For only those who prove they love and trust him are chosen to be his eternal sons. And that requires much faith in him. For the Bible says the righteous man will live from faith (see for example Romans 1:17).

Winning hearts

Since only we can make ourselves worthy of eternal sonship, then God must win our love and loyalty. Therefore, as part of his testing he uses persuasion. For example, during a time when his people Israel rebelled against him, he said to them, "**Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for Jehovah has spoken. I have nourished and brought up sons, and they have rebelled against me. ... Come now, and let us reason together, says Jehovah ...**" (Isaiah 1:2, 10). He was calling his lost sheep by persuasion.

Also consider these words of Paul: "**Or do thou despise the wealth of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God guides thee to repentance? But according to thy hardness, and thy impenitent heart, thou store up wrath to thyself in the day of wrath, and revealing, and righteous judgment of God ...**" (Romans 2:4-5). God is tolerating much sin and sorrow in the world, giving men time to repent.

With the establishment of his church God now uses the words of his Holy Bible as his primary means of persuasion. For that book reveals

who he is and what he is like. It also explains why he is allowing so much sin and sorrow here. And most important it tells how we can qualify to become his sons for eternity. For he is testing our souls.

The following passage is just one from the New Testament that tells how Jesus attempted to persuade the people to believe in him: **“They [the Jews] said therefore to him, Who are thou? And Jesus said to them, The beginning, something that I am even telling you. I have many things to say and to judge about you. But he who sent me is true, and I speak to the world these things that I heard from him.**

“They did not understand that he spoke the Father to them. Jesus therefore said to them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then ye will know that I am he, and I do nothing from myself, but I speak these things as my Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. The Father has not left me alone, because I always do things pleasing to him.

“As he spoke these things of him, many believed in him. Jesus therefore said to those Jews who believed him, If ye remain in my word, ye are truly my disciples, and ye will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:25-32).

When Jesus said **“The beginning”** in answer to their question about who he was, it was a riddle. And it means he was the beginning of everything, everything but God himself. For he was the first thing that God brought into existence, and God created all things through him.

God sent many prophets to his people before Christ came. He sent those prophets to try to persuade the people to be faithful to him. Here is what the record says about that just before the destruction of their country: **“And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy”** (Second Chronicles 36:15-16).

God must use persuasion, because we have free will and can choose to sin. Only God is so perfect that he cannot sin. Even his Son Jesus could have sinned, otherwise he could not have been tempted. And since only we can prove ourselves worthy of eternal sonship, then God must use persuasion to encourage us. We prove ourselves worthy by serving him faithfully in this world ruled by the devil.

In the Old Testament times God sent his prophets to be his ambassadors to persuade his people Israel. And now the disciples of Christ are serving him as ambassadors to the entire world. We serve him as

ambassadors by using persuasion to encourage men to believe, repent, and obey his Son.

Paul was one of the last men who could serve as prophets like those of the Old Testament, and he called himself an ambassador for Christ. He said that when he was telling how God wants us to be reconciled with him: **“So then if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new. And all things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation.**

“How that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore, ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were calling through us. We plead on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God” (Second Corinthians 5:17-20).

THE DEVIL AND THE DEMONS

Satan in heaven

The devil is also called Satan because that word means adversary. Satan was an adversary of God, and yet he was still allowed to be in heaven, probably because he had not sinned enough to be cast out. Remember how he challenged God in heaven about the righteous man Job. And he was allowed to be in heaven until Jesus lived his victorious life upon the earth. It was only after that when Satan was condemned and cast out of heaven to the earth.

A mighty creature

I believe Satan was a mighty creature in heaven, both in body and in spirit. God may have created him a mighty creature in heaven because he had a special role for him there. However, at some time Satan rebelled and made himself an evil spirit. Regarding his body, there is an interesting passage in the book of Ezekiel that suggests Satan was once a great cherub. It was written about the king of Tyre, but many men have suggested it also symbolizes Satan. I was once rather doubtful it referred to him. However, I now believe the symbolism of its words has a dual meaning, and includes both the king of Tyre of ancient times and also **“the ancient serpent, called the devil and Satan”** (Revelation 12:9).

Part of that passage in Ezekiel says, **“Moreover the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the lord Jehovah: Thou seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, the topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold. The workmanship of thy tambourine and of thy pipes was in thee.**

“In the day that thou were created they were prepared. Thou were the anointed cherub who covers. And I set thee, *so that* thou were upon the holy mountain of God. Thou have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou were perfect in thy ways from the day that thou were created, till unrighteousness was found in thee.

“By the abundance of thy commerce they filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou have sinned. Therefore I have cast thee

out of the mountain of God as profane, and I have destroyed thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty. Thou have corrupted thy wisdom because of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 28:11-17). Thus, Satan may have been a cherub.

Remember, the four living creatures that were around the throne of God seem to have been cherubim, and the way they were described indicates they were very powerful. Indeed, they were described as being even more powerful than the heavenly agents, because they did not have the form of men. And since God has taken the form of a man, the body of a cherub probably appears to be more powerful than his body.

Competing with God

I say that about cherubim, because if Satan were originally a great cherub, perhaps he became proud in his glory, and was emboldened to compete with God because he thought he had a more powerful body. Satan may have thought that God was only more powerful because he has many agents to support him, and he has control of the seven lamps of fire, that great source of power. And that may have been when Satan decided to become his adversary.

Indeed, Satan may have even thought that God was himself created by some other being, a long vanished being that God competed with, defeated, and wants forgotten. Satan may have thought that God was a more advanced being than the one that had created him. And if Satan believed in the idea of evolution, then he may have thought God felt he deserved superseding the one who created him.

If Satan believed he was the continuation of that evolution, then he could justify, to himself and to his followers, trying to supersede God, just as God had (supposedly) superseded the one who created him. Satan may have thought that way especially if he has the body of a great cherub, while God has the weaker form of a man. If you wonder how Satan could have believed such a fantastic idea about God, then consider all the fantastic ideas men believe about him. Satan is probably just as capable of being self-deceived and he is of being able to deceive others.

Nevertheless, whatever were his motives, he competed with God because of his pride. For pride is a major characteristic of the devil. Indeed, God said about leviathan, **“He beholds everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride”** (Job 41:34). I have no doubt leviathan symbolized Satan who had persecuted Job. And he is

indeed the king of all the sons of pride. Indeed, it may have been Satan's own pride that blinded him so much about God.

Regarding pride among men, have you ever noticed how much sinners glorify and promote the most proud men, especially if they are very talented and crafty like the devil? And those proud men are all deceived about God. In contrast to exalting pride, Jesus said, **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs"** (Matthew 5:3). No son of pride will ever become a son of God.

Part of the power of the devil is his wisdom, wisdom that he corrupted when he became proud. Remember, the passage about the king of Tyre probably refers symbolically to the devil, and it says about him, **"Thou have corrupted thy wisdom because of thy brightness."** The devil apparently corrupted his wisdom into craftiness, slyness, and cunning. Therefore, he was cautious and subtle when competing with God. And instead of attempting to defeat him directly, he sought to win the support of the majority of God's offspring.

That is how Satan has been successful in this world. For Paul said to the disciples in Corinth about Satan, **"For we are not ignorant of his methods"** (Second Corinthians 2:11). The devil has won the allegiance of the great majority of men, and is now the ruler of the world instead of God. As Jesus said to his disciples at the last supper, **"Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out"** (John 12:31). Although God remains the ruler of our material world, Satan has become the ruler of the world of men.

Because the devil was so powerful and cunning, he became the leader of all in heaven who were discontented with God and his righteousness. Jude even mentions how some agents in heaven were so discontented they became rebellious and had to be kept in bonds: **"And the agents who did not keep their own principality, but left their own habitation, he has kept reserved in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day"** (Jude 1:6). Discontented agents who were more subtle about it like the devil apparently became his agents in his competition against Jehovah. Remember, Satan and his agents became so powerful in heaven that they even fought against the agents of God when he was being cast out from there.

Now I do not believe the particular creature called Satan was special in the sense that he was the only one who could have become the chief adversary of God. He was apparently the first one to make a major effort. For example, Jesus said he was the father of lies. When Jesus was disputing with the religious leaders of the Jews, he said, **"Ye are from the father, the devil, and ye want to do the desires of your father. He was a man-killer from the beginning, and he has**

not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Being a man-killer from the beginning was when he tempted Adam and Eve to sin, thus causing their deaths. Jesus said the devil was the father of lies. That means the devil was the first of God’s offspring to use the stratagem of deceit. And he made it a part of his very mentality, which may have happened when he transformed his spirit into the dragon, the great adversary of God.

Satan was apparently the most successful adversary of God. And he became the leader of all those in heaven who were discontented. And being powerful and cunning he was able to keep his supremacy over all other discontented spirits. I suspect that he did not tolerate any challenges to his leadership, which is certainly true of ruthless rulers of men on the earth. No doubt Satan has many cunning ways to crush efforts by other evil spirits who might want to supplant him.

Challenging God

First I must say there is a big difference between questioning God and challenging him. There are many examples of righteous men who questioned God. For example, when God told a righteous man named Ananias to speak with Saul of Tarsus, he replied, **“Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how many evil things he did to thy sanctified at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name”** (Acts 9:13-14).

And when God was preparing Peter to accept Gentiles into the church, he caused him to see a vision. Part of that vision was this: **“And a voice came to him, After rising, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord, because I have never eaten anything profane or unclean. And a voice again for a second time, What God has cleansed, thou shall not make profane”** (Acts 10:13-15).

Perhaps the most famous example of a righteous man questioning God was Abraham. That happened when God told Abraham he might destroy Sodom: **“And Abraham drew near, and said, Will thou consume righteous men with wicked men? Perhaps there are fifty righteous men within the city. Will thou consume and not spare the place for the fifty righteous men that are in it? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay a righteous man with a wicked man, that so the righteous man should be as the wicked man. Far be it from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?**

“And Jehovah said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous men within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sake. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord, who am but dust and ashes. Perhaps there shall lack five of the fifty righteous men. Will thou destroy all the city for lack of five?” God told Abraham he would not destroy it.

Abraham then asked him about forty, then thirty, then twenty. Finally, the passage says, **“Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Perhaps ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for the ten’s sake”** (Genesis 18:26-32). Notice the humble words in Abraham’s questions.

A challenge is more demanding, and is often an act of hostility. Part of Satan’s hostility was to compete with God by publicly disputing and challenging him. And by so doing he could spread seeds of doubt and distrust about God, to weaken God’s credibility and enhance his own. Thus he could build a following to defeat God.

Remember, that is how he operates in the world. He uses his allies among men to undermine trust in God and his holy word. That is how he opposed the Son of God when Jesus was upon the earth. For while Jesus worked among the people to persuade them that God had sent him, his enemies continually challenged him and accused him falsely. Jesus even said to them, **“Ye are from the father, the devil, and ye want to do the desires of your father”** (John 8:44).

Challenging what God said is how Satan persuaded Eve to sin against Jehovah. He belittled God’s warning about the forbidden fruit, and he implied that Jehovah had a selfish and ulterior motive for telling her not to eat of it. For the Bible record says, **“And the serpent said to the woman, Ye shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day ye eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”** (Genesis 3:4-5).

Consider the example from the book of Job about Satan challenging God in heaven. The story begins with this passage: **“Now it came to pass on the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah, that Satan also came among them. And Jehovah said to Satan, From where do thou come? Then Satan answered Jehovah, and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it”** (Job 1:6-7).

First regarding Jehovah, remember when Paul was speaking about the sons of Israel who were freed from Egypt, he said Jehovah was the **“spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was the Christ”** (First Corinthians 10:4). Jehovah was Jesus the Christ, who brought salvation to us. Who those other sons of God were when Satan came

among them is not told. The New Testament tells how Jesus was transfigured on top of a mountain, and he spoke with Moses and Elijah who appeared to him there (see Matthew 17:3). Perhaps those sons of God who came to present themselves to Jehovah were righteous men who had died, and like Moses and Elijah they were taken to heaven before the final judgment.

Nevertheless, when Jehovah told Satan what a righteous man Job was, Satan replied, **“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has, on every side? Thou have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce thee to thy face”** (Job 1:9-11). With those words Satan disputed with Jehovah’s judgment, and implied he was wiser than Jehovah. Thus, he challenged him before those other sons of God, and there were probably other observers there also. Satan not only slandered Job about his righteousness, but he tried to undermine faith in Jehovah’s judgment, and convince the inhabitants of heaven that he was wiser.

With God’s permission Satan caused enormous suffering to the man Job, to test him. And Job was completely unaware of why he was suffering so much. However, Job never renounced God, which proved that God was right about him, and Satan was wrong. Remember, the word Satan means adversary, and the devil means false accuser. Satan challenged God and he falsely accused Job. Nevertheless, the Bible says nothing about Satan being punished for challenging God and causing Job to suffer. I suspect Satan was given Jehovah’s assurance that he would not be punished if Job proved him wrong. For Satan is very cunning. He knew that if God did not take his challenge about Job it would make God appear to doubt his own judgment.

The dialogue that Satan had with Jehovah about Job was no doubt only one example of his efforts in heaven to undermine the credibility of God and elevate his own. For he succeeded in persuading many in heaven to join with him. Remember, Satan had obviously persuaded a large number of the citizens in heaven to become his allies, because it took a war in heaven to cast them all out. And no doubt Satan used all of the arguments that his followers among men in the world use against God, and perhaps many more.

Satan also may have won a large following in heaven by using various arguments to defend those who sinned against God. For example, he may have argued that God and his only begotten Son are so different that they are not subject to temptations. Therefore, in order to be just to everyone else, God should be more tolerant, and should not condemn everyone who sins.

His methods

Dear reader, if you want to know how Satan operated in heaven, just look around at how he operates in the world. Remember what Paul said about that: **“For we are not ignorant of his methods”** (Second Corinthians 2:9-11).

Satan and his methods can be seen in those who serve him. They use many ways to tempt and deceive. They make many accusations against God and those who serve him. They make extravagant claims about how their ways are superior to those of God. They accuse him of oppressing them, and making unreasonable demands. And they condemn him when he does not prevent sorrow.

The devil’s disciples are continually defending habitual sinners. They make excuses for them, especially by blaming various circumstances, and they strive to reduce or eliminate their punishment. One of the most diabolical of those excuses they make is to blame some innocent souls, including parents, communities, and even all of society, for causing men to commit their evil deeds. According to their logic, the ultimate cause of all guilt is the failure of God who created us.

Those are just a few examples of the methods he uses to oppose God and his righteousness in the world. And he also used various evil devices to oppose God in heaven. Of course, the methods he used in heaven were no doubt more suitable for the conditions there. For example, God tolerates no sin there as he does here. And heaven is not a world of tribulation filled with temptations.

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of heaven are also offspring of God. And we know they are vulnerable to sin because some of them did become guilty. They are vulnerable, but not nearly as vulnerable as we are upon the earth. For not one soul here has ever lived without sin, except for Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son.

Our enemy

Defending those who sinned in heaven may also have been one of the reasons why the devil continually accused us to God before Jesus redeemed us. For the book of Revelation says about Satan, **“... the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night”** (Revelation 12:10). Satan could argue that if God condemns everybody who offends him, then he would have to condemn all of his sons as well. We would have to be condemned with the devil and his agents because all of us have offended God at some time, just like Adam.

Satan’s accusations also included false ones. Remember how he falsely accused Job. And his disciples upon the earth continually

make false accusations against us. For example, heartless men have slandered a faithful disciple of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, by accusing her of being a great sinner because she had been possessed by many demons. They even claim she was a prostitute or an adulteress.

She had indeed been afflicted with many demons, for one passage about her, says, **“And it came to pass that he traveled through, by city and village in succession, announcing and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, and the twelve men with him, and certain women who were healed from evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out ...”** (Luke 8:1-2).

Nevertheless, there is absolutely no evidence she was ever a chronic sinner. She is only spoken of as a righteous woman who was completely devoted to our Savior. And there is no record she was ever rebuked for anything she did, either in the past or after she became a disciple of Jesus.

As the influence of the devil has increased in America, men now judge all the righteous souls of the Bible very harshly. And those critics even include men who claim to believe in Christ. They brand those righteous souls of the Bible with labels as a result of things such as a single sin in their lives. For example, they classify Jacob as a liar because (at the urging of his mother) he once deceived his father. And there is no record he ever told another lie. A single lie does not make a man a chronic liar.

They also classify Abraham as a liar because he told some Gentile rulers his wife was his sister. The fact is, she was his half-sister. And the reason he concealed their marriage from them was because of the danger he was in. For she was very beautiful and they might have killed him to get her. And his fears were realized when those Gentile rulers seized her by force when they saw her; she did not go willingly. There is nothing wrong with concealing information in times of danger. Only thoughtless men call Abraham a liar. God never criticized Abraham for what he did. In fact, the Bible says that God rebuked those rulers, not Abraham.

Abraham’s nephew Lot has been greatly slandered because he lived in Sodom. But Peter said about him, **“For if God ... rescued righteous Lot, being distressed by the conduct of the lawless in their licentiousness (for that righteous man dwelling among them day after day, in the sight and hearing of their lawless deeds, it anguished his righteous soul) ...”** (Second Peter 2:4, 7). Three times in that brief passage Peter called Lot a righteous man. Only slanderers condemn Lot for living in Sodom.

Those false accusations are exactly like the kind the devil continually made against the sanctified of God when he was in heaven. And the devil's disciples still make accusations against us on the earth. The world is filled with many examples. They rage against a righteous man with false accusations, or for a single error he may have committed, but they ignore and excuse the continual transgressions of sinners.

I also suspect Satan and many of those citizens in heaven were envious and resentful that God was going to make men to be his sons for eternity, to reign with him over the other citizens in heaven. Perhaps such envy and resentment is another reason why Satan was able to persuade many of them there to be his agents. That may also have been another reason why the devil continually accused us to God before Jesus redeemed us. With his accusations he and his agents could argue that we are no more worthy to reign with God in heaven than they were.

The successful life of Jesus on earth enabled us to become worthy to be sons of God and reign with him for eternity. For when Jesus gave instructions to the seven congregations of Asia he gave a blessing to each one of them for overcoming. And here is the last blessing he gave: **“He who overcomes, I will give him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne”** (Revelation 3:21).

We prove ourselves worthy by overcoming, overcoming the trials and temptations of this sinful world. Sinners prove their unworthiness by only scoffing and complaining about how God is selecting sons for eternity. When a man believes in Jesus Christ, repents of his sins, obeys all of his commandments, and lives a courageously humble life, striving to overcome, then he can prove himself worthy.

Satan punished

The Bible tells how Satan had been punished before he was cast out of heaven, because he was the serpent in the garden of Eden who tempted Eve to sin. The Bible says that God punished him this way: **“And Jehovah God said to the serpent, Because thou have done this, cursed are thou above all cattle, and above every beast of the field. Upon thy belly thou shall go, and dust thou shall eat all the days of thy life”** (Genesis 3:14).

Those words are no doubt very figurative. Perhaps it means that God reduced Satan's rank with him to the lowest of his creatures in heaven. Satan was apparently willing to risk that happening in order to cause the condemnation of mankind. He wanted that to happen,

because only we have the potential to become sons of God for eternity. And since Adam was the prototype man, his sin brought condemnation to every man. For Paul said, “... **as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, in that all sinned**” (Romans 5:12).

I say much more about those things in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*. Satan may have also wanted all men condemned in order to strengthened his leadership among God’s enemies. Those things were probably why he was willing to lose his standing with God.

The part about Satan (the serpent) eating dust is very mysterious. No doubt God’s heavenly creatures need sustenance just as his earthly creatures do. However, their sustenance may be a form of energy and not anything material. If the bodies of men were also imperishable, we would only need energy for our sustenance. Therefore, when God cursed Satan to eat dust, that may mean he could only get his sustenance (his supporting energy) in our world, which is one of dust.

Remember, in the story of Job when God asked Satan from whence he came, he replied, “**From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.**” Because Satan is a creature of the heavenly world, he is invisible to us. Nevertheless, he goes to and fro on the earth, and walks up and down on it. Indeed, Peter warned us, “**Be sober, be vigilant. Your opponent the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom to devour**” (First Peter 5:8). Satan may somehow get some of his sustenance by entering into men to share their energy.

He may even enter into other organisms for that purpose, to somehow “feed” upon them. For there is a passage about the death of Moses that says, “**But Michael the arch-agent, when he disputed with the devil, contending about the body of Moses, dared not bring a railing judgment, but said, May the Lord rebuke thee**” (Jude 1:9). Perhaps the spirit of Satan entered into some flesh-eating beast in an effort to tear apart and feed upon the body of Moses. Perhaps he somehow gains energy that way, even though he does not have a body of flesh. What that part of his curse means is very mysterious.

God also said to the serpent, “**And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel**” (Genesis 3:15). The part about enmity between his seed and her seed is the enmity between the disciples of the devil and Jesus Christ. They bruised Jesus’ heel, which symbolizes the death of his flesh. And he bruised Satan’s head, which may symbolize how Jesus defeated all of the devil’s arguments against God and his will. And that caused Satan to be cast out of heaven.

It took a war in heaven to cast out the devil, but now it will only take a single heavenly agent to cast him into the abyss. For that was what John saw in his vision of the future (see Revelation 20:1-3). That indicates Satan was much more powerful when he was in heaven.

Satan in the world

While Jesus lived as a man of flesh in the world the devil desperately tried to tempt him to sin. But Jesus lived a sinless life and he defeated all of Satan's arguments to justify sin and opposition to God. For Paul said **"God, having sent his own Son in a form of flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh ..."** (Romans 8:3). Jesus condemned sin by defeating the idea that sin is unavoidable. And John said, **"The Son of God was made known for this, so that he might destroy the works of the devil"** (First John 3:8).

Jesus came to the earth to condemn sin and destroy the works of the devil. And those works are his opposition to God. Therefore, Jesus came to condemn disobedience to God and destroy opposition to him. And he succeeded by living a sinless life of self-sacrifice in complete obedience. That also proved his moral and spiritual superiority, and earned for himself the right to redeem all who belong to him. I speak more about those things in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*.

A deceiver

Satan not only challenges God, but he uses every kind of evil device to compete against him. He tries every way to lure souls away from God, and he uses deceit as one of his major weapons. Remember what Jesus said about him: **"... he has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it"** (John 8:44).

Satan made deceit a part of him because it is a very powerful weapon to use against God's rule. And he uses it whenever he can, because he has no scruples about anything. His heart is completely hardened. Remember, the fierce leviathan probably symbolizes Satan, and he was described by God as having a heart **"as firm as a stone, Yea, firm as the nether millstone"** (Job 41:24).

God cannot be deceived, but his offspring can. Therefore, they are very vulnerable to being deceived and tempted to disobey God, as were Adam and Eve. Even Paul said about himself, **"For sin, having taken opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me"** (Romans 7:11). Sin uses deception to kill us, and that is how the devil caused the condemnation of Adam and Eve, and every other man in the world, except Jesus Christ, who is the only begotten Son of God.

Therefore, part of God's war with the devil is a war between truth and deceit. For deceit is how the devil keeps men blind so they will not learn the truth about God and his righteousness. As Paul said, **"But we have renounced the covert things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor misrepresenting the word of God, but by the disclosure of the truth, commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God. But even if our good news is concealed, it is concealed in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, in order for the light of the good news of the glory of the Christ (who is a likeness of God) not to shine forth to them"** (Second Corinthians 4:2-4).

His power to manipulate

The Bible also teaches that the spirit of Satan can enter into men on earth to manipulate them. Remember the passage that says, **"And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray."** The fact that Satan leads the whole world astray is certainly obvious to every disciple of Christ. Remember, Jesus himself acknowledged that, when he referred to the devil as the ruler of the world. And remember, Paul told how the god of this age (Satan) blinds the minds of the unbelieving: **"But even if our good news is concealed, it is concealed in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, in order for the light of the good news of the glory of the Christ (who is a likeness of God) not to shine forth to them"** (Second Corinthians 4:3-4).

Paul also told how Satan works in the sons of disobedience, when he said, **"Even you, who were dead in trespasses and sins in which ye once walked according to the era of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience"** (Ephesians 2:1-2).

There are several other passages that tell how Satan manipulates men. For example, the Bible says that is what he did with Judas who betrayed Jesus: **"... the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he would betray him ..."** (John 13:2), and, **"... Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And having departed, he conversed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him to them"** (Luke 22:3-4).

Jesus gave an example of how the devil manipulates men when he was explaining his parable about the man who sows: **"Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. And those by the way are those who hear, then the devil comes, and takes away the word**

from their heart, lest having believed, they would be saved” (Luke 8:11-12). And Peter told how Satan manipulated the heart of Ananias and his wife Sapphira to lie about money they gave for the church. Peter said, **“Ananias, why did Satan fill thy heart for thee to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back from the price of the land?”** (Acts 5:3).

The devil is somewhat like the director of a motion picture story. The director manipulates his actors by command. The devil manipulates sinners by deceit. As Paul said, **“But evil men and impostors will go forward to worse, leading astray and being led astray”** (Second Timothy 3:13). Satan leads evil men and impostors astray, and they lead other men astray.

How is Satan able to do such things? Remember, the seven Spirits of God radiate energy before his throne (his command center), and that radiant energy has the power to control and manipulate. Perhaps the spirit of Satan also has the ability to radiate out that way, although with much less power. Remember, I believe God created Satan with a very powerful body and spirit. And perhaps God created him with a limited form of power like that of his seven Spirits. God must have had a very special role for him in heaven that required him to be so powerful. However, at some time Satan became proud and transformed himself into an evil spirit to compete with him.

Satan’s spirit radiates energy that can somehow arouse evil thoughts in the minds of men. Righteous souls resist and reject such thoughts, but sinners accept them, which makes them vulnerable to manipulation by him. However, unlike the Spirits of God, the strength of Satan’s spirit apparently diminishes with distance. He must be near us to have the greatest effect. For example, Peter said, **“Be sober, be vigilant. Your opponent the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom to devour”** (First Peter 5:8). And James said, **“... resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7). Apparently the devil must go about seeking souls he can have the strongest effect upon, and when people resist him then he departs and moves on.

Therefore, in order to have a strong effect on the greatest number of people he must move about quickly, switching from one to another. And perhaps he can do that by traveling at an ultra-high rate of speed. Consider the picture of a television set. The way the set operates is with a tiny but very high speed spot of light on the screen (three of them together with color sets). That spot of light starts at the top of the screen, and it moves across in a horizontal line, then shifts back to make another line slightly lower. And it continues that way until it reaches the bottom, where it jumps back to the top again. That kind of movement is called a raster scan. And the spot varies in brightness as

it moves, varying according to the signal received for the picture it is projecting. And because it moves so fast we cannot see it as a spot. Instead, our minds blend the process into a complete picture.

Perhaps the devil has the ability to travel at such a high rate of speed that he can seem to be everywhere in the world the same way the tiny spot of light of a TV set moves to give the illusion that it covers the screen. For example, when the Bible describes how Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, perhaps that was like a small region on a TV screen that only portrays part of the picture. Satan tempted Jesus while at the same time he was no doubt functioning elsewhere in the world. He could do that if he had the power to move back and forth at a very high rate of speed.

There is a passage in the book of Ezekiel that suggests spiritual creatures can move that way. When Ezekiel was describing his vision of cherubim, he said, **“As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches. It went up and down among the living creatures, and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning”** (Ezekiel 1:13-14).

When he said those living creatures **“ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning,”** that may mean those living creatures could move so fast it looked like a flash of lightning. And that may be how Satan is able to move about in the world to give the illusion that he is everywhere. Especially if he can “run and return” much faster than a flash of lightning. God does not operate that way because he does not need to move about. His Spirit has the power to radiate anywhere at full strength.

Ruler of the power of the air

Whatever is the way Satan does it, the Bible says he manipulates the thoughts of sinful men to use them for his purposes. In one sense, therefore, they are the devil’s body of flesh upon the earth, just as the disciples of Christ are his body of flesh. For Paul said to his Christian brothers about Jesus, **“... we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

Perhaps sinners are Satan’s body of flesh, because there are times when the Bible says he did something, but it was by the hands of men. Here is one example: **“Therefore we wanted to come to you, indeed I, Paul, even once and again, and Satan hindered us”** (First Thessalonians 2:18). It was the spirit of the devil in men that hindered Paul and his companions.

Another example is when Jesus warned his disciples at Smyrna about persecution: **“Behold, the devil is indeed going to cast some of you into prison, so that ye may be tried, and ye will have tribulation ten days. Become thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10). It was the spirit of the devil in men that caused their persecution.

Also remember how Paul said Satan was **“the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). John also said, **“He who is doing sin is of the devil ...”** (First John 3:8). What John meant by “doing sin” was living a sinful life. And he said observing the way men live was how to determine who belonged to God and who belonged to the devil: **“By this the children of God are visible, and the children of the devil. Every man not doing righteousness is not of God, and he who is not loving his brother”** (First John 3:10).

Paul called the devil **“the ruler of the power of the air.”** That is also no doubt figurative. Remember, a spirit is energy and power. And since Satan rules the spirits of sinful men and demons, he is the ruler of that power. And since air is an invisible material that covers the world, perhaps that passage symbolizes the invisible spirits (powers) of those evil men and demons that he rules throughout the world.

Nevertheless, whatever it means, the rule of his spirit is limited. He cannot perform anything supernatural, and God will always have the power to override whatever the devil does. There is a passage in the book of Job that suggests how God limits Satan. When God finally answered Job, he asked him many questions about the world. God was showing him how many things there are that men cannot know and cannot do. This is what he asked about the sea: **“Or who shut up the sea ... and said, This far thou shall come, but no further, and here thy proud waves shall be stayed?”** (Job 38:8-11).

I believe those words about the proud waves of the sea being limited also apply figuratively to Satan: **“This far thou shall come, but no further, and here thy proud waves shall be stayed.”** For the proud spirit of the devil cannot influence us without our permission, nor can he harm us without God’s permission. Satan enters into men when they “tune in” to him and his evil ways, and when they put their minds “on his wavelength.”

I continually marvel at how Satan manipulates men not only to sin against God, but also because he has contempt for them, even those who are his allies. When the people of America forsook God several decades ago, they began making themselves look like freaks, clowns, and savages. Their wild hair and beard styles, their ridiculous and comical clothing, their perverse tattoos, is like the devil mocking them. For God who loves us commanded against such things.

His power to afflict

There is some information in the Bible about other powers of the devil besides his ability to manipulate men who are receptive to him. Other passages say he can afflict men with diseases. For example, when Jesus was criticized for healing a woman on the sabbath, here is what he said about how Satan had afflicted her: **“And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound, lo, eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?”** (Luke 13:16).

And here is what Peter told Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, about how the devil oppresses people with sickness: **“Jesus of Nazareth—how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who passed through doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him”** (Acts 10:38). The devil oppresses righteous men. God punishes wicked men.

Paul also gave an example of how Satan afflicted his body: **“And so that I might not be over exalted by the extraordinariness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an agent of Satan so that he would buffet me, so that I would not be over exalted”** (Second Corinthians 12:7). God allowed an agent of Satan to buffet Paul, a faithful servant of Christ, to keep him from becoming over exalted. Nothing else is ever said about that affliction.

Apparently Satan can enter into some other earthly creatures to manipulate their behavior the way he does with the “sons of disobedience.” Perhaps he can manipulate creatures such as germs by “transmitting” his spirit into them. Nevertheless, he is limited to the laws of nature, and he can do nothing unless God allows him. And of course, God has given us the power to combat such things.

Remember the story about the demons in a man that was near a herd of swine. The demons said to Jesus, **“If thou cast us out, allow us to go away into the herd of swine.”** The text then says, **“And he said to them, Go. And having come out, they went into the herd of swine. And behold, the whole herd of the swine stampeded down the slope into the sea, and perished in the waters”** (Matthew 8:31-32). I say more about demons under the next heading.

Remember, however, neither the devil nor demons can give energy to men or beasts, nor can they cause them to perform any kind of supernatural behavior. They can only manipulate behavior according to the capabilities of the organism within the laws of nature. And never forget, God can overrule anything they do, and we can also combat much of what they do. We are not completely helpless about them.

God limits what Satan can do, but sometimes God actually uses the devil. He uses him to punish disciples of Christ who sin. Here is an example that Paul gave about a sinner in the Corinthian church: **“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a man to Satan for destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (First Corinthians 5:4-5). Delivering the man to the devil was done in the hope that Satan’s afflictions would cause the man to repent to restore his salvation, which the man later did (see Second Corinthians 2).

Here is another example of when Paul spoke of delivering men to be disciplined by Satan: **“This command I set before thee, child Timothy, according to the prophecies leading the way for thee, so that by them thou might war the good warfare. Holding faith and a good conscience, which some, having put away, made shipwreck about the faith, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan, so that they may be disciplined not to blaspheme”** (First Timothy 1:18-20).

Although God allows the devil to afflict men, Satan cannot cause them to commit sin against their will. He can only cause men to sin by manipulating those who are “on his wavelength.” And he cannot do that with those who choose to be guided by God’s Holy Spirit. And he can only tempt whenever he has the opportunity. For the Bible says about Jesus, **“And when the devil ended every temptation, he withdrew from him until a time”** (Luke 4:13).

Demons

Demons are also called evil spirits and unclean spirits. They are very mysterious creatures that were often spoken about during New Testament times. If you doubt the existence of such things, remember how many thousands of years men were ignorant of the invisible creatures called germs. Faithful disciples of Christ accept the reality of demons because we believe the testimony of God’s witnesses in his Bible. When demons possessed persons they seemed to have caused different kinds of afflictions to the functioning of their nervous system, such as lunacy, epilepsy, and deafness.

Demons are offspring of God that had been in heaven, but turned against him and joined with the devil. And there are many men upon the earth who have taken the good spirit that God gave them when they were born into the world, and changed themselves to be evil spirits. Such men are often respected and popular, but inside they are devils. They are like these enemies of Jesus that he cursed: **“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye are like white-**

washed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). And Jesus said to his apostles about Judas Iscariot, "**Did I not choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?**" (John 6:70). Yet none of the other apostles ever recognized Judas that way until he betrayed Jesus.

There are only two passages in the Old Testament that mention demons, and both of them are about men sacrificing their children to false gods. Nevertheless, some demons may have always roamed the earth, because that is what Satan does. Therefore they are probably still here serving the devil in his kingdom.

Indeed, Jesus said that demons were part of Satan's kingdom, as in this passage: "**And the scholars who came down from Jerusalem said, He [Jesus] has Beelzebub, and, By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons. And having summoned them, he said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand**" (Mark 3:22-24). Satan's kingdom is in this world, of which I speak more about in my analysis of Revelation in the last half of this book.

Since the devil is "**the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience**" (Ephesians 2:2), then perhaps the demons also work in them in ways besides giving them afflictions. There is evidence that not all demons cause disorders of the nervous system. Apparently, like the devil, some of them can plant evil thoughts in the hearts of men who are receptive.

Consider what Paul said about that: "**But the Spirit says expressly that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, their own conscience having been seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, to abstain from foods, which God created for partaking with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth**" (First Timothy 4:1-3).

Paul said the doctrines of demons include such things as deceit, hypocrisy, and forbidding things that God does not forbid. And I am confident those are but a few of the evil doctrines they use to influence men to oppose God and his righteousness. Notice Paul said some would depart from the faith and give heed to those demonic influences. They would give heed to them wilfully, just as sinful men are receptive to the influence of the spirit of the devil in them.

Some of the demons were apparently cast into a mysterious place called the abyss. Here is a passage about demons and the abyss: "**And Jesus demanded him, saying, What is thy name? And he said,**

Legion, because many demons were entered into him. And they entreated him that he would not command them to go out into the abyss” (Luke 8:30-31).

The abyss may be a prison for evil spirits, because when Peter spoke about the death of Jesus, he said, **“Having indeed been killed in flesh, but made alive in spirit, in which also, having gone, he preached to the spirits in prison who were disobedient formerly, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah who prepared an ark in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water”** (First Peter 3:18-20). I speak more about that passage in the appendix to this book.

The prison that Peter mentioned was probably the abyss, because when Paul was encouraging us to live by faith in God’s word, and not try to understand everything, one of the things he said was, **“Thou should not say in thy heart ... Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)”** (Romans 10:7). And when the devil is bound for a thousand years he is going to be cast into the abyss (See Revelation 20). Thus, the abyss seems to be a prison for evil spirits. I speak much more about the devil and the demons, and how they operate, in the next chapter

Combatting those enemies

Paul spoke of our struggle with those enemies from heaven when he said to his brothers in Ephesus, **“... our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principal offices, against the positions of authority, against the world-rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things”** (Ephesians 6:12).

I believe those **“spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things”** that Paul said we wrestle with are the devil and the demons. For I believe the words “heavenly things” indicate they were spiritual creatures who had been in heaven but are now on the earth. And they manifest themselves to us primarily in the evil thoughts and evil behavior of men. For remember, the devil is **“the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). Remember also the passages that tell how the devil manipulated men to commit sin, as this one in the book of Acts: **“But Peter said, Ananias, why did Satan fill thy heart for thee to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back from the price of the land?”** (Acts 5:3).

Nevertheless, we should have no more fear of evil spirits than we fear evil creatures such as germs that our flesh continually wrestles with to keep us healthy. Evil things may harm our flesh, but keep your mind and your behavior spiritually clean, and nothing, including evil spir-

its, can harm your eternal spirit. Remember these words of James: **“Be subordinate therefore to God, but resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7). Therefore, we should not fear the devil.

However, we should not be foolish and rail against the devil either. For he has great power, and God may allow him to rebuke you for being overconfident. Even the agent of God who disputed with the devil did not rail against him. For the passage says, **“But Michael the arch-agent, when he disputed with the devil, contending about the body of Moses, dared not bring a railing judgment, but said, May the Lord rebuke thee”** (Jude 1:9).

Think righteous thoughts

Hearken also to these words of encouragement by Paul: **“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your requests known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally brothers, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are commendable, if anything is a virtue, and if anything is praiseworthy, think on these things”** (Philippians 4:6-8).

Think on things virtuous and praiseworthy. We should practice thinking righteous thoughts. Develop the habit of thinking righteous thoughts and rejecting evil ones. Hearken also to these words from the wise king Solomon: **“My son, attend to my words. Incline thine ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes. Keep them in the midst of thy heart. For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life”** (Proverbs 4:20-23).

Keep words of truth and righteousness always in your heart, and keep your heart with all diligence. For some of the most evil things men have done were preceded by their harboring evil thoughts. Drive them out of your mind as soon as you notice them. And remember, righteous thoughts are not just about righteous things. Righteous thoughts also include thinking about how to condemn and oppose evil.

And always remember, whether God allows us to be afflicted by the devil, by germs, or by demons, nothing can separate us from his love. As Paul said, **“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or restriction, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, For thy sake we are**

killed the whole day long. We are considered as sheep of slaughter.

“But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor agents, nor principal positions, nor powers, nor things that have come, nor things that are coming, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

Resist evil thoughts

Some of the evil thoughts in our minds may be the devil’s efforts to influence us, and some may come from our own corrupted flesh. Nevertheless, whatever is the source of them, always resist evil thoughts as well as evil behavior. The best way to resist evil thoughts is to think righteous thoughts. Apply these words of Paul to your thoughts: **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21).

And remember what Jesus said about a man who had been possessed by evil spirits: **“When the unclean spirit departs out of the man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest. And not finding, it says, I will return to my house from where I came out. And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and having entered in, it dwells there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first”** (Luke 11:22-26). If a man is not thinking good thoughts he will be thinking bad thoughts. For there is no such thing as neutral thinking. Therefore, always resist evil thinking with good thinking.

And let not evil men tempt you to flirt with evil thinking. This world is now filled with men who glamorize evil thinking. But beware of it, because evil thinking is deadly. Like narcotic substances, it can destroy your soul. Do not allow your mind to become a mental sewer. Keep it clean and wholesome. And that means to avoid exposing yourself to morally filthy experiences, although sometimes they are unavoidable because there is now so much of it.

Also take heed to this warning by the apostle John: **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but examine the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (First John 4:1). And that warning includes the very thoughts of our own minds. For the prophet Jeremiah said, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt. Who can know it?”** (Jeremiah 17:9). Do not allow yourself to be deceived by anything,

including your own heart. Confirm the truth of everything you believe about things spiritual by using authentic evidence from the Bible. And then nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Exorcism

Unless the hearts of sinners are permanently hardened, those who have the spirit of the devil working in them, and who give heed to the doctrines of demons, have the will power to repent, oppose those influences, and free themselves of them. However, the Bible says that those who were possessed by demons which caused neurological disorders were unable to heal themselves. Only God has the power to heal persons possessed that way by demons. And he only gave that power to a few Christians during the time when the church was beginning.

God has not given such supernatural power since, nor will he ever give it again. Therefore, if demon possession is suspected, then we can only rely upon prayer. It is both presumptuous and useless to attempt exorcism. And it can even cause more trouble. Consider this example of men attempting exorcism presumptuously:

“And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so as to even bring handkerchiefs or aprons from his skin to those who were incapacitated and to free their infirmities from them, and the evil spirits to go out from them. But some of the wandering Jewish exorcists, attempted to name the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul proclaims. And there were some sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, seven doing this.

“And having answered, the evil spirit said, I know Jesus and I recognize Paul, but who are ye? And the man in whom was the evil spirit, leaping on them, and having overpowered them, he prevailed against them, so as for them to flee out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:11-16).

Also, since it is impossible to diagnose whether anybody is possessed by demons, then we should never make that assumption. We are only justified in humbly asking God to intervene—if there is a possibility of that. Furthermore, we should never rely upon prayer only. Other efforts should be utilized, including clinical ones that are available to treat a disordered mind, unless such methods are in violation of the righteousness taught by God.

Dear brothers, this world is filled with enemies of God and his righteousness, including some from heaven. And his enemies are our ene-

mies. We can see those enemies who originated on the earth, but those from heaven are invisible to us. And our information about those invisible enemies from heaven is very limited. Why God has not informed us much about them is unclear. Perhaps he does not want us to worry about them. Like the invisible germs that are everywhere around us, we must be cautious about them, but never anxious and fearful.

For Paul said, **“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your requests known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:6-7). And Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper, **“Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many dwellings, and if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will take you along to myself, so that where I am, ye may be also”** (John 14:1-3).

THE NATURE OF OUR WORLD

The great war for the souls of men

Compared with the glories of the heavenly world, life in this world is a tribulation. For it is filled with sin and wickedness, and is a cosmic battleground in the war between God and the devil for our souls. And Jesus told how he is a part of that great war.

Here are two passages that quote what he said about that warfare: **“Think not that I came to spread peace on the earth. I came not to spread peace, but a sword”** (Matthew 10:34), and, **“I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what I desire is if it were kindled already. ... Do ye suppose that I came to give peace on the earth? I tell you, no, but rather division. For henceforth there will be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. A father will be divided against a son, and a son against a father, a mother against a daughter, and a daughter against a mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”** (Luke 12:49, 51-53).

Paul spoke of that warfare as a good warfare. In a letter he wrote to Timothy, he said, **“This command I set before thee, child Timothy, according to the prophecies leading the way for thee, so that by them thou might war the good warfare”** (First Timothy 1:18). And in that same letter to him, he said, **“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life for which thou are called, and confessed the good confession in the sight of many witnesses”** (First Timothy 6:12). It is a good fight of the faith, the faith we have in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our warfare is not against flesh and blood. That kind of warfare is the responsibility of designated authorities in governments. Our warfare is a spiritual war against wickedness in the world, wickedness from both earthly and heavenly spirits who are opposed to God. And remember, Jesus said there can be no neutral observers in that war: **“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters”** (Matthew 12:30). This world is a cosmic battleground in the war between God and the devil for our souls, and every man must choose between them, whether he realizes it or not. If a man will not choose God, he automatically chooses the devil.

Paul wrote about how we war against evil forces, when he said, **“For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the**

demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled” (Second Corinthians 10:3-6).

Paul said we struggle to bring **“every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ.”** Our spiritual war involves thoughts and ideas, because they are what influence our souls to believe and obey God or not. That is why the power of God for salvation is through preaching the good news of Christ, as Paul said, **“For I am not ashamed of the good news of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to every man who believes, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek”** (Romans 1:16).

Ours is a spiritual warfare against all the evil things that would turn our hearts away from God, of which there are very many. Indeed, the competition against God for the minds of men is an obvious fact throughout the world. Almost everywhere you go you can see the many things that would lure us away from his righteousness. There are not only people who tempt us, but there are many other things as well. There are things in our stores, in the books and magazines that are published, in the programs that are broadcast, in all the trials and temptations we face. And there are many things to deceive us. There is truly a great spiritual war in the world for our souls. And the devil has a vast army that is serving him.

Paul told how we are to prepare ourselves for our warfare, by putting on special armor: **“Finally my brothers, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the full armor of God to enable you to stand against the wiles of the devil. Because our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principal offices, against the positions of authority, against the world-rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things.**

“Because of this take ye up the full armor of God, so that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand ye therefore having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet in preparation of the good news of peace.

“Above all having taken up the shield of faith, by which ye will be able to quench all the fiery darts of evil. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying through every prayer and entreaty at every time in spirit, and being alert in this same thing in all perseverance and entreaty for all the sanctified ...” (Ephesians 6:10-18).

The war between God and the devil began in heaven. It was apparently like a cold war for a long time, even before the world began. But after Jesus lived his victorious life on the earth, it became a hot war in heaven. Satan was condemned to leave there, but remember he and his agents fought, and they had to be cast out to the earth.

Satan is continuing his war against God in this world. For remember, John said he heard a great voice in heaven, saying, **“Rejoice because of this, O heavens, and ye who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has little time”** (Revelation 12:12). And God is allowing him to continue to fight against him here because God is developing sons for eternity, and they need to be tested.

The book of Revelation tells more about Satan and his kingdom, and their war against God, than any other book in the Bible. And the last half of this book is my analysis of what Revelation says about that great spiritual conflict. For it is an ongoing conflict that cannot be avoided. And every man needs to know about it. Therefore, if you love God, then gird up your loins, put on the full armor, and join forces with him, because he has given us the supreme opportunity to fight for the ultimate victory, and to become his sons for eternity.

Notice in the former passage that I quoted from Ephesians, it says that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Our armor is not just for defense, because a sword is not a defensive weapon. Swords are used to fight offensively. And remember what Paul said about fighting when he was near the end of his life: **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me in that day, and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing”** (Second Timothy 4:7-8).

He also said to Timothy, **“Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man who serves in the military entangles himself in the affairs of life, so that he may please the man who enlisted the army”** (Second Timothy 2:3-4). Entangling ourselves in the affairs of life means living for the flesh instead of for the Spirit. Jesus gave a parable that includes an example of how men entangle themselves in the affairs of life. Here is how he explained the parable to his disciples: **“Hear ye then the parable of the man who sows. Of every man who hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, evil comes, and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is that which was sown by the wayside.**

“And that which was sown upon the rocky places, this is he who hears the word, and straightaway receiving it with joy, yet he has

no root in himself, instead it is temporary. And when tribulation or persecution develops because of the word, straightaway he is caused to stumble.

“And that which was sown in the thorns, this is he who hears the word, and the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of wealth, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

“But that which was sown upon the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who indeed bears fruit, and is productive, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:18-23).

The care of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth are ways men entangle themselves in the affairs of life. Our warfare is a war of spiritual truth and light against spiritual darkness and deceit. It is a spiritual warfare involving ideas, because ideas are what control the souls of men. Therefore our war must be fought with ideas. And the most powerful ideas are taught in the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. And that is why I write my books.

A world of tribulation

Regarding tribulations, Jesus said to his apostles during the last supper, **“These things I have spoken to you, so that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33). We have tribulation because this is a world of tribulation. And we are expected to patiently endure our many tribulations (those that are necessary for our salvation). As the record says about Paul, he was **“strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22). Enduring tribulations is necessary, because Jesus said, **“And he who does not take his cross and follow behind me, is not worthy of me”** (Matthew 10:38). Taking the cross is a symbol of enduring tribulation for God’s righteousness.

Solomon even spoke of the world as a great tribulation: **“And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven. It is a great tribulation that God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith”** (Ecclesiastes 1:13). And there is a passage in the book of Revelation that says the same thing: **“And one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these who are clothed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, My lord, thou know. And he said to me, These are those coming out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the**

Lamb” (Revelation 7:13-14). That was about souls resurrected to heaven who became sons of God for eternity.

Not only is this world a great tribulation for us, but the apostle Paul said that it is a world subject to futility and in the bondage of corruption: **“For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. Because the creation itself will also be freed from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation is groaning and travailing together until now. And not only so, but also ourselves who have the first fruit of the Spirit. And we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body”** (Romans 8:20-23).

Solomon also said about our world, **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has man from all his labor in which he labors under the sun? One generation goes, and another generation comes, but the earth abides forever. ... All things are full of weariness, man cannot utter it”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2-4, 8).

Solomon said that everything was vanity and all things are full of weariness. Everything is vain and wearisome because all material things are meaningless in themselves, and they all eventually perish. Only spiritual things endure and have meaning. Without our hope of heaven, life in this world is truly vain. And Solomon gave many examples in his book Ecclesiastes to illustrate that vanity. The greatest vanity is death, because that happens to everybody no matter how successfully they may live.

For those whose hope is only in this life, **“... all is vanity.”** For death will destroy their every hope. Speaking about those who believe in Christ, Paul said, **“If we are men who have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men more miserable”** (First Corinthians 15:19). We would be more miserable because we sacrifice our worldly lives for our hope in the good news of Christ. On the other hand, if our hope in the good news of Christ is true, then we are of all men more blessed. And as for myself, I trust God that our hope is indeed true. Remember, John said, **“And this is the promise that he promised us: the eternal life”** (First John 2:25). That is our hope.

The scientific term for the world’s bondage of corruption is called entropy. Entropy is a measure of the disorder in a closed system, and it is a result of the second law of thermodynamics. That law says the total entropy of any closed thermodynamic system tends to increase over time. And our universe is a closed thermodynamic system (in terms of its natural order), and disorder is always increasing in it no matter how much order we may create. For everything that is made

orderly requires the breakdown of the order of other things, such as the food and fuel used for energy. And overall there is always more disorder created than order. Even the sun and the stars are wearing out.

The Bible speaks of entropy in passages like this one which says the world is growing old like a garment: **“Of old thou [Jehovah God] laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shall endure. Yea, all of them shall grow old like a garment. As a vesture thou shall change them, and they shall be changed, but thou are the same, and thy years shall have no end”** (Psalms 102:25-27). Our world is growing old like a garment because it is in the bondage of corruption.

From the beginning

Remember the passage that says, **“For the creation was made subject to futility ... because of him who subjected it in hope”** (Romans 8:20). The creation was made subject to futility because of God himself, not because of sin. He made it subject to futility because of hope. Hope that our lives in it will make us worthy of eternal sonship.

It is a place of testing for our souls. Peter spoke of how our faith in God is proven by fire: **“In which ye greatly rejoice, although made sorrowful in various trials. Since it is now necessary for a little while, so that the proof of your faith, much more precious than gold that perishes, and though proven by fire, may be found for praise and honor and for glory at the revealing of Jesus Christ”** (First Peter 1:6-7). And that fire is this life of tribulation.

God made the world a place of tribulation in the bondage of corruption from the beginning. He did not change the entire world from being incorruptible to one of corruption based simply upon the sin of Adam. The sin of Adam caused his own corruption, and God sent him from the garden of Eden so he could not eat of the tree of life and live forever.

God did not make our world a place free of pain before Adam and Eve sinned, because after the sin God said to Eve, **“I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy childbearing, in pain thou shall bring forth children”** (Genesis 3:16). He was going to greatly multiply the natural pain in childbearing. Thus, some pain in childbearing (including child rearing) was part of being a woman from the beginning, which pain is part of the **“groaning and travailing”** that Paul spoke about in this world subject to futility. The curse of her sin only increased it. It is much more difficult to bear and rear children now. I explain more about that in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*.

The Bible says that the tree of life was only in the garden of Eden. That means it was not available worldwide. And it is very improbable that all the vegetation in the world that God created on the third day was free from the force of death. The book of Revelation suggests that life in this world has always been subject to the forces of strife, struggle and labor for survival, and death—except in the garden of Eden. I speak more about that in the chapter *Our Lives in the World*. Adam had been in the garden because he was a son of God. It was after he sinned that he lost his eternal sonship and was sent out of the garden to suffer from those forces in this world of tribulation.

Nevertheless, even though our world has always been in the bondage of corruption, there is evidence that it was a much more peaceful place until Adam brought sin into the world and men filled it with violence. For none of the birds and beasts that God created before the great flood were carnivorous. Here is what it says about them after God created males and females of mankind on the sixth day: **“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed. To you it shall be for food, and to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps upon the earth in which there is life, for food—every green herb. And it was so”** (Genesis 1:30). Even all the fish may have been herbivorous.

Then after the flood God told Noah and his sons, **“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. As the green herb, I have given you all”** (Genesis 9:3). And that would include food for the beasts as well. The fact there were no carnivorous beasts before the flood, and other facts about animal breeding, indicate the first birds and beasts were of a very limited number, with nothing like the great variety that now populates the earth. Hence, Noah’s ark could easily have carried samples of them all. Incidentally, the law of Moses placed many restrictions on what kinds of animals the sons of Israel could eat (see Leviticus 11), but Jesus removed all those restrictions when he created his church (see Mark 7:18-19).

Since there were no carnivorous beasts on the earth before the flood it must have been much less violent. Animals did not kill and eat each other, and they had no fear of men. The Bible says animals did not fear men until after the flood: **“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the heavens, with all with which the ground teems, and all the fishes of the sea”** (Genesis 9:1-2).

Regarding the vegetation, when Jehovah punished Adam because of his sin, he said, “... **cursed is the ground for thy sake. In toil thou shall eat of it all the days of thy life. Also, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to thee, and thou shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face thou shall eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it thou were taken. For thou are dust, and to dust thou shall return**” (Genesis 3:17-19). That passage indicates the vegetation of the world was also much more benign and helpful before Adam sinned. When God cursed Adam he added thorns and thistles in the world, and made the ground more difficult to produce food.

The world may have been much more peaceful in other ways as well. There were probably no violent things such as earthquakes and storms before the flood. It was mankind that brought sin and violence into the world. Earthquakes and storms are a result of curses that God sends against mankind because of their sinfulness. I speak more about that in the chapter *God’s Wrath Against the World*. God made this world in the bondage of corruption because it would be a proving ground for his offspring to demonstrate their worthiness to be his sons for eternity. It would also be a battleground in the cosmic war between God and the devil.

This world is in the bondage of corruption because God knew from the beginning that Adam would sin eventually, although he did not cause it. For he has confined all men in disobedience, as Paul said: “**For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all**” (Romans 11:32). And God knew that his Son would need to suffer in this world in order to redeem us. Remember what Revelation says about his suffering: “... **the Lamb [Jesus] who was killed from the foundation of the world**” (Revelation 13:8).

As soon as God began the Creation, “**from the foundation of the world,**” Jesus was destined to die for us. And although we are all confined in disobedience, we can all be redeemed from condemnation because of the obedient death of God’s sinless Son Jesus Christ. And that is how God is “**merciful to all.**” I speak much more about sin in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*.

Knowing all of those things, God was not going to make an incorruptible world that would be filled with sin. Men who believe the world was perfect at the beginning quote the passage that says, “**And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good**” (Genesis 1:31). However, that means it was very good for all the purposes he made it, and not that it was good in every way. For remember, Paul also said, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to pur-**

pose” (Romans 8:28). And that “good” does not mean all things work together for our worldly happiness free from sorrow, hardship, and other things that cause our groaning.

Furthermore, God made the statement, about everything being very good, after Adam and Eve sinned. For Adam and Eve were made before the other males and females of mankind were created. That is told in Genesis 2:4-25, which I also explain in the chapter *The Sin of Adam*.

God also may have made the world in the bondage of corruption to discourage men from putting all their hopes here. We who are striving to become his sons for eternity put our hope in the heavenly world. When the author of the book Hebrews was speaking of their righteous forefathers, he said, **“All these died in faith, not having taken the promises, but who saw and greeted them from afar, and who confessed that they were foreigners and sojourners on the earth. For those who say such things show that they are seeking a fatherland”** (Hebrews 11:13-14). Our eternal fatherland is in heaven.

Satan existed before the world was created, and God had other enemies in his heavenly world before he made this one. Apparently another reason God made this world was to allow those enemies to roam here with greater freedom to do their own will (within the limits he has set) even though they oppose him. The devil competes with God, and perhaps he thought he could change the world to make it better if he had the chance to do it his way. That is a very common attitude among sinners; they think they can make the world a better and happier place if they do things their way, and not God’s way.

For his sons

The main purpose for this world was to be a proving ground for the development of his eternal sons. It is the place where his offspring can choose to become his sons for eternity, or they can reject him like his enemies, and live with more freedom to do their own will. Only men and women have the potential to become sons of God for eternity. Therefore, God made the world to be ruled by mankind. That means we are to be lords of the world. For remember what God said to them after the creation: **“Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”** (Genesis 1:28).

God did not create a finished world. He made the raw materials of it at the beginning, and with them he created things to impose some order in it. And then he created mankind to continue the creation process. We are his offspring, and our duty is to **“Be fruitful, and multi-**

ply, and fill the earth, and have power over it.” And we are also to rule over all other living things. He made us lords of the earth so that we could continue creating things to make it better (within the limits of its bondage of corruption). We are to make things better in order to fill the earth with his offspring to have more souls with the opportunity to become his sons for eternity.

Not only are we the lords of the earth, but Jesus even said that we are gods. He said that when he was debating with the Jews. For when he said to them, **“I and the Father are one,”** they accused him of making himself God: **“Therefore again the Jews took up stones so that they might stone him. Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from my Father. Because of them, which work do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, We stone thee not about a good work, but about blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, make thyself God.”**

Jesus answered them again, saying, **“Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods? If he designated those men gods, for whom the word of God came to be (and the scripture cannot be broken), whom the Father made holy and sent into the world, do ye say, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God? If I am not doing the works of my Father, do not believe me. But if I am doing them, even though ye do not believe me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him”** (John 10:31-38).

Jesus quoted that Old Testament passage (Psalm 82:6) to remind the people that we are even gods. It is the devil and those deluded by him that deny we are gods. We are gods because we are God’s offspring with the potential to become his sons for eternity. However, we are nothing like the gods worshiped by sinners. We are gods by being sons of God. And all who are disciples of Christ are united with him through his Holy Spirit.

All who reject Christ and his righteousness lose their divinity and will be condemned to perish. That is told in the same part of the psalm that Jesus quoted from: **“God stands in the congregation of God. He judges among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and respect the persons of the wicked? ... Judge the poor man and the orphan. Do justice to the afflicted and destitute man. Rescue the poor and needy man. Deliver from the hand of the wicked man. They know not, nor do they understand. They walk to and fro in darkness. All the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High. Nevertheless ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the rulers”** (Psalm 82:1-7).

That passage says God judges among the gods. And those who do things like respect the persons of the wicked, fail to show mercy and do justly, and who walk to and fro in darkness, will **“die like men.”** That means all who live unrighteously will lose their divinity and will perish. They will perish in the second death, which is described in the book of Revelation: **“This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14-15).

God is King of kings and Lord of lords, both in heaven and on the earth. And he has made mankind the lords of the earth under his authority. He is also sharing with us the experience of being lords in a world where there are many hostile elements, evil creatures, and rebellious spirits. Thus on the earth God is giving us the opportunity to experience what he does; namely, living righteously and productively while having to endure hostile opposition of many kinds. And all men who endure the trials and temptations of this world filled with God’s enemies, choosing good and opposing evil, can qualify to become God’s sons for eternity in heaven.

What man is there who has ever attempted to do something good and useful that has not experienced some frustration and disappointment from things that interfere with his efforts? What man is there who has ever attempted to create something productive and constructive, that has not struggled with material failures, breakdowns, and other kinds of interference from both things and men?

What mother is there who has ever attempted to rear her children properly that has not experienced some frustration and disappointment from things that interfere with her efforts? What righteous mother is there who has ever attempted to teach and discipline her children, who has not had to struggle with resistance, opposition, and conflict?

What righteous man has never become weary of trying to do good, while numerous things were hindering him? Who among us has never had to contend with diseases, corrosion, and various kinds of filth? What man is there who is trying to live right, that has never suffered because of the hostility, lies, cruelty, and treachery of other men?

The devil does not want men to know the true cause of all the troubles of the world. Therefore, he keeps them deceived about why we have them. He wants men to join him and blame God for our suffering. That way he can keep them alienated from God and subject to him instead. Nevertheless, the source of all the troubles of the world is sin and opposition to God and his righteousness. And God, who labors the most to do good, suffers the most from it.

God suffers from the sins of the world because his Spirit is a necessary part of it. He is intimately involved with this world that he made, and he is aware of everything that happens. And some of our greatest feelings of sorrow and pain are when we simply see and learn about terrible things, especially when they happen to those we love. Sin causes grief to God, and it causes grief to every righteous soul.

Remember, God is giving us the opportunity to experience suffering for righteousness as he does. Consider these words of Paul: **“I now rejoice in sufferings for you, and make complete in my flesh things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, which is the church”** (Colossians 1:24). Paul said he was making complete in his flesh **“things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, which is the church.”** It is because of the afflictions of the Christ that we can become sons of God for eternity. And as an apostle, Paul was adding to the words of the good news of Christ that Jesus had not given while he was still in the world. And those words were also a result of afflictions.

Also remember what Paul said about the continued suffering of God: **“And if God, wanting to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, even that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he previously prepared for glory, namely us whom he called, not only from Jews but also from Gentiles”** (Romans 9:22-24).

God is enduring opposition against him, with much longsuffering, in order to make known the wealth of his glory upon the vessels of mercy, namely everyone who trusts and obeys him. He even took on our form to help us become his sons for eternity. And that form is his “weak thing,” which he will keep as long as his offspring are qualifying.

In a sense, as his offspring our earthly form is the “weak thing” of our eternal identity. Therefore, how can we complain about the suffering we endure while we are in this weaker form? Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, never complained. God is suffering with us to enable us to become his eternal sons. Although God suffers in a different kind of way, he still suffers as long as this rebellious world exists. He suffers in his Spirit. Remember these words about the sinfulness of the antediluvian world: **“And Jehovah regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart”** (Genesis 6:6).

Knowing those things, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15). And Jesus has promised that if we continue to trust and obey him, while enduring with much longsuffering

the sorrows and tribulations of this life, he has promised to reward us with eternal sonship in heaven. If we follow him by faithfully doing good and opposing evil, then when our body perishes, then he will take our spirit up in heaven to live for eternity with him in that new and perfect place **“in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13).

Paul also said about our suffering, **“For our slight momentary affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory from extraordinariness to extraordinariness, while we look not at things seen, but at things not seen. For things seen are temporal, but things not seen are eternal”** (Second Corinthians 4:15-18). Paul certainly suffered greatly, yet he said that no matter how severe is our suffering, it is slight and momentary compared with the glory that God has prepared for us. If you trust and obey God it will happen!

Sons of the devil

Nevertheless, God has also warned that all who join the devil to oppose his truth and righteousness will suffer eternal condemnation. For they are the sources of opposition against all who are attempting to do good. Remember, the word *satan* means adversary. And every man who opposes God by sinning against him is a child of Satan. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews who were opposing him: **“Ye are from the father, the devil, and ye want to do the desires of your father”** (John 8:44).

Jesus once even called Peter “Satan.” That happened when Peter was discouraging him from submitting to the cross. Here is what the record says about it: **“But he, having turned around, and having looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Go thee behind me, Satan, because thou think not the things of God, but the things of men”** (Mark 8:33). Jesus loved Peter greatly. Indeed, he gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Yet when Peter opposed him, no matter how noble was his motive, Jesus called him Satan. And whenever we oppose God, no matter how noble our motives may be, we become a son of the devil.

Paul called a sorcerer a son of the devil when he kept opposing him. For the record says, **“But Saul (the man is also Paul) having been filled with the Holy Spirit, and having gazed on him, said, O man full of all deceit and all recklessness, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, will thou not cease distorting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, behold, a hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou will be blind, not seeing the sun until a time. And immediately there fell on him gloom and darkness, and going around he sought hand-guides”** (Acts 13:9-11).

John also told how we can identify the children of the devil, when he said, **“By this the children of God are visible, and the children of the devil. Every man not doing righteousness is not of God, and he who is not loving his brother”** (First John 3:10). That is a very simple way of identifying those who belong to the devil. Every man who does not live righteously and does not love other men who live righteously, is a child of the devil.

Very good for his purposes

After describing the creation of our world, the Bible says, **“And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”** (Genesis 1:31). God made this world as a very good place to serve his many purposes, especially to allow us to become his sons for eternity. When God said everything he made was very good, he did not mean the world was a place of perfection. Even heaven is not a place of perfection, because agents there sometimes sin. Only the new Jerusalem will be a place of perfection, because everyone who is considered worthy to be there will have forsaken sin forever. I speak more about those things in the chapter *The New Heaven and Earth*.

Everything in this world serves God’s purposes, whether those things are good or evil. For example, Solomon said, **“Jehovah has made everything for its own end, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil”** (Proverbs 16:4). And never forget this passage: **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). God made this world as a very good place to serve his purposes, even though it is a place of tribulation in the bondage of corruption.

Sin is being tolerated now, but the world will not last forever. For remember, God is enduring (tolerating) **“with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, even that he might make known the wealth of his glory upon vessels of mercy ...”** (Romans 9:22-24). And those vessels of mercy are all who strive to become his sons for eternity.

THE BEGINNING OF OUR WORLD

God began our world with what we call raw material. For the Bible says, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters”** (Genesis 1:1-2). Perhaps what is meant by the heavens and the earth in that passage is space and matter. Perhaps in the description of the Creation the word waters is used in two ways. It may first refer to a kind of diffuse cloud of elements that filled space. And from that cloud God began to impose law and order in that space. And perhaps the first order he created from it was our planet earth, which he covered with water as we normally use the word.

And perhaps also our planet earth is actually the center of the universe, although it is definitely not the center of our galaxy, for no life could exist in such a place. Most astronomers claim there is no center to our world. They claim it is more like the surface of a growing balloon with a center nowhere on the surface. How can there be a surface like a balloon without something like a balloon? And how can there be a balloon without a center?

Their explanation sounds very strange, especially when they claim the earth began as a Big Bang. How could something begin from a tiny substance that was nowhere? Perhaps they think the center of that “balloon” is in some other dimension that is inaccessible to us. One thing I do know, modern scientists have invented many bizarre theories to explain the world without God. And the science of cosmology seems to have the most bizarre of them.

Nevertheless, what I have suggested about the beginning of Creation is only conjecture, because the Bible does not explain those things. However, the Bible does say clearly that God created the world in six days. Many men deny those words, and claim the world is billions of years old. However, anybody who has studied the Bible carefully, and learned about the true God, the Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth, knows that he does not require years, much less eons, to create great things.

Consider this passage about the prophet Ezekiel: **“The hand of Jehovah was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of Jehovah, and set me down in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones. And he caused me to pass by them round about. And, behold, there were very many in the open valley, and, lo, they**

were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O lord Jehovah, thou know.

“Again he said to me, Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of Jehovah. Thus says the lord Jehovah to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah.

“So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a noise, and, behold, an earthquake, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I beheld, and, lo, there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above, but there was no breath in them.

“Then he said to me, Prophecy to the wind. Prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the lord Jehovah: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceedingly great army” (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

How many years did it take Jehovah to create that exceedingly great army? He created them in only a few minutes of time. No doubt he could have created them more quickly, but he slowed the process down so that Ezekiel could see it. God did not need years to create that exceedingly great army. And God did not need years, much less eons to create our world.

Now what would the natural man, a man who does not accept God’s testimony, and did not himself see how such an army was created, what would he conclude about such an army? The natural man would conclude from the “empirical evidence” that it took many years for those men to be born, grow to maturity, and assemble into an exceedingly great army. Such conclusions, based upon ignoring God’s testimony, are examples of men who trust in mythical theories like evolution instead of the testimony of God about his creation.

The second son of God

On day one God created light. However, it was a special kind of light that was temporary, because he did not create the sun, moon, and stars until the fourth day. Perhaps whatever produced the glow of light initially involved some other kind of daily cyclic activity, such as gigantic waves of light and darkness in the cloud of space before God coalesced the cloud into the celestial bodies that now exist. If that were the case then the cycle would probably have been from all night

to all day for the whole world (instead of the moving half night and half day as it is now). Perhaps it was like sound waves in the air, where the pressure waves of the cloud produced light.

The Bible says that on the second day God created the firmament, which is our atmosphere. When God first made the earth it was covered with water. And on the second day when he created the atmosphere he caused it to contain some of that water. That was to help support life on land, which he first created on the third day.

On the third day God separated the surface waters to form some dry land, and then he created Adam. (I explain his creation on the third day a little farther on.) God first created his body, then he breathed the breath of life in him. The breath of life that God gave him was of his own Spirit. Therefore, Adam was a son of God.

Jesus was the first Son of God, and Adam was apparently his second one. However, Adam did not come into existence the way Jesus did. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and he is the exact image of the essence of the Father. He is the only begotten Son in the sense of being the uniquely begotten Son of God. There will never be another one like him. He is the first and the last.

Nevertheless, every disciple of Christ is begotten of God. Jesus taught that when he spoke to Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews. Jesus said to him, **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** The record then says, **“Nicodemus says to him, How can a man be begotten, being old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s belly, and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is begotten from the flesh is flesh, and that which is begotten from the Spirit is spirit”** (John 3:3-6).

However, Jesus is the only begotten Son of God in the sense of being uniquely begotten before time began. In the book of Revelation, John said that when he saw the heavenly body of Jesus he fell at his feet as though dead. Then John said, **“And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, and he who lives. And I became dead, and behold, I am living into the ages of the ages. Truly. And I have the keys of death and of Hades”** (Revelation 1:17-18). Jesus is the first and the last Son begotten from God himself. There will never be another one.

The body of Adam was created, and he was given life when God breathed into him. He breathed of his Spirit in him. Therefore, the Bible says Adam was a son of God. And Paul compared him with Jesus, when he said, **“And so it is written, The first man Adam**

developed into a living soul. The last Adam a life giving spirit. ... The first man was of the earth, earthly. The second man is the Lord from heaven” (First Corinthians 15:45-47).

The Bible says that Adam was created when **“no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up, for Jehovah God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. And there was not a man to till the ground, but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground”** (Genesis 2:5-6). God created both dry land and vegetation on the third day. Therefore, Adam was created on the third day after dry land appeared and before any vegetation. That means Adam was created before any other living thing on the earth.

After creating Adam, God made the garden of Eden, which was a special habitat for him. Perhaps one reason why God made the garden was that he wanted Adam to live in a protected environment separate from the normal activities of this world that is in the bondage of corruption. And since Adam was a son of God, then Jehovah God (the only begotten Son of God) wanted to be with him. Thus, he walked with Adam in the garden during the time of creation.

And apparently God treated him like an apprentice, because Adam was with him when God created the garden and the first birds and beasts. The creation of those animals is told with the story of the creation of Eve. The record says, **“And Jehovah God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make a help meet for him. And out of the ground Jehovah God formed every beast of the field, and every bird of the heavens, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was the name of it. And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the heavens, and to every beast of the field, but for man there was not found a help meet for him”** (Genesis 2:18-20). Perhaps Adam saw God create those animals out of the ground the way the prophet Ezekiel saw him create living men from dry bones.

There is much mystery about those animals. The precise number of different species of animals that now exist in the world is not known, but they are estimated to be in the millions. Hence, the animals that God created for Adam to consider were of a much smaller number. And I do not believe any of them still exist, because apparently none of those animals were capable of reproduction. For the Bible says that Eve was the mother of all living: **“And the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living”** (Genesis 3:20). That means she was the prototype mother, the first creature

ever created that was capable of bearing offspring. And those animals had been created before Eve was. Hence, none of them were females.

Those beasts were specially created to be potential help meets for Adam. They were birds and beasts, but they needed to be very intelligent and widely functional to even be considered as a help meet for him. Nevertheless, none of those animals were found suitable because they were not of the same flesh as Adam. That is when God created the woman to be a help meet for him. He created her in the image of Adam, and from part of the body of Adam himself. When Adam saw her he said, **“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man”** (Genesis 2:23). A woman is a man with a womb, a womb-man. Hence, he knew she could be a mother.

Paul spoke of her creation when he was giving reasons why women need to cover their heads during prayer: **“For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, being an image and glory of God, but woman is a glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. For also man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man”** (First Corinthians 11:7-9).

Every woman has the same potential to become a son of God for eternity, because every woman is an offspring of God made in his image and received of his Spirit. Every woman is made in the image of God because Eve was made in the image of Adam, who was made in the image of God. No animal is worthy to receive of the Spirit of God. Only men are worthy, because only we are in the image of God. And that may be the main lesson of that story.

Although women were created to be help-meets for men, and are not their equals, nevertheless, they have the same potential to become sons of God for eternity—if they too remain faithful and obedient to God, including their proper roles as help-meets for men and as mothers. And I thank God he gave me a faithful and righteous woman who has been a wonderful help-meet for me in so many ways, including with this book.

Those special birds and beasts that God created for Adam were probably created on the fourth day before any of the other birds and beasts of the world were created. For the birds and the beasts outside the garden were created on the fifth and sixth days. What happened to those special animals in the garden is another mystery. The garden probably covered a huge area, with plenty of room for those animals to live. However, they were probably sent out of the garden with Adam when he sinned. Therefore, they would have died out because they could not reproduce, and they did not have access to the tree of life. They probably stayed with Adam until they died.

The other men and women created

The Bible says that after God created the beasts on the sixth day he created mankind: **“And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”** (Genesis 1:27-28).

God used Adam and Eve as prototypes to create multiple copies of their bodies on the sixth day to comprise the rest of mankind. And he used those men and women to populate the earth as he did with the birds and the beasts. They were offspring of God, made in his image, but the Bible does not say they were sons of God. Remember, the agents in heaven are his offspring but not his sons. Those men and women were made in the image of God, and they were commanded to **“Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”** (Genesis 1:28).

Those males and females that God created on the sixth day were made after the sin of Adam, because they had the same altered body, and knowledge of good and evil that Adam had acquired from the forbidden fruit. That the sin of Adam altered the human body is shown by these words of Jehovah after the great flood: **“I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake, for that the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”** (Genesis 8:21). God did not create Adam with an evil imagination in his heart. That was a consequence of his acquiring knowledge of good and evil prematurely, about which I speak much more in the next chapter.

Regarding God’s judgment of those other men and woman created on the sixth day, they would have been judged as Paul said Gentiles would who did not have a law: **“For when the Gentiles who have no law do by nature the things of the law, these men, not having law, are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news”** (Romans 2:14-16).

Those men and women were judged that way, because when they became too sinful God destroyed them with the great flood. And there is no evidence he had ever given them a spoken or written law. Nev-

ertheless, he judged them by the law of righteousness written in their hearts, which is instinctive or intuitive knowledge of right and wrong that every man is born with. Although, like walking, it takes a little time to mature. And that intuitive knowledge consists of only the fundamentals of righteousness. Therefore, it is very important to reinforce that knowledge with good training, for the proverb says, **“Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it”** (Proverbs 22:6). Of course, like most proverbs that does not mean there will be no exceptions.

Why would God create Adam and his offspring to be sons of God, but not the rest of mankind? God does not create everything equal. He is not an egalitarian. He created men and women different, and he commanded women to be subservient to men (see First Peter 3:1-6). Nevertheless, God is always just, and he has a good reason for creating differences, whatever they may be. Therefore, if you want to be one of his sons for eternity, then trust and obey him, regardless of how he made you.

The Bible does show that God has always chosen a special people for himself. First he chose a race of people, which was Adam and his offspring before the flood, then Abraham and his offspring of promise (the Hebrews) after the flood. With the coming of Christ, God chose a people based upon their spirit not upon their flesh. Perhaps God always wanted a special people to be his sons who would be the spiritual leaders for the rest of the world, the priesthood of mankind.

THE SIN OF ADAM

Jehovah God said to Adam after he made the garden of Eden for him, **“Of every tree of the garden thou may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shall not eat of it. For in the day that thou eat of it thou shall surely die”** (Genesis 2:16-17). Nevertheless, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit of that tree; they ate it prematurely. And the knowledge they acquired was not intellectual but intuitive. Knowledge of good and evil is necessary to be creative. However, the proper control of that knowledge requires sufficient mental development in order to use it wisely. That is why children should never be given every kind of knowledge, because they cannot manage it properly.

There would certainly be less evil in this world if men were not able to have knowledge of good and evil until they had developed enough to have good judgment. Here is a passage from Hebrews that speaks of that: **“For every man partaking of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is childlike. But solid food is for mature men, those having their sensibilities trained through practice for the discernment of both good and evil”** (Hebrews 5:13-14). Avoidance of sin requires training to discern both good and evil. Nevertheless, although such training is necessary, it is still not sufficient. For we must all willfully choose good over evil.

Having knowledge of good and evil early in our childhood, and many other evil things about this world, makes it much more conducive to sin, which is very unlike the world of heaven. Most are obedient there, but most are disobedient here. Superficially therefore, it would seem to be a disadvantage to be an offspring of God in this world. However, that disadvantage is greatly outweighed by our opportunity here to become sons of God for eternity. For it is only in this world that offspring of God can qualify for that most wonderful gift.

Consider these words of Jesus: **“And to every man to whom much was given, much will be required from him. And to whom they entrust much, they will ask him more abundantly”** (Luke 12:48). Every man born into this world has been given the opportunity to become a son of God for eternity. Therefore, we are tested more severely. And we are required to endure much more temptation and hardship while attempting to live righteously.

We are required to endure much opposition to our righteousness, so that we can experience what God does when he strives to do good. God suffers through his unseen Spirit that works in this world that is filled with spirits who oppose him. And God is giving us the opportu-

nity to share that suffering for righteousness, which none of his offspring in heaven experience. (God sends agents into the world to do things, but there is no evidence they ever suffer.) Nevertheless, we all fail to avoid sinning against him, because the quality of our spirit is not strong enough to resist all of the temptations we face in this world of sin. Yet God has promised to forgive our sins when we commit our lives to his Son, Jesus Christ who never sinned.

Nevertheless remember, although we are given the great opportunity to become sons of God for eternity, we are going to be judged strictly about what we do with it. That is the lesson in the parable Jesus told about the men who were given various talents and were expected to use them wisely (see Matthew 25:13-30). For all who refuse to believe and obey God to live righteously are going to be cast into hell with the devil and the demons.

Satan accuses and tempts

Adam was commanded not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that was in the garden of Eden. And that was because his mental development was not ready. God told Adam the penalty for violating that command was death. He said to him, “... **in the day that thou eat of it thou shalt surely die.**” Adam did not die that day in the familiar sense. What happened on that day was the beginning of his death. A flower is not dead the minute it is cut from its plant. Its death is inevitable, but it does not die immediately. And that was how Adam died on the day he ate the forbidden fruit.

It is reasonable to wonder why the fruit of that tree was freely available in the garden. Perhaps it was available because Satan challenged God to test Adam. Satan may have argued that if men were to be the lords of the earth, with the potential to become sons of God for eternity, then they should demonstrate they are worthy of it. He may have told God that man should at least be tested to prove his worthiness.

God knew that eating that fruit prematurely would corrupt mankind, and apparently the devil knew that also. For Adam was the prototype man, and therefore represented the future of mankind. And if Adam ate the fruit of it prematurely, all of mankind from that time on would have a corrupted body. Therefore, Satan must have wanted him tested in the hope that he would be corrupted.

Remember how Satan challenged God about Job. Jehovah asked Satan if he saw how righteous a man Job was. Satan argued that Job would renounce God to his face if he suffered. Satan was arguing that all men are selfish, and every man is going to offend God sometime. According to Satan’s reasoning, no man was any more righteous than he and his followers were. Therefore, men are not worthy to be sons

of God. Remember, I suspect Satan and his allies in heaven were envious and resentful that God was going to make men to be his sons for eternity. And that may have been a major reason why the devil continually accused us to God before Jesus redeemed us.

There are many wicked men with the attitude that other men are no better than they are. It is a common attitude among career criminals. The law of Moses commanded capital punishment for career criminals (Numbers 15:30). That minority of criminals creates the majority of crimes, and they lure other men to commit crimes. They are a plague that needs to be eradicated for the good of the population. Those who defend and protect them are on the side of the devil.

Jehovah accepted Satan's challenge about Job, and he allowed Satan to persecute Job severely. Jehovah allowed Satan to do that for the sake of his other offspring. God knew that Job would prove he was right about him, and God's offspring needed to learn that. God's offspring need to learn that he is always right. Therefore, because of Satan's powerful influence on God's offspring, and the need for them to learn to always trust God, he accepted many, if not all of Satan's challenges. He accepted them until the earthly life of Christ proved the spiritual and moral supremacy of the Son of God, and justified the condemnation of Satan and his allies.

Paul even spoke of how the principle offices and the positions of authority in heaven needed to know the reason that only men on earth can qualify to become God's sons for eternity. Remember, Paul said, **“So that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things, through the church, according to the purpose of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through his faith”** (Ephesians 3:10-12).

Regarding Satan's accusations, remember, the Bible says that when he was still in heaven he continually accused us to God: **“And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night”** (Revelation 12:10).

There is an example of how Satan accused the sons of Israel when David was king. That story is told in two different books, but it is about the same event. In one book it says, **“And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel”** (First Chronicles 21:1). In another book it says, **“And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them,**

saying, Go, number Israel and Judah” (Second Samuel 24:1). What that means is that Satan accused the sons of Israel of being guilty of sin, and his accusation provoked Jehovah to cause David to number the population.

The reason God caused David to number the population was to test them. For one of the laws of Moses commanded each man to pay a ransom whenever they were numbered: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, When thou take the sum of the sons of Israel, according to those who are numbered of them, then they shall give every man a ransom for his soul to Jehovah when thou number them, that there be no plague among them when thou number them”** (Exodus 30:11-12).

The sons of Israel disobeyed that law, and so God punished them. You can read the details in those two books. However, I want to point out that David was not guilty because he numbered them. He blamed himself because the people suffered as a result. But God never accused David, nor did he punish him for numbering them. Most men have condemned David as the guilty one, but God did not. Therefore, be not a false accuser and blame David for causing that plague. The people were guilty, not David.

Satan continually accuses righteous men whether they are guilty or not. Nevertheless, we all eventually sin in some ways, and like Adam that brings condemnation. What brought salvation to men was the sinless life of God’s only begotten Son. He proved the devil had no defense for sin because Jesus lived without sin. He proved it was possible for a man to face every trial and temptation, and still live a sinless life upon the earth. For Satan could not justly accuse God’s Son of anything wrong.

During the last supper, Jesus said to his apostles, **“I will no longer speak many things with you, for the ruler of the world comes. And he has nothing on me ...** (John 14:30). The ruler of the world is Satan, and he was coming in his spirit, which was in the bodies of the sinful rulers of the Jews. Satan had nothing he could justifiably accuse Jesus about, yet he provoked those sinful rulers to crucify him anyway.

Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life, even though he was tested and tried severely. Therefore, Satan could no longer argue that sin was inevitable. Consequently, he was cast out of heaven. And remember, one reason he accused us continually was probably to justify himself and his followers. But Jesus earned the right to be our Redeemer so that we can no longer be justifiably accused. And all the redeemed of Christ will be adopted by God to be his sons for eternity. Remember what Jesus said: **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man**

comes to the Father, except by me” (John 14:6). Nevertheless, Satan’s allies in the world keep accusing us here so that we will be condemned by the world.

Adam may have passed the test by not eating the forbidden fruit if he had not been tempted by Eve. That was probably why Satan the serpent was willing to risk the punishment of God’s wrath in order to tempt her. He probably knew that she would be easier to deceive and tempt. And he knew that she would be a more effective way to tempt Adam. Remember, Paul said that Eve was deceived but Adam was not. Eve sinned because she was deceived. Adam was not deceived, but he sinned anyway because of the influence of his wife. And that happens countless times. For men often go against their best judgment because of the influence of their wives who are deceived.

Satan appeared to the woman in the garden of Eden. And the Bible says he appeared there as a serpent. That serpent was not a serpent of flesh, because no beast has the ability to converse as that one did. The book of Revelation says the devil is a fiery red dragon, and a dragon is a type of serpent. Adam and Eve in their purity were probably able to see things spiritual. And what Eve saw was Satan the dragon, but she was too innocent and naive to fear him. Nevertheless, the serpent tempted the woman to sin and eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. He deceived her, and she believed what he said instead of what God said. Therefore, she ate and gave to Adam who also ate of it.

The corrupted body of man

Eating that forbidden fruit somehow gave them knowledge of good and evil. The knowledge they received was not intellectual but intuitive. They sensed it was wrong to go about naked, and so they hid themselves from Jehovah when they heard him coming. Perhaps that fruit contained a hormone that triggered the development of that knowledge in their brain. For no doubt God planned for them to have it eventually when they were mentally prepared for it.

Regarding nakedness, it is natural for men and women to want to be clothed. Barbarians who go about naked have seared their conscience about such feelings. Paul wrote about sinful men with **“their own conscience having been seared with a hot iron ...”** (First Timothy 4:2). The conscience of little children has not developed sufficiently for them to know not to go about naked. Therefore, they are innocent about it, which is how Adam and Eve were at the beginning.

The sin of Adam meant the condemnation of all the sons of God, because the change it made to the body of Adam has been handed down to every man. As Paul said, **“Because of this, just as through**

one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, in that all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Our bodies now become aware of what is right and wrong early in our lives. And as a child none of us have the character and quality of spirit to resist every temptation. We cannot keep from sinning, because foolishness (that premature knowledge of evil) is bound up in our young hearts, as Solomon said: **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him”** (Proverbs 22:15). Thus, Satan could condemn every man as being unworthy of being a son of God by showing how every man offends God.

Remember, God said after the flood, **“... the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”** (Genesis 8:21). However, God did not create Adam that way; it was the result of his acquiring the knowledge of good and evil prematurely. God knew that the premature acquisition of that knowledge would cause every man to sin and corrupt himself. Therefore, he made the tree of life unavailable so that no man on earth could live forever: **“Behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil, and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever—therefore Jehovah God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken”** (Genesis 3:22-23).

Can you imagine what the world would be like if men lived forever on the earth? One of the greatest blessings to mankind is when wicked men perish, especially those who gain great power over many other people. This world would be a place of torment for most people if wicked men did not die here.

Adam acquired knowledge of good and evil prematurely. And since he was the prototype man, then having that knowledge prematurely is now a part of human nature. And the premature knowledge of evil seems to be why **“the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”** Consequently, even the best of men sin in their youth, because we have the ability to sin when we are too young to resist it.

As an example, consider the righteous man Job. When he was pleading to God during the time of his great ordeal, he said, **“Why do thou hide thy face, and reckon me for thine enemy? Will thou harass a driven leaf? And will thou pursue the dry stubble? For thou write bitter things against me, and make me to inherit the iniquities of my youth”** (Job 13:24-26). The very righteous man Job, whom God praised as a **“perfect and upright man”** (Job 1:1), had iniquities in his youth.

Even Jesus had to struggle with that evil imagination of his flesh, but he never sinned. He was always able to master his body to avoid it, for remember the writer of Hebrews said that Jesus **“was tempted in all things in the same way, without sin”** (Hebrews 4:15). Even though he was tempted in all things the way we are, he never sinned, because he is the only begotten Son of God, and his sinless life proved his moral and spiritual superiority.

After human nature became corrupted by Adam’s sin, we all now sin, all but God’s only begotten Son. God knows that we are all going to sin now in some way. He makes no man sin, but our bodies and the world are now such that we all do sin. Remember, the Bible says, **“For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all”** (Romans 11:32). And it also says, **“But scripture confined all things under sin, so that the promise from faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe”** (Galatians 3:22).

Confined in disobedience

God allowed our flesh to be corrupted, and he has allowed the world to be filled with evils and temptations, so that no mere man can live a sinless life. He has **“confined all men in disobedience.”** And he said the reason why was **“so that he might be merciful to all.”** Our failure to live without sin proves the moral and spiritual superiority of his only begotten Son. And that qualifies him to be our Redeemer and have supremacy over all things, including God’s offspring. For none of them can be proud and boast of equality with Jesus to live a sinless life in this world filled with temptations. His sinless life here made him fully perfect in his service to his Father (see Hebrews 2:10).

Our failure to avoid sin condemns us, but the success of Jesus enabled him to redeem us from that condemnation. And that is how God **“might be merciful to all.”** And that mercy works retroactively to men before Christ, even including Adam. Although Adam lost his eternal sonship with God, he was no doubt able to regain it the way we all do. Which means trusting God and committing our lives to his righteousness.

Thus, our sin and redemption were all part of God’s great plan to defeat his enemies, and develop sons for eternity. As Paul said, **“So that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things, through the church, according to the purpose of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through his faith”** (Ephesians 3:10-12).

God knew that eating the fruit of that tree prematurely would result in the corruption of mankind. It is not the knowledge of good and evil that corrupts us. It is our inability to keep from using it to sin. Consider these words of Paul: **“What will we say then? The law is sin? May it not happen! Yet I did not know sin except through law. For likewise I would not have known lust, if the law did not say, Thou shall not covet. But sin, having taken opportunity through the commandment, wrought in me every evil desire, for apart from law sin is dead.**

“And I was alive once apart from law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And I found to me, the commandment being for life, this is for death. For sin, having taken opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

“So the law is indeed holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Has therefore what is good become death to me? May it not happen! Instead, it is sin, so that it might be revealed, sin working death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment sin might become sinful to extreme” (Romans 7:7-13).

Substituting the words “knowledge of good and evil” for the words law and commandment in that passage, it would read this way:

What will we say then? The knowledge of good and evil is sin? May it not happen! Yet I did not know sin except through knowledge of good and evil. For likewise I would not have known lust, if the knowledge of good and evil did not say, Thou shall not covet. But sin, having taken opportunity through the knowledge of good and evil, wrought in me every evil desire, for apart from knowledge of good and evil sin is dead.

And I was alive once apart from knowledge of good and evil, but when the knowledge of good and evil came, sin revived, and I died. And I found to me, the knowledge of good and evil being for life, this is for death. For sin, having taken opportunity through the knowledge of good and evil, deceived me, and by it killed me.

So the knowledge of good and evil is indeed holy ... and righteous and good. Has therefore what is good become death to me? May it not happen! Instead, it is sin, so that it might be revealed, sin working death in me through what is good, so that through the knowledge of good and evil sin might become sinful to extreme.

Paul said that law (knowledge of good and evil) is **“what is good.”** Therefore, having that knowledge does not condemn us. We become

condemned when we use it to sin. Sin deceives us, and by using our knowledge of good and evil, it kills us. It kills us by making us guilty, just as it did with Adam. And the spirit of every man is deceived and condemned that way during the weakness of his youth.

One purpose of God allowing sin to become sinful to extreme was to demonstrate how evil sin is. For anyone with eyes to see knows how much evil is in this troubled world. And every bit of it is caused by sin against God. Another purpose of sin becoming sinful to extreme was to defeat God's enemies. For living in this world of sinfulness to extreme proves that no mere man can live without sin to avoid condemnation. Hence, we all sin and need to be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Those who love and obey him receive the gift of salvation from him, but God's incorrigible enemies refuse, and so they receive just condemnation. Unrepentant sinners will bear the full punishment of their sins.

The law of sin

We are all now born with the knowledge of good and evil, that intuitive sense of right and wrong. And the premature knowledge of evil means that foolishness in a natural part our childish minds. Remember what Solomon said about the mind of a child: **"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child ..."** (Proverbs 22:15). And every man who wants to be righteous must struggle against that foolishness we are born with, that premature ability to commit evil. Even Jesus was born with it, but he never allowed it to cause him to sin. Remember, it is not wrong to have knowledge of good and evil.

We are also born with a law of sin within our bodies. There is much mystery about it, but apparently when Adam sinned by eating the fruit of that tree prematurely it also created a law of sin in his body-parts. And since he was the prototype man, that law of sin is transmitted genetically to all of us. Paul mentioned the law of sin when he said, **"For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man, but I see a different law in my body-parts, warring against the law of my mind, and taking me captive in the law of sin, which is in my body-parts"** (Romans 7:22-23).

That law of sin is apparently what makes our flesh hostile to the purity of our spirit (our inner man). That law of sin does things like corrupt the normal appetites of our body into lusts, which urge us to indulge our appetites indiscriminately. And so both Peter and Paul warned about how our flesh is against our spirit. Peter said, **"Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"** (First Peter 2:11). And Paul said, **"But I say, walk in the Spirit and ye will, no, not fulfill a lust of**

the flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do” (Galatians 5:16-17).

Even Jesus was born that way. He too had to struggle against the law of sin in his flesh, but he never became captive to it. For Paul told how God sent his own Son in a form of flesh of sin to condemn sin. Remember what he said: **“Consequently nothing is condemnation now to those in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and of death. For the impotence of the law, in that it was weak because of the flesh, God, having sent his own Son in a form of flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the justice of the law might be fulfilled in us, those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**

“For those who are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mentality of the flesh is death, but the mentality of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mentality of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not submissive to the law of God, for neither is it able. And those who are in flesh cannot please God.

“But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, this man is not of him. And if Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up the Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwells in you.

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to flesh. For if ye live according to flesh, ye are going to die, but if in spirit ye kill the deeds of the body, ye will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:1-14).

Remember however, that corruption of our flesh does not corrupt our spirit until we sin, and Jesus never sinned. No doubt as soon as he was able he totally suppressed all the foolishness that was bound up in the heart of his flesh. And he never sinned to become captive to the law of sin in his body-parts. I say more about those things farther on.

Unlike Jesus, however, the rest of us sin, which then causes us to become captive in the law of sin. Remember, Paul said, **“I delight in**

the law of God according to the inner man, but I see a different law in my body-parts, warring against the law of my mind, and taking me captive in the law of sin, which is in my body-parts” (Romans 7:22-23). And that captivity keeps us doing things wrong even against our will. As Paul also said, **“For I do not do good that I want, instead, wrong that I do not want, this I do. But if I do this that I do not want, I no longer perform it, but sin dwelling in me. Consequently I find the law in my wanting to do good, that evil is present in me”** (Romans 7:19-21).

He was not speaking about willful sins against God’s commandments. He was referring to the constant things we do wrong that we try to avoid. I sometimes cut my finger. I sometimes bump into someone. I sometimes drop something accidentally. I sometimes forget to do something I said I would. Those are just a few of the things Paul meant by doing the wrong he did not want. They even include things we do accidentally that cause great harm or even death.

Such things are all so common among men that we think they are natural to us. Instead, they are all the consequence of the law of sin we become captive to. We become captive to the law of sin when we first sin, and that happens to all of us, except Jesus Christ.

Sinless

Sinless by choice

Jesus never became captive to the law of sin, because he never chose to sin. When we first choose to sin we become captive in the law of sin. Paul spoke of that when he said, **“... the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, having been sold under sin”** (Romans 7:14). We sin because of the pleasure it gives us. And the first time that happens we become captive in the law of sin. For whatever pleasure it may have been, we sold ourselves to become captive in the law of sin. And as with a woman and her virginity, once she violates it she can never get it back. Our flesh remains captive in the law of sin.

Jesus never sold himself under sin because he never sinned. Therefore, he never became captive in the law of sin. That is why this passage that Satan quoted to Jesus is literally true: **“If thou are the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He will command his agents about thee, and, They will take thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone”** (Matthew 4:6).

God did not allow Jesus to even dash his foot against a stone, because he never sinned and became captive in the law of sin. He lived infallibly. That is why he could contrast himself with us, when he said to his disciples such things as, **“If ye therefore, being evil, know to give**

good gifts to your children, how much more your Father in the heavens will give good things to those who ask him?" (Matthew 7:11). God did not protect Jesus from such accidental things simply because he was the Son of God. That would have defeated the goal of his Son living a fully human life. Our spirits have all been corrupted by sin, but the spirit of Jesus never was. That was why he was able to live an infallible life.

Yet even though we are all "evil" in the sense Jesus spoke about, if we repent of our sins, believe in him, strive to suppress all the foolishness in our hearts, resist the law of sin in our body-parts, and pursue righteousness by obeying him, then he will forgive our sins, redeem us from condemnation, and save us to become sons of God for eternity. Therefore Paul could say, **"Consequently nothing is condemnation now to those in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and of death"** (Romans 8:1-2).

The Spirit of life is the Holy Spirit that each one of us receives when we put on Christ. And that happens when we believe in him, repent of our sins, and are immersed for the remission of them. And the law of the Spirit of life is the way that God wants us to live. Consequently, our willful obedience to that law frees our eternal spirit from the law of sin. Jesus saves our spirit from condemnation, and frees it from captivity in the law of sin when we walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Although no man can keep his flesh innocent before God, we can be innocent in spirit before him. We can be innocent by being begotten again in spirit (see First Peter 1:23). And that happens when we commit our lives to the law of the Spirit of life through Christ. And that not only makes us innocent again, but it keeps us innocent. For John said, **"Every man who has been begotten of God is not doing sin, because his seed abides in him, and he cannot be sinning, because he has been begotten of God"** (First John 3:9). He also said, **"We know that every man who has been begotten from God does not sin, but he who was begotten from God keeps himself, and the evil does not touch him"** (First John 5:18). And remember what Paul said, **"Who will accuse against the chosen of God? God is he who makes righteous"** (Romans 8:33).

When John said we do not sin, he did not mean we live infallibly. For our body still offends because it remains captive in the law of sin. Therefore, we cannot live infallibly while we are in the flesh no matter how much we may try. Nevertheless, when we have been redeemed by Christ, then God does not consider those errors of the

flesh that we commit to be sin. Nor does he consider those willful sins we may commit occasionally to be sin. For Paul said, **“Blessed is a man to whom the Lord does, no, not impute sin”** (Romans 4:8).

We cannot sin in that sense because he does not impute or attribute sin to us, which means our offenses are not sin to him. Therefore, the eternal spirit of every man who chooses to walk according to the Spirit always remains sinless before God. Nevertheless, he will still chasten us when we offend him. Remember this passage: **“My son, do not disparage the chastening of the Lord, nor become disheartened when punished by him? For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives”** (Hebrews 12:5-6). You can learn more about all those things by reading my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Sinless because of ignorance

Sin is doing wrong willfully. As Jesus said to the Pharisees who opposed him, **“If ye were blind, ye would have no sin, but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remains”** (John 9:41). And that kind of blindness is true of the foolish behavior of infants. Their behavior is reflexive, and affected by the law of sin within them. And because their foolishness is not volitional, their spirits are not defiled. When Jesus spoke about being defiled, he said, **“For from inside the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, reviling, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from inside, and defile the man”** (Mark 7:21-23).

It is only when children become able to choose between good and evil, that their foolish behavior defiles them. And the first time that happens they become captive in the law of sin. I have no doubt the infant body of Jesus also behaved foolishly in that reflexive way. Otherwise he would not have been fully human. However, as soon as his childish mind became able to choose between good and evil, he subdued that instinctive foolishness he was born with, and always chose that which was good and right.

When Isaiah prophesied about the virgin birth of Jesus, he said, **“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, when he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhor shall be forsaken”** (Isaiah 7:14-16). Isaiah not only told how Jesus would be born of a virgin, but he also told how the body of Jesus would need to mature in order to **“know to refuse the evil, and choose the good,”** just like a normal child.

At what age that ability develops in a child no doubt varies with each individual. But for each one of us, unless the brain is seriously defective, sometime in our early childhood our conscience develops and we become able to subdue that instinctive foolishness. And for each one of us, we become defiled whenever we commit foolishness willfully. Therefore, during infancy our mental “blindness” keeps our spirit from being defiled by our foolish reflexes. We cannot sin until we are mature enough to be able to subdue them.

In the same way, brain diseases can afflict our minds and give us that kind of “blindness,” even after our conscience develops. One of the most terrible of them is Alzheimer’s disease, which gradually destroys a man’s ability to control his mind and his behavior. The afflicted man begins to lose his ability to combat the law of sin within his body, which can cause him to do foolish things he would never have done in his right mind, and not even realize what he is doing. Even very righteous souls afflicted with that disease sometimes do such things as utter filthy words or even on occasion try to hurt those they love the most.

The effects of that disease are like some of the afflictions caused by evil spirits that are described in the New Testament. In one sense they are evil spirits afflicting the functioning of the brain. However, those kinds of spirits are not like the demons of the New Testament that were spiritual creatures which could exist outside of a body. That disease is more like a spreading corrosion that gradually destroys the brain.

The age of accountability

I need also say something about the judgment of young children who sin but perish before they have matured enough to make their own decision about Christ and his church. They will no doubt be judged by **“the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ ...”** (Romans 2:15-16). It is futile for their parents to make that decision about Christ and his church for them, especially when they are only infants.

Those who promote infant immersion for salvation quote the command that Jesus gave to bring children to him. The Bible says, **“Then children were brought to him, so that he would lay his hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Allow the children, and do not forbid them to come to me, for of such kind is the kingdom of the heavens. And having laid his hands on them, he departed from there”** (Matthew 19:13-15).

Notice, however, they were brought to him so that he would lay his hands on them and pray. They were not brought to repent so they could enter the kingdom of God. Membership in the church is strictly voluntary, and is only for those who believe in Christ, repent of their sins, and submit to immersion for remission of them. God will not hold little children accountable about Christ until they are mature enough to make their own decision about him.

Parents have their infants christened for two reasons: first, because they love them and want their souls saved, which is good, and second, because they are deceived, which is bad. Imposing salvation on anyone is impossible. If it were possible, then why would God not impose salvation upon all of his offspring? For Peter said that “**God is not partial**” (Acts 10:34). God does not impose it, because it cannot be done, not as long as we are made in his image with free will. And it is wrong for any of us to try to do what God himself cannot.

God's reasons

Regarding Adam and Eve, they probably sinned on the fourth or fifth days. They sinned before the creation of other men and women on the sixth day. Remember, Paul said, “... **just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, in that all sinned**” (Romans 5:12). The sin of Adam changed the nature of mankind such that no mere man can avoid sinning. Only Jesus, the only begotten the Son of God, was able.

All of those things are part of God's great plan for our sonship, which he prepared before time began. And, dear reader, if you do not like the way God does things, then you are thinking like Satan, God's great adversary. If you do not like the way God does things, and you live as you please and try to escape God's wrath yourself the way the devil does, then do not blame God when you find yourself in hell with the devil and the demons.

Be not a fool who criticizes God for the way he does things. Be humble and trust him, because he is all wise. Remember, his thoughts and his ways are astronomically above ours. Believe in these words about how things happen: “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose**” (Romans 8:28). Therefore, be wise and always love and trust him!

FROM THE BEGINNING TO CHRIST

The world forsakes God

After telling about Cain and Abel, the Bible says, **“And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son, and called his name Seth. For, she said, God has appointed for me another seed instead of Abel, for Cain killed him. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of Jehovah”** (Genesis 4:25-26). That passage says men began to call upon the name of Jehovah. That does not mean they became more religious. It means Jehovah no longer walked with men as he had done before. Therefore, they had to call upon him as in prayer when they spoke to him.

There is no evidence that God gave the sons of men any knowledge about him. Therefore, they had to rely upon the knowledge of God that was passed on to them from the sons of God, the descendents of Adam. God probably used Adam and his offspring to serve as priests for the rest of the world. For when God brought the people of Israel to mount Sinai after leading them from the land of Egypt, he said he wanted them to be **“a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation”** (Exodus 19:6). Like those Israelites, I believe Adam and his descendents had been chosen to be a family of priests.

After listing a genealogy from Adam to Noah and his sons, the Bible says, **“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair. And they took to them wives of all that they chose”** (Genesis 6:1-2). Those men were sons of God in the flesh because they were descendents of Adam. However, they were not sons of God in the spirit because we all lose our eternal sonship when we sin.

Instead of preserving and promoting righteousness, the sons of God were led into sinfulness. For the Bible says that before the great flood **“Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”** (Genesis 6:5). Then God said after the flood, **“... the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”** (Genesis 8:21). He said that the imagination of our heart is evil from our youth, but he did not say that every imagination of our thoughts are only evil continually. That is only true of men who surrender to their evil imag-

inations. Although we must all struggle against evil imaginations within our flesh, only sinners surrender to them.

Every man is not bound to have the imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually. Noah did not think that way. Indeed, for every righteous soul who fights against it, those evil imaginations become progressively weaker in his mind, and they become increasingly repulsive. While at the same time the imaginations of goodness in his thoughts become progressively stronger and more satisfying. Therefore, the thoughts of the minds of righteous men, and the thoughts of the minds of sinners become increasingly different and antagonistic. That is told in the following proverb: **“An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, and he who is upright in the way is an abomination to a wicked man”** (Proverbs 29:27).

Regarding the antediluvian world, the record says, **“And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth”** (Genesis 6:11-12). Modern Americans, who have forsaken righteousness for sinfulness, have become much more violent. Their music, their dancing, the stories they tell and portray, even the bright flashing of the lights and the pictures on their television screens are much more violent. They vent their anger and frustration in more violent ways. Many of them even pursue pleasure by creating violence.

The men of the antediluvian world had become so wicked and unrepentant that they exhausted God’s tolerance. Therefore, God decided to cleanse the world with a great flood. Here is the first part of that story: **“And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Jehovah regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. And Jehovah said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground, from man, to beast, to creeping things, and birds of the heavens, for I regret that I have made them. But Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah.**

“These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

“And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher

wood. Thou shall make rooms in the ark, and shall pitch it inside and outside with pitch” (Genesis 6:5-14).

God also commanded him to take samples of each of the different kinds of beasts of the earth. Remember, there were far fewer beasts in the world before the great flood. Nevertheless, as huge as the ark was it must have taken Noah and his sons many years to build. And building such a great ship in the middle of land was a clear sign to the men of that time what God was going to do to them. When Peter was warning about the wrath of God, among the things he said was, “... **he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, the eighth, a herald of righteousness, when he brought on a flood upon the world of the irreverent ...**” (Second Peter 2:5).

Peter called Noah a herald of righteousness. Noah’s righteous living, and his powerful faith in God, which was demonstrated by building that great ship, heralded to the world what God was going to do to them if they did not repent. But the historical record says those men would not believe and repent. They were probably like the ancient Israelites, about whom the Bible says, “**But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy**” (Second Chronicles 36:16).

After the flood

All men after the great flood were descendants of Noah, who was himself a descendant of Adam. Hence, none of the descendants of the men that God created on the sixth day survived. And it is very unlikely that any of Noah’s sons married of their women. No doubt Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters, and they intermarried. The dangers of incest did not develop until many generations later, and the science of genetics can explain to you why.

Indeed, the Bible gives an example of daughters having healthy offspring by their own father. That happened after Lot fled the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. His two daughters thought everyone else in the world had been killed. Therefore, they used their father to give them children by making him drunk and bedding with him while he slept. The text says, “**Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father**” (Genesis 19:36). The descendents of those offspring eventually became the nations of the Ammonites and the Moabites.

Every soul born into the world after the great flood is a descendent of Adam through Noah. Therefore, since Adam was a son of God, as Adam’s offspring we are all born sons of God. However, we all eventually sin against him and lose our eternal sonship. It is only when we

believe and obey Jesus Christ that God will adopt us to be his sons for eternity. God adopts every soul to be his son again when they reject sin and live righteously, even those before Christ came to the earth to redeem us. For the Bible speaks of righteous men raised to heaven before our redemption. And Satan no doubt complained to God about that before Jesus earn the right to redeem us by paying all our debts to God. When those debts were paid, then Satan could no longer justifiable complain about our sonship with God.

Our redemption by Jesus was clearly retroactive for all of the righteous souls who lived before he became our Redeemer. The author of Hebrews gives an example: **“By faith Moses, having become great, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, having chosen rather to be mistreated with the people of God, than to have the pleasure of sin temporarily. Having esteemed the vilification of the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he focused toward the recompense of reward”** (Hebrews 11:24-26).

The vilification of the Christ mentioned in that passage refers to sinners condemning the righteousness of God. Moses was an adopted prince of Pharaoh, but he chose to be vilified for obeying God’s righteousness rather than to live sinfully and enjoy the treasures of Egypt. Publicly vilifying Christ and God’s righteousness is very common now in pagan America. And sinners persecute all who obey him.

The world after the flood is very different from what it was before that happened. The geology of the earth was greatly changed, and it became a much more violent place. Remember, it was only after the flood that there were carnivorous beasts. God may have made our world after the flood that way because mankind had so corrupted it the first time with their sinfulness. And now instead of having a more peaceful world, it is filled with hostile elements and hostile creatures. Those things are continual reminders to us that living in a world of sin includes much trouble.

Regarding mankind, they began to multiply again, and since they were all descendants of Noah they sought to work together to create great things, the first of which was to be a city having a tower with **“its top in the heavens”** (Genesis 11:4). Men love to create tall buildings. Jehovah knew what great potential men have when they are united together. For when he saw the city and the tower, he said, **“Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. And now nothing will be withheld from them, which they propose to do”** (Genesis 11:6).

I suspect God did not want them to have such capability so early in the development of civilization. Like Adam’s premature acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil, having such power to create

would have brought more evil than good. Therefore, he confounded their language so they could not understand each other. And that created division among them, a division that continues to this day. For there is nothing that divides men more than not knowing each other's language.

The Bible says the average lifetime of men before the flood was over nine hundred years. However, not long before the flood Jehovah said, **“My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he also is flesh. Yet shall his days be a hundred and twenty years”** (Genesis 6:3). Therefore, the lifetime of men gradually declined for several centuries after Noah. And by the time of Moses their lifetimes did not exceed much over a hundred years.

The great dinosaurs were probably created immediately after the flood, and I believe they existed only during that period when lifetimes were declining. Long lifetimes would explain the huge sizes of some of them, including the fishes, because some animals continue growing throughout their lives. Some creation scientists have suggested such an explanation for their huge sizes. Some also believe that an ice age occurred between the time of the flood and Abraham, which is what caused the extinction of the dinosaurs.

The fairly brief existence of the dinosaurs, and the initial geographic concentration of mankind after the flood, probably explains why men had little or no contact with them. And by the time God divided the languages to scatter mankind over the earth, the dinosaurs were probably already extinct. Why God created those great beasts, and then let them die out that way, I have no idea. They must have served some kind of purpose. There are many mysteries about our world.

Dear reader, let not scoffers use those mysteries to undermine your faith in God and the testimony he has given us in his Holy Bible. Remember, God made great changes to the surface of the earth after the flood. The land masses are different, and the mountains are much higher. Therefore, since he made those major differences in the surface of the earth, then he could certainly have made great changes about the kinds of animals on it. And I have no doubt that is what he did, even though the Bible is silent about such things.

It should never be forgotten that the Bible does not contain the history of every detail that God has done in the world. There are many things that we are expected to accept on faith. However, we are allowed to conjecture about things that it does not record in order to give us explanations, as long as they do not contradict the Bible record. Indeed, we have an example in the Bible of when Abraham conjectured about what God would do. That is told in the book of Hebrews: **“By faith Abraham, being tested, offered Isaac. And he who**

received the promises offered his only begotten son, about whom it was said, **The seed by thee will be called in Isaac. Having reckoned that God is able to raise up even from the dead, from where also, in a figure, he did receive him back**" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham actually believed he was going to slay Isaac, but he conjectured that God would raise him from the dead. Abraham was a man of very great faith in God. And we should walk in the steps of such men if we want to become sons of God for eternity with them.

A new chosen people

God knew that mankind would become wicked again after the flood, and he did not want to keep cleansing the earth that way. And remember, he has apparently always wanted a special people to help lead mankind spiritually. Therefore, he wanted to again select a people for himself to preserve righteousness and faith in him.

The man he chose to be the patriarch of that people was Abraham (first called Abram). Jehovah later said of Abraham, **"I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, to the end that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him"** (Genesis 18:19).

Jehovah's goal for revealing himself to Abraham was for him to rear progeny that would **"keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice."** And that which God **"has spoken of him"** was to make of him a great nation to preserve righteousness and justice upon the earth. And that promise has truly been kept through knowledge of the Holy Bible, which was written by Abraham's descendants, and is now preserved and propagated by the church.

Abraham was born only a few generations after the great flood, yet man had already fallen into polytheism. For after conquering their promised land Joshua said to all the sons of Israel, **"Thus says Jehovah, the God of Israel: Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed ..."** (Joshua 24:2-3). I have seen in my lifetime how quickly men can turn away from the truth of God and sink into error.

Abraham was otherwise a very righteous man. Therefore, God took him from polytheism and chose him to be the patriarch of his people. How God spoke with Abraham is usually not told. Nevertheless, at the beginning he commanded Abraham to leave his homeland and go

to a land where God would send him. Jehovah said to him, **“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, to the land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and be thou a blessing. And I will bless those who bless thee, and he who curses thee I will curse. And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed”** (Genesis 12:1-3).

Whatever was the way Jehovah first spoke with Abraham, it was obviously very convincing, because he obeyed his command. And he remained faithful the rest of his life, even though God tested his faith severely. Abraham was so faithful to God that he is called the father of the faithful. For when Paul was speaking to Gentile Christians in Rome, he said they were **“the seed from the faith of Abraham, who is father of us all (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations), before him whom he believed, of God who makes the dead alive, and who calls things not existing, as existing. Who, against hope, believed in hope, in order for him to become father of many nations according to that which was spoken, So thy seed will be”** (Romans 4:16-18). Abraham is the father of all men (from many nations) who have complete faith in God as he had.

Abraham begot Isaac, and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot twelve sons. Jacob’s sons were called the sons of Israel because Jacob was later named Israel. Those were the sons of God’s promise to Abraham, the ones God had chosen to be his people.

The nation of Israel

From the twelve sons of Israel developed the twelve tribes of Israel while they were in the land of Egypt. Israel and his sons first went there because of a great famine. As they multiplied the Egyptians began to fear them, and so they enslaved and oppressed them. After the population of Israel had multiplied to over a million adults God chose Moses to lead them out to the land that God had promised them. Moses was a son of Israel, but he had been reared as an adopted son in the house of Pharaoh. However, when he was forty years old he killed an Egyptian who was oppressing a son of Israel, and so he had to flee the country.

Sinful men who rule over slaves can be very brutal and cruel, and often think nothing of killing them. That was vividly revealed to American soldiers who were prisoners of the Japanese during the second world war. Moses was a courageous and righteous man, besides being a prince of Pharaoh. And he was morally justified in God’s sight to kill that Egyptian. He was not a murderer, as some men have slandered him.

After forty years of exile Jehovah commissioned Moses to go back to Egypt and lead his people out to their promised land. And after punishing the Egyptians with many plagues God brought his people out of Egypt into the wilderness of Sinai. When they arrived at mount Sinai (also called Horeb) God said to Moses: **“Thus thou shalt say to the house of Jacob, and tell the sons of Israel: Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be my own possession from among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak to the sons of Israel”** (Exodus 19:3-6).

There at the mountain God gave them his laws to prepare them for nationhood in the land of Canaan to fulfill his promise to their founding fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He even spoke to them the ten commandments with his own voice from the mountain. And the way he spoke was an awesome and terrifying experience.

The Bible even says that Moses trembled when it happened. For when the author of the book of Hebrews was comparing the disciples of Christ with those ancient Israelites, he said, **“For ye have not come to a mountain being felt, and which burned with fire, and to darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and a sound of a trumpet, and a voice of words, of which those who heard begged that a word not be added to them. For they did not bear that which was commanded, if even a beast should touch the mountain, it shall be stoned. And so fearful was that which was made visible, that Moses said, I am terrified and trembling”** (Hebrews 12:18-21).

God no doubt gave them that unforgettable experience to encourage them to always be faithful to him. Nevertheless, only a few weeks afterward, while Moses was on the mountain with God, they forsook him and began worshiping a golden idol shaped like a calf. As the psalmist later said of them, **“Thus they changed their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats grass”** (Psalm 106:20).

The sons of Israel were only a little better than the Gentiles around them. For even after witnessing all the great signs and wonders that God gave them, they frequently rebelled against him in the wilderness. Jehovah finally cursed that generation to die there. And forty years later, near the end of Moses’ life, when the second generation was ready to invade their promised land, Moses said to them, **“Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you”** (Deuteronomy 9:24).

That pattern continued throughout their history. They would cycle from rejecting Jehovah during times of prosperity to times of pleading with him for salvation during times of oppression. However, the trend was always downward, getting progressively more sinful. As God said of them, through the prophet Jeremiah a thousand years after Moses, **“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened not to me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff. They did worse than their fathers”** (Jeremiah 7:25-26). Each generation did worse than their fathers.

Nevertheless, even during the times of their apostasy there always remained a remnant of them who were faithful to God and preserved righteousness. And God chose some of those men to be his prophets to warn the people, and urge them to repent and return to him. He also used some of them to write his book for mankind—the Holy Bible—the greatest book ever written. That book is one of the things that made Israel a great nation. The life of Jesus was another.

Moses was probably the first prophet that God used to begin writing his holy book. And other prophets added to it until after the spreading of the kingdom of God, which is the church. The collection of books in the Bible that were written before Christ is called the Old Testament. The collection of books in it that were written after Christ is called the New Testament.

After about a thousand years in their land the Israelites became so wicked that God sent armies to destroy their land and scatter them. But after the seventy years of exile prophesied in the book of Jeremiah (25:11-12), a remnant of Jews (former citizens of Judah) were encouraged to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, the temple, and their country. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell about their return. That was about five centuries before Christ, and that story ends the history of the Old Testament. No history is given in the Bible about the events of the Israelites during those five centuries before Christ.

THE COMING OF CHRIST

Preserving righteousness

God had given mankind of the antediluvian world a chance to live on their own without giving them a set of specific laws. And remember, their world began as a place that was much more peaceful than it is now. Nevertheless, that did not work, because they became very wicked and corrupted the earth. For remember, the Bible says, **“And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence”** (Genesis 6:11).

It was mankind that corrupted the earth and filled it with violence. Consequently, God had to destroy them. I believe he allowed them to live that way to show the world that trying to live independently of his guidance does not work, even when it is in a more peaceful world. For Jesus said, **“It is written [in Deuteronomy 8:3], Man will not live on bread alone, but on every word coming out through the mouth of God”** (Matthew 4:4).

Although those men did not have a written word of God, they did have knowledge about God from the sons of Adam. Enoch lived before the flood, and here is what Jude says about him: **“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men, saying, Behold, The Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the irreverent of them about all the works of their own irreverence that they have done irreverently, and about all the harsh things that irreverent sinners spoke against him”** (Jude 1:14-15). They were not wicked because of ignorance.

After the great flood God chose a race of people to become his own nation. And he gave them an excellent set of laws to show them how to live righteously. That did not work either, because they too became very wicked and corrupted the land. Therefore, as he had warned them numerous times that he would, he also destroyed those people.

One reason God chose a nation for himself was to use faithful men from it to create his book, the Bible. However, I believe another reason why God chose a nation for himself, and gave them their own excellent set of laws, was to prove that choosing a special race and nation to preserve righteousness would not work either.

All of those things happened so that we can learn the lessons about them. And those lessons are recorded in the words of the Holy Bible that God has provided for us. As Paul said, **“For as many things as were written previously were written for our learning, so that**

through perseverance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

And one great lesson is that the only successful way to preserve righteousness upon the earth is an international brotherhood of men who are personally committed to an obedient faith in him. And such men can come from any race of people, because it is a voluntary brotherhood.

One of the important reasons the Son of God came into the world was to establish that international brotherhood, which he called the kingdom of God and the church. He also called it the kingdom of heaven (and the heavens), probably because it is the earthly part of the one in heaven. The church may have been the first international brotherhood in history.

The ministry of Christ

The Messiah

The Son of God was born into the land of Israel about sixty years after the Romans began their occupation of it. The Jews were longing for their promised Messiah to save them. However, they were expecting a great warrior-king like David, who would lead them to military victory and supremacy. Jesus was their Messiah, but they would not believe in him, because he taught a different kind of salvation, an eternal salvation of the soul. He came to bring salvation to all who would believe in him, and to give them the power to become sons of God for eternity.

Jesus was much more concerned about things spiritual, which can be seen in the many lessons he taught to the people. And history has proven that his concern for things spiritual created far more good for mankind than if he had only been a great warrior like David. Moreover, I have no doubt that if they had accepted his Son, God would have delivered them from the Romans. But because they continued to reject him, God brought the Roman army to destroy their nation forty years after Jesus began his ministry.

The Jews at that time were intensely prejudiced toward all Gentiles. They considered themselves to be the exclusive people of God, and all other men were unclean infidels. That attitude was copied from them by the creators of Islam six centuries after Christ. That false religion copied many things from the Jews and from the Bible.

An example of that attitude of prejudice by those Jews can be seen in a passage about a time when Jesus preached in a particular synagogue. Here is part of what the record says: **“But in truth I [Jesus]**

say to you, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine occurred on all the land. And Elijah was sent to none of them, except to Zarephath, to a widow woman of Sidon. And many lepers were in Israel near Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, except Naaman the Syrian.

“And all in the synagogue were filled with rage, having heard these things. And having risen up, they thrust him outside of the city, and brought him as far as the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw him down headlong. But he, having passed through the midst of them, departed” (Luke 4:25-30).

What Jesus said to them was the truth, and they could not deny it. What infuriated them was the implication there were some Gentiles who were better than Hebrews. They even had laws forbidding Jews to fraternize in any way with Gentiles, which the laws of Moses did not forbid. That is why the leaders of the Jews would not even go into the praetorium to speak with Pilate about crucifying Jesus. They believed going in that Gentile place would have “defiled” them.

In his patience, and to fulfill his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jesus first offered his good news of salvation to God’s chosen people. He would not allow his disciples to evangelize the Gentiles or even the Samaritans, who were half-breed Hebrews. It was only after his crucifixion, and the establishment of his church, that all peoples were invited to become members of it.

That attitude of prejudice by those Jews was one of the reasons they could not accept Christ’s church. And the Jews as a whole rejected and persecuted any other Jew who became a Christian, which many still do to this day. Indeed, it was the Jews who persecuted the apostle Paul, a fellow Jew, much more than any of the Gentiles.

Saving souls

When Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty years, the book of Matthew says he **“began to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached”** (Matthew 4:17). And it says a little farther, **“And Jesus went around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people”** (Matthew 4:23). He healed every sickness and disease of every soul who came to him.

The biographies of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell about some of the things Jesus did on the earth. But never forget what the

apostle John said at the very end of his biography of him, **“And there are also many other things, as many as Jesus did, which if they would be written every one, I suppose not even the world itself to make room for the books being written. Truly.”**

There are two main reasons why Jesus performed miracles of healing. The most important reason was to prove that he was sent by God. For his power to heal was proof that God was with him. As he said to the Jews, **“I am he who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me”** (John 8:18). God the Father was testifying about him by giving him the power to heal every sickness and every disease. Only God has that power and the ability to give it to others.

The other reason why Jesus healed was simply to show compassion to those who were suffering. Indeed, there were times when he even commanded them not to report how they had been healed. Consider this one example: **“And Jesus, having felt compassion, having reached out his hand, he touched him, and says to him, I will, be thou clean. And after he spoke, straightaway the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.**

“And having strictly warned him, straightaway he sent him out. And he says to him, See thou say nothing to any man, but go, show thyself to the priest, and bring for thy cleansing the things that Moses commanded for a testimony to them.

“But having gone out, he began to proclaim it much, and to spread abroad the matter, so as for him to no longer be able to enter openly into a city, but was outside in desolate places. And they came to him from all directions” (Mark 1:41-45).

Such was the ingratitude of the man whom Jesus healed. And he was not an unusual case, because Mark said farther on, **“... but as much as he commanded them, so much the more abundantly they proclaimed it”** (Mark 7:36). Nevertheless, not all whom he healed were so disobedient.

Those ungrateful and disobedient souls just added to his hardships, requiring him to be **“outside in desolate places.”** He could not enter openly into a city after that because whenever he did he was mobbed by all kinds of people attracted to his miracles of healing. And most of the world is just as ungrateful to God. By continually sinning against him they add to his grief, whether they realize it or not.

Jesus lived in a body of flesh just like every other man. He was not a superman who never became weary. Therefore, he could not spend all of his time and energy trying to repair all the physical damage caused by evil. Jesus worked long and hard to help those who suffered the

most from evil. Consider this passage about him: **“And the multitude comes together again, so as for them, no, not even to be able to eat bread. And when those with him heard it, they went out to grasp him, for they said, He is beside himself”** (Mark 3:20-21). Yet his primary purpose for being here was to save the souls of men, not to heal their bodies. And the endless pleas for him to heal were a major obstacle to that primary purpose.

The main goal of Jesus upon the earth was to enable God’s offspring to become sons of God for eternity. And that would make them spiritual brothers of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. He loved that kind of men, and he himself called them brothers. For example, when Jesus was in a crowded building, and he was told that his mother and brothers were outside wanting to see him, he replied, **“My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it”** (Luke 8:21).

And after his resurrection, when he revealed himself to Mary Magdalene who had come to his tomb, he said to her, **“Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brothers, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God”** (John 20:17).

And remember what he said in his prayer during the last supper: **“And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou sent me.**

“And I, the glory that thou have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, just as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be fully perfected in one, and so that the world may know that thou sent me, and loved them, just as thou loved me.

“Father, whom thou gave to me, I desire that where I am, they also may be with me, so that they may see my glory that thou have given me, because thou loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:20-24).

He indeed loved his apostles, and he loves all men who want to become sons of God for eternity, to become his brothers to reign with him in the glorious world of heaven. Remember the words that Jesus in his glory said to John during his great vision: **“He who overcomes, I will give him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne”** (Revelation 3:21).

The other goals of Jesus were all part of that general goal. Some of those are the following: (1) to urge men to repent from sin and obey

God and his righteousness, (2) to develop faith in him and the good news of his salvation, (3) to defeat the devil and all of God's enemies, (4) to become the Redeemer of all who will believe and obey him, (5) to reveal to the world more fully what God is like, (6) to teach a superior form of righteousness free from the bondage of legalism, and (7) to establish his church, the kingdom of God.

If you want to know what God is really like, do not listen to men, but study the Bible, especially the biographies of Jesus. Of course, you will not learn there (or anywhere else) details about what God looks like. All we know about the appearance of God is that he looks like the most exceedingly magnificent man. You will not even learn there (or anywhere else) what Jesus looked like in his body of flesh. All we know it is that he did not have an attractive appearance.

Indeed, a prophecy in Isaiah says about him, **“For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And as him from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not”** (Isaiah 53:2-3).

Nevertheless, we can all learn much about what kind of heart and mind God has—his innermost nature, the character of his Spirit—which is the most important thing about anybody. We can learn some of those things from the Old Testament, but nothing to the extent that we can from reading the New Testament.

His church

The Greek word for church means a gathering, assembly, or congregation of people, but it almost always refers to the disciples of Christ. After Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus said to him, **“And I also say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever thou may bind on earth will be what is bound in the heavens, and whatever thou may loose on the earth will be what is loosed in the heavens”** (Matthew 16:18-19). Those keys were not objects, they were the words used to inform people how to receive eternal sonship.

Christ's church was not established until after Jesus ascended back to heaven. Among his last words he commanded his apostles to stay in Jerusalem **“until ye are clothed with power from on high”** (Luke 24:49). That happened on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they began speaking in various tongues. Many

Jews from many nations had assembled for that feast, and they were astonished at how each one heard what the apostles were saying in their native language.

It was then that Peter used the keys Jesus gave him to open the door to the kingdom of the heavens, his church. And Peter did that by preaching to them what men must do to obtain salvation. Remember, he said to them, **“Repent ye, and be immersed each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). That opened the doors to the kingdom of the heavens, the church, and three thousand souls were added to it that very day.

The book of Acts is an historical record of the establishment of the church and its growth during the times of the apostles. However, like the biographies of Jesus, and indeed like the Bible itself, it only describes a few examples of all that happened during those times.

The first half of Acts primarily describes the establishment and growth of the church among the Jews. However, it also describes how the Samaritans were also invited to become members. Remember, they were half-breed Hebrews that were largely ignored during the time of Jesus.

However, with the establishment of his church, the Gentiles were also invited to become members of it. And that required special divine intervention in order to break the powerful prejudice held by the Jews. That happened when an agent of God appeared to a righteous man named Cornelius, who was a Roman Centurion, and he commanded him to send for Peter. In the meantime, Peter saw a vision commanding him to eat things he considered unclean. When Peter protested, a voice said to him, **“What God has cleansed, thou shall not make profane”** (Acts 10:15). Those things happened three times.

After Peter went with the messengers sent by Cornelius, he preached to him and all who were with him. As he preached the Holy Spirit descended upon those Gentiles as it did the apostles on the day of Pentecost. That proved to Peter that Jesus wanted the Gentiles to be offered his salvation. God sent Peter to convert that first Gentile, because remember Peter had been given the keys of the kingdom.

Peter used those “keys” to open the door of the kingdom on those two special occasions: at the gathering of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and at the gathering of the Gentiles with Cornelius. And now that it has been opened to both Jews and Gentiles, any knowledgeable man can preach the salvation of Christ. For the doors will not be shut until the end of the world.

Peter was apparently the primary spokesman to the Jews, and Paul was the primary spokesman to the Gentiles. For Paul said to the Galatians, “... **he [Christ] who was working in Peter for the apostleship for men of circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles ...**” (Galatians 2:8).

Paul had been a zealous Pharisee who was persecuting the church severely. But Jesus appeared in a vision to enlighten him. Therefore, Paul became an even more zealous spokesman for Christ, even though he suffered greatly because of it. However, Christ was always with him, and indeed, he even honored him by making him one of his special apostles. For Paul said about his conversion, “... **as to the untimely birth, he also appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. And his grace for me did not become empty, but I labored more abundantly than them all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me**” (First Corinthians 15:8-10).

The last half of the book of Acts is primarily about the work of Paul among the Gentiles. Paul was the primary spokesman to the Gentiles, but wherever he went, he almost always preached first at the synagogue of the Jews. His heart was always with his people, those who had been chosen by God before the establishment of the church.

Nevertheless, the Gentile proselytes of the Jews were the most receptive to his preaching the good news of Christ. The Jews in those Gentile lands resisted the good news, just as the Jews did in Israel. Their proselytes were much more receptive. That was probably because of the character of those proselytes. They had rejected the pagan religions and were looking for the true God. And that led them to accept the righteous teachings of Moses. Then when they heard about Christ, they were even more zealous about his good news because of its great superiority for righteousness. They were open-minded men who loved righteousness, and were not members of the synagogue simply because of traditional family beliefs like most of the Jews.

Both Peter and Paul contributed to the writings of the New Testament. However, Peter had been an illiterate fisherman. We know that because of this passage in Acts: “**Now when they [the rulers, the elders, the scholars, and the chief priests] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they are illiterate and uneducated men, they marveled. And they recognized them, that they had been with Jesus**” (Acts 4:13). Peter must have used someone else to write for him.

Paul was a highly educated man, and he was also totally committed to his Lord Jesus Christ. Remember what Paul said about that, “**For do I**

now trust men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I were still pleasing men I would not be a bondman of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). Therefore, the Holy Spirit used Paul to write much of the New Testament.

Christ came to offer men the power to become sons of God for eternity. And that is now done through the words of the New Testament and membership in his church. Although Christ ascended back to heaven to sit with God in his throne, nevertheless he is still here in spirit. His spirit is here in all who are his faithful disciples, even as the spirit of the devil is in the sons of disobedience. For remember what Paul said about Christ being in the world now: **“... we [the church] are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:29-30). The Spirit of Jesus is here in the world in the bodies of his faithful disciples. And his teachings are in the books of the New Testament.

PART THREE:
PRESENT AND
FUTURE



ANALYSES FROM REVELATION

The book of Revelation is a record the apostle John wrote about a great vision he had of things in heaven. It was the greatest such vision ever seen by a man. He first saw Jesus appear to him in his heavenly glory, and Jesus gave him messages to write for each of the agents of the seven congregations of Asia. Those agents were probably representatives from each of them, because John was exiled on the island of Patmos. And those agents were to report what Jesus said for their respective congregations. Those messages include words of both encouragement and warning, and the lessons of them are of great value for every congregation. However, I am only going to analyze what John saw in his vision of heaven.

Many of the things John saw seem to have been like theatrical productions that portrayed figurative things and events, all staged for John's benefit so that he could record them in his book. His vision is about things such as (1) the nature of our earthly life, (2) how God is interacting with the world, (3) Satan's kingdom and his war with God, (4) what we should expect as children of God, and (5) the end of the world, the final judgment, and the new world.

Since John's book is filled with descriptions of things and events that are highly symbolic, that makes what he wrote very difficult to interpret. It is without doubt the most difficult book to understand in the entire Bible. And my desire to be accurate about what I write almost caused me to give up attempting to analyze the book. Especially after I noticed this passage about one of the prophet Daniel's visions: **"And I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end"** (Daniel 12:8-9). I said to myself, "Could the words of Revelation be shut up and sealed till the time of the end?"

However, I then noticed this passage from Revelation: **"And I am John, the man hearing and seeing these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the agent showing me these things. And he says to me, See thou not. I am thy fellow bondman, and of thy brothers the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God! And he says to me, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near"** (Revelation 22:8-10).

The agent in heaven commanded John not to seal the words of the prophecy of that book. Therefore, I continued to study its words. For there are many valuable lessons and insights that can be gained from that great book. Indeed, the book itself says, **“Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and who keep the things written in it, for the time is near”** (Revelation 1:3).

Concerning the words “for the time is near” in those two passages above, many men have concluded that most of Revelation is about things that happened or were going to happen during the early years of the first Christians. However, a short time in the sight of God can be a very long time in our sight. For example, Peter said, **“But beloved, let not this one thing be ignored by you, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”** (Second Peter 3:8).

Moreover, James said that our entire lifetimes are like a wisp of vapor: **“For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away ...”** (James 4:14). Therefore, words like “come quickly” and “time is near” cannot be interpreted according to our very limited human perspective.

There is another important characteristic of Revelation that you need to recognize to prevent you from becoming confused about the sequence of events described in it. Switching between descriptions of things about the past, about the present, and about the future is done very frequently in Revelation and without explanation or warning. That kind of time switching is done occasionally in the Old Testament, but it is very common in Revelation. Therefore, be prepared to notice when descriptions of things involving the past, present, or future are switched from one to the other.

Revelation is a marvelous overview of what our world is like, how to understand what is happening now, and what we can expect in the future. It also offers many encouraging words for the righteous to endure their suffering here, promising them ultimate victory and eternal reward in heaven. It also contains many warnings about sinning against God. It is a very appropriate book to end the Holy Bible.

THE THRONE OF GOD

After Jesus gave John instructions for the seven congregations in Asia, John was commanded to go up to heaven to see things there.

- **After these things I looked, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard like a trumpet, speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show thee what must happen after these things. And straightaway I became in spirit.**
- **And behold, a throne was set in heaven, and him sitting upon the throne similar in appearance to a jasper and a sardius stone. And a rainbow was around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones were sitting twenty-four elders clothed in white garments, and golden crowns upon their heads. And out of the throne proceeds lightnings and voices and thunders. And seven lamps of fire burned before his throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne was like a glassy sea similar to crystal.**
- **And in the midst of the throne, and all around the throne, were four living creatures containing eyes in front and back. And the first living creature was similar to a lion, and the second living creature was similar to a young bull, and the third living creature having a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was similar to a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, one by one, each having six wings, are full of eyes around and inside” (Revelation 4:1-8).**

Remember, I gave my interpretations about the seven Spirits of God and about the four living creatures in previous chapters of this book. Notice in the next passage, which describes those around the throne honoring God, that the seven Spirits were not included. That is further evidence those seven Spirits are not persons.

Honoring God in heaven

- **And they have no cessation day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord, the Almighty God, he was, and who is, and who is coming. And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, he who lives into the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders would fall down before him who sits on the throne, and would worship him who lives into the ages of the ages, and would cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, our Lord**

and God, the Holy, to take the glory and the honor and the power, because thou created all things, and because by thy will they are, and were created (Revelation 4:8-11).

John told how the four living creatures and the elders worshiped and praised the Lord, the Almighty God. Those who are closest to God in heaven are motivated to praise and worship him continually. However, that does not mean they did nothing else, because those are figurative words like these commands Paul gave to the brothers in Thessalonica: **“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing”** (First Thessalonians 5:16-17).

The longer I live and the closer I become to my beloved heavenly Father the more I want to praise him. My mind frequently urges me to praise him because he is so wonderful in every way. He is so good and right and just; he is so merciful and gracious and loving; he is so perfect in every way. I cannot stop praising him because I have learned so much about him. Even when I am concentrating intensely upon something else, those thoughts in my mind of worship and praise to him are always in the background of my thinking.

Revelation speaks of a temple in heaven. Perhaps those elders and living creatures were all worshiping and praising God inside that temple where God was, because the temple in Jerusalem was called the house of God. Here is a passage that tells how David made preparation to build the first temple in Jerusalem: **“And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be built for Jehovah must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries. I will therefore make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death. Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build a house for Jehovah, the God of Israel”** (First Chronicles 22:5-6).

We are now the temple of God in the world, for Paul said, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy this man, for the temple of God is holy, which ye are”** (First Corinthians 3:16-17). We are his temple because his Spirit dwells in us here upon the earth.

The worthiness of the Lamb

What John saw in heaven immediately after those things seems to have been a symbolic portrayal presenting an overview of the nature of our lives in the world. That overview contains figurative descriptions of (1) the four natural forces of life in the world, (2) how righteous souls are persecuted by sinners in the world but are rewarded in heaven, and (3) God’s wrath against the sinners of the world. That

overview portrayed to John things of the past, of the present, and of the future. And it does not explain when it switches from one time period to another.

John's description of that overview also includes encouraging words about God's protection of the righteous from his wrath, and their guaranteed salvation in heaven. I speak more about those things in the next chapter *Our Lives in the World*. That overview began when the Lamb in the midst of the throne opened the seven seals of a book that God gave to him. The next passage tells why God gave him the book.

- **And I saw at the right hand of him who sits on the throne a book, written inside and outside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a powerful agent proclaiming in a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals of it? And none in heaven above nor on the earth nor under the earth was able to open the book or to see in it. And I wept much because none was found worthy to open the book or to see in it.**
- **And one of the elders says to me, Weep not, behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, overcame to open the book and the seven seals of it. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, like it had been killed, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took it out of the right hand of him who sits on the throne (Revelation 5:1-7).**

I believe that book symbolizes God's plan for developing sons for eternity. And that plan required the creation of our world. For it would be in our world where his offspring would be offered the opportunity for eternal sonship. Nobody was found worthy to open the book in God's hand, and John wept much because of it. He wept because he understood what that meant.

I believe what it meant was that nobody was found worthy of fulfilling those plans. And without fulfilling them there could be no sons of God for eternity. However, we can all thank God and rejoice that the Lamb (the Son of God) was found worthy. He alone was able to make the world fit for existence. For without his redeeming power, the world would be a place of complete vanity. Remember these words of Solomon: **"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has man from all his labor in which he labors under the sun?"** (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3).

Without our hope of salvation for a life in heaven, our lives would be completely vain and senseless. For what profit would there be in it? This world is a place of tribulation where every life always ends in death. All that we could do is try to have some pleasure and enjoyment in the midst of all our toils and sorrows until we perished. After which we would suffer the wrath of God because of our sins.

Only the Lamb of God was found able to give us that salvation. Therefore, God gave him the book to open the seals of it. Jesus was able to carry out God's plan for our salvation and adoption, because of his ability to live a sinless and sacrificial life as a man in the world. When he lived that life successfully it earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **"If ye love me, keep my commandments"** (John 14:15).

- **And when he took the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls containing incense, which are the prayers of the sanctified. And they sing a new song, saying, Thou are worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it, because thou were killed and purchased us from God by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And thou made them kings and priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth.** (Revelation 5:8-10).

That passage seems to include the four living creatures among the twenty-four elders who were saying they were purchased by the Lamb out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, and that he made them kings and priests to God. However, I do not believe the four living creatures were included for three reasons: (1) those creatures are not in the image of God, (2) they are referred to in the neuter gender instead of the masculine, and (3) the twenty-four elders had thrones and crowns (to indicate they were kings), which the four living creatures did not have.

- **And I looked, and I heard as a voice of many agents all around the throne and the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands, saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that has been killed to receive the power, and wealth, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!**
- **And every creature that is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and is in the sea, and things in them all, I heard saying, The blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion is to him who sits upon the throne, and to**

the Lamb, into the ages of the ages. Truly! And the four living creatures were saying the Truly. And the elders fell down and worshiped. (Revelation 5:11-14).

Not only does the population of heaven worship and praise God, they also worship and praise his Son. And we should also worship and praise his Son, especially because of the great sacrifice he made to become our Savior.

John said he heard every creature speaking praises. However, some of those praises may be figurative, like the declaration of the heavens mentioned in this passage: “**The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork**” (Psalm 19:1). The heavens and all creatures praise God in various ways, some consciously and willfully with words, and some by simply existing to show the glory of his power.

OUR LIVES IN THE WORLD

This chapter is a description of what happened after the Lamb opened the seven seals of the book that God gave him. Remember, I believe that book symbolizes God's plan for developing sons of God for eternity. And opening the seven seals of it presented an overview of that plan. That overview was presented in very figurative language, which I interpret as describing (1) the four natural forces of life in the world, (2) how righteous souls are persecuted by sinners in the world but are rewarded in heaven, and (3) God's wrath against those sinners.

The four forces of earthly life

Opening each of the first four seals of the book brought forth a horse, each of a different color. Those horses are what have come to be called the four horses of the Apocalypse (another word for Revelation). Since horses symbolize force (e.g., horsepower), I believe those horses symbolize the four forces of life in the world. The science of physics says there are only four fundamental forces of nature: strong, weak, electromagnetic, and gravitational. Those are the four basic forces of the elemental things. These horses described in Revelation seem to symbolize the four basic forces of life in this world of tribulation.

- **And I saw that the Lamb opened one of the seven seals. And I heard one of the four living creatures saying like the sound of thunder, Come and see. And behold, a white horse, and he who sits on it having a bow. And a crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering, and so that he might conquer (Revelation 6:1-2).**

The white horse symbolizes the force of life and human development. And that force prevails, because no matter how much death and destruction may happen, life virtually always reappears, and the growth and progress of mankind continues.

- **And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. And another horse came forth, fiery red. And it was given to him (to him who sits on it) to take peace from the earth, so that they would kill each other. And a great sword was given to him (Revelation 6:3-4).**

The red horse symbolizes the force of conflict and strife that occurs between and among the beasts and men, and that can be seen everywhere throughout the world. Although there were no carnivorous

beasts before the flood, there was no doubt still conflict and strife among them, just as there is among herbivorous beasts now.

- **And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come and see. And behold, a black horse, and he who sits on it having a balance in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius. And thou may not harm the olive oil and the wine (Revelation 6:5-6).**

The black horse symbolizes the struggle and labor needed for survival, which creates so much hardship. The oil and wine symbolize comfort and pleasure, for the proverb says, **“He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil shall not be rich”** (Proverbs 21:17). Thus, in spite of the need to labor for survival there will always be some comfort and pleasure.

- **And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature saying, Come and see. And behold, a green horse, and he who sits on top of it. His name was Death, and Hades followed with him. And authority was given to him over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with starvation, and with what is deadly, and by the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:7-8).**

The green horse, the last one, symbolizes death. Other versions say it was a pale horse, but the Greek word in the original document means green, as in green grass. Perhaps the green horse symbolizes death because I am told the skin of a dead man first changes to a greenish color. For example, here is what one website said about it:

Typically, the first visible sign of putrefaction is a greenish discoloration of the skin of the anterior abdominal wall. This most commonly begins in the right iliac fossa, i.e. over the area of the caecum, (where the contents of the bowel are more fluid and full of bacteria), but occasionally, the first changes are peri-umbilical, or in the left iliac fossa. The discoloration, due to sulph-haemoglobin formation, spreads to involve the entire anterior abdominal wall, and then the flanks, chest, limbs and face.¹

Those horses symbolize the four forces that govern the basic nature of life everywhere in the world. And they cannot be avoided, because in this world there will always be life, conflict, labor for survival, and death. Those forces have all operated in the world from the time of Creation, except in the garden of Eden. Although before the flood

1. <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/forensicmedicine/notes/timeddeath.pdf>

God seems to have created the world outside of the garden with less conflict. Remember, there were no carnivorous beasts. And it may also have been less difficult to survive then. And also remember how much longer men lived before the flood.

Opening the next two seals describes the conflict between the righteous and sinners. And that is also a fundamental part of our lives in the world.

The righteous will be persecuted

- **And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because of the word of God, and because of the testimony of the Lamb that they held. And they cried out in a great voice, saying, Master, Holy and True, how long do thou not judge and avenge our blood from those who dwell on the earth?**
- **And a white robe was given to them each, and it was said to them that they should still rest a time, until also their fellow bondmen, and their brothers, and those going to be killed as they too, would be fulfilled** (Revelation 6:9-11).

Opening the fifth seal revealed how the righteous suffer great persecution from sinners on the earth, but are rewarded in heaven. Notice how they cried out to God that he would judge and avenge their blood from those who dwell on the earth. But those righteous souls were given a white robe and told to be patient and continue to rest for a time. God is allowing sinners to shed the blood (literally and figuratively) of his sanctified souls until he decides to end the world.

Regarding vengeance, the world hates it, and they have persuaded most modern believers that God hates it too. But vengeance is justice, and God and his genuine sanctified souls love justice. Therefore, his martyred sons that are in heaven were not criticized for pleading for vengeance. Remember, however, we are not to avenge ourselves personally. For Paul said, “... **it is written** [in the law of Moses], **Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord**” (Romans 12:19). If each man sought to apply his own vengeance, the world would be filled with chaos.

The Lord said he will repay. And he uses the world’s offices of authority as some of his instruments to apply his vengeance, as Paul said in this passage: “**For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it. For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is**

a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil” (Romans 13:3-4).

Those offices of authority are helpers of God, vengeful for wrath against evildoers. And they themselves sin when they fail to do so, which is happening more and more now in pagan America.

Sinners will be punished

- **And I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black as hairy sackcloth, and the whole moon became as blood. And the stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree that casts its unripe figs being shaken by a great wind. And the sky departed as a scroll being rolled up. And every mountain and island were moved out of their places.**
- **And the kings of the earth, and the rulers, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Because the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand?** (Revelation 6:12-17).

That passage describes what will happen on the earth at the end of the world. When the disciples of Jesus asked him about the end of the world, among other things in his answer, he said, **“But straightaway after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. And the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky.**

“And then all the tribes of the earth will beat the breast, and they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and much glory. And he will send forth his agents with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather together his chosen from the four winds, from the boundaries of the heavens—as far as their boundaries” (Matthew 24:29-31). That description Jesus gave is very similar to the one in the above passage in Revelation.

Those descriptions are simple summaries of what will no doubt be a very complex event. For example, we know the stars as they are now cannot literally fall to the earth. What God may do is compress each star into a tiny mass of matter, after which he will cause them to fall to the earth. Remember how much empty space is in matter, and remember also I believe the earth is the center of the universe. Never-

theless, who knows what new knowledge men will acquire to help explain more precisely what the end could be like. What is important are the lessons taught in the Bible about being prepared for the end.

The righteous escape God's wrath

- **And after this I saw four agents standing at the four corners of the earth, restraining the four winds of the earth, so that wind would not blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree. And I saw another agent ascending from the rising of the sun, having a seal of the living God. And he cried out in a great voice to the four agents to whom it was given to them to harm the earth and the sea, saying, Do not harm the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, until we may seal the bondmen of our God on their foreheads (Revelation 7:1-3).**

Those words say to us that God allows no harm to come to the earth until he identifies those who belong to him. The seal on their foreheads is, of course, figurative. That passage is similar to the one in Ezekiel which also tells how God commanded to first identify the righteous souls in the world before he sends his wrath. It says, **“Then he [Jehovah] cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause ye those who have charge over the city to draw near, each man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate, which lies toward the north, each man with his slaughter weapon in his hand, and one man in the midst of them clothed in linen, with a writer’s case by his side.**

“And they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub, upon which it was, to the threshold of the house, and he called to the man clothed in linen who had the writer’s case by his side. And Jehovah said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and who cry over all the abominations that are done in the midst of it.

“And to the others he said in my hearing, Go ye through the city after him, and smite. Let not your eye spare, nor have ye pity. Kill utterly the old man, the young man, and the virgin, and little sons, and women, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the old men who were before the house” (Ezekiel 9:1-6).

The six men with their slaughter weapons were obviously heavenly agents of God (invisible to men) who came at his command to execute his wrath upon the sinners. Notice however, they could not begin the slaughter until they had identified all the men who sighed and

who cried over all the abominations that were done in the midst of Jerusalem. There will never be a soul upon the earth who grieves about all of its sin and wickedness that will not be identified by God, and he will have his eternal spirit spared from his wrath.

Nevertheless, that does not mean every soul who suffers some kind of tragedy is suffering from God's wrath. Remember the story of Job and how much he suffered. God allows the righteous to suffer many things in this world, but their eternal spirits are always spared from his wrath.

And always remember, sometimes our suffering is chastening from God. For Jesus said, **"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent"** (Revelation 3:19). Also remember what Solomon said: **"In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider"** (Ecclesiastes 7:14). In the day of adversity do some soul searching to consider how you may need to repent.

- **And I heard the number of those sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel. Twelve thousand were sealed from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand from the tribe of Benjamin, were sealed** (Revelation 7:4-8).

That passage is also very figurative. Remember, the number twelve is another number that symbolizes fullness. What those hundred and forty-four thousand symbolize is the population of all the children of God upon the earth, with members from all the nations, which is symbolized by the twelve tribes of Israel. And those righteous souls needed to be identified so they would not suffer punishment with the rest of the world.

That list of names of the tribes of Israel is very unusual, and Bible commentators disagree about what it means. Neither Dan nor Ephraim are mentioned, while Levi and Joseph were. Both Dan and Ephraim were given tribal territories in the land of Israel, but Levi and Joseph were not. The descendants of Levi were given no tribal territory because he had been so sinful. There was no tribe of Joseph because he was so righteous that Jacob (also called Israel) gave him two tribes by adopting his first two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. If

you want explanations about why that list is so unusual you can study the commentaries for yourself.

In the Bible God used various ways to express what he wanted to say. And sometimes it takes some study to understand. Indeed, Jesus sometimes spoke riddles, which he did not explain. For example, when the Jews warned him that king Herod wanted to kill him, Jesus only said, **“Having gone, say to this fox, Behold, I cast out demons and finish cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am fully perfected”** (Luke 13:32). Even Jesus’ disciples did not understand what he meant until after his resurrection.

The nation of Israel was the one that God chose to be his own among all the nations of the world. And it was in the nation of Israel that his holy word the Bible was written. And it was in the nation of Israel that his only begotten Son came into the world to bring salvation to all who believe and obey him. And it was in the nation of Israel that the kingdom of God, his holy church, was established.

But now the chosen people of God are the members of the church of Christ. And those hundred and forty-four thousand that were sealed symbolize all of the children of God upon the earth. And that includes souls **“out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues,”** as described in the next passage of Revelation.

Paul described who God recognizes as the true sons of Israel, when he was writing to the Gentile Christians in Rome. He said that a real Jew was determined by a man’s heart and not his flesh: **“For he is not a Jew in what is visible, nor is circumcision in what is visible, in flesh, but he is a Jew in what is hidden, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit not a document, whose praise is not from men but from God”** (Romans 2:28-29).

And he said later that the real children of God were the children of the promise, and not children of Israel in the flesh: **“For all those from Israel, these are not Israel, nor, because they are Abraham’s seed, are they all children, rather, In Isaac a seed will be called for thee. That is, the children of the flesh, these are not children of God, instead, the children of the promise are reckoned for seed”** (Romans 9:6-8). And the children of the promise are now those who believe and obey Jesus Christ.

Saved for heaven

- **After these things, I looked and lo, a great multitude, which none could number, out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands, and**

crying out in a great voice, saying, Salvation is in our God who sits upon the throne, and in the Lamb!

- **And all the agents had stood all around the throne, and the elders, and the four living creatures, and they fell before his throne on their faces, and worshiped God, saying, Truly! Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and strength, is for our God into the ages of the ages. Truly!** (Revelation 7:9-12).

The previous passage was about identifying the chosen people of God upon the earth. The above passage is about the chosen people of God who had been taken to heaven. The smaller number of those upon the earth symbolizes all the chosen people of God from each generation. The larger multitude which none could number was all the chosen people of God from every generation.

Although the number of sons of God **“out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues”** was so great that none could number them, nevertheless God knows every one, and he knows the exact number, even to the number of hairs on their heads. For remember Jesus said, **“But even the hairs of your head are all numbered”** (Matthew 10:30). And all those righteous souls will be gathered together in heaven to be clothed in white robes, no matter how poor and lowly they were upon the earth. And they will have the great privilege of standing around the throne of God to worship and praise him.

- **And one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these who are clothed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, My lord, thou know. And he said to me, These are those coming out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple.**
- **And he who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They will hunger no more, nor will they thirst any more. The sun will, no, not fall upon them, nor any heat. Because the Lamb in the midst of the throne will tend them, and will lead them to fountains of waters of life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes** (Revelation 7:13-17).

Remember, the “great tribulation” is life in this world of sin, and not merely a more troubled time in history. The above passage says that those righteous souls were **“coming out of the great tribulation.”** That indicates there are some disciples of Christ who will be resurrected before the final judgment to serve God **“day and night in his temple.”** And that is a continuing process. Their numbers are con-

tinuing to increase, because they are still coming out of this great tribulation.

Revelation speaks of the temple of God that currently exists in heaven. And that temple is probably huge compared with any earthly temple. And perhaps the walls and covering of that temple can somehow be retracted so that the throne of God could be seen from outside of it. For remember this passage: **“And I looked, and I heard as a voice of many agents all around the throne and the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands ...”** (Revelation 5:11).

That temple is in the capital city of heaven, which is also called Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem. For remember this passage: **“But ye have come to mount Zion, and to the city of a living God, a heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of agents ...”** (Hebrews 12:22). Nevertheless, that temple will end with the coming of the new Jerusalem, because John said about that city, **“And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb”** (Revelation 21:22). I describe what Revelation says about the new Jerusalem in the chapter *The New Heaven and Earth*.

- **And when he opened the seventh seal, silence occurred in heaven, like half an hour** (Revelation 8:1).

After the creation of our world God rested on the seventh day (see Genesis 2:2). Hence the short time of silence after the seventh seal was opened seems to signal the end of that overview of the basic activities of our lives in the world.

GOD'S CURSES AGAINST THE WORLD

The next part of Revelation seems to focus on the conflict between God and the sinners of the world. And it explains why there are so many disasters here, both natural and man-made. For not only is this a world in the bondage of corruption, but God sends curses (woes) against it because of the sinfulness of men.

The language in Revelation about those curses is very symbolic. However, in the book of Deuteronomy you can read a literal and very vivid description of curses that God said he would send against his people Israel if they sinned against him (see 28:15-68). And remember, the book of Lamentations describes those curses that they later suffered because they turned away from Jehovah. God sends curses against every nation that sins against him. Remember the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the plagues of Egypt.

Revelation also describes how God proclaims his will to the world but they reject it. It describes how God fights for the righteous, and how he punishes those who oppress them. It also describes how God reveals knowledge about himself to mankind in the world. However, I discuss all those things in the next chapter of this book.

- **And I saw the seven agents who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another agent came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer. And much incense was given to him, so that he would give with the prayers of all the sanctified upon the golden altar before the throne. And the vapor of the incense, with the prayers of the sanctified, ascended before God out of the agent's hand.**
- **And the agent who took the censer, also filled it from the fire of the altar, and cast it to the earth. And there occurred thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven agents who have the seven trumpets prepared themselves so that they might sound (Revelation 8:2-6).**

A censer is a hand held instrument containing incense for the worship of God. Offering incense was part of the worship commanded by the law of Moses. And being able to use a censer indicated authority to lead men in worship. In ancient Israel incense was burned in the house of God as a pleasing aroma to him. And the above passage suggests our prayers are enhanced on their way to God to make them more pleasing. For remember Paul said, "... **for we know not what we would pray for as we ought ...**" (Romans 8:26).

The fire of the heavenly altar was used not only to burn the incense as a pleasing aroma to God, but also to express wrath against the world. For the thunders, lightnings, and earthquake in the above passage caused by that fire seem to symbolize the power of that wrath. The voices in that passage may symbolize the word of God that is preached by his witnesses.

Those things in that passage of Revelation are figurative words to show how God listens to the prayers of the sanctified. And that is encouragement for all men who endure the trials and temptations of this life and remain faithful to him. They also symbolize how he deliberately sends troubles to the world, which is explained in the next passages in Revelation.

Curses against nature

The book next tells about the heavenly agents with trumpets that announced different kinds of curses. The descriptions are, of course, very figurative. Here are the first four:

- **And the first sounded, and there occurred hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth. And the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.**
- **And the second agent sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was cast into the sea. And the third part of the sea became blood, and the third part of the creatures in the sea (those having lives) died, and the third part of the ships was destroyed.**
- **And the third agent sounded, and a great star fell from the heaven burning like a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the springs of the waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood oil. And the third part of the waters developed into wormwood oil, and many of the men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.**
- **And the fourth agent sounded, and the third part of the sun was struck, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, so that the third part of them would be darkened. And the day did not shine the third part of it, and likewise the night (Revelation 8:7-12).**

Those four disasters seem to symbolize curses against all the natural parts of the world, as suggested by this passage: **“And worship him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and springs of waters”** (Revelation 14:6-7). Like the curses above, that passage

mentions only those four parts of nature, but they no doubt symbolize every part of it, because God made every part.

I believe the words “the third part” in those passages simply mean a minority part. Thus, when the first trumpet sounded a minority part of the earth was subjected to destruction. When the second trumpet sounded a minority part of the sea and the things in it were subjected to destruction. When the third trumpet sounded a minority part of the fresh waters was subjected to destruction, which caused many men to die. When the fourth trumpet sounded a minority part of the light from the celestial bodies was darkened. Perhaps that refers to whatever things may obscure vision to cause death and destruction.

Those first four curses were sent against the natural things of our world. The lesson seems to be that such disasters occur because God sends curses against it. He sends curses because there is so much sin and rebellion against him here. Men war against God and commit all kinds of folly and wickedness, and the curses he sends are among the ways he punishes them. Yet those rebels deny being guilty, and they accuse God of cruelty for sending them.

Remember how God cursed Adam after he sinned: “... **cursed is the ground for thy sake. In toil thou shall eat of it all the days of thy life. Also, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to thee, and thou shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face thou shall eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it thou were taken. For thou are dust, and to dust thou shall return**” (Genesis 3:17-19). And remember how God cursed Cain after Cain murdered his brother: “**And now cursed are thou from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand. When thou till the ground, it shall not henceforth yield to thee its strength. A fugitive and a wanderer thou shall be on the earth**” (Genesis 4:11-12).

Therefore, dear reader, do not wonder why there are so many plagues, earthquakes, storms, floods, and other disasters of nature. They are responses by God against mankind who have rebelled against him.

Nevertheless, those disasters are not always for the worst of sinners, as revealed by this passage: “**Now some were present at the same time who informed him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. And having answered, Jesus said to them, Do ye suppose that these Galileans became sinful above all the Galileans because they have suffered such things? I tell you, no, but if ye do not repent, ye will all perish similarly. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them. Do ye think that these became debtors above all the men who dwell**

in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but if ye do not repent, ye will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

Moreover, God's sanctified souls are not protected from all disasters. For example, the Bible tells how the faithful apostle Paul suffered through a violent storm at sea. Here is part of that story: **“And since we were exceedingly storm-tossed, on the next day they jettisoned. And the third day we cast out by hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars appeared for more days, and no small storm laying on, all remaining hope for us to be saved was taken away. And being long without food, then Paul, who stood in the midst of them, said, Ye truly ought, O men, to have complied with me, not to launch from Crete, and gain this damage and loss.**

“And now I exhort you to cheer up, for there will not be one loss of life from you, except of the ship. For there stood by me this night an agent of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul. Thou must stand before Caesar, and lo, God has granted thee all those sailing with thee. Therefore men, cheer up, for I believe God, that it will be so in that way it has been told to me. But we must fall off upon a certain island” (Acts 27:18-26).

There were two hundred seventy-six souls on board that great ship, and they had been so storm-tossed that they had not eaten anything for fourteen days. Therefore, Paul encouraged them to eat from the bread they had remaining to strengthen them for the shipwreck that would place them on the island. Paul had suffered along with all of those other souls from that terrible storm at sea.

God does not protect those who belong to him from all of the plagues and disasters that afflict the earth. Therefore, be not grieved if some innocent souls suffer with the guilty, for that is a consequence of all sin. In this world the innocent always suffer to some extent because of the sins of the guilty. As God said about idols in the second of the ten commandments, **“Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”** (Exodus 20:5-6). The bodies of innocent sons suffer because of the iniquity of their fathers, but their eternal souls are not affected. They only become condemned when they themselves sin and refuse to repent.

And also remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall on the ground independent of your Father”** (Matthew 10:29). Nobody can

suffer in any way without God allowing it. And if some innocent souls suffer from natural disasters or in any other way, remember what Paul said, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). God sometimes allows the innocent to suffer here on the earth with the guilty, but he saves their souls for eternity in the greater world of heaven.

Therefore, let not scoffers provoke you to accuse God when you suffer. Remember what the Bible says about Job after he was afflicted with so many things: **“Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped. And he said, Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah has taken away, blessed be the name of Jehovah. In all this Job did not sin, nor foolishly accuse God”** (Job 1:20-22).

Job was a very great man of righteousness, although he was not a perfect man like the Son of God. Nevertheless, in spite of (1) the loss of everything he owned, (2) the violent death of all his children, (3) the painful sores all over his body, (4) his complete ignorance about why all those things happened, and (5) all the false accusations his friends continually made against him, Job never accused God.

It was his wife who criticized God, because the book says, **“Then his wife said to him, Do thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God, and die. But he said to her, Thou speak as one of the foolish women speaks. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this Job did not sin with his lips”** (Job 2:9-10). All that Job did while he was suffering was to plead with God and defend himself.

Curses against sinners

- **And I looked, and I heard one eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying in a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth from the remaining sounds of the trumpet of the three agents who are going to sound** (Revelation 8:13).

That passage speaks of three woes. Woes are curses, and those three woes that resulted from the trumpet sounds were specifically against sinful men.

- **And the fifth agent sounded, and I saw a star fallen from the sky to the earth. And the key of the pit of the abyss was given to him. And he opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke ascended out of the pit, like smoke of a burning furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened from the smoke of the pit.**

And locusts came forth out of the smoke upon the earth, and power was given to them, like the scorpions of the earth have power.

- **And it was told them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor anything green, nor any tree, except the men who have not the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given them that they would not kill them, but that they would be tormented five months. And their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. And in those days men will seek death, and will, no, not find it. And they will long to die, and death will flee from them.**
- **And the likeness of the locusts was similar to horses prepared for battle. And upon their heads were like golden crowns, and their faces were as men's faces. And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were as of lions. And they had breastplates like iron breastplates. And the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots of many horses running into battle.**
- **And they have tails similar to scorpions, and stings. And in their tails they have power to hurt men five months. Having a king over them, the agent of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in the Greek he has the name Apollyon (Revelation 9:1-11).**

The fifth trumpet announced a curse that was against all men who do not have the seal of God upon them. Those monstrous locusts may symbolize evil spirits that God set loose to torment sinners. For they are said to have come from the pit of the abyss, which seems to be a prison for evil spirits. An example of God sending an evil spirit against a sinner is the case of king Saul: **“Now the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Jehovah troubled him”** (First Samuel 16:14). The Spirit of Jehovah came upon Saul to strengthen him after God selected him to become the first king of Israel. But not long afterward Saul began to disobey God. Therefore, God withdrew his supporting Spirit from him and he sent an evil spirit.

What I think the passage about the locusts means is that all men who do not believe and obey God are subjected to certain mental torments for an appreciable part of their lives. Those torments only happen to unrepentant sinners. And they are severe enough during the time of their suffering for them to want to die, but they will not take their own lives, probably because of fear of death. How sinners suffer those torments no doubt varies widely. And for each individual those torments may be spread out over time or they may happen only on occasion.

The sky being darkened may mean that those sinners are kept from understanding about their mental torments. And the crowns of those tormentors may mean their sufferings rule over them and are inescapable. And their savage appearance suggests they rule over them with brutality.

The lesson seems to be that the minds of unrepentant sinners suffer severely and inescapably in certain ways during part of their lives that the sanctified of God never experience. Perhaps that fifth curse produces a form of mental anguish and torment that only unrepentant sinners suffer. Such sufferings may help explain why so many sinners become drunkards and drug addicts. Those substances dull their pains, but they also dull their minds and do much harm to their lives.

The faith and obedience of the sanctified keep them immune from that kind of mental suffering. They experience an inner peace from God that cannot be understood, as Paul said, **“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your requests known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:6-7).

The passage in Revelation says the agent of the abyss was king over those locusts (the evil spirits). That agent probably controls such things about them as who they can torment and when. That is just another indication of how God has the ultimate control of the world, and no harm can happen without his permission.

- **One woe is departed, behold, two woes yet come after these** (Revelation 9:12).

The second woe seems to be about words, and how God curses men because of how they use them. They use evil words, and God causes those words to create harm against them. They also oppose good words, words of truth about God and his will for them. How their words create evil against them is described figuratively in these next passages of Revelation. The part about how they oppose the truth of God and his will for them is included in the next chapter of this book.

- **And the sixth agent sounded, and I heard a voice, one from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth agent who has the trumpet, Loose the four agents who have been bound at the great river Euphrates. And the four agents were loosed, who were prepared for the hour and for the day and month and year, so that they would kill the third part of men.**
- **And the number of the armies of the horsemen was ten thousands of ten thousands. I heard the number of them. And**

thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those who sit on them having breastplates fiery red, and hyacinth color, and brimstone.

- **And the heads of the horses are like heads of lions, and out of their mouths come fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three plagues the third part of men was killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails. For their tails are similar to serpents, having heads, and by them they injure.**
- **And the rest of the men who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so that they would not worship the demons, and the golden and silver and brass and stone and wooden idols, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts (Revelation 9:13-21).**

That curse is primarily against sinners, and it causes the death of a minority of them. Although it is primarily against sinners, the text does not say it is for them only, as it does in the fifth curse. The text says the men were killed by the fire, smoke, and brimstone out of the mouths of the horses. Thus, the sixth curse seems to refer to the ways men are injured and killed as a result of the force (symbolized by horses) of destructive words that come out of their mouths, and that sometimes afflicts the righteous also.

Words express ideas, and evil ideas can provoke enormous death and destruction, which can erupt with volcanic violence. Evil words can certainly be like fire, smoke, and brimstone. Evil words can be a result of gossip, slander, false teachings, seductive flattery, insults, lies, and many other ways that words are used to provoke various other kinds of evil, including great violence such as rioting and war. Such evil words can sometimes appear very colorful to the naive, like fire, smoke, and brimstone, but beware of how deadly they are. Modern rock-and-roll and “rap” music are examples.

James warned about the power of the tongue for destruction when he said, **“Behold we put bits into the mouths of horses for them to obey us, and we guide about their whole body. Behold also the ships, being so great and driven by fierce winds, are guided about by a very small rudder, wherever the impulse of the man who steers determines.**

“So also the tongue is a little body-part, and boasts greatly. Behold a little fire, how much wood it kindles. And the tongue is a

fire, the world of unrighteousness. Thus, the tongue is made to lead among our body-parts, defiling the whole body, and setting the cycle of nature on fire, and being set on fire by hell” (James 3:3-6).

And although the righteous are not immune from such words, unrepentant sinners seem to suffer the most from them. The righteous are much less inclined to allow their behavior to be influenced by false and harmful words. Nevertheless, no man is immune from the effects of them.

What is the significance of the river Euphrates in that description, is difficult to understand. God intended for that to be the northern border of the land he promised to give to the sons of Israel. For Moses said to them, **“Every place on which the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours, from the wilderness, and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even to the hinder sea shall be your border”** (Deuteronomy 11:24).

Instead of conquering all of the land as God commanded, they quit trying after they won enough to settle there. Since the Euphrates is mentioned in the above passage of Revelation, that may be intended to remind men about that failure by the ancient Israelites to destroy all the people that God had condemned. And that suggests man's failure to obey God's will to combat evil will cause him to release some of his agents to punish them.

That failure to combat evil behavior is very widespread in pagan America, both with the people and with their rulers. Indeed, our sinful rulers have created many laws to make it more difficult to combat evil behavior. That pleases the guilty and increases the profits of defense lawyers, but lawlessness is increasing and more innocent souls are suffering.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The seven thunders

- **And I saw a mighty agent coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud, and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire, and having in his hand an opened book. And he placed his right foot upon the sea, and the left upon the earth.**
- **And he cried out in a great voice as a lion roars. And when he cried out, the seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders uttered, I was going to write. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up what the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them** (Revelation 10:1-4).

I believe the opened book in the hand of the mighty agent was a heavenly record of the will of God for men, which record we find in the Holy Bible. I believe that because of what Revelation says about that book in the passage after the next one. Perhaps what the voices of the seven thunders uttered was the word of God for us spoken directly from heaven. And we are not allowed to hear such words because our knowledge of God's will for us can only come through God's holy prophets and his Son Jesus Christ. And our only record of that knowledge now is in the Holy Bible.

God certainly has the power to speak to the world directly from heaven. Remember, he spoke that way from mount Sinai when he gave the sons of Israel the ten commandments (see Exodus 20). And at the day of Pentecost there were many foreign visitors in Jerusalem, yet when the apostles preached, each man heard in his native language (see Acts 2). God has the power to speak so that the whole world could hear what he was saying. But he does not want to speak that way. He uses the humble to proclaim his word to the humble.

- **And the agent whom I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth raised his right hand to heaven, and swore by him who lives into the ages of the ages, who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that time would be no more. But in the days of the voice of the seventh agent, when he is going to sound, even the mystery of God is finished, as he declared the good news to his bondmen the prophets** (Revelation 10:5-7).

That passage may mean the seventh trumpet would announce the end of this description of God's curses against the world. Nevertheless, the seventh trumpet was not yet sounded; that would come later.

The will of God for man

- **And the voice that I heard from heaven was again speaking with me, and saying, Go, take the little book that has been opened in the hand of the agent who stands upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went to the agent, telling him to give me the little book. And he says to me, Take and eat it. And it will make thy belly bitter, but it will be sweet as honey in thy mouth.**
- **And I took the book out of the agent's hand, and ate it. And it was sweet as honey in my mouth, and when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter. And he says to me, Thou must prophesy again against many peoples, and against nations and tongues and kings (Revelation 10:8-11).**

Remember, I believe the book John ate symbolizes knowledge of God's will for men. The book tasted sweet to him, because for righteous men like John, knowledge of God's will for us provides great encouragement and comfort to our spirits. It is joy to our spirit because it proclaims truth and righteousness, and it gives us hope of eternal life. It is delightful nourishment for the souls of those who love truth and righteousness.

It made his belly bitter, because obedience to the will of God is sorrow to our flesh. It is sorrow because what it commands is against our evil lusts. For remember these words of Paul: **"For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do"** (Galatians 5:17).

Jesus warned his disciples that obedience to him causes suffering in the flesh, when he said to them, **"If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"** (Matthew 16:24), and, **"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life because of me will find it"** (Matthew 10:39). Losing our life is figurative for sacrificing the lusts and sinful desires of our bodies. Thus the book was sweet to John's mouth which symbolizes his spirit, but bitter to his belly which symbolizes his flesh.

Witnessing for Christ

- **And there was given me a reed similar to a rod, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it. And leave out the court outside the temple, and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations. And they will trample the holy city forty-two months. And I will give to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy a thou-**

sand two hundred and sixty days clothed in sackcloth. These men are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, having stood before the Lord of the earth.

- **And if any man wants to harm them, fire comes out of their mouth and devours their enemies. And if any man wants to harm them, he must be killed this way. These men have authority to shut the sky, so that it may not rain the days of their prophecy. And they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they may desire (Revelation 11:1-6).**

The temple, the altar, and the worshipers may symbolize the church. For remember, Paul said to the disciples at Corinth, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God?”** (First Corinthians 6:19). And perhaps John was commanded to take special recognition of all the sanctified of God (members of Christ’s church), but ignore the unbelievers.

The unbelievers of the world are allowed to persecute the church for a time, which time is a half cycle. Seven symbolizes completeness, and forty-two months is half of seven years. Since everything cycles in this world, then they were allowed to trample the holy city (the church) for a half cycle of time.

I believe the two men mentioned in that passage symbolize the small number of humble and lowly men who proclaim the genuine good news of Christ to the world. They were likened to olive trees and lampstands because by their teachings they brought forth much good fruit and light into the world. And the truth of their words destroys the effectiveness of the men who seek to combat their teachings.

Also they have the power (through prayer) to bring plagues upon the earth, even to withhold rain from the sky. As James said about Elijah, **“A working supplication of a righteous man is very powerful. Elijah was a man of the same nature as we. And by prayer, he asked for it not to rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit”** (James 5:16-18).

Nevertheless, such men will not use that power quickly or without full justification, as in the case with Elijah when he thought he was the only righteous man left in Israel. He said to Jehovah, after all his efforts to bring the sons of Israel back to God had failed, **“I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts. For the sons of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away”** (First Kings 19:10).

God now reveals vital knowledge of himself and of his will to his disciples through the words of the Bible. And the spirits of some of them, humble and lowly men, are aroused to be witnesses to proclaim that knowledge of him, and to preach his will to the rest of the world. Yet the world rejects their efforts. And they persecute all of God's disciples, especially those who serve as his witnesses to proclaim him and his will for mankind. When disciples of Christ act as witnesses of God, he gives them the power to send plagues upon the earth if they pray for them. He also protects them so that the truth of their words will defeat all who would harm their efforts.

Their defeat

- **And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the abyss will make war with them, and he will overcome them and kill them. And their corpses are in the thoroughfare of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. And out of the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations they see their corpses three and a half days. And they will not allow their corpses to be put in a sepulcher. And those who dwell upon the earth rejoice over them, and will celebrate, and will give gifts to each other, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth** (Revelation 11:7-10).

Those are also figurative words, and here is what I believe they mean. When God considers the testimony of his witnesses to be full and sufficient he will allow an evil beast from the abyss to defeat and destroy those righteous men who were proclaiming the word of God. That beast is later described, but I will say now I believe it symbolizes **“the world-rulers of the darkness of this age”** (Ephesians 6:12).

Although it says that beast will destroy God's witnesses, it probably means some literally and some figuratively, and not all at the same time. And their defeat will bring rejoicing and celebration by their enemies, because those witnesses tormented the sinful men on the earth. They tormented them by condemning their sinfulness, and by calling for plagues from God to punish them. Remember what Jesus said: **“The world ... hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil”** (John 7:7).

That great city, which was spiritually called Sodom, and Egypt, and Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified, symbolizes centers of civilization that are sinful and opposed to God. Sodom was morally corrupt, Egypt persecuted God's people severely, and Jerusalem crucified the Son of God. The sinners of the world will slander and abuse the memory of those witnesses for God, and they will rejoice greatly because

of their defeat. They will rejoice because those men, who proclaimed the truth of God to them, rebuked and condemned them for their sinfulness. And sinners hate criticism and rebuke.

Their victory

- **And after the three and a half days a spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell upon those who watched them. And I heard a great voice from heaven saying to them, Come up here. And they ascended up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. And in that day a great earthquake occurred, and the tenth part of the city fell. And seven thousand names of men were killed in the earthquake. And the rest became afraid, and gave glory to the God of heaven (Revelation 11:11-13).**

That description is, of course, also very figurative, and here is what I think it means. For a short half cycle of time the world thought all those who proclaim the truth of God had been defeated and eliminated, and they rejoiced because of their defeat. But not long afterward God caused something to happen to greatly enhance the reputation of his witnesses in the sight of the world. And the realization by those men of what they had done to God's witnesses sent fear into their hearts. At the same time great disasters struck and killing many of them. That contributed to their fear, and they turned to God to honor him.

I do not believe all of those things refer to a single time in history. They probably symbolize a cyclic pattern. One that begins with a lengthy (but variable) time when righteous souls will be persecuted, and a few of them, humble and lowly men, will proclaim the word of God. That is followed by a shorter time when the testimony of God will seem to suffer total defeat. After which God will cause something in the world to shock their persecutors into realizing the great value of that testimony and they will begin worshiping him.

Examples of that happening are the prophets of the Old Testament. They were God's humble witnesses in the years before the nation of Israel was destroyed and the people were carried away captive. Jeremiah wrote more about how he was persecuted than the others, but they were all persecuted. For Stephen said to the Jews, "**Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?**" (Acts 7:52).

The prophet Jeremiah was hated, maligned, often arrested, and even cast into a deep, narrow, muddy well to die a slow death. Yet after Israel was destroyed, and the Jews returned from exile to restore their

nation many years later, the words of Jeremiah were added to their holy scriptures. They were added because they were proven to be from God.

Another example can be seen in the apostles of Christ. Here is what Paul wrote about them: **“For I think God has exhibited us the apostles least, as men sentenced to die, because we became a spectacle to the world, both to agents and to men. We are foolish for the sake of Christ, but ye are wise in Christ. We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are esteemed, but we are disreputable.**

“As far as the present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are ill clothed, and are treated roughly, and are homeless. And we toil, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being slandered, we entreat. We became as trash of the world, an offscouring of all things, until now” (First Corinthians 4:9-13).

Paul said they became as the trash of the world and an offscouring of all things. And yet, as with Jeremiah, their words became holy scripture, and even unbelievers now recognize them as great men.

Therefore dear brothers, as faithful disciples of Christ, we should persevere in our service to God, especially our witnessing to the world about him, even when we are severely persecuted. Because rejection and persecution always happen, especially to those who serve as God’s witnesses. Nevertheless, the final victory always belongs to God. And our labors will eventually bear much fruit and light, and we will be respected even by sinners.

- **The second woe departed. Behold, the third woe comes quickly** (Revelation 11:14).

Remember, the second woe seems to be about words, and how God curses men because (1) they use them for evil, and (2) they oppose words of truth about him and his will for us. Although the third woe is never named in the book, it is probably about how the devil and his disciples on the earth fight against God and his righteousness. For the word woe is used only once more in the book of Revelation, and that was after the devil was cast out of heaven to the earth. When that happened the book says, **“Rejoice because of this, O heavens, and ye who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has little time”** (Revelation 12:12).

Satan is truly a curse to mankind, because he is the great enemy of God and his righteousness. And he leads most of the world astray. His war against God on the earth is described in much of what remains in the book of Revelation.

Final victory

- **And the seventh agent sounded, and great voices occurred in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he will reign into the ages of the ages. And the twenty-four elders who sit before the throne of God, on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying, We thank thee, Lord God Almighty, who is and was, because thou have taken thy great power and reigned.**
- **And the nations were angry. And thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to thy bondmen the prophets, and to the sanctified, and to those who fear thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:15-18).**

Those things seem to be about the end of the world, and the final judgment when God will reward all who loved and obeyed him on the earth, and in his wrath he will **“destroy those who destroy the earth.”** Men destroy the earth by polluting it with all their sinful deeds.

- **And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord was seen in his temple. And there occurred lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and great hail (Revelation 11:19).**

The covenant of the Lord, his new covenant brought to us by his only begotten Son, is his promise that men on earth can become his sons for eternity if we will believe and obey that Son. And the temple in heaven, having been opened to reveal that, may symbolize, at the time of judgment, the recognition by all of mankind of the enormous beauty and value of that covenant. Remember, the new covenant of God is called the good news. And “good news” is truly a great understatement. It is the most fabulous news for all who love God and his righteousness, especially for the poor and lowly.

The lightnings, thunders, voices, and great hail may indicate expressions of God’s great power. That description may be a reminder of the mighty power he has to punish sinners. And it seems to end this part of Revelation about the nature of our world, which is about God’s reaction to rebellion against him here upon the earth.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE DEVIL

The next part of Revelation describes the great spiritual forces that are hostile to God, hostile to his righteousness, and hostile to his sons. It seems to be about the most powerful enemies of God: the devil and his organized allies. I speak about the devil's allies in subsequent chapters of this book. I believe all those things are about Satan's kingdom, which Jesus mentioned when some Jewish scholars accused him of casting out demons by the power of the devil.

Remember what Jesus said to them: **“How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has rise up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end”** (Mark 3:23-26). Although Satan is not divided against himself, his kingdom is a very loose one. I say more about that farther in this chapter.

Regarding their accusation against Jesus, his opposition against Satan was total. He not only combated the demons, but he was against everything else about Satan's evil influence and activities in the world. Jesus was completely opposed to Satan, as John said of him: **“He who is doing sin is of the devil, because the devil sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was made known for this, so that he might destroy the works of the devil”** (First John 3:8).

God's righteousness symbolized

- **And a great sign was seen in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. And having in her womb, she cried out, suffering birth pains, and suffering to give birth** (Revelation 12:1-2).

The passage says, **“a great sign was seen in heaven.”** However, a later passage says she was on the earth. She is clearly not a creature. I believe she symbolizes a spirit that personifies God's righteousness among men, both in heaven and on the earth. Solomon, in the first third of his book of Proverbs, personified wisdom as a noble woman, and he personified folly as an evil woman. In this section of John's report, what he first saw was a woman who was clothed, supported, and crowned with brightness. God's righteousness is based upon truth and wisdom, which is brightness, and it contrasts with the darkness of sin in the world.

The word of God has always emphasized light and truth over darkness and deceit. Indeed, Jesus himself personified light, as John said about him in another book: **“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it”** (John 1:4-5). And Paul said it was God **“Who rescued us out of the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love ...”** (Colossians 1:13).

John also said, **“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. For every man who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God”** (John 3:19-21).

That woman was suffering birth pains. And those birth pains seem to symbolize the struggle and suffering necessary for God's righteousness upon the earth to bear fruit. For a later text says that she had other offspring on the earth. The text also says later that she bore Jesus Christ. And it was God's righteousness upon the earth that brought forth Jesus into the world.

It is only with struggle and suffering that any righteous soul upon the earth can bear fruit. Jesus was the sinless Son of God, yet it was even necessary for him to suffer. Remember what the author of Hebrews said about him: **“For it was fitting for him, through whom are all things, and because of whom are all things, having brought many sons to glory, to make the Pathfinder of their salvation fully perfect through sufferings”** (Hebrews 2:10). He suffered so that he could be fully perfected as our Redeemer.

Paul offered some encouraging words for us about our suffering, so be not disheartened when you must suffer for righteousness. Here is what he wrote to the Corinthians: **“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in all our affliction, in order for us to be able to encourage those in every affliction, through the encouragement of which we ourselves are encouraged by God. Because, as the sufferings of the Christ abound to us, so also our encouragement abounds through the Christ.**

“But whether we are oppressed, it is for your encouragement and salvation, which works by endurance from the same sufferings that we also experience (and our hope for you is steadfast), or we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement and salvation, knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so also of the encouragement” (Second Corinthians 1:3-7).

And remember, he also wrote in his letter to the Romans of the great reward God has for us who endure suffering for his righteousness: **“The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer jointly, so that we may also be glorified jointly. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us”** (Romans 8:16-18).

The fiery red dragon

- **And another sign was seen in heaven. And behold, a great fiery red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads** (Revelation 12:3).

That great fiery red dragon is later identified as the devil. The description of him is, of course, figurative. Horns symbolize power; heads symbolize things like mentality and leadership; and diadems symbolize authority. Since the dragon is described as a predatory beast that has seven heads, that suggests he is an evil creature that has a very divided mentality, a mentality that leads about and seeks to satisfy his one monstrous body.

Having ten horns and seven heads suggest he not only has a divided mentality but he has more power than intelligence. Having diadems on his heads indicates he has great authority. And that each of his heads has a diadem seems to indicate that he retains his authority even though he has a divided mentality. Having a divided mentality means he is completely unstable in his thinking and behavior. For when James was speaking about how to ask God for wisdom, he said, **“And if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives to all generously and not reproaching, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by wind and tossed about. For that man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord, a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways”** (James 1:5-8).

James said a double-minded man was unstable in all his ways. The devil is more than double-minded. His mentality is multiple-minded to the fullest extent (the symbolic seven), which means he is completely unstable, unreliable, and untrustworthy. Those seven heads may also symbolize his desperation to think of ways to defeat God so that he can seize complete supremacy.

The devil has a divided mentality, and he is only united in his evil feelings, lusts, and desires, and in his opposition to God—he has one monstrous body. Remember, he is the ruler of this world, and the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. That may be another rea-

son why there is so much division in the world. Although the devil is the ruler of this world, he is incapable of uniting men together to do anything except to oppose the righteousness of God, because he himself has such a divided mentality.

Therefore, Satan's kingdom is very loosely united. It seems to be like this description of a nation that was prophesied in the book of Daniel: **"And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things. And as iron that crushes all these, it shall break in pieces and crush. And whereas thou saw the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom. But there shall be of the strength of the iron in it, inasmuch as thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men, but they shall not cling one to another, even as iron does not mix with clay"** (Daniel 2:40-43).

Bible commentators generally agree that prophecy describes the Roman empire, which was a loose federation of countries. It was "a divided kingdom" in the sense that it was composed of different countries with different languages. Nevertheless, they were all united in the one empire, which was held together with the strength of iron (brute force). And that seems to be the kind of kingdom Satan has.

- **And his tail drags the third part of the stars of the heaven, and cast them to the earth** (Revelation 12:4).

Remember, the third part of the stars that the dragon cast upon the earth probably symbolizes the spiritual allies he had in heaven, which are now the demons of the world. Such spiritual creatures prefer to be in the world where they can live independent of God's will. They were probably spirits of God's offspring in heaven who joined the devil in opposition to him, because they have knowledge of good and evil, and the power of free will. And by Satan's influence those of them who were still in heaven fought with him when he was being cast out from there. Remember what the demons said to Jesus: **"What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God? Did thou come here before the time to torment us?"** (Matthew 8:29). God is allowing them to live and roam upon the earth before the time of the final judgment.

Christ and the devil

- **And the dragon stood before the woman who was going to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male who was going to**

tend all the nations with an iron rod. And her child was taken up to God and to his throne (Revelation 12:4-5).

The child that the woman delivered was Jesus Christ. The woman symbolizes God's righteousness among men, and it was through God's righteousness that Jesus, being the Son of God and the son of man, became our Savior. The devil wanted to destroy him because Jesus' life of perfect obedience as the son of man would defeat the devil's arguments to justify sin. Remember, Paul said that **"God, having sent his own Son in a form of flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh ..."** (Romans 8:3). In spite of all the devil's efforts against him Jesus remained sinless. He lived in perfect obedience to God in this dark world filled with trials and temptations—he alone of all of the children of God.

Jesus' sinless life of obedience caused the condemnation of the devil, which meant the devil could no longer be in heaven. For Jesus told his apostles just before his betrayal and crucifixion, **"Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. And he said this, signifying by what death he was going to die"** (John 12:31-33). Jesus would draw all men to him by offering them redemption from their sins. For he earned that right by suffering in faithful obedience even to the point of crucifixion (lifted up).

His sinless life of obedience to God brought glory both to himself and to the Father. For he proved their complete superiority. As he said to his apostles, just before his crucifixion, **"Now the Son of man is glorified, and God is glorified in him"** (John 13:31). Therefore, God has raised him up to his throne, where he will reign over all the nations with an iron rod, which means with strict control.

The nations in the passage in Revelation refer to all men who have not been redeemed by Jesus, because they refused to repent and submit to him. Consequently, when this sinful world is destroyed, those men will be bound and cast into the lake of fire with the devil and the demons. In that place those unrepentant sinners will no longer have the ability to rebel, for they will be ruled with absolute control; they will be ruled with an iron rod—with hard and unbreakable force.

- **And the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place there prepared by God, so that they may nourish her there a thousand two hundred sixty days** (Revelation 12:6).

The text says the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place there prepared by God so she could be nourished for three and a half years (a half cycle of time). The wilderness probably symbolizes the humble and lowly souls of the earth, where God's righteousness is

nourished and preserved for a period of time. Remember, that was the same length of time that the two witnesses of God testified about him before they were slain.

Men who are faithful disciples of Christ are humble and lowly, for Jesus said to God, **“I extol thee, O Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, because thou hid these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to the childlike. Yea, Father, because this way it was done pleasing in thy sight”** (Matthew 11:25-26). They are humble and lowly, yet they preserve righteousness upon the earth.

Man and the devil

- **And war developed in heaven: Michael and his agents to fight with the dragon. And the dragon and his agents fought. And he did not prevail, nor was a place found for him any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, he who leads the whole world astray. He was cast out to the earth, and his agents were cast out with him** (Revelation 12:7-9).

After Jesus ascended to God's throne the devil was condemned to be cast out of heaven. When Adam and Eve sinned they were sent out of the garden of Eden, and they departed passively. The devil was cast out of heaven because all of his arguments for sin were defeated by the Son of God. However, the devil did not leave without a fight. Like every wicked man he demands justice for himself and his allies, but he does not want justice against himself.

The devil lost his war in heaven and he was cast out. However, he still leads the whole world astray. He uses temptations and deceit to lead men astray. And once he is accepted into the heart of a man, he keeps him deceived about the truth, and keeps him disobedient to God. And that is the case with most men of the world.

That is taught in this passage Paul wrote, which was about the Jews who would not accept Jesus: **“But to this day when Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is removed”** (Second Corinthians 3:15-16). Their refusal to believe keeps them blinded to the truth about Jesus and his good news. The veil over their eyes prevents them from recognizing how the message of the good news of Christ was sent by God and is far superior to the law of Moses, which it supersedes. You can read more about that in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

- **And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now it came to pass, the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. Because the accuser of**

our brothers was cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night (Revelation 12:10).

While the devil was in heaven he continually accused the faithful offspring of God who were in the world because of our inability to live without sin. He can no longer do that before God, because Jesus' perfect sacrifice redeemed us from condemnation. That brought us salvation, and made us righteous before God. It also brought us spiritual power over our enemies and established his church, the kingdom of God on the earth for us. And it proved the moral and spiritual superiority of Christ, which verified indisputably his right to have authority over all things. Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament, and he had been constantly challenged by the devil in heaven. God continues to be challenged on the earth by sinful men.

The devil can no longer accuse us in heaven, but he uses his allies on the earth to continually accuse us and condemn us here. That helps keep sinful men blinded to the truth. His allies look for every fault they can find in our lives to accuse us, especially when we oppose them. And if they cannot find any against us, they invent some and accuse us falsely. That is a major way the devil and his allies fight against us. Remember, "false accuser" is the literal meaning of the Greek word for devil.

• **And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they loved not their life to the point of death** (Revelation 12:11).

We overcame the devil by Jesus' power to redeem us, and by our acceptance of the word of his good news, which his apostles first testified and we continue to proclaim. For neither the devil nor anybody else can now justifiably accuse before God those who belong to Christ. For Paul said, "**Who will accuse against the chosen of God? God is he who makes righteous. Who is he who will condemn? It is Christ who died, but more, who also was raised up, who also is at the right hand of God, who also appeals for us**" (Romans 8:33-34).

Jesus' death upon the cross culminated his life of perfect self-sacrifice. Therefore, he won the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. For he paid all our debts to God caused by our sins. Therefore, we can no longer be condemned to hell with the devil and the demons. We cannot be condemned as long as we remain faithful and obedient to Christ, and are willing to sacrifice our lives for God as Jesus did his life upon the earth.

Most of us sacrifice our lives for him in a figurative way, by giving up our selfishness and living righteously in obedience to the will of God.

As Jesus said to his disciples, **“If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. For what does it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Matthew 16:24-26).

Woe to the world

- **Rejoice because of this, O heavens, and ye who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has little time** (Revelation 12:12).

That passage says woe to the world because the devil has come down to us. His presence is a curse to us because he is the great enemy of God and all who belong to him. And he is powerful and cunning enough to lead the world astray so it will join him in his opposition to God, which causes God to send curses upon the earth because of that opposition. Therefore, the devil is a curse to all of mankind, whether they join him or not. If men join him, then they will be cursed and condemned with him. And if men do not join him, then he persecutes them. Therefore, woe to us on the earth. The devil is a curse to us either way.

The Bible indicates that the devil was a thorn in the side of all the righteous souls in heaven before Christ's great victory over him. Remember how the devil confronted and disputed with Jehovah about the righteous man Job. The devil challenged Jehovah's assessment of Job and implied he was wiser than Jehovah. Jehovah called Job a perfect and upright man. But the devil said in effect that Jehovah was wrong, and if Job were tested that would prove Jehovah was wrong.

That event was no doubt a tiny sample of the continual challenges and accusations the devil made to God against us. But the victory of the Lamb, Jesus' sinless life of obedience, brought us salvation, justified his power, established God's kingdom (the church, composed of his sons for eternity), and won him the ultimate authority. It defeated all of the devil's arguments. The citizens of heaven knew those things, which is no doubt why they rejoiced. The devil is full of wrath because he was defeated by Christ (justly), and he lost his ability to be in heaven.

There is a very popular myth that says hell is the devil's domain. That myth is even perpetrated by some men who call themselves Christians. Hell is definitely *not* the devil's domain nor will it ever be. When he is finally cast into hell he will be in bondage there, and ruled

with an iron rod like every other soul there. He will have no freedom or authority, and he will suffer the fires of hell like every other sinner.

His domain is not hell but the world, where he roams about leading men astray and seeking to destroy those who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. For he is the invisible spirit that works in the sons of disobedience, and who is the ruler of this world. And the more I have learned from the Bible, the more I can see his evil spirit continually at work using sinful men to undermine faith in God and his righteousness. Regarding that myth about him, no doubt the devil helps perpetrate it, because it keeps men from knowing the truth about how he actually operates.

Perhaps what is meant by the devil having little time is that he has little time before he is bound and cast into the abyss, which I describe in the chapter *The Defeat of Satan's Kingdom*. It may also mean he has little time before being cast into the lake of fire to remain forever, which may be thousands of years from now. For remember, “... **one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day**” (Second Peter 3:8).

Persecuting the righteous

- **And when the dragon saw that he was cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male. And two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she might fly into the wilderness to her place. So that she might be nourished there for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.**
- **And the serpent cast water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might make her carried away by the flood. And the earth helped the woman. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was angry toward the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, those keeping the commandments of God, and having the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:13-17).**

As I suggested earlier, the wilderness mentioned in the above passage in Revelation probably symbolizes the hearts of righteous souls, faithful men who are humble and lowly. The “**time, and times, and half a time**” no doubt means three and a half, which is half of seven. Hence a half cycle of time. The river from the mouth of Satan may symbolize the lies used by his disciples in an effort to overwhelm obedience to the righteousness of God.

Remember, two of the main methods of our enemies are to continually pour out lies against God's righteousness, and to make false accusations against all who are striving to become his sons for eternity. Yet God causes some kinds of forces of the earth (both human and nonhuman) to create circumstances that prevent those lies and false accusations from destroying his righteousness. That may be the meaning of the earth opening its mouth.

It is very common for unbelievers to condemn those who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. Peter spoke of that when he said, **"Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Having your behavior good among the Gentiles, so that, upon which they speak against you as evildoers, they may glorify God in the day of visitation, from having observed your good works"** (First Peter 2:11-12). Sinful men are deceived by the devil here upon the earth so as to speak against us as evildoers. But in heaven they will learn the truth of our good works, and then they will glorify God.

Nevertheless, whatever those things in Revelation mean, the devil continues to try to destroy those who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. He wants to destroy us because we are allied with God in his war against sin. Perhaps another reason he wants to destroy us is because God may have a quota of souls that he wants to become his sons before he ends the world. God may want a certain number of his offspring to be his sons for eternity, and he does not choose who they will be until they are tested by living in this world.

Whether that is true or not, if Satan believes it then he may think the more souls he can turn away from God the longer he can roam the earth and escape the lake of fire. And that may be another reason why he is such a vicious enemy of all who are righteous.

Nevertheless, no matter how strong an enemy he becomes to us, consider these encouraging words of John: **"... greater is he in you than he in the world"** (First John 4:4). And also consider these of Paul: **"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor agents, nor principal positions, nor powers, nor things that have come, nor things that are coming, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:38-39).

SATAN'S KINGDOM

The previous material in Revelation was about the devil, the great fiery red dragon, who was cast out of heaven after Jesus ascended victoriously to God's throne. The material in the next part seems to be about Satan's kingdom on the earth. However, his kingdom existed here long before he was cast out of heaven. Remember how Jesus spoke of Satan's kingdom when the Pharisees accused him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub the ruler of the demons.

John told how we can identify followers of the devil, when he said, **"By this the children of God are visible, and the children of the devil. Every man not doing righteousness is not of God, and he who is not loving his brother"** (First John 3:10). Every man not doing righteousness and not loving his brother (other righteous men) is a child of the devil and part of his kingdom. God's kingdom on the earth consists of men who are doing righteousness and loving their brothers, and they are God's children. And every man in the world belongs in one or the other of those spiritual kingdoms.

The world-rulers of the darkness

- **And I stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea having ten horns, and seven heads, and ten diadems upon its horns, and upon its heads names of blasphemy. And the beast that I saw was similar to a leopard. And its feet were like a bear, and its mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave to it his power, and his throne, and great authority. And one of its heads was as in death, having been killed. And its deadly wound was healed.**
- **And the whole earth marveled behind the beast. And they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and who is able to war against it? And a mouth was given to it speaking great things and blasphemy. And authority was given it to make war forty-two months. And it opened its mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, those who dwell in heaven. And it was given it to make war with the sanctified, and to overcome them.**
- **And authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to it. And all who dwell upon the earth will worship it, whose name has not been written in the book of**

life of the Lamb who was killed from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:1-8).

Jesus was the Lamb who was killed from the foundation of the world. He was killed in the sense of being destined from the beginning to be killed for our salvation. He is our sacrificial “passover lamb.”

Regarding the beast, there has never been such a physical creature upon the earth nor will there be. That description symbolizes a spiritual “beast” that is a type of evil spirit or way of thinking in the minds of certain sinful men. It is a single beast because it is a common spirit that is in their minds, a way of thinking that is like that of the devil. Remember, thoughts in our minds are a type of spirit. That beast is manifested by different men, but it is a common spirit within them. Men who have that spirit within them live and die, but that spirit endures in the minds of men who replace them. Nations continue to exist even though their citizens are continually being replaced as they are born, live, and then die. Likewise that evil beast.

That beast seems to be the one the book previously said ascended out of the abyss. John said in the above passage he saw the beast rising out of the sea. Now remember, in other passages of the Bible the sea sometimes symbolized populations of mankind. And at another place in the book of Revelation water is used to symbolize those populations: **“The waters that thou saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues”** (Revelation 17:15). Therefore, the sea from which the beast arose must symbolize the population of the world.

I said previously that the pit of the abyss was a prison for evil spirits. Perhaps the abyss can also refer to the minds of men who harbor evil thoughts within their hearts, which is another pit of evil spirits. That would mean this beast was a product of evil thoughts and ideas (a type of evil spirits) that develop in the minds of sinful men. Consider this proverb: **“He who hates masquerades with his lips, but he lays up deceit within him. When he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart”** (Proverbs 26:24-25). Evil men are full of abominations in their hearts.

That beast arose out of the sea (see 13:1), meaning from the population of the world. And it ascended from the abyss (see 11:7), meaning it is composed of evil spirits, which in this case I believe are evil thoughts in the hearts of men. It was described as being generally similar to the dragon, which means it is a satanic creature. It was more specifically described in symbolic terms as being aggressive, predatory, and stealthy. It was also said to be boastful and blasphemous. And it was described as having **“authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation”**

There is only one mighty power among men throughout the world that has such authority and force, and that is the governments of nations. Remember, horns symbolize power; heads symbolize things like mentality and leadership; and diadems symbolize authority. Its seven heads may symbolize the rulers of world governments, for remember the number seven symbolizes completeness. And its horns and diadems symbolize their power and authority. Having ten diadems on its horns may symbolize authority based upon force, which is true of all governments. And like the devil, having more horns than heads suggests that beast has more power than intelligence, which is certainly true of world governments.

Also world governments cannot be eliminated. A particular regime may be destroyed, but as long as a nation exists it will have a government. The head with the deadly wound that was healed may symbolize that fact. The wound symbolizes the destruction of a government controlled by a particular regime. Yet a government of one kind or another always survives, being ruled by somebody else.

Regarding world governments, remember what Paul said: **“Put on the full armor of God to enable you to stand against the wiles of the devil. Because our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principal offices, against the positions of authority, against the world-rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things”** (Ephesians 6:11-12).

As children of God, ours is a spiritual warfare, a warfare that is now centered in the world. It involves a conflict between spiritual powers: the power of God versus the power the devil, each joined by their respective allies. And since the devil is now the ruler of this world, then his allies occupy all of the principle offices and positions of authority (virtually all). They are **“the world-rulers of the darkness of this age,”** which are the dominant rulers of the governments of this world. And remember, the **“spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things”** probably refer to the devil and the demons that roam the earth.

Regarding the relationship of world governments to the devil, remember one of the things the devil said to Jesus when he was tempting him in the wilderness: **“And having brought him onto a high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, I will give to thee all this authority, and the glory of them, because it has been delivered to me, and to whomever I want I give it. If therefore thou wilt worship before me, it will all be thine”** (Luke 4:7). The great majority of men have always been allied with the devil.

Jehovah gave the world to mankind, but men have given themselves to the devil. For remember, Paul said the devil is the **“spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). And Jesus called him the ruler of this world at the last supper. Jesus was going to be betrayed, which would result in his crucifixion. And when Jesus ascended back to heaven, the devil was going to be cast out from there. Therefore he said, **“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”** (John 12:31).

Satan, the fiery red dragon, was cast out of heaven after Jesus was raised from the earth to the throne of God. Satan was cast out of heaven because the sinless and sacrificial life of Jesus defeated all of the devil's arguments to defend his opposition to God. Therefore, he was found unworthy of living in heaven. Remember, God is tolerating him on the earth because he is still developing sons for eternity, and they need to suffer for righteousness as Jesus did so they can prove their worthiness.

The passage in Revelation said about the beast, **“And the dragon gave to it his power, and his throne, and great authority.”** That power and authority is over the sons of disobedience, because he is the ruler of this world. And the populations of the world are ruled by their governments. And since the governments of the world belong to the devil, that is more evidence that the beast must symbolize those governments, **“the world-rulers of the darkness of this age.”**

Those world-rulers of the darkness, those who serve the devil, claim supremacy even over God and all religions, and they require all men to serve and venerate them as supreme. How subtle or blatant they are about it depends upon how much power they gain over their populations. Nevertheless, they all claim ultimate authority, and they use the power of their “horns” to enforce it.

History shows that world governments have always been more or less disobedient to God, except for a few brief times in the small country of ancient Israel. The word of God says that Jesus is **“Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14). Yet no government has ever recognized him that way. Governments ruled by Catholicism do not serve God, because the Catholic hierarchy and their traditions are nothing like the true church. And Islam is a completely false religion. The deity of Muslims is Allah, who is absolutely *not* God. Never insult God by associating his name in any way with that evil and ruthless religion, which is what servants of the devil are doing.

Even the founders of our American government (when most of whose citizens believed in Christ) excluded God from involvement in government, except to occasionally honor him with their lips. Remember what Jesus said about being neutral toward him: **“He who is not with**

me is against me ..." (Matthew 12:30). When our forefathers excluded the King of kings from involvement in our government, that made them against him. Although I am sure they did not realize it.

Incidentally, when Jesus was giving instructions to John for the congregation at Pergamos, among his words for them, was, **"I know thy works, and where thou dwell, where Satan's throne is. And thou hold firm my name, and did not deny my faith in the days in which Antipas was my faithful witness, who was killed among you where Satan dwells"** (Revelation 2:13). Jesus did not mean that Satan dwelt at the city of Pergamos. He meant Satan dwells in the world. And he has a throne here because men have chosen him to rule over them.

Two spirits within world governments

Now the disciples of Christ are commanded to obey their governments. For Peter said, **"Therefore because of the Lord, ye should submit to every human establishment, whether to a king as being supreme, or to governors as being sent by him for vengeance of evildoers and praise of well-doers"** (First Peter 2:13-14). And Paul said, **"I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men, for kings and all those who are in prominence, so that we may live a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and propriety. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of truth"** (First Timothy 2:1-4).

Paul even said they were helpers of God to punish evil men: **"Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves. For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it.**

"For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil. Therefore there is a need to be subordinate, not only because of the wrath, but also because of the conscience. For because of this ye also fulfill taxes, for they are servants of God being devoted to this same thing. Render therefore to all, the things

due: tax to the man of tax, tribute to the man of tribute, fear to the man of fear, esteem to the man of esteem” (Romans 13:3-7).

Since those things were commanded, how could that beast symbolize world governments? It could symbolize a certain kind of spirit within governments. The Bible teaches that we are to submit to them when they serve God by promoting law and order, and by opposing evil men, but not when they act against God. For both Peter and Paul often disobeyed governors and other men in offices of authority when those rulers were opposing God and his righteousness.

Notice what Paul said about them: **“For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted.”** That means offices of authority or their office holders are not legitimate if they are **“not by God,”** meaning they do not act as a **“helper of God” “for vengeance of evildoers and praise of well-doers.”** And we can conclude from what the early disciples did that whenever any office holder commands us to violate the will of God, then we also must disobey him. For Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Thus it seems, every government is influenced by two spirits. First, God influences the rulers of our governments to be his servants by promoting righteousness and opposing evil. Consider these instructions Jesus gave to his disciples about obeying the rulers of the government: **“The scholars and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. All things therefore, however many they may tell you to observe, observe and do, but do not ye according to their works, for they say, and do not”** (Matthew 23:2-3). The scholars and Pharisees were hypocrites who did evil, but they still promoted the laws of Moses for the population: they sat **“on Moses seat.”** Indeed, no nation could survive if their rulers did not promote some law and order.

Second, since God has allowed all the kingdoms of the world to belong to the devil, then the devil’s spirit controls them. And I believe that satanic beast described in Revelation symbolizes the human manifestation of the spirit of the devil that controls world governments.

Thus, there are two spirits at work in the governments of the world. The Spirit of God influences them to promote deeds of righteousness and oppose evil ones, which helps maintain law and order in their countries. In contrast the spirit of the devil influences them to be aggressive, predatory, stealthy, boastful, and blasphemous. That satanic spirit causes them to resist honoring Christ as their Lord and King, and leads them to persecute the faithful of God. It is just another part of the continuing war between God and the devil.

It should be noted, however, that the evil spirit of a government is not always dominant enough to persecute us fully. Therefore, such hostility to the sanctified of God can cycle from very mild to very severe. That is what is happening in the United States of America. The spirit of that satanic beast has increased greatly in my country in the last half-century. Consequently, hostility toward Christians, including persecution against them, by our government is increasing in this land, which was formerly populated mostly by Christians. In this book of Revelation God is warning us to expect things like that to happen.

- **If any man has an ear, let him hear. If any man keeps in captivity, he goes. If any man kills with a sword, he must be killed with a sword. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the sanctified** (Revelation 13:9-10).

Those are more words of warning about sin, and encouragement for faithfulness to God.

False religions and evil ideologies

- **And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and it had two horns similar to a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon. And it exercises all the authority of the first beast before it. And it made the earth and those who dwell in it so that they would worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. And it does great signs, so that even fire would come down out of the sky upon the earth in the sight of men.**
- **And it leads my kind astray (those dwelling on the earth) because of the signs that were given it to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast that had the sword-wound and lived. And it was given it to give a spirit to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would both speak, and would make as many as would not ever worship the image of the beast be killed.**
- **And it makes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the freemen and the bondmen, that they would give them marks on their right hand, or on their foreheads. And so that not any man can buy or sell unless having the mark—the name of the beast or the number of its name. Here is wisdom: He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a number of a man. And its number is 666** (Revelation 13:11-18).

That beast was later called the false prophet (see 16:13). John gave no description of its appearance, except to say it had two horns similar to a lamb. What John describes is how it behaves. Since it was called the false prophet, it must symbolize erroneous beliefs about God and how he wants us to live in the world. That means it is about false religions and evil ideologies.

The description of that second beast seems to say we should expect to see such beliefs arise that superficially appear to be gentle and harmless (like a lamb), but they speak like the devil and are a part of his kingdom. Such beliefs support and promote the spirit of governments that is hostile to God and his righteousness.

The passage says that men who champion those false beliefs will use powerful methods of persuasion to lead populations astray and cause them to submit to and serve the satanic parts of their governments. As Jesus prophesied, there will be many false prophets who will use such devices: **“For there will arise false Christs and false prophets, and they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen”** (Matthew 24:24).

Such men will rely heavily upon deceit, because the spirit of the devil guides them. For remember, Jesus said deceit is a natural part of the devil: **“... and he has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it”** (John 8:44). And when Paul was defending himself against false teachers in the church, he said about them, **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for even Satan disguises himself into an agent of light”** (Second Corinthians 11:13-14).

None of the great signs that unrighteous men use are supernatural, for only God has that power, and he no longer gives it to men. Moreover, he never gave it to a sinner. Some of those deceivers may rely upon superstition and coincidental effects to give the impression they have divine powers. Some of them may also utilize clever magical tricks and ingenious devices, as well as knowledge of natural laws to create **“great signs and wonders”** to lead men astray.

Notice also the text says the second beast told men to make an image of the first beast. Since I believe the first beast symbolizes the satanic part of world governments, then it must be some kind of image of that. Perhaps the image symbolizes an idealized description of that part of government, which description is then promoted and worshiped. And perhaps that idealized description eventually becomes so deeply ingrained in the hearts of the people that it becomes a motivating spirit within them.

Perhaps an example of such an “image” is the modern doctrine of communism. Communism is a type of image, an abstract image that is an idealistic form of government. One that is hostile to God, and is composed of **“world-rulers of the darkness of this age.”** Supporters of communism worship that idealistic form of government.

Another example that few Americans realize is the American Constitution, the laws of which are now worshiped and interpreted to combat God and his will for us. They are now being used to support all manner of wrongs they call “rights,” and to take away our God-given rights to perform righteousness. Our constitution has become an idol. For all of our rulers are required to bow down and do homage to that human document instead of the sacred document of the word of God. Humanism is the evil ideology that has promoted the worship of that human document, which document is an example of the “image” of the beast; the beast that is composed of men who control the governments of the world to oppose the reign of Christ and his righteousness.

Evil ideologies and false religions also make all men become aligned with the part of their government that is hostile to God, and they create situations that require all men to support it. The passage said that beast **“exercises all the authority of the first beast before it.”** That authority is not based upon legal requirements of governments. It is based upon the spiritual authority the devil has over the sons of disobedience.

Such ideologies and false religions lead to physical and economic persecution against the sanctified of God. Rules, regulations, and socio-economic conventions are promoted so as to isolate and brand as unfit all who will not cooperate with those parts of governments that are hostile to God and his righteousness.

For example, our public schools take the children of the country and subtly turn their hearts away from God. Regulations have been created so that no text book is allowed to be used if it honors God as Creator of the world; no teacher is allowed employment unless he teaches that all organisms evolved naturally during a period of millions of years; and no Bible is allowed on the property nor can the name of God even be mentioned, unless it is taken in vain as an expletive (violating the third of the ten commandments). The colleges and universities are even more blatant in their hostility toward him.

Consider also the issues of abortion and homosexuality. We who oppose those things are called extremists and phobic (phobias are mental disorders). They have encouraged the creation of legislation such as the ones they call “anti-discrimination” and “hate-crime” laws, which are being used to persecute us. Those laws are designed

to criminalize our opposition to their evil, which opposition they demonize as “discrimination” and “hate.”

Those hypocrites themselves constantly discriminate against us, and they are filled with hatred of our righteousness. Yet they condemn as evil our opposition and hatred of their wickedness. Nevertheless, they are bringing the wrath of God against them, because the prophet Isaiah said, **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”** (Isaiah 5:20).

The meaning of the number of the first beast (666) is very mysterious. But perhaps that number symbolizes great power and wealth, because that was the number of talents of gold that came to king Solomon each year (see First Kings 10:14). And there is nothing that has more power and wealth than world governments. It also may symbolize a system that is flawed: not reaching a perfect seven (only six) or a full half of it (only three).

Dear reader, if you want to know why there is so much opposition to Christ and the Bible by world governments, the book of Revelation tells you. If you are puzzled why there is now so much government support in America for false religions such as Islam and Buddhism, but hostility toward Christ and the Bible, the book of Revelation tells you. There are powerful spiritual forces at war in this world, powers for the devil against powers for God. On the side of the devil is the satanic spiritual beast that rules the nations of the world. And that beast is supported by another spiritual beast that helps the devil lead the hearts of men astray.

But remember, those spiritual forces operate through particular men. And those men can be identified by their works. Therefore, by their actions we can identify the men who are a part of those evil beasts. And being able to identify such men will greatly increase your understanding about the world they control. For they serve the devil, who seeks to destroy men who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. Indeed, since the devil is the spirit that rules this world, I have no doubt that the children of God upon the earth would be totally destroyed if it were not for the intervening support of God. He continually protects each one of us who belong to him.

Remember these encouraging words of Paul: **“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or restriction, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, For thy sake we are killed the whole day long. We are considered as sheep of slaughter.**

“But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor agents, nor principal positions, nor powers, nor things that have come, nor things that are coming, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

Therefore, be like Paul and fight the good fight, serving God patiently, and wait for the victory he will bring. Also remember these words of the psalm: **“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will have them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his great displeasure”** (Psalm 2:1-5).

As the psalm says, the nations of the world become violent and set their thoughts on unrighteous things. And their rulers join together to rebel against God and his Son, Jesus Christ, whom they accuse as oppressing them by using “bonds” and “cords” to keep them from their freedom—freedom to indulge their sinful lusts. Nevertheless, the Lord is so much superior that he will deride them, and will respond with his wrath and great displeasure—but in his own good time and way.

The statement that he will laugh, no doubt symbolizes his judgment of how ridiculous such puny creatures are to oppose him. Here are two other Psalms about God laughing at the wicked: **“The wicked man plots against the righteous man, and gnashes upon him with his teeth. The Lord will laugh at him, for he sees that his day is coming”** (Psalm 37:12-13), and, **“Even thou, O Jehovah God of hosts, the God of Israel, arise to visit all the nations. Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. ... They return at evening. They howl like a dog, and go round about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth. Swords are in their lips, for they say, Who hears? But thou, O Jehovah, will laugh at them. Thou will have all the nations in derision”** (Psalm 59:5-8).

The antichrist

Although it is not mentioned in Revelation, I need to say something about the antichrist, which some believers in Christ interpret as a dangerous person who is coming. The only places where that term is mentioned in the Bible are in two of John's letters. Here is what he said about it in his first letter: **“Children, it is the last hour. And as ye heard that the antichrist comes, and now many antichrists**

have developed, from which we know that it is the last hour” (First John 2:18).

Then a little farther in that letter, he defined what the antichrist is: **“Who is the liar if not he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son”** (2:22), and, **“... every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ has come in flesh is not of God. And this is that of the antichrist, which ye have heard that it comes, and is now in the world already”** (4:3).

John said the same thing in his second letter: **“Because many deceivers have gone forth into the world, those not acknowledging Jesus Christ coming in flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist”** (Second John 1:7).

And that is all the Bible says about the antichrist. John made it very clear that what he meant by the antichrist was simply the spirit in any man that denies Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That spirit of denial grew as a reaction against the spread of faith in Christ. And John was warning his fellow Christians about it, fellow Christians he affectionately referred to as children. As faith in Christ grows, so does the denial of him. Thus, **“many antichrists have developed,”** which simply means many men deny him.

The only creature that could be called “the antichrist” is a common spirit in the minds of men that denies Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. And the world is now filled with men who have such a spirit in them. The world is filled with them, because knowledge about Christ has filled most of the world. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a man of flesh called the antichrist.

The matter about it being the last hour, probably refers to the last period in the creation of the church and the New Testament. That “hour” symbolizes the time of the apostles when the church was established and the New Testament was being written. And it was a time of transition, which involved the passing away of the law of Moses. As the author of the Hebrew letter said, the law of Moses was **“becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance”** (Hebrews 8:13).

It was also the time when Gentiles were added to the church. Thus, the last part of that time of transition was called the last hour. And it was during that time, when the church grew rapidly, that the opposing antichrists became many, being simply those who deny him.

HARVESTING SOULS

A first fruit of souls for God

- **And I looked, and lo, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with it a number, a hundred and forty-four thousand, having its name and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven as a sound of many waters, and as a sound of great thunder.**
- **“And the voice that I heard was as of harpers harping with their harps. And they sing a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders. And none could learn the song except the hundred and forty-four thousand, those who have been redeemed from the earth.**
- **These are men who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchased by Jesus, out of men, a first fruit to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth, for they are unblemished (Revelation 14:1-5).**

John told earlier about a hundred and forty-four thousand of the sons of Israel upon the earth who received the seal of God upon their foreheads. The hundred and forty-four thousand in the above passage were in heaven. That passage says those men were purchased by Jesus out of men. Every faithful disciple of Christ has been purchased by Jesus out of men. And the book of Revelation said earlier that the chosen of God would be **“a great multitude, which none could number, out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues ...” (7:9).**

Therefore, the hundred and forty-four thousand who were singing before the throne probably symbolize those men who were a select group of God’s faithful disciples that were chosen to be brought to heaven before the end of the world, **“a first fruit”** of those who are becoming God’s sons for eternity. And it should certainly not be interpreted to mean there will only be a hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed souls in heaven. They were a first fruit, and not the whole harvest.

Mount Zion in Israel was where the temple of God was built. Therefore, mount Zion in the above description must symbolize the location of the temple of God in heaven. The men being virgins is no doubt figurative, meaning they had been purified by the blood of the Lamb, and did not defile themselves by continuing to indulge in sin-

ful pleasure. Sinful pleasure is symbolized in Revelation as an evil and lascivious woman (see Revelation 17).

Even though we have all been defiled by our sinful pleasures, we become spiritual virgins when we accept Jesus Christ. For remember, Paul said, **“So then if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new”** (Second Corinthians 5:17). We are a new creation, an undefiled creation in spirit. Therefore, we are all virgins in spirit. Also remember what Paul said, **“For I am jealous for you with a jealousy of God. For I betrothed you to one husband, a pure virgin to present to the Christ”** (Second Corinthians 11:2). Therefore, in that sense we are all pure virgins, having been begotten from above, begotten from the Spirit (see John 3:7-8).

Paradise

There are many other passages in the New Testament that tell of men being brought to heaven before the final judgment. For example, remember how Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus when he was transfigured on the mountain (see Matthew 17:3). And Jesus told a parable in which he said that Lazarus, who had been a sick beggar, was in the bosom of Abraham (see Luke 16:22).

There are two passages that suggest those resurrected souls will reside in some kind of paradise in heaven. Jesus spoke of paradise when he was being crucified. The record says, **“And one of the malefactors who were hanged railed him, saying, If thou are the Christ, save thyself and us. But the other man having answered, rebuking him, saying, Thou fear not even God, since thou are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive worthy of what we did, but this man did nothing amiss. And he said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when thou come into thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Truly I say to thee, today thou will be with me in the paradise”** (Luke 23:39-43).

Notice how that malefactor not only believed in Jesus but he defended him. He was probably a courageous Zealot who had been trying to help free Israel from Roman occupation, and was not a common criminal.

Paul also spoke of the paradise of heaven, when he said, **“I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in body, I know not, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) such a man was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in body, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) that he was caught up into the paradise, and heard inex-**

pressible sayings that are not permitted for a man to utter” (Second Corinthians 12:2-4).

Paul was probably that man, but he would not boast of it because of his humility. For he said, **“For if I should want to boast, I will not be foolish, for I will speak the truth. But I refrain lest any man should reckon to me above what he sees of me or hears anything from me”** (Second Corinthians 12:6).

Jesus also mentioned paradise when he was giving his messages for the seven congregations of Asia. He said, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations. To him who overcomes, I will give him to eat from the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of my God”** (Revelation 2:7).

The paradise mentioned in those passages may be the same place that was said to be “under the altar” where the martyred souls called for God’s vengeance (see Revelation 6:11). In the law of Moses altars were places where offerings and sacrifices were made to God. And those martyred souls had sacrificed their lives for him. Therefore, the words about being “underneath the altar” are no doubt figurative, and they may refer to the paradise of heaven that exists before the coming of the new Jerusalem.

I believe the paradise of heaven is probably now the place where the souls of righteous men who are resurrected before the final judgment will reside until the coming of the new Jerusalem. That paradise is no doubt a great community in a place with super-high technology, and not simply a garden as it was in Eden at the beginning.

Words of encouragement and warning

- **And I saw an agent flying in mid-heaven having eternal good news to proclaim to those who sit on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, saying in a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. And worship him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and springs of waters** (Revelation 14:6-7).

The agent flying in mid-heaven speaking in a great voice may symbolize a time when the good news of Christ is proclaimed throughout the world with great power and vividness. That may happen near a time of God’s judgment, although probably not the final judgment. The good news of Christ contains words of encouragement for all mankind to fear God and worship him.

- **And another, a second agent, followed, saying, Babylon the great has fallen, has fallen. She has given all the nations to**

drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication (Revelation 14:8).

The Babylon of that passage symbolizes the commerce of illicit pleasure. And like the two beasts described earlier it is not a unique one of a kind creature. It is the spirit that energizes that activity whenever and wherever it develops. Much more is said about that evil business in the chapter after the next one.

- **And another agent, a third, followed them, saying in a great voice, If any man worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also himself will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which was mixed undiluted in the cup of his anger. And he will be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy agents and before the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends into the ages of ages. And they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and its image, and if any man receives the mark of its name** (Revelation 14:9-11).

Those are words of stern warning against worshipping that representative of the devil, and becoming a part of it. For every man who does, and who continues to do so has already been judged to receive eternal torment with fire and brimstone, which refers to the lake of fire. For that beast is like the devil incarnate. Indeed, those who have their eyes open can actually see the devil manifested in the world that way.

I used to wonder what the devil was like in the world, but the word of God opened my eyes so that I no longer wonder. I can see him everywhere being manifested in the bodies of evil men. Scoffers will no doubt accuse me of being “paranoid.” But they are pawns of the devil used to discourage attempts to strip the mask from his face, and expose how he really operates in the world.

There are many ways to see and understand the world. And many of those ways are very erroneous. Those ways include false religions and other false beliefs such as Darwinism. Paranoia is a pathologically irrational way of seeing reality. Men who are paranoid are fools, and how they live proves it. Believers in God and his Bible are wise men, and the fruits of their lives proves it. For there is no more rational way of seeing reality than through the lens of the Bible. Therefore, let not scoffers lead you astray and discourage you from seeing the truth about God and about the devil.

- **Here is the perseverance of the sanctified. Here are those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth.**

Yea, says the Spirit, so that they may rest from their toils, and their works follow with them (Revelation 14:12-13).

Those are more words of encouragement for those who are obedient to God. Their works follow them because they will be judged by their works. It may also refer to the improved character of their eternal spirits, which every disciple of Christ is expected to develop. For our personal spirit is our eternal identity.

The final harvest

- **And I looked, and behold, a white cloud. And sitting upon the cloud, like a son of man, having a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another agent came out from the temple, crying out in a great voice to him who sits on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle and reap, because the hour has come to reap, because the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he who sits on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped** (Revelation 14:14-16).

That passage no doubt means an agent was sent from God commanding Jesus his only begotten Son to commence the process of reaping the ripe harvest, meaning to gather together his sanctified souls to bring up to heaven. Jesus is always obedient to the Father. For when he told his apostles he was going to submit to crucifixion, as God commanded him, he said, **“And as the Father commanded me, thus I do”** (John 14:31).

Those words of that passage in Revelation may symbolize part of what will happen at the end of the world. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples about the end: **“But straightaway after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. And the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.**

“And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky. And then all the tribes of the earth will beat the breast, and they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and much glory. And he will send forth his agents with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather together his chosen from the four winds, from the boundaries of the heavens—as far as their boundaries” (Matthew 24:29-31).

Jesus himself is coming in the clouds of the sky with his mighty agents to gather together from throughout the world those who are chosen to be sons of God for eternity. The sickle mentioned in the above passage in Revelation probably symbolizes the agents he will send forth.

- **And another agent came out from the temple in heaven, also himself having a sharp sickle. And another agent came out from the altar having power over the fire. And he cried out in a great shout to him who has the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the grapevine of the earth, because its grapes are fully ripe.**
- **And the agent sent his sickle to the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out from the winepress, up to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs (Revelation 14:17-20).**

Another agent from the temple in heaven was sent to command a different agent to begin the process of gathering the sinners of the world at a time of great destruction. Jesus gathered his sanctified for salvation, an agent from heaven gathered sinners for punishment.

That description of the judgment of sinners is vivid and gruesome. It was given that way no doubt to help alarm and warn men (those who will listen) to repent of their sins and become a faithful disciple of Christ. Otherwise they will suffer something far more horrible in the lake of fire that burns forever.

- **And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven agents having seven plagues, the last, because in them the wrath of God is ended (Revelation 15:1).**

That passage seems to anticipate the final overview of the world that is described next in Revelation. The details of that overview are after the following passage about a kind of victory celebration in heaven by all the faithful of God. Those last plagues may also be the third woe mentioned previously. But first are more words of encouragement:

- **And I saw like a glassy sea mingled with fire, and those who were victorious over the beast and over its image and over the number of its name, standing on the glassy sea, having harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the bondman of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,**
- **Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the nations. Who will, no, not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, because thou alone are holy? Because all the nations will come and worship before thee, because thy righteous deeds were made known (Revelation 15:2-4).**

Those are great words of encouragement for those who endure the trials and temptations of this life while promoting God's righteousness and opposing evil. It tells how they will be rewarded in heaven. It also tells how all the nations (the sinners of the world) will worship God at that time, because they will learn about all his righteous deeds. Their eyes will be opened to see all of the good that God had done for them, which is why they should have worshiped and obeyed him, and been grateful, while they were on the earth.

In heaven they will have no choice but to worship him. As Paul said, **"For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, I live, says the Lord, that every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess to God. So then each of us will give account about himself to God"** (Romans 14:10-12).

Nevertheless, there will no doubt be some condemned souls who will continue to hate God even when all of his **"righteous deeds were made known"** to them. For remember Jesus said about hell: **"There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth"** (Matthew 8:12). There will be both sorrow and anger.

Those nations who were worshiping the Lord may also include the citizens of the new heavens and earth after the end of this one. For when the book describes the new Jerusalem there, it says, **"And the nations will walk by the light of it. And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it"** (Revelation 21:24).

GOD'S WRATH AGAINST SATAN'S KINGDOM

This next part of Revelation is about seven plagues and a war between Christ and the kings of the world that resulted in the destruction of the two beasts. The passages about those things are very mysterious and especially difficult to interpret. Those words seem to be a description of God's wrath against Satan's kingdom, which is how I interpret them.

Remember, the previous passage before the description of these plagues says they are the last ones: **“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven agents having seven plagues, the last, because in them the wrath of God is ended”** (Revelation 15:1). The wrath of God being ended with those seven plagues may mean they will be the last ones before the two beasts are destroyed and Christ reigns for a thousand years over the earth. Those things are mentioned after the description of the plagues. Therefore, the seven plagues seem to be sent primarily against the two beasts and all who support them.

- **And after these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And the seven agents came forth from the temple having the seven plagues, who were clothed in pure bright linen, and golden belts girded around their breasts. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven agents seven golden bowls containing the wrath of God who lives into the ages of the ages.**
- **And the temple became full of vapor from the glory of God and from his power. And none was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven agents were ended. And I heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven agents, Go ye and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth** (Revelation 15:5-16:1).

The first four plagues

The curses that occurred when the first four trumpets were sounded (quoted previously) involved the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs of water, and the sun. And the description of those curses was very figurative. These plagues that resulted from the bowls being poured out (quoted next) also involved the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs of water, and the sun. And the description of them is also very figurative. Those curses seemed to be against all sinners. However, these plagues seem to be directed primarily against men who are

more actively involved in opposing God—men who belong to Satan's kingdom.

- **And the first went and poured out his bowl into the earth, and a bad and evil sore developed upon the men who have the mark of the beast and who worship its image** (Revelation 16:2).

That plague was targeted against all who cooperate with the leaders of governments who are opposed to the rule of Christ and his righteousness. The bad and evil sore probably symbolizes various problems and troubles that afflict the lives of those men, and not anything specific.

- **And the second agent poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like of a dead man, and every living soul in the sea died** (Revelation 16:3).

That plague is very similar to the one that came when the second agent sounded his trumpet: **“And the second agent sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was cast into the sea. And the third part of the sea became blood, and the third part of the creatures in the sea (those having lives) died, and the third part of the ships was destroyed”** (Revelation 8:8-9).

Notice however, the first curse, resulting from the second trumpet sound, only caused a minority of the creatures and ships to be destroyed. The second plague, resulting from the second bowl of God's wrath being poured out, caused every living soul in the sea to die. That seems to symbolize God's wrath being more severe to the members of Satan's kingdom.

- **And the third agent poured out his bowl into the rivers and into the springs of the waters, and they became blood. And I heard the agent of the waters saying, Thou are righteous who is and was—the Divine—because thou judged these things. Because they poured out the blood of the sanctified and prophets, and thou have given them blood to drink; they are deserving. And I heard the altar saying, Yea, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments** (Revelation 16:4-7).

That plague was upon the fresh waters; fresh waters being another vital element for our lives in this world. The agent who carried out the plague praised God for being righteous. That plague was a just recompense for sinners because of their severe persecution of his sanctified souls and his prophets. And words from the altar in heaven reinforced what the agent said. For the judgments of the Lord God

Almighty are indeed true and righteous. And no man can justify complaining about them.

- **And the fourth agent poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given him to scorch men with fire. And the men were scorched with great heat. And the men blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues, and they did not repent to give him glory** (Revelation 16:8-9).

That plague used the sun to cause men to suffer. Those men knew that God was responsible for their suffering, but instead of repenting to give him glory, they blasphemed his name.

When hearts are hardened they cannot repent. The devil and the demons know about God, and the devil has even spoken with him in his presence. Yet they still hate and oppose him. Remember, the devil is probably the fierce leviathan described by God as having a heart **“as firm as a stone, Yea, firm as the nether millstone”** (Job 41:24). And God also said about him, **“He beholds everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride”** (Job 41:34).

The last three plagues

I believe the last three plagues are about things that prepared for the destruction of the two beasts. And that destruction is described in the chapter after the next one.

- **And the fifth agent poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and its kingdom became darkened, and they gnawed their tongues from the anguish. And they blasphemed the God of heaven from their pains and from their sores. And they did not repent of their works** (Revelation 16:10-11).

That plague was given specifically against the throne of the beast, which means the reign of the world-rulers of the darkness. And its kingdom consists of all who support them. The kingdom of the beast being darkened suggests that God sends the fifth plague to cause ignorance and confusion to be among them, and their frustration and agony about it were severe.

And perhaps those things were what prepared them to be gathered together for **“the battle of the great day of the Almighty God,”** which is mentioned in the next passage. For they continued to blaspheme God without repenting of their works. James wrote about how the frustrated desires of men cause them to make war, when he said, **“From where are wars and fightings among you? Is it not from here: from your pleasures warring in your body-parts? Ye desire and do not have, so ye murder. And ye envy and cannot obtain, so**

ye fight and make war. Ye do not have, because ye do not ask. Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures” (James 4:1-3).

Men fight and make war because they are frustrated about not being able to indulge their pleasures. The kingdom of the beast being darkened by that plague produced much anguish within it. Therefore, I believe that made them receptive to anything that would encourage them to go forth to war, as mentioned in the next passage. In contrast to sinners, righteous men would have repented, and would not have blamed God for that plague.

- **And the sixth agent poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates, and the water of it was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared.**
- **And I saw out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are spirits of demons, doing signs that go forth to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the battle of that great day of the Almighty God. (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, so that he may not walk naked, and they see his shame.) And he gathered them together into the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon** (Revelation 16:12-16).

The passage says, **“And he gathered them together into the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon”** (Revelation 16:16). The words about **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God,”** and about **“the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon”** are only mentioned in that one passage in the Bible.

Since those evil spirits came out of the mouths of the devil and the leaders of his kingdom, they probably symbolize convincing words that captured the hearts of the kings of the world and aroused them to gather together for **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”** Those kings may be like some evil rulers today, as well as some believers of false religions and evil ideologies, who consider the church to be an enemy that needs to be destroyed.

In the Bible when the expression “day of God” is used it almost always refers to a time of judgment and of punishment. Therefore, that battle seems to be a time when the world-rulers of the darkness will unite together against God, but he will defeat them. And their defeat is apparently going to be great, because the passage says it is a great day of God. Wicked men have no faith in God, and they can see

that his genuine followers on the earth are few and weak. Therefore, they always think they can defeat them.

Regarding the river Euphrates, remember that was to be the northern border of the land of Israel. And the curse that followed when the sixth agent sounded his trumpet involved the release of four agents at that river to punish sinners. The plague that followed the sixth agent pouring out his bowl caused that river to dry up to prepare the way for the kings of the rising of the sun. And that suggests conditions were created to make it easier for the world-rulers of the darkness to engage in **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”** That was a plague against them because it brought about their destruction.

Regarding Armageddon, the passage says the kings of the whole world were gathered together there for that battle, but I do not believe that means the battle will occur at Armageddon. The battle may not happen there because the passage does not say their armies were gathered with them. It may only mean the kings were gathered together at Armageddon to agree for that battle. Armageddon may even refer to a place like the headquarters of the United Nations.

A passage farther in Revelation does mention when the kings and their armies gathered together to make war against Christ: **“And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him who sits upon the horse, and against his army”** (Revelation 19:19). The one on the horse was Jesus Christ. Revelation says they were gathered to make war, but it does not say anything about that war. It only says the two beasts were defeated.

Nevertheless, regardless of the meaning of Armageddon, those two different passages (in Revelation 16 and 19) both refer to the kings of the earth uniting together to go to war. And I think they both refer to one event, which is called **“the battle of the great day of the Almighty God.”** That battle is never described, but I believe it will happen sometime after the seventh plague.

- **And the seventh agent poured out his bowl upon the air, and a great voice came forth out of the temple of heaven, out of the throne, saying, It has come to pass. And there occurred lightnings, and thunders, and voices. And a great earthquake occurred, such as did not happen from that time men came to be upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, so great.**
- **And the great city became in three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And the great Babylon was remembered before God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the wrath of his anger. And every island fled away, and the mountains were**

not found. And great hail, like a talent weight, descended out of the sky upon men. And the men blasphemed God from the plague of the hail, because the plague of it was exceedingly great (Revelation 16:17-21).

That passage has some similarities to a description of the end of the world. Perhaps it symbolizes the beginning of what could be called, "the end of the world as we know it." That is a popular expression that refers to a complete change in conditions. What that plague may lead to is the end of the system of the world as Satan has ruled it. And that will be followed with a new system of the world over which Jesus will reign for a thousand years.

What that seventh plague will be is very mysterious. It speaks mainly of the effects of a great earthquake and great hail. That could refer perhaps to a terrible meteoroid storm, or even a collision of an asteroid with the earth. However, I am inclined to believe it refers to a great war between all the nations.

Perhaps, after the kings of the world had gathered together for "**the battle of that great day of the Almighty God**" (to agree about it), then God caused the nations of the world to fight against each other. And the description of the seventh plague may be about what happened in that war.

There is a report in the Old Testament about a time when God used that method to save his people from three enemy nations that were coming to invade them. When king Jehoshaphat and the people were praying to God for deliverance, one of the Levites there (probably one of the priests) prophesied that God would save them, and God said they would not even need to fight.

Here is how it happened: "**And when he [Jehoshaphat] had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who should sing to Jehovah, and give praise in holy array, as they went out before the army, and say, Give thanks to Jehovah. For his loving kindness is forever. And when they began to sing and to praise, Jehovah set an ambushment against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir who came against Judah, and they were smitten.**

"For the sons of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, to slay and destroy them utterly. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another of themselves. And when Judah came to the watch-tower of the wilderness, they looked upon the multitude. And, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and there were none who escaped" (Second Chronicles 20:21-24).

Nevertheless, if such a war between all the nations actually occurs, I do not believe it will be the one called **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”** I believe the seventh plague will be brought against the nations of the world because of their intentions to fight that battle. I believe the plague will be a war among themselves that will prevent them from going to **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”** Not only will that plague prevent them from going against God the first time, but it will prepare them for defeat when they eventually do go.

I believe it will happen that way because that is how the passages read in Revelation. It describes twice how the kings of the world gathered against God. The kings first gathered together to agree to go against him. Apparently, however, before they could gather their armies and begin the battle, their plan was prevented because of the seventh plague.

Then after describing the seventh plague (and the destruction of Babylon the great whore, which is described in the next chapter), Revelation says, **“And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him who sits upon the horse, and against his army”** (Revelation 19:19). That was the second time Revelation says the kings of the earth were gathered together. And this time the passage says their armies were with them.

Nevertheless, whatever the seventh plague means, I am confident it will not happen soon. It will not happen soon because there is no evidence to indicate anything like that will. However, when it does happen it will prepare the kings of the earth for defeat in the great conflict between Jesus and Satan's kingdom, which I discuss in the chapter that follows the next one.

Before I leave this part about the seven plagues, I want to comment about the warning given in the description of the sixth plague. It warns against not being prepared to meet God. It says a man who was not prepared will walk naked and they will see his shame. The righteous souls of the earth will be given new bodies and apparel in the afterlife. Sinners will be given neither; they will exist in shame as naked spirits in the lake of fire that burns forever. And that will be much worse for them than any plague men could experience on the earth. The book of Revelation is filled with words of encouragement and warning about being prepared and reconciled to God before it is too late.

THE COMMERCE OF ILLICIT PLEASURE

This part of Revelation is about a woman called Babylon, the mother of whores. I believe that woman symbolizes illicit pleasure. By illicit pleasure I mean the kind that God forbids, no matter how legal or widely acceptable it may be in the world. And the commerce of illicit pleasure is also part of the devil's kingdom.

- **And one of the seven agents who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come, I will show thee the judgment of the great whore who sits upon the many waters with whom the kings of the earth fornicated, and those who inhabit the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication. And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness.**
- **And I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast containing names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup containing abominations and the filthy things of her fornication, and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF WHORES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**
- **And I saw the woman drunken from the blood of the sanctified, and from the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And having seen her, I wondered with great amazement (Revelation 17:1-6).**

That is a description of a woman intoxicated with sensual sin. She was arrayed in wealth and luxury, and was drinking a cup full of abominations and filthy things from her licentiousness. She was also drunk from indulging in the destruction of the sanctified of God and his witnesses. A whore is a woman who markets her body for illicit pleasure. And so the whore described here in Revelation must symbolize the marketing or commerce of illicit pleasure. Our world is filled with that filthy business, and it is supported by **“the world-rulers of the darkness.”**

The most prominent example of the commerce of illicit pleasure is the modern entertainment business, in all of its many forms. The motion picture business is a major offender. It is built upon that which is false (e.g., fictitious stories and images), which they cleverly portray as reality. And it uses them to glamorize folly and wickedness,

indecent and vulgarity. It has made things such as voyeurism and other invasions of intimacy and privacy seem respectable, And it seductively promotes and encourages all manner of other evils, including false teachings about God, his righteousness, and his followers. It is rotten and satanic to the core.

But anything that markets illicit pleasure of any form is part of Babylon the great, the mother of whores. Even the tobacco business is an example. All such things promote sinful pleasure. And those who promote it fight against the sanctified of God. They fight against us because they hate virtue, and we condemn what they are doing.

What supports it

- **And the agent said to me, Why did thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou saw was, and is not, and is going to ascend out of the abyss and go into destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and will come (Revelation 17:7-8).**

There seems to be only one such beast as described above, and that is the one which symbolizes **“the world-rulers of the darkness.”** And it is quite understandable that they would support the commerce of illicit pleasure.

The part of the passage that says the beast was, and is not, and is going to ascend out of the abyss, is difficult to interpret. But it may be saying that men in world governments who are opposed to God will cycle in the degree of their control. The satanic parts of governments dominate for a time (was), after which they lose their complete domination (is not), but that domination later returns because of the evil thoughts that arise in the hearts of men (the abyss). That process apparently cycles, but they will eventually all **“go into destruction.”**

- **Here is the mind that has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains where the woman sits on them. And there are seven kings, the five are fallen, the one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, he also is an eighth, and is of the seven, and he goes into destruction (Revelation 17:9-11).**

The seven heads that are mountains probably symbolize the governments of the world (heads) and their countries (mountains), all of

which support the commerce of illicit pleasure. Since seven symbolizes completeness perhaps the seven kings symbolize all the rulers that come and go over time. Since the heavenly agent had previously mentioned the judgment of the great whore, then the five kings that were fallen may symbolize all that were in the past before the time of that judgment.

The last king may symbolize the last of the satanic governments that support the commerce of illicit pleasure, the last ones before the great war with Christ that is mentioned in the next chapter. They will not last long, because they will be destroyed in that great war. The beast being an eighth may mean it symbolizes the composite of all the others; therefore, it belongs in the list with them, "is of the seven."

- **And the ten horns that thou saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. And those with him are the called and chosen and faithful (Revelation 17:12-14).**

The agent told John those kings were horns, and since horns symbolize force, then those ten kings probably symbolize all the military commanders and police chiefs of the world, which are "kings" in the most general sense of the word. And they will join with the satanic part of their governments at the time of a great war with Christ and his church. Being ten of them suggests a full quantity, which is how the number ten is sometimes used. For example, when Jacob departed Laban, for whom he had worked twenty years, among his many complaints to him, he said, "**And thou have changed my wages ten times**" (Genesis 31:41). Nevertheless, Christ will be victorious. And all who are with him are the called and chosen and faithful, which means all of those in this world who believe and obey him, all who strive to become sons of God for eternity.

When they turn against it

- **And he says to me, The waters that thou saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns that thou saw, and the beast, these will hate the whore, and will make her desolate, and will make her naked, and will eat her flesh, and will burn her with fire. For God gave in their hearts to do his will. Even to do one will, and to give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God would be ended. And the woman whom thou**

saw is the great city having reign over the kings of the earth
(Revelation 17:15-18).

Those words may mean that the military and police forces of the nations, and the evil rulers of their governments who had supported the commerce of illicit pleasure, will eventually turn against it, and will destroy it utterly. The passage says that God will control their minds to cause that to happen.

Perhaps God will open the eyes of those powers to see the need to destroy that evil business. For the commerce of illicit pleasure is a major contributor to the spiritual decadence and disintegration of nations. That is why God commanded against such things. Those men will destroy the great whore, not because they will return to God, but to preserve the survival of their nations.

The woman was called the great city that reigned over all the kings of the earth. What that probably means is that the commerce of illicit pleasure eventually accumulates so much wealth and popular support in a country that its rulers will cater to it.

- **And after these things I saw another agent coming down out of heaven having great authority, and the earth was illuminated from his glory. And he cried out in a mighty voice, saying, Babylon the great has fallen, has fallen, and became a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird.**
- **Because all the nations have drunk from the wine of the wrath of her fornication. And the kings of the earth fornicated with her, and the merchants of the earth became rich from the power of her wantonness** (Revelation 18:1-3).

The populations of the earth indulge more or less in illicit pleasure, including their rulers. And men have become rich by doing business with that evil activity, making great profits by pandering to the vices and base appetites of people. Nevertheless, the inevitable end of the commerce of illicit pleasure is to degenerate into a gathering place for the lowest and most vile forms of life, such as the dead body of an animal left out in the open. One modern example of the great city Babylon is Las Vegas in Nevada, which is appropriately called “sin city.” There are other such cities in the world, but Las Vegas is probably the richest and most famous. And the heart of its economy is the commerce of illicit pleasure.

Now I am not a seer; there have been no seers in the world since the times of the Bible, nor will there be again. No man can foretell complex events in the future with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, I can discern the signs. When the Pharisees and Sadducees demanded that

Jesus show them a sign from the sky, he replied, **“When it becomes evening, ye say, Fair weather, for the sky is red. And at morning, Bad weather today, for the sky is red, being gloomy. Hypocrites! Ye indeed know how to discern the face of the sky, but the signs of the times ye are not able”** (Matthew 16:2-3).

And from the signs it is obvious to me that if those sinners of Las Vegas do not repent and stop marketing illicit pleasure, then the time is coming when that city is going to fall and **“became a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird.”** For it is a modern example of Babylon the great, the mother of whores.

It will be like the following description that the prophet Isaiah gave of ancient Babylon: **“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, nor shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, nor shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures. And ostriches shall dwell there, and wild goats shall dance there. And wolves shall cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant palaces. And her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged”** (Isaiah 13:19-22). And that Babylon has never been rebuilt.

Its destruction

- **And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out from her, my people, so that ye may not participate with her sins, and that ye may not receive from her plagues. Because her sins have reached as far as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.**
- **Render to her as she also rendered to you, and double to her two-fold according to her works. In the cup that she mixed, mix two-fold for her. In an amount she glorified herself and lived wantonly, give her so much torment and grief, because she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and will, no, not see grief. Because of this her plagues will come in one day, death, and grief, and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, because strong is the Lord, the God who judged her** (Revelation 18:4-8).

Notice those words of warning to the people of God not to participate in any way with the commerce of illicit pleasure, so they would not suffer from the plagues sent against it. When the sins of that filthy

business reach to heaven and it boasts about its glory and security, then God will suddenly cause it to be destroyed utterly.

Notice also the important lesson in that passage that God sometimes renders punishment more severe than the guilt that brought it. The evil consequences of sins are often much greater than their immediate effects. Therefore, the punishment for sin is usually greater than the act itself.

- **And the kings of the earth who fornicated and lived wantonly with her, will weep and will beat their breasts for her when they see the smoke of her burning, having stood from afar because of the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! Because thy judgment has come in one hour.**
- **And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn for her, because no man buys their merchandise any more, merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearl, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and every ivory vessel, and every vessel of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and olive oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and sheep, and cattle, and horses, and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. And the fruit of the lust of thy soul have departed from thee. And all the fat and bright things are destroyed from thee. And thou will, no, not find them any more.**
- **The merchants of these things who became rich from her will stand from afar because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, and saying, Alas, alas, the great city, which was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stone and pearls! Because in one hour such great wealth was devastated.**
- **And every shipmaster, and every man who sails anywhere, and sailors, and as many as work by sea, stood from afar and cried out seeing the smoke of her burning, saying, What is like the great city? And they cast dust on their heads, and cried out, weeping and mourning, and saying, Alas, alas, the great city in which all who had ships in the sea became rich from her luxuriance! Because in one hour she was devastated (Revelation 18:9-19).**

That is a lengthy and vivid description of how much wealth is acquired in the commerce of illicit pleasure. It operates like a voracious parasite in the body of a society. Beware! Indulging in the prof-

its of that filthy business is a great temptation for many. But it is a way that leads to destruction, which, when it comes, will come swiftly.

- **Be glad over her, thou heaven, and the sanctified, and the apostles, and the prophets, because God has decreed your judgment of her** (Revelation 18:20).

All the merchants and workers that were involved with that filthy business mourned bitterly when they saw its destruction, because they loved the wealth they got from it, instead of loving God and his righteousness. In contrast all the righteous souls were glad when it happened. They were glad because every righteous soul is troubled by such an evil filthy business and condemns it. We can see how spiritually corrupting it is. I and my righteous wife, as well as all others who hate sin, are very troubled and disgusted by how much that evil filthy business has grown in modern America, grown like a deadly cancer. And we all pray for the day when it is destroyed utterly.

- **And one mighty agent took up a stone like a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus in violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will, no, not be found any more. And a sound of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters will, no, not be heard in thee any more.**
- **And every craftsman of every craft will, no, not be found in thee any more. And a sound of a millstone will, no, not be heard in thee any more. And the light of a lamp will, no, not shine in thee any more. And a voice of a bridegroom and of a bride will, no, not be heard in thee any more. Because thy merchants were the chief men of the earth, because all the nations were led astray by thy enchantments** (Revelation 18:21-23).

That passage gives a further description of the destruction of the commerce of illicit pleasure. That filthy business became so strong and prominent before its destruction that its merchants were the chief men of the earth. They were the chief men of the earth because all the nations were led astray by its enchantments.

The enchantments of that filthy business include all the different kinds of illicit pleasure marketed by it. And those pleasures bewitch the people into thinking they are something good to pursue and indulge in. But in reality they intoxicate their souls and contribute to the corruption and degeneracy of their lives. The corrupting effects of commercialized illicit pleasure are very destructive to civilization.

For they addict people to squandering their resources on useless and destructive pleasures.

Another form of enchantment is used when they peddle fiction. They carefully craft imaginary stories and deceitful pictures to manipulate the thoughts and reasoning of people. They enchant them with things such as charming actors, illusions, and emotional stories that are about fabricated and contrived events and things, but they give the powerful impression of reality. Part of those enchantments is the addition of things that seem to be true and right, but are cleverly manipulated to excuse committing all manner of sins. They also enchant people, and lead them astray by portraying things such as drunkenness, lying, fornication, and cheating, as comical, harmless, and inconsequential.

Remember this passage from Isaiah: **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”** (Isaiah 5:20). Those peddlers of entertainment often carefully craft that which is evil to make it appear good, and they distort that which is good to make it appear evil. They take the false and deceitful and they make them appear to be truth and light; they shrewdly portray that which is genuinely good, right, and just to make them seem bad, wrong, and crooked.

In their eyes everything is perverse. Women are stronger, wiser, and more successful than men; children are better than their parents; criminals are better than the police. Most authorities are portrayed as bumbling fools or corrupt tyrants. They persuade people that perversities like homosexuality are simply other expressions of love and companionship that deserve our encouragement and support. They call fornication love, and bastards love-children. They take marriage as God would have it, and they make it seem to be oppressive and unnecessary for a happy and healthy life.

Those are just a few of the things they do to attack God and his righteousness, and promote the cause of the devil. They start with subtlety when the values of a people are moral, and they slowly infect their thinking with their “sugar coated” poisonous ideas. And as they become more successful in corrupting the minds of the people they become bolder and more aggressive in promoting the evil against the good. They also become more vicious in attacking God, his Holy Bible, and everyone who is striving to become one of his sons for eternity.

The best way to expose them is with the light of the word of God. Study the teachings of the Holy Bible, and they will open your eyes to see how those sinners use all kinds of evil enchantments to lead souls

astray from God and his righteousness. Virtually every time I turn on my television set I see examples. My father, in his old age, even with his mind dulled by the first stages of his Alzheimer's disease, complained in the 1970's (after America became pagan) about television being "a school of crime." He never went to see movies, but he would have been even more disgusted with them. My father was absolutely correct about what is being broadcast on television. Most of it has become part of the commerce of illicit pleasure. Computer games are even worse for promoting evil, as is the modern music business.

- **And in her was found blood of prophets, and of the sanctified, and of all who have been killed upon the earth** (Revelation 18:24).

The blood of prophets and the sanctified was a result of her persecution of them. The passage also says she was responsible for "**all who have been killed upon the earth.**" The pleasure of sin is what has caused the spiritual death of every soul, even from the beginning. For here is what the Bible says about the sin of Adam and Eve: "**And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make wise, she took of the fruit of it, and ate. And she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate**" (Genesis 3:6). Eating that fruit was illicit pleasure for them. And no doubt the reason why Cain murdered his brother Abel was to satisfy his unjustified anger, which can be called a form of illicit pleasure.

Peter taught the same thing when he said, "**Because of which, the precious and greatest promises have been given to us, so that through these ye might become companions of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption in the world in lust**" (Second Peter 1:4). That passage says the corruption of the world is a result of lust. Thus, in a very general sense illicit pleasure of some kind is what causes the condemnation of every soul. And only Jesus Christ can redeem us from that condemnation.

- **And after these things I heard as a great sound of a large multitude in heaven, saying, Praise the Lord, the salvation, and the power, and the glory of our God! Because true and righteous are his judgments, because he has judged the great whore who ruined the earth by her fornication, and he has avenged the blood of his bondmen from her hand.**
- **And a second time they said, Praise the Lord! And the smoke of her ascended into the ages of the ages. And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne, saying, Truly! Praise the Lord!** (Revelation 19:1-4).

All the righteous souls in heaven rejoiced when the great whore was destroyed, because she ruined the earth by her fornication. The marketing of illicit pleasure does not just contribute to the corruption and degeneracy of the lives of those who indulge in it. It also foments hatred and violence against all the righteous, because we condemn and oppose that filthy business. That evil business has been a major contributor to the destruction of faith in God and his righteousness in America where it had been so strong. There is nothing that degenerates character more than indulging in sinful pleasure.

Of course, the devil and his disciples always deny the destructiveness of sin. And they use every idea they can conceive to blame other things for those destructive consequences. But remember these words of Paul: **“Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows this he will also reap”** (Galatians 6:7). Therefore, be not misled about the destructiveness of sin. Even though it is usually slow in developing, the commerce of illicit pleasure is extremely destructive to any civilization.

We, the faithful disciples of Christ, condemn that evil business, and they hate and persecute us because of it. And since they now have the greater power, we suffer by them. As Jesus said to the Jews when they arrested him: **“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness”** (Luke 22:53). Nevertheless, God will eventually destroy that filthy business, and then we can rejoice with all those in heaven. We can praise the Lord even more when he judges that great whore, and avenges our blood (literally and figuratively) from her hand.

Now remember, that whore symbolizes a spirit, one that has produced many worldwide examples of the commerce of illicit pleasure, each of which rise and fall over time. Nevertheless, the entire filthy business will eventually be destroyed throughout the earth. For Revelation tells about the defeat of the dragon and the two beasts, followed by the thousand year reign of Christ over the earth. Therefore, the commerce of illicit pleasure will apparently not be completely destroyed upon the earth until that time of great victory for Christ and his church.

The marriage of the Lamb

- **And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, Praise ye our God, all his bondmen and those who fear him, the small and the great. And I heard as the sound of a large multitude, and as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, Praise the Lord! Because the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. We should be glad and rejoice and give the glory to him, because the marriage of the Lamb**

has come, and his wife has prepared herself. And it was given her that she clothe herself in fine linen, bright and pure. For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the sanctified (Revelation 19:5-8).

John said he heard a voice in heaven commanding all the righteous to praise God because he reigns, after which he heard the mighty sound of them praising the Lord our God. And we should all obey God, and be glad and rejoice, and give glory to him, because we have been blessed with an invitation to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb. Jesus is the Lamb and his wife is the new Jerusalem, where he will dwell with all the other sons of God for eternity.

- **And he says to me, Write, Blessed are those who have been called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb. And he says to me, These are the true sayings of God** (Revelation 19:9).

Those words expressed the promise of God to bless those who have been called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. That means all who believe and obey Jesus Christ (the called) will become part of the new Jerusalem in heaven as sons of God for eternity. And those words were reinforced with the judgment that they were true sayings of God. And no doubt John was commanded to write those words so that we could be encouraged by them.

- **And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he says to me, See thou not. I am a fellow bondman of thee and thy brothers, those who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy** (Revelation 19:10).

Only our heavenly Father and his Son are to be worshiped. And regarding prophecy, all who teach and proclaim the good news of Christ can be called prophets in this Christian era, because **“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”** And only that testimony can be called prophecy now, because there are no longer any seers inspired by God, nor will there be. The last men who had that ability were disciples of Christ who lived during the time when the New Testament was being written.

THE DEFEAT OF SATAN'S KINGDOM

These next passages describe events that happened after the seven plagues. Remember, I believe those plagues prepared Satan's kingdom to be defeated by Christ.

- **And I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he who sits upon it called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems having names written, and a name written that none knows except he himself, and clothed in a garment dipped in blood. And his name is called The Word of God (Revelation 19:11-13).**

The rider of the white horse was Jesus Christ, because the next passage calls him the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The above passage says he was called Faithful and True. He was called that probably because only God and his Son are perfectly faithful and true. The name he has that none knows except himself probably means he has an exclusive identity. For he is the only begotten Son of God; the only one begotten directly from him. His garment dipped in blood no doubt symbolizes his sacrificial life on the earth, which earned him the right to judge and make war. And whenever he judges and makes war he is always right and just.

He is also called the Word of God. For John said at the beginning of his biography of Jesus, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"** (John 1:1). Jesus was called God, because he was God the Son. He was called the Word in John's biography of him, and he is called the Word of God here in Revelation. He is called the Word because he is the means by which God communicates with men. And he is the means by which God sends his commands from his throne to influence and exert final control over everything. For he is the Lamb that has control of the seven Spirits of God.

Armies of heaven

- **And the armies in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, pure white. And a sharp two-edged sword comes out of his mouth, so that he would smite the nations by it. And he will tend them with a rod of iron. And he treads the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of the Almighty God. And he has on his garment and on his**

thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:14-16).

That is a description of Christ with his armies in heaven following him. There are indeed armies in heaven. Consider this example of a time when God sent an army to protect his prophet Elisha. The king of Syria had sent an army to capture him, and here is part of what happened: **“And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an army with horses and chariots was round about the city. And his servant said to him, Alas, my master! What shall we do? And he answered, Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Jehovah, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And Jehovah opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha”** (Second Kings 6:15-17).

Those horses and chariots of fire were part of an army from heaven sent by God to protect them. And remember these words: **“And war developed in heaven: Michael and his agents to fight with the dragon. And the dragon and his agents fought”** (Revelation 12:7).

There are armies in heaven and there was a war there. Those things happened because of the great conflict between God and the devil, and their respective agents. However, the conflict between God and the devil in heaven was a kind of cold war until Satan was condemned to be cast out. And that is when it became a hot war. Therefore, I believe those words about armies and war in heaven are literal. Not everything in Revelation is figurative.

Of course many things in Revelation are figurative words. But like interpreting other things in the Bible, it is just a matter of using good judgment to determine when words are used literally and when figuratively. An example of a word used figuratively is the sword that comes out of Jesus' mouth. That sword no doubt symbolizes the word of God. And it is by the word of God that the nations would be smitten. The word of God contains truth about reality, and that truth is going to smite the sinners of the world. It will smite them by exposing how evil and destructive they are, and by proving they deserve condemnation. And when they are defeated Jesus will rule over them with strong and irresistible force.

The armies of Christ in heaven are invisible to us, but they still operate in the world. There are many places in the Bible that tell how the agents of heaven did things in the world. And some of those times were when they intervened in battles to determine the outcome. Although invisible in the world, Christ and his armies will apparently intervene in some way when he defeats Satan's kingdom.

Carnal and spiritual war

- **And I saw one agent having stood in the sun, and he cried out in a great voice, saying to all the birds flying in mid-heaven, Come, gather together to the great supper of God, so that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of those who sit upon them, and the flesh of all men, both freemen and bondmen, and both small and great** (Revelation 19:17-18).

The passage in Revelation that preceded the one above described Jesus with his armies. The next passage describes the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him. Therefore, the above passage about the great supper of God must be a prophecy about a great slaughter that will result from that war, because it calls for the vultures to come together in preparation for it.

- **And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him who sits upon the horse, and against his army.**
- **And the beast was taken, and the false prophet with it who did the signs in its sight by which he led astray those who received the mark of the beast and those who worship its image. The two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone.**
- **And the others were killed by the sword that comes forth out of his mouth (of him who sits upon the horse), and all the birds were filled from their flesh** (Revelation 19:19-21).

That passage speaks about the kings of the world gathering together to make war against Christ. Remember, when the kings of the world first agreed to go against God, he sent the seventh plague against them. I believe that plague was a great war among all the nations. But whatever that upheaval was, it prevented the kings of the world from going against God (meaning his kingdom on the earth, which is his church). Apparently after that plague, however, the beast and the kings of the earth prepared again to make war against Christ, which is indicated in the above scripture.

Remember, the beast symbolizes a satanic spirit within rulers of the world, the rulers of the darkness. And although they may have fought each other, as often happens in this sinful world, that evil spirit was still operating in them. And so they again gathered together to war against Christ. But this time when they gathered together they had their armies with them. And I believe that war will be what was called in the description of the sixth plague, **“the battle of the great day of**

the Almighty God.” For agreeing to that battle was probably why the kings of the world had gathered together the first time.

And the result of that battle will be the defeat of the two beasts and all who are allied with them. Those allies are men with the mark of the beast and who worship its image, which means every man who cooperates with the world-rulers of the darkness, and the false religions and evil ideologies. Satan is also going to be defeated, because the next passage in Revelation describes how he will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years.

Perhaps the great catastrophe of the seventh plague will cause a spiritual awakening in the hearts of many men, which will make them receptive to the power of the word of God. And the enlightenment given them by that knowledge will enable them to successfully defeat Satan's kingdom.

The earlier passage said that Jesus will smite the nations with the sword coming out of his mouth. The world-rulers of the darkness, and the false religions and evil ideologies, will be defeated with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Therefore, that great battle will use the power of words and ideas to combat Satan's kingdom. Remember how the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (the second beast) sent the spirits of demons from their mouths. Those spirits of demons seem to symbolize loathsome but convincing words that captured the hearts of the kings of the world and aroused them to gather together for **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”**

I believe in a similar way, the sword of the Spirit, which symbolizes the beautiful word of God, will capture the hearts of many men after the seventh plague. Remember this passage that Paul wrote: **“For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled”** (Second Corinthians 103-6).

The sword of the Spirit is our weapon for **“casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ”** Therefore, I believe knowledge of the word of God will bring the thoughts of many men captive into the obedience of the Christ. And that will arouse them (with the invisible help of Christ and his armies) to defeat the world-rulers of the darkness, and the

false religions and evil ideologies. And that defeat will establish the supremacy of truth and righteousness in the world.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that final war will be one of words and ideas only. Remember, it took a war of force to cast Satan out of heaven even though he was condemned justly. Therefore, **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God”** may also include a war of flesh and blood. For the devil and his allies cannot be destroyed by words only. When Paul said that **“the weapons of our warfare are not carnal,”** he was not condemning our use of carnal weapons.

There is a time and a place for both kinds of weapons. Our weapon for the church (the sword of the Spirit) is the word of God, which is used to capture the hearts of men for obedience to Christ. Carnal weapons are used to enforce justice.

Remember what Paul said about the administration of justice: **“Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves.**

“For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it. For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil” (Romans 13:1-4).

When the world-rulers of the darkness, and the false religions and evil ideologies are condemned by authorities that are approved by God, then the use of carnal weapons is justified. And indeed, their use is mandatory. For the passage says those authorities do not bear the sword in vain, because they are helpers of God for what is good.

Notice in the previous passage in Revelation how the two beasts were thrown into the lake of fire. And the next passage says the devil will be bound and cast into the abyss. They were thrown and cast, and that requires force. It will take force to get rid of them. Words will defeat them in the hearts of men, but force will be required to destroy them. How such force will be applied, I know not. Nevertheless, I believe it will take some kind of carnal war, and that will result in **“the great supper of God,”** mentioned earlier. Remember, it took a war to cast Satan out of heaven.

Hide yourself

There is a passage in Isaiah that seems to prophesy these same events. It says, **“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors around thee. Hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation be passed over. For, behold, Jehovah comes forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. In that day Jehovah with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the swift serpent, and leviathan the crooked serpent, and he will kill the monster that is in the sea”** (Isaiah 26:20-27:1).

Jehovah warned his people to protect themselves from the wrath of his indignation when he punished the inhabitants of the earth for their sins. The part about the earth disclosing her blood and not covering her slain is very similar to the previous passage in Revelation about the birds and **“the great supper of God.”**

The words in Isaiah about leviathan, the swift and crooked serpent, seem to symbolize Satan. Remember, leviathan almost certainly symbolized Satan in the book of Job. He is also called a serpent in the book of Genesis, and a dragon in the book of Revelation. The monster in the sea mentioned in Isaiah is probably the beast that Revelation describes as a monster that rose out of the sea. That prophecy in Isaiah says the serpent would be punished, and the monster in the sea would be killed. These passages in Revelation say that Satan will be punished in the Abyss, and the beast that rose out of the sea will be cast into the lake of fire, which the Bible says is the second death: **“This is the second death, the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14)..

Jehovah's **“hard and great and strong sword”** is not the sword of the Spirit. It is a carnal sword used to fight a carnal war. Here is an example of that from the book of Ezekiel that speaks of the sword of Jehovah: **“Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt. And I will break his arms, the strong arm, and that which was broken, and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand. But I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a mortally wounded man.**

“And I will hold up the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down. And they shall know that I am Jehovah when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Baby-

lon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries. And they shall know that I am Jehovah” (Ezekiel 30:22-26). God said he was going to put his sword into the hand of the king of Babylon. And that sword symbolized carnal weapons used to fight a carnal war.

Therefore dear brothers, even though God is going to unleash his wrath against the inhabitants of the world for their iniquities, be not afraid. Simply protect yourselves until the violence passes, lest you have your blood shed with theirs. Do not think every righteous soul needs to be in the midst of that carnal war, although no doubt some will be. Every righteous soul needs to be in the midst of God's spiritual war against Satan and his allies, but our weapon in that war is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

THE THOUSAND YEAR REIGN

- **And I saw an agent coming down out of heaven having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he seized the dragon, the old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, who leads the whole world astray, and bound him a thousand years. And he cast him into the abyss, and locked and sealed over him, so that he would no longer lead the nations astray until the thousand years were ended. After these things he must be loosed for a little time** (Revelation 20:1-3).

Now these passages about the defeat of Satan and his kingdom, and about those thousand years are very brief. And as with many other passages in Revelation, what they mean is very controversial. Nevertheless, I believe Satan is going to be bound and cast into the abyss literally for a thousand years so that he will not be able to lead the nations astray.

And that will result in righteousness reigning in the world, which will then greatly exalt mankind. For the wise king Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34). Because Revelation says so little about it, I am going to make many conjectures about what will happen during that thousand year period. Never forget, however, they are only conjectures, and conjectures should only be considered as possibilities.

The destruction of those two beasts, and the dragon being bound and cast into the abyss, meant there was no longer any serious opposition to Jesus Christ or false information about God in the world. The passage above says the devil would no longer lead the nations astray for that thousand years. His kingdom and everyone that was a part of it will be destroyed. And he will not be able to manipulate the minds of men with evil thoughts and evil ideas. Therefore, men will not be deceived about God and his righteousness.

During that thousand years the nations would no longer be led astray about God and his righteousness as they are now. Therefore, during that thousand years the general populations of the nations and their governments would acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ, and they would be committed to his righteousness. However, I must add about the church and governments, that just as the family structure is not a part of the church, so also governments should not be part of the church; those things are separate social structures. Nevertheless, they are all required to obey Christ and his commandments.

Although men would acknowledge the lordship of Christ, as with every generation of believers, individuals would vary in the degree of their commitment. And there will certainly still be sin during those thousand years. There will be much more truth about things spiritual, and much more righteousness, which means sins will be greatly diminished. Nevertheless, sins will still occur, because the world will still be a place of tribulation, where every man exists in a body of flesh with lusts, which Peter said, **“war against the soul”** (First Peter 2:11). And remember, Paul said, **“For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever these things are ye may want, ye may not do”** (Galatians 5:17).

Now regarding God’s judgment of us, each man is going to be judged relative to the conditions of his time and place. Countries have always varied widely in how much peace, law, and order exist in them. And some very prosperous and orderly countries only have a few citizens who believe in Christ. Righteousness exalts a nation whether its citizens are committed to Christ and his church or not. God rewards men for wise and righteous living even without faith in him and his Christ. But always remember, such rewards are only for this life.

Therefore, even when it is easy to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, that will not be enough. Remember what he said about that: **“Not every man who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of my Father in the heavens”** (Matthew 7:21). Even those who live in times of great righteousness will still need to endure testing by suffering, because Paul said, **“... it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22). And consider these words of Peter: **“Beloved, ye should not be surprised at the fieriness in you, which occurs for a trial to you, like a strange thing happening to you. But rejoice in so far as ye are partakers in the sufferings of the Christ, so that also at the revealing of his glory ye may rejoice, having exceeding joy”** (First Peter 4:12-13).

It is certainly more difficult to live right in the sight of God at some times and places than others. Therefore, God is going to judge us relative to our conditions and our opportunities. A man who sins to a certain degree in an evil generation filled with sin, will be judged less severely than a man who sins to the same degree in a very righteous generation. That may be one reason why Jesus forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery (see John 8), which was a capital crime in the law of Moses. He demonstrated the fact, to everyone who was there, that all of her accusers were equally guilty; they had just not been caught. That generation was very corrupt spiritually, and God

destroyed them four decades later with the Roman army. Therefore, that adulteress was not judged as strictly.

There are several passages in the Bible that support the idea of judging relative to conditions, which I quote and discuss in the chapter *The Final Judgment*. Therefore, even though righteousness will prevail during those thousand years, that will not give them a special advantage to become sons of God for eternity. For they will be judged more strictly. The trials and temptations men face will be different, but personal sacrifice for God's righteousness will still be necessary. These words of Jesus will still be valid: **"If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it"** (Matthew 16:24-25). And men will be judged more strictly because they will live in a time when righteousness prevails. For Jesus said, **"And to every man to whom much was given, much will be required from him"** (Luke 12:48).

The reign of Jesus and his disciples

- **And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them. And judgment was given to them and the souls of those who were beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus, and because of the word of God, and who did not worship the beast nor his image, and did not receive the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand. And they lived, and reigned with the Christ the thousand years.**
- **The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. On these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years** (Revelation 20:4-6).

Regarding the first resurrection, I believe that refers to righteous souls who are being resurrected to heaven before the end of the world. They are like Abraham, Moses, and Elijah who are mentioned in the New Testament as having already been resurrected to heaven. The second resurrection will be the one at the end of the world, and it will also contain righteous souls. Those righteous souls will also be **"blessed and holy"** just like those of the first resurrection, but they will not be brought to heaven before the end of the world. I also believe the first resurrection will not happen at one particular time, as will the second resurrection. It seems to be an ongoing resurrection, because Abraham, Moses, and Elijah each lived centuries apart.

That passage also speaks of the reign of Christ during that thousand years, which obviously means reigning over the earth. Consider this passage about the time when Christ, the Lamb, received the book with the seven seals: **“... the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls containing incense, which are the prayers of the sanctified. And they sing a new song, saying, Thou are worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it, because thou were killed and purchased us from God by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And thou made them kings and priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth”** (Revelation 5:8-10).

Notice that passage says those men would be **“priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth.”** That is very similar to what Revelation says will happen during those thousand years: **“... they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years.”** The first passage says they will reign over the earth, and the second passage says they will reign with Christ a thousand years. Apparently therefore, some souls (a “first fruit”) from every part of the world are being resurrected to reign as priests with him over the earth when that thousand year period comes to pass. For Christ is our high priest, as this passage says: **“Because of which, holy brothers, companions of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our affirmation, Jesus Christ ...”** (Hebrews 3:1).

Now it is important to recognize that they will reign *over* the earth, but not *upon* the earth. For the Bible teaches that neither Jesus nor any resurrected souls will return to live upon this earth. As the book of Hebrews says, **“And inasmuch as it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, judgment, so also the Christ, having been offered once in order to take up the sins of many, will appear a second time, independent of sin, to those waiting for him for salvation”** (Hebrews 9:27-28). What some men call “the Rapture” will never happen.

The second time Jesus appears will be like this description he gave to his disciples about the end of the world: **“But straightaway after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. And the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky. And then all the tribes of the earth will beat the breast, and they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and much glory.**

“And he will send forth his agents with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather together his chosen from the four winds, from the boundaries of the heavens—as far as their boundaries” (Matthew 24:29-31). That prophecy is about the end of the world. And **“the tribulation of those days”** simply refers to whatever particular tribulations were occurring then. For remember, this is a world of tribulation. With those words Jesus was saying that the end times will have tribulations like every other time in this world of vanity in the bondage of corruption. It will not be a time of special tribulation.

Also about his coming again, remember what Paul said about our resurrection: **“For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain for the coming of the Lord, will no, not precede those who became asleep. Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the arch-agent, and with a trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up simultaneously with them in clouds to the Lord’s gathering in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage each other with these words”** (First Thessalonians 4:15-18). The nearest thing to Jesus coming a second time to the earth is when he comes in the clouds at the end of the world to gather his faithful disciples to be with him always in heaven.

Those righteous souls of the first resurrection were not going to be resurrected in the flesh to reign upon the earth. I believe what the passage in Revelation means is that their spirits are being resurrected to reign over the earth together with Christ from heaven. Perhaps they will even reign from their habitation in the paradise there. And the way those souls in heaven on their “thrones” (meaning places of command) would reign with Christ for that thousand years is through their spirits.

Remember, the seven Spirits of God that are before his throne are the source of power that he uses not only to energize everything, but also to have the ability to control anything. And perhaps some of that energy will be channeled into the paradise of heaven, where all the souls of the first resurrection will be, so that their spirits can use that energy to help them reign over the earth. Not to apply energy for it, but to enable them to guide the righteous men on earth in the decisions they make and in the work they do. Perhaps somehow the strengthened spirits of those resurrected men (including Abraham, Moses, and Elijah) will radiate down from heaven to work in the minds of Christians together with the Holy Spirit of God.

Consider this passage from Isaiah: **“And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I**

said, Lo, send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:8-10).

Perhaps, in an opposite way, the spirits of those resurrected men in heaven will radiate down to help the righteous men of the world (1) to open their ears to hear, (2) to open their eyes to see, and (3) to open their hearts to understand. And in that way men on earth will gain enormous knowledge and ability to **“Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it ...”** (Genesis 1:28). And by fill the earth, it means to fill the entire universe, not just this one planet.

Since God sends his Spirits upon the earth to influence and control men, I believe that is how the righteous souls that were resurrected will reign over the earth with Christ for a thousand years. Neither Jesus nor any of those righteous souls will bodily return to the earth to reign; they will reign from heaven. And they will reign by radiating their spirits to the earth to influence the men here. I believe those righteous souls in heaven will be given the power to extend their spirits the way God does. Therefore, they can use those forces to guide the minds of men on the earth, but not in miraculous ways.

Remember, Satan has the power to use his spirit to lead men astray. And the Bible mentions when God even gave him the power to control the elements when he was afflicting Job (but not in any miraculous way). That is described in the following passage:

“And it fell on a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, that there came a messenger to Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away. Yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee.

“While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God fell from heaven [probably a lightning storm], and has burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee.”

“While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have taken them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee.

“While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in

their eldest brother's house. And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee" (Job 1:13-19).

Satan sent evil men against Job because he is the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. If Satan has the power to use his spirit to influence evil men, then God can certainly give us the power for our spirits in heaven to influence righteous men. And that is how the righteous souls in heaven are going to reign over the earth with Christ for a thousand years. They will reign with Christ by the influence of their spirits from heaven.

Now some men have interpreted ambiguous words spoken by Peter, to support their idea that Jesus is going to return to the world, and transform it back into what they believe was a perfect world at the beginning. Here is what Peter said: **"Repent ye therefore, and be converted in order to wipe away your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. And he may send Christ Jesus who has been pre-ordained for you, whom heaven must indeed receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God spoke through the mouth of all his holy prophets from the age"** (Acts 3:19-21).

I believe the expression **"the times of restoration of all things,"** simply means that the full authority of God over all things will be restored. Remember, Satan is now **"the ruler of this world"** (John 12:31). The world was created to be ruled by men under the supervision of God, but men have given themselves to the devil to be ruled by him.

Consider also this passage where Jesus speaks of all things being restored: **"And his disciples questioned him, saying, Why then do the scholars say that Elijah must first come? And having answered, Jesus said to them, Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things. But I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they knew him not, but did to him how many things they wanted. Likewise also the Son of man is going to suffer by them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them about John the immerser"** (Matthew 17:10-13). Jesus said that John would restore all things. But John certainly did not restore the earth to what it was at the beginning, which was not perfect anyway.

Conjectures about material development

I believe that during those thousand years the Lord will make the ears of righteous men to hear keenly, their eyes to be opened, and their hearts to understand. Therefore, during those thousand years there

will be an explosive-like growth of knowledge and development. Consider the twentieth century. It was a time of astonishing material development in spite of containing much evil, including two extremely destructive world wars. If that much development could occur in one century with all those things that interfered with it, what could happen in ten centuries during a time of peace and righteousness?

I also believe it will be a time of unprecedented unity among men. For the most righteous disciples of Christ will be the great men of the world. They will be the rulers and the judges, the chief engineers and developers, the major scientists and clinicians, the finest professionals and craftsmen, the best educators and preachers. They will be the great men in every human endeavor. That contrasts completely with the world as it has been, because it is now dominated by the devil. Remember what Paul said, **“For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent”** (First Corinthians 1:26).

There is even some evidence to suggest the world will be governed like a modern military system. The officers will be chosen from the most faithful disciples of Christ, and the general populations will be like enlisted men. And just as in a military system, the members of the general populations will be in subjection to the officer class. For the text says that Jesus will tend the nations with a rod of iron. I believe that means the Spirit of Jesus will operate in the hearts of his disciples to rule with strict discipline to maintain the supremacy of order and righteousness. That will be necessary because most men in the world do not commit themselves to be sons of God for eternity.

And for such reasons the rulers will not be popular with the general population; it will not be a democratic system. For remember what James said about popularity: **“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is hatred of God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”** (James 4:4). Those righteous leaders will not be friends of the world, but they will have all the power.

That does not mean, however, that the general public will have no freedom. I believe it means that the more men prove themselves worthy, the more freedom they will be given. For it will be a merit system, where men can work their way into higher positions of authority and responsibility, including the ability to qualify for the officer or ruling class. Freedom, rights, and responsibilities will all be earned, not inherited.

Nevertheless, although the most righteous disciples of Christ will be the officers and chief men, they will lead and rule the way Jesus com-

manded us. For he said to his disciples, **“Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their eminent men have power over them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wants to become great among you, he shall be your helper, and whoever wants be first among you shall be your bondman. Just as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:25-28).

Also consider this passage about Jesus: **“He will not quarrel, nor will he shout, nor will any man hear his voice in the thoroughfares. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoldering flax he will not quench, until he sends forth justice for victory”** (Matthew 12:19-20). Jesus was not like the aggressive men of the world who promote themselves so they can have power over others and lord over them. Jesus was a very powerful and forceful leader, but he was humble and gentle.

Also consider Moses. He was a very powerful and forceful leader of the sons of Israel during the difficult time when they had to struggle with Pharaoh to achieve their freedom from bondage in Egypt. And he led them faithfully to their promised land, even though they were so rebellious, against both him and Jehovah, that God eventually cursed them to wander forty years in the wilderness. Yet the Bible says of him: **“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth”** (Numbers 12:3).

Both Jesus and Moses were great leaders, yet they were both meek. They were not meek in the sense of being timid, because both of them were dynamic leaders who demonstrated great courage. And they both used force when necessary. They were meek in the sense of being humble and gentle. Remember these words of Jesus: **“Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:5). And God gave them leadership not because they pursued it, but because they were the best qualified. And Jesus even proved undeniably that he deserves supremacy over all others.

Thus, the chief men of the world will lead and rule the way both Moses and Jesus did while they lived upon the earth—to serve in a loving and gentle way, and never selfishly and self-willed, because Moses and Jesus were always in full obedience to God’s commands (although Moses was not perfect).

However, just as Moses did, and Jesus always has, they will serve with strict authority and discipline. Remember what Jesus said: **“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent”** (Revelation 3:19). They will act as both lambs and lions, lambs toward the righteous and lions toward the wicked. That is how Jesus has been described. For example, John the immerser said of

him, **“Behold, the Lamb of God!”** (John 1:36). And one of the twenty-four elders in heaven said about Jesus, **“... behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David ...”** (Revelation 5:5).

Now to help you appreciate the greatness of the coming of those thousand years, I will offer some conjectures about what could happen. One of the greatest obstacles to the unity of mankind is the great number of different languages used. I believe there is going to develop early in that thousand years one superior international language that every man would learn as a child. However, before that time men will probably develop tiny computer-like devices they can carry around that will instantly convert one language to another. That would enable men to communicate easily and clearly to each other, even though each man does not know the other man’s language.

Moreover, I believe the world is yet in its embryonic stage of development. I believe that mankind is going to develop and improve, not just our planet earth, but the whole world. And that includes colonizing the entire universe. That was implied by Jesus, when he said to his disciples, **“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars of the sky will be falling, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with much power and glory. And then he will send forth his agents, and will gather together his chosen from the four winds, from the outermost part of the earth as far as the outermost part of heaven”** (Mark 13:24-27). Thus mankind will colonize the whole universe before the end of the world.

Jesus also said he would gather his chosen **“from the outermost part of the earth ...”** However, at another time Jesus asked, **“... when the Son of man comes, will he then find faith on the earth?”** (Luke 18:8). That must mean it is possible that knowledge of the word of God will become so rare on the planet earth that faith in him may not be possible.

That kind of situation is almost true even now in some Muslim and communist countries. Nevertheless, there are still souls worthy of being chosen from those conditions, even if they have no opportunity to develop faith in him. For remember how Paul said that God will judge men who have never heard the law: **“For when the Gentiles who have no law do by nature the things of the law, these men, not having law, are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, testifying of their conscience, and their thoughts amidst each other accusing or also defending them in a day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news”** (Romans 2:14-16).

I believe man will discover how to travel much faster than the speed of light, fast enough to be able to traverse the universe in a reasonable amount of time. That kind of speed is only imaginary now. But who would have thought during the time of animal transportation and wind-driven ships that thousands of people would routinely travel in comfort to the other side of the world in a single day. And man will also develop the ability to communicate throughout the universe the way we can now communicate throughout the earth.

I also believe men will learn how to easily gain access to the unlimited energy contained in all matter. Moreover, they will learn how to manipulate the particles of atoms in order to create different elements at will. They will achieve what the medieval alchemists sought: changing things such as base metals into gold. With such knowledge they will be able to manufacture air and water from rocks and dirt.

Thus I believe they will build automated factories on different planets throughout the universe to manufacture things such as air and water in places without them in order to create environments needed to sustain life. Indeed, they may even gain the power and knowledge needed to change the motions of planets to make them more like that of the earth, such as moving Mars closer to the sun. Regarding planets in other solar systems, I believe some of them do contain life, because God created our universe to be inhabited. However, there are no other creatures in the world that are superior to men, because we are offspring of God.

Now of course, all of those things I have conjectured about the development of mankind are farfetched ideas of science fiction to us now. However, men are made in the image of God, and the potential of mankind is unlimited. For remember what God said about them soon after the great flood: **“Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. And now nothing will be withheld from them, which they propose to do”** (Genesis 11:6-7). However, I do not believe men will develop the capability to colonize the universe before that thousand year reign of Christ and his righteousness, because they are now so divided.

Conjectures about when will it happen

How many years in the history of the world will pass before that thousand-year reign will happen is not told. It could begin in a few years from now, in a thousand or more years from now, or any time in between. I personally believe it will begin sometime in the next couple of centuries for the following reason. The Hebrews were God’s chosen people for about two thousand years, beginning with Abraham and ending with Christ. Gentile Christians now comprise the great

majority of God's people, and they have been for about two thousand years.

I suspect that when those two time spans equalize, that will result in the sons of Israel embracing Christ equally with the Gentiles. Consider what Paul said to the Gentile Christians in Rome: **“For I do not want you, brothers, to be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise according to yourselves, that a callousness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The man who delivers will come from Zion, and will turn away impiety from Jacob. And this is the covenant from me to them when I will take away their sins.**

“They are indeed enemies toward the good news for your sake, but toward selection, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as ye once were also disobedient to God, but now have received mercy at the disobedience of these, so also now these have been disobedient for thy mercy, so that they also may receive mercy. For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all” (Romans 11:25-32).

And when that happens I believe it will usher in the great thousand-year period when Christ will reign over the earth, reigning with his Spirit, and with the spirits of his sanctified, from his throne in heaven. For Satan the great dragon now reigns with his spirit upon the earth.

I believe it will happen then because that is what Paul suggested when he was contrasting the unbelief of the Jews with the belief of the Gentiles: **“Now if their transgression is wealth of the world, and their failure is wealth of Gentiles, how much more their fullness? ... For if the casting away of them is reconciliation of the world, what is the acceptance except life from the dead?”** (Romans 11:12, 15).

When the Jews develop faith, and accept Jesus Christ, that will be like **“life from the dead.”** And I believe that **“life from the dead”** will be when mankind is no longer led astray by the devil and his organized allies upon the earth.

THE END OF THE WORLD

- **And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed out of his prison** (Revelation 20:7).

How long the world will last after Satan is loosed from his prison is not told. Remember, I believe the world will have colonized the entire universe by that time. Therefore, God could allow the world to exist thousands of years more before the end and the final judgment. Jesus said that nobody but God himself knows how long the world will last (see Mark 13:32). However, I personally believe the world will last many thousands of years longer.

Nevertheless, Revelation does say that the world is again going to forsake God. For the next passage says that Satan “**will come forth to lead astray the nations ...**.” During those thousand years Satan will not be able to manipulate them with his deceit and temptations. And he will not have a powerful kingdom to serve him. But after he is released from bondage he will again lead men astray from God and his righteousness. He will lead them astray because the majority of men have always been vulnerable to manipulation by the devil. They are vulnerable to him because their faith in God is weak, and they prefer living to satisfy their worldly lives.

John warned about living only to satisfy our earthly lives, when he said, “**Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Because everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the arrogance of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world**” (First John 2:15-16). Since most men love the world and live to satisfy their earthly lives, then when Satan regains his power, they will again submit to him.

With Satan’s release from the abyss he will again poison the hearts of most people, and he will provoke some of them to become more combative against God and his holy word the Bible. Such men will no doubt begin with subtlety and deceit, just as Satan has always done. Deceitful men and scoffers will again challenge the truth about spiritual things, and will falsify history to deny how righteousness has exalted nations. And they will rebuild his kingdom, which will create a new age of spiritual darkness.

Many scholars today even deny there is such a thing as truth. They are like Pilate who scoffed when Jesus said to him, “**Every man who is of the truth hears my voice**” (John 18:37). Pilate responded, “**What**

is truth?" Then without waiting for an answer, he went out to the people who were clamoring for Jesus' crucifixion. Pilate's response indicates to me that he thought there was no answer.

Men who are not of the truth, and do not believe in it, think nothing of mixing facts with fiction to manipulate people's thinking and promote whatever goals they may have. The modern television docudrama is a common example. Therefore, just as throughout history, except for those thousand years, the nations will be led astray to turn from God and his righteousness. With the power of his influence in evil men, Satan will rebuild his kingdom by using the aggressive ones among them to become the world-rulers of that new darkness.

Revelation says nothing about the return of the two beasts, nor does it say anything about Babylon, the great whore. Nevertheless, I believe the devil will use other sinful men to invent new religions and ideologies that will support those rulers. Also the world will probably begin again to glorify, glamorize, and embrace folly, wickedness, and perversity. And they will again commercialize illicit pleasure. They will do those things because human nature will not change, and Satan will again be able to lead their hearts astray.

The book of Revelation gives no details about the various forces of evil that might arise after the thousand year reign. I am confident it would be far too complex to describe to us. It only speaks of the final conflict between good and evil. Remember, the entire universe is going to be inhabited by mankind. And there will no doubt be many thousands of planets populated by men, perhaps even millions of them. This vast universe was not created just to **"declare the glory of God"** (Psalms 19:1). Therefore, the variety of things that men will do in all of it could not possibly be summarized in any book.

The last battle

- **And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed out of his prison. And he will come forth to lead astray the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the battle, of whom the number of them is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the encampment of the sanctified and the beloved city.**
- **And fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. And the devil who leads them astray was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also were the beast and the false prophet. And they will be tormented day and night into the ages of the ages (Revelation 20:7-10).**

That passage is the only place in the New Testament that mentions Gog and Magog. However, there is a rather lengthy prophecy about them in the book of Ezekiel.

Gog and Magog in the Old Testament

The prophecy in Ezekiel about them is so lengthy that I am just going to summarize here what it says. It begins this way: **“Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the ruler of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him”** (Ezekiel 38:2). (Jehovah often called Ezekiel “son of man.”) Jehovah said he was against Gog, and he was going to bring him forth with all his great army and many peoples with him. Jehovah said that Gog, in the latter years, would come into the land of Israel that had recovered from its destruction. And he and all his hordes would come like a storm, like a cloud to cover the land.

The lord Jehovah said of Gog, **“It shall come to pass in that day, that things shall come into thy mind, and thou shall devise an evil plan”** (Ezekiel 38:10). Jehovah said Gog was going to plunder the land of unwallled villages, the waste places that were now inhabited, and the people (of Israel) who were gathered out of the nations. Jehovah said that Gog, his mighty army, and the many peoples with him were going to come against his people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. Jehovah said he was going to bring him against his land, so that the nations would know him, and he would be sanctified in him.

Then with many words Jehovah described how he was going to destroy Gog and the many peoples with him. He said, **“And the nations shall know that I am Jehovah, the Holy One in Israel”** (Ezekiel 39:7). Jehovah said those who dwell in the cities of Israel would go forth and plunder those who plundered them. And they would make fires of the weapons. He said it would take seven years before they were all burned. And it would take seven months to bury all the dead bodies. Then Jehovah told Ezekiel to speak to the birds and beasts for them to assemble to his sacrifice. He said they would eat the flesh of the mighty and drink the blood of rulers. He said, **“And ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, says the lord Jehovah”** (Ezekiel 39:20).

Jehovah said the house of Israel would know that he was Jehovah. And the nations would know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity. Then he said he would now bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and they would dwell securely in their own land. He said, **“For I have**

poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the lord Jehovah” (Ezekiel 39:29).

That prophecy about Gog and Magog was followed by a very lengthy and detailed description of a new temple in Jerusalem. That was followed by information mainly about the priests, the offerings and other ordinances of worship, and a new plan about the distribution of the land for the twelve tribes (see Ezekiel 40-48). All those things are at the end of the book, and they take ten to fifteen pages in typical modern Bibles. Most of what it says is the description of the temple. Below is a small sample of that description:

“And the man said to me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thy heart upon all that I shall show thee. For thou art brought here to the intent that I may show them to thee. Declare all that thou see to the house of Israel. And, behold, a wall on the outside of the house round about, and in the man’s hand a measuring reed six cubits long, of a cubit and a handbreadth each. So he measured the thickness of the building, one reed, and the height, one reed.

“Then he came to the gate which looks toward the east, and went up the steps of it. And he measured the threshold of the gate, one reed broad, and the other threshold, one reed broad. And every little chamber was one reed long, and one reed broad, and *the space* between the little chambers was five cubits. And the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate toward the house was one reed.

“He also measured the porch of the gate toward the house, one reed. Then he measured the porch of the gate, eight cubits, and the posts thereof, two cubits. And the porch of the gate was toward the house. And the little chambers of the gate eastward were three on this side, and three on that side; those three were of one measure. And the posts had one measure on this side and on that side.

“And he measured the breadth of the opening of the gate, ten cubits, and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits, and a border before the little chambers, one cubit *on this side*, and a border, one cubit on that side, and the little chambers, six cubits on this side, and six cubits on that side.”

“And he measured the gate from the roof of the one little chamber to the roof of the other, a breadth of twenty-five cubits, door against door. He also made posts, sixty cubits. And the court *reached* to the posts, round about the gate. And *from* the forefront of the gate at the entrance to the forefront of the inner porch of

the gate were fifty cubits. And there were closed windows to the little chambers, and to their posts within the gate round about, and likewise to the arches. And windows were round about inward, and upon each post were palm trees” (Ezekiel 40:4-16).

All of those things in the book of Ezekiel are very figurative. For none of those things have ever happened in the land of Israel nor will they ever. What that prophecy seems to describe, in very symbolic language, is (1) the final battle of the devil’s kingdom (symbolized by Gog and Magog) against God’s people, the church, and (2) the establishment of the new Jerusalem in heaven. It was a prophecy about the same things described in the book of Revelation about the last great battle on earth, and the coming of the new Jerusalem in heaven.

The disciples of Christ are now God’s temple upon the earth, because Paul said to us, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16). And there is evidence the entire new Jerusalem, where all the sons of God will reside with him, will be the temple of heaven. I speak much more about the new Jerusalem in the chapter *The New Heaven and Earth*.

Why there is such a lengthy and detailed description in the book of Ezekiel about a new temple, I can only conjecture. What I believe is that we should make no effort to understand all that detail, because for Christians it is meaningless. Perhaps there are two purposes for that detailed description: First, to inform (with figurative language) those who accept Christ that the new Jerusalem in heaven will be a complex place filled with detail. And second, to mislead and confuse those who reject him, by causing them to think that description is literal. Only Christians who accept what the New Testament teaches can understand that lesson. For the New Testament says there will never be such a temple upon the earth.

Gog and Magog in the New Testament

The book of Revelation says the devil is going to **“lead astray the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the battle, of whom the number of them is as the sand of the sea.”** He is going to lead the nations to surround the encampment of the sanctified and the beloved city. The encampment of the sanctified probably symbolizes the worldwide population of all the disciples of Christ. The beloved city probably symbolizes all the worldwide congregations of Christ, because cities are places where people congregate to live and work.

How the devil will gather together the nations to assault the church will no doubt depend upon the highly advanced technologies of communication and transportation that will be available then. Neverthe-

less remember, the devil is unable to unite all the nations except in their opposition to God.

The main lesson in that passage seems to be that even when the disciples of Christ and their churches are scattered throughout the universe the devil will be able to arouse the world-rulers of that new darkness (symbolized by Gog) and all their nations (symbolized by Magog), and unite them together in an effort to destroy the children of God. Nevertheless, when the nations seem to be on the verge of victory, having **“surrounded the encampment of the sanctified and the beloved city,”** then God will send fire from heaven to devour the nations. That fire from heaven will probably be the fire sent from God to destroy the world. For when that happened the devil was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were to be tormented day and night forever.

Therefore, dear brothers, fear not even when it seems the congregations of Christ and all of his disciples are on the verge of destruction. Trust and believe in God, because his holy word prophesies that such dangers will happen. But the final victory always belongs to our Lord and those who belong to him.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

- **And I saw a great white throne, and him who sits upon it, from whose face the earth and the sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works.**
- **And the sea gave up the dead in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead in them. And they were judged, each according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).**

That passage describes the great day of judgment when all men will be judged. We will be **“judged from the things that were written in the books, according to [our] works.”** God is keeping records of all that we do, all that every man does. Those “books” are records from his great database about how every man has lived. And I suspect those recordings are so complete that they can recreate exactly what happened at any time in full detail, as if it were happening again. For remember, even the hairs of our head are all numbered.

The book of life only contains the names of the sons of God. Therefore, every man who has not believed and obeyed Christ to become a son of God, will be thrown into the lake of fire, which is hell. I say much more about the judgment of hell, and even the possibility of being released from there, in the appendix to this book.

The book of life is mentioned five times in the book of Revelation. However, Psalm 69:28 and Philippians 4:3 are the only other passages in the Bible that mention it. Nevertheless, the names that are contained in that book determine who will live in the new Jerusalem and who will be cast into the lake of fire. For it is the record God is keeping of those who will be his sons for eternity. And perhaps on the judgment day every man will be able to see whether his name is there or not.

Nevertheless we are all going to be judged by our works that are recorded in those other books. Indeed, Jesus even told the people, **“But I say to you, that every idle word, whatever men may speak, they will render account about it in the day of judgment”** (Matthew 12:36). Notice also, the passage in Revelation says we are going to be judged by our works, not by our faith. As James said, **“For as**

the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without the works is dead” (James 2:26). Therefore, be not led astray by the very popular but false doctrine of salvation by faith only.

Of course, just as we are not saved by faith only, neither are we saved by works only. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples, **“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then I will profess to them, I never acknowledged you. Depart from me, ye who work lawlessness”** (Matthew 7:22-23).

Paul also explained how no man can be made right before God from works only. For he said, **“Now we know that as many things as the law says, it says to those in the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become accountable to God. Because from works of law no flesh will be made right before him, for through law is knowledge of sin”** (Romans 3:19-20). What Paul meant by works of law is works based upon the laws of God’s righteousness. And no matter how hard we try to live righteously, we all lack the quality and character of spirit to live without sinning and being condemned.

Therefore, we cannot be saved by our works only, because just as with Adam, a single sin will condemn us. We can only be saved by faith in God and obedience to him through Jesus Christ. We are saved by faith and works. You can learn much more about the relationship between salvation by faith and salvation by works in my book, *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

The sinners of the world are going to be cast into the lake of fire. It is called the second death because it follows the death of our mortal bodies. It is a living death because the spirits of all who are cast there will exist for eternity. Every offspring of God cannot cease existing, because their spirits came from God himself. And since God is eternal, that makes our spirits eternal.

Therefore, the existence of the condemned will be a living death of eternal torment. For when Jesus was describing the end of the world, he said, **“The Son of man will send forth his agents, and they will gather out of his kingdom all the stumbling-blocks, and those doing lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth”** (Matthew 13:41-42). The lake of fire is also called the furnace of fire, which is commonly called hell.

In the day of judgment God will separate all the souls that ever lived upon this earth into two groups: those who will be rewarded with life

as sons of God for eternity in the new Jerusalem, and those who will suffer punishment in the lake of fire that burns forever. For Jesus said, **“Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered from every kind, which, when it was full, after dragging to the shore, having sat down, they gathered the good into vessels, but they cast out the useless. So it will be at the end of the age. The agents will come forth, and separate the bad from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth”** (Matthew 13:47-50).

He also said, **“But when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the holy agents with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from each other, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will truly place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left”** (Matthew 25:31-33). Sheep are meek; goats are aggressive.

Judging each other

There is evidence that men will be involved in judging each other on the day of judgment. For when Jesus was on the earth, he said to the Jews, **“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here”** (Matthew 12:41-42).

And when Paul was rebuking the Christians in Corinth for having lawsuits against each other, he said, **“Dare any of you, having a matter against the other, go to law before the unrighteous and not before the sanctified? Or know ye not that the sanctified will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are ye unworthy of very small legal disputes? Know ye not that we will judge agents? Then why not mundane things?”** (First Corinthians 6:1-3).

Paul said the sons of God are going to judge the world. And remember what Jesus said to John when he was instructing him about the seven congregations in Asia: **“He who overcomes, I will give him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne”** (Revelation 3:21). The faithful disciples of Christ will judge the world with him in his throne.

Judging relative to conditions

Remember, there is also evidence in the Bible that we are going to be judged according to our circumstances. Consider this passage in the book of Matthew: **“Then he [Jesus] began to upbraid the cities in which most of his mighty works occurred, because they did not repent. Woe to thee, Chorazin! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! Because if the mighty works that occurred in you occurred in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.**

“Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which was exalted as far as the sky. Thou will be brought down as far as Hades, because if the mighty works had occurred in Sodom that occurred in thee, it would have remained until this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Matthew 11:20-24). Notice Jesus said it would be more tolerable for some people than for others because of the differences in their opportunities.

Further evidence that God judges relative to conditions is illustrated by this passage: **“And having sat down opposite the treasury, Jesus watched how the multitude cast money into the treasury, and many rich men cast in much. And one poor widow having come, she cast in two mites, which are a quadrans. And having summoned his disciples, he says to them, Truly I say to you, that this poor widow cast in more than all those who are casting into the treasury. For they all cast in from that which is abundant to them, but she from her need cast in all, as many things she had, her whole living”** (Mark 12:41-44). It was not the absolute amount of what they contributed that Jesus emphasized. It was what they contributed relative to what they possessed. And in the same way God will judge us relative to our circumstances.

Jesus also told a parable about a house-ruler who hired workmen for his vineyard. The house-ruler considered other things besides the labor of those men when he paid them. He hired men in the early morning, again at about the third hour, then about the sixth hour, then the ninth hour, and the eleventh hour. Here is what happened when he paid them:

“And having become evening, the lord of the vineyard says to his manager, Call the workmen, and render to them their wage, having begun from the last until the first. And those who came about the eleventh hour, each received a denarius.

“But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more. And they also received a denarius each. And when they

received it, they murmured against the house-ruler, saying, These last did one hour, and thou have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the heat.

“But having answered, he said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong. Did thou not agree with me for a denarius? Take thine and go. But I want to give to this last man, as to thee also. Is it not permitted for me to do what I want with my own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last, for many are called, but few chosen” (Matthew 20:8-16).

The men who were hired early certainly worked longer. However, the longer it was before the other men were hired, the longer they had to worry about earning anything. Those were times when men worried about what they, their wives, and their children were going to have to eat. Those men all wanted to work, but they did not all have the same opportunity to work a full day.

The lord of the vineyard was kind enough to reward them all the same because they all wanted to work, even though they did not all work the same amount of time. The lesson of that parable is not that God will reward every righteous soul equally in every way. The lesson is that God is not going to reward men only according to things like the quantity of their works. Circumstances vary far too much for that to be a just way to reward.

Incidentally, notice these words in the parable: **“Is it not permitted for me to do what I want with my own?”** Not in modern America. This sinful generation of Americans have been so obsessed with demanding rights to sin that they have failed to notice how many genuine rights have been robbed of us by our evil rulers.

Degrees of reward and punishment

On the day of judgment God is going to separate all men into two groups. Those placed at his right hand will be given eternal reward, but those placed at his left hand will be given eternal punishment. Nevertheless, I do not believe that in the day of judgment those placed at his right hand will all be rewarded equally in the kingdom of heaven, and those placed at his left hand will all be punished equally in hell. For God is a God of justice, and I do not believe he is going to disregard all those books after making that simple division.

Regarding differences in rewards, consider this parable of Jesus: **“He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And having called ten of his bondmen, he gave them ten minas and said to them, Do business until I come. ... And it came to pass for him to return,**

having taken the kingdom. And he said for these bondmen to be called to him, to whom he gave the silver, so that he might know what any man gained by trading.

“And the first came, saying, Lord, thy mina gained ten minas. And he said to him, Well, thou good bondman. Because thou became faithful in the least, be thou having authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy mina gained five minas. And he also said to him, And thou become over five cities.

“And another came, saying, Lord, behold thy mina, which I had put away in a napkin. For I was afraid of thee because thou are an austere man. Thou take up what thou did not lay down, and reap what thou did not sow. He says to him, Out of thy mouth I will judge thee, thou evil bondman. Thou had known that I am an austere man taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow. Then why did thou not give my silver into a bank, and having come I would have collected it with interest?

“And he said to those who stood by, Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has the ten minas. And they said to him, Lord, he has ten minas. For I say to you, that to every man who has, will be given, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him” (Luke 19:12-26).

A mina is a unit of money. The ten men were given an equal amount of money to work with. One man increased his mina tenfold, and he was rewarded with authority over ten cities. Another man increased his mina five fold, and was rewarded with authority over five cities. Jesus was teaching about how we will be rewarded for our service to God, and that parable indicates we will not all be rewarded equally in every way.

Regarding punishment, the Bible teaches there are two general kinds of sinners: the foolish and the wicked. Most of the sinners of the world are not wicked men; they are foolish about spiritual things. The man in the parable who did not use his mina wisely was foolish, and he lost what he had been given.

In a similar parable Jesus told about men being given talents to work with. A talent is also a unit of money. Here is what is says about the man who was given one talent and did not use it wisely: **“And the man who received the one talent also having come, said, Lord, I knew thee that thou are a hard man, reaping where thou did not sow, and gathering from where thou did not scatter. And after being afraid, having gone, I hid thy talent in the ground. Lo, thou have thine own.**

“But having answered, his lord said to him, Thou evil and lazy bondman, thou knew that I reap where I sowed not, and gather from where I did not scatter. Thou ought therefore to have placed my silver with the bankers, and having come I would have received back my own with interest.

“Take ye therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every man who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him. And cast ye the unprofitable bondman into the outer darkness. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:24-30).

Notice in the parable that not only did the foolish man lose his talent, but he was cast into the outer darkness. And that outer darkness is the lake of fire called hell, because that is where there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Another lesson in that parable is that only having a little is no excuse for not using it wisely. Whatever God gives us, whether much or little, we should use it wisely.

The wicked are the most evil, because like the devil they prey upon other men. They are like the Pharisees that Jesus cursed when he said, **“But woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye devour widows’ houses, and praying long in pretence. Because of this ye will receive greater condemnation”** (Matthew 23:14). Notice how Jesus said they would receive greater condemnation.

Since all men are not equally evil, not all men deserve equal punishment. I fear the idea that every soul in hell will receive equal and eternal punishment has discouraged many men from believing they are bad enough to deserve it. They trust that God will be fair to them, and will not give them equal punishment with the devil and the most wicked men of the world. Therefore they reason they will not be cast into hell.

There are many things in the Bible that indicate sinners will not be given equal punishment in the afterlife. For example, the psalmist said of God: **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). Every sinner is going to be punished with full justice, for not one of them will be punished beyond what he deserves. And some sinners certainly deserve much more punishment than others. Therefore, although every sinner will be cast into hell, I believe there will be degrees of punishment there.

Consider what Jesus said in this example: **“And that bondman who knew his lord’s will, and who did not prepare, nor do according to his will, will be beaten much, but he who did not know, and did things worthy of blows, will be beaten little. And to every man to**

whom much was given, much will be required from him. And to whom they entrust much, they will ask him more abundantly” (Luke 12:47-48). Having knowledge of God’s will is one variable that will affect a sinners punishment. Nevertheless, refusing that knowledge is just as bad as disobeying it deliberately.

In the day of judgment, how God will apply his justice appropriately for each lost soul and for each saved soul, I know not. But I have no doubt that every soul will be judged with full justice according to his works. For remember the passage that says, **“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works”** (Revelation 20:12).

That passage says we are going to be judged according to our works, and that means we will be rewarded according to our works, rewarded with good or with evil. And I believe the more righteously a disciple of Christ lives in this world, the more he will be rewarded in the day of judgment. And the more wickedly and foolishly a sinner lives in this world, the more he will be punished in the day of judgment. Remember however, God will no doubt consider our circumstances when he judges us, and will not judge strictly according to any kind of absolute criteria.

And always remember this warning: **“For when we sin willfully after taking the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and of fire, a fervor that is going to devour the opposition.**

“Any man who has disregarded the law of Moses dies without mercies from two or three witnesses. “By how much worse punishment do ye think he will deserve who has trampled the Son of God, and who considered profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who treated the Spirit of grace contemptuously? For we know him who said, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge his people.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31).

I say much more about hell itself farther in the book.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

This part of Revelation contains perhaps the most encouraging words in the Bible. For it gives us a glimpse of the great reward that God will give to all who become his sons for eternity.

A new world and capital city

- **And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having been prepared as a bride adorned for her husband** (Revelation 21:1-2).

That passage says our world, the first heaven and the first earth, will pass away to be replaced by a new heaven and earth. Remember, I believe that the greater heavenly world surrounds our world. And our universe is a mere temporary district inside of it. Remember this passage from Isaiah: **“Thus says Jehovah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool”** (Isaiah 66:1). In one sense the entire world of heaven is God’s throne, for it is the place where he reigns. And our entire physical universe is his footstool, being beneath the greater heavenly world, but associated with it.

Regarding the passing away of our world, Peter said, **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, during which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, being intensely hot, will be disintegrated, and the earth and the works in it will be destroyed by fire.**

“Therefore, all these things being disintegrated, what kind ought ye to be in holy actions and pieties, anticipating and hastening the coming of the day of God, by which the heavens, being made fiery hot, will be disintegrated, and the elements dissolve, being intensely hot? But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells” (Second Peter 3:11-13).

And speaking about God and the world, the author of the book of Hebrews said, **“They will perish, but thou are permanent. And they will all become old as a garment. And thou will roll them up as a mantle, and they will be changed. But thou are the same, and thy years will not cease”** (Hebrews 1:11-12).

Perhaps when our world is disintegrated in great heat, everything about it will be purified and transformed into an imperishable sub-

stance to be integrated into the new earth. For remember when Paul wrote to his brothers in Philippi, he said our earthly bodies were going to be transformed into heavenly bodies: **“For our citizenship exists in the heavens, from which also we await a Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our lowliness, in order for it to become similar in form to the body of his glory, according to the working of his power even to subject all things to himself”** (Philippians 3:20-21). Of course, our transformation does not literally involve our flesh, because our earthly bodies return to dust.

Perhaps the new heavens that John saw are the heavens of the greater world that surround our present world. They could be called new in the sense that they will replace the heavens we now have. Or perhaps it will be some new heavens of a kind unimaginable to us. For God said, **“Behold, I make all things new”** (Revelation 21:5). Whatever it will be, John said he saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

What is meant by the new earth is also unclear. It could refer to a special planet in that new heaven. However, I am inclined to believe it refers to a new imperishable substance for the material contents of that new heaven. For the word earth can mean our planet or the material of it. Also John said, **“... the first heaven and the first earth passed away”** That no doubt means that not only did all the outer space of our world pass away, but all of the material contents of it did as well.

Nevertheless, that great city new Jerusalem will no doubt be the center of the new world. Astronomers say our planet earth is not the center of the universe. Maybe. Nevertheless, it is the center of the world in the spiritual sense. For it is where man first began. And it is where the only begotten Son of God humbled himself to live as a man, so that he could redeem us and build his church, the kingdom of God upon the earth. In that sense, therefore, the earth is the center of our world. For it is the center where mankind began, and from which they will spread out into the rest of the world.

I believe the new Jerusalem will be the center of the new world in every sense, because that is where God will reside. And it may even function like our sun does for our planets. It will be the center of all the other heavenly bodies of that greater heavenly world. And it will illuminate them, because when Jesus was speaking of what happens after the final judgment, he said, **“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear”** (Matthew 13:43). And when the heavenly agent was speaking to John about the new Jerusalem, he said, **“And**

the nations will walk by the light of it. And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it” (Revelation 21:24).

The book of Revelation describes many things about that great city, but it says nothing about what kind of earth it will be upon. It may not even be upon any kind of earth, but may simply float in the space of the new heaven the way the celestial bodies of our world float in our space. That new heaven and earth are going to be so different from our world that even if it were explained to us we would probably not be able to understand most of the things about it.

God dwells with men

- **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 will be his people. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will not be any more death, nor grief, nor crying, nor will there be any more anguish, because the former things are gone** (Revelation 21:3-4).

Those are such wonderful words of encouragement. There will be no suffering and sorrow there because there will be no sin. It will be a place of love and good will. For the men who are going to dwell in heaven with God are those who strove to become his sons for eternity by believing and obeying his Son Jesus Christ. Remember, Paul spoke of that when he said our citizenship was in heaven. He also said we belong to the household of God: **“So then ye are no more alien and foreign, but fellow citizens of the sanctified, and belonging to the household of God”** (Ephesians 2:19).

Remember also, John wrote in another book about our being given a new body that is similar in form to the glorious body of our Savior in heaven. He said, **“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made known what we will be. But we know that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is”** (First John 3:2).

Paul also spoke about how and when we will be given those new bodies: **“Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will actually not all sleep, but we will all be transformed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For it will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be transformed. For this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal put on immortality”** (First Corinthians 15:51-53).

There are some passages in Isaiah that also tell about our afterlife. Here is what Jehovah said in one of them: **“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create. For, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people. And there shall no more be heard in her the voice of weeping and the voice of crying.**

“There shall be no more from there an infant of days, nor an old man who has not filled his days. For the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them. And they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them” (Isaiah 65:17-21).

That passage is similar to the one in Revelation where it says there will be no suffering and sorrow. What the passage means by **“the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”** is that the memory of our lives in this world will probably be like memories of unpleasant dreams that quickly fade away when we awake.

Nevertheless, the Bible teaches we will still be able to recognize persons there. For when Jesus was warning about the punishment of hell for Jews who were workers of unrighteousness, he said, **“There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when ye will see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you being thrust out”** (Luke 13:28).

What I think God means by **“no more from there an infant of days,”** is that none of us will begin our lives there the way we do as infants in this world. We will be given bodies the way Adam was giving his body. Our new body will be mature and able to communicate with whatever language is used there.

Many translations add words to that passage like “who lives but a few,” making it mean no infant will die young. They corrupt their translations by adding commentary that says what they think the passage means. They have no right to do it (unless it is required for translation because of the differences in the nature of the languages). Such added commentary makes their translations more popular, but they sin by doing it. For what they add is often wrong, and it distorts what the scriptures say. They need to heed this warning from Solomon: **“Every word of God is tried. ... Add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar”** (Proverbs 30:5-6).

What I think the passage means by **“the child shall die a hundred years old,”** is that we will begin like children in our knowledge of

that eternal world. And it will take the equivalent of a hundred years for us to acquire all the knowledge we need to function fully there. Although God will endow our new body with things such as the innate ability to know the language, we will apparently still need to learn many more things to become fully prepared for our individual roles there. We will not live by instinct.

Thus our initial developmental stage will not end (or “die”) until after a considerable amount of time. Therefore, in a figurative sense our “childhood” will “die” after the equivalent of a hundred years. It will probably take that long because of how immensely more complex that world will be.

The part about an old man filling his days, may mean that when we become fully developed in body and mind there (for our particular role) the time we spend with that role will be completed as intended. The productive performance of every son of God in the new Jerusalem will be successfully completed, and will never be cut short, as so often happens in this world. Only then would the man prepare for a new role.

All things new

- **And he who sits upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he says to me, Write, because these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, I have become, I, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 21:5-6).**

Remember I spoke about that passage earlier in the chapter *The Nature of God*. I believe God had originally fashioned his body in the form of a man when he was preparing to create things for the purpose of having sons for eternity. But sometime after he ends our world and makes the final judgment of every man, he will transform himself back to his original true form. Hence, the words “**I have become.**” His form will become what it was originally. Therefore, he will no longer have the need for bodyguards to protect his throne, or for his seven Spirits to give him the power of complete control and awareness. For he will no longer exist in the form of a man, which was his “weak thing.”

And since the above passage says he makes all things new, that must include the new bodies we will be given for the new Jerusalem. They will be of the same form as the one God had originally, because we will be his sons for eternity. And that new body will be nothing like the one we now have, with its hair, eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. And I have no doubt that the power, the glory, and the beauty of those new bodies will far surpass anything we can ever imagine. Remember

what Paul said, **“But as it is written, What an eye has not seen, and an ear has not heard, and have not arisen in a heart of a man, are things that God prepared for those who love him”** (First Corinthians 2:9).

God will probably also give his faithful heavenly agents new bodies, because they now also have the form of men. Remember, the human form was designed for men in the world to become sons of God for eternity. And since our world will no longer exist, the human form will be obsolete. Perhaps God will even give the citizens of those nations new dwellings and other things as well, because he said he makes all things new. However, perhaps he will commission the citizens of the nations in that heavenly world to build those things, while God himself will design what they will be. And perhaps we will work with him in the new Jerusalem designing many of those things that he is going to make new.

God told John to write about those things, because the **“words are true and faithful.”** God wants us to know that he is going to make all things new, and we will live with him in his new world as his sons for eternity. And he reinforced what he said by saying the words were true and faithful. In other words, we can be completely assured that those things will happen—if we trust and obey him.

Therefore, dear brothers, be encouraged and always remain faithful and grateful. For the sorrows of this world are as nothing compared with what awaits us in that new world. Paul probably suffered as much for God as any other man (except for Jesus our Savior), yet he always remained faithful and grateful. You can read a summary in Second Corinthians (11:22-29) of some of the things he suffered. Yet even with all his sufferings, he said about them, **“For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us”** (Romans 8:18).

- **I will give to him who is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely** (Revelation 21:6).

Those words are no doubt figurative. For when Jesus once met a Samaritan woman at a well and asked her for water, he said to her, **“If thou had known the gift of God, and who it is who says to thee, Give me to drink, thou would have asked him, and he would have given thee living water”** (John 4:10). That living water was the good news of salvation that Jesus came into the world to give.

However, the fountain of the water of life in the new Jerusalem probably includes much more than the good news of salvation. The fountain that God mentioned may be the river of water of life that John was shown in the new Jerusalem: **“And he showed me a pure river**

of water of life, bright as crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its thoroughfare” (Revelation 22:1-2).

- **He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to me** (Revelation 21:7).

Those are such marvelous words of encouragement. Could there ever be a greater gift that God could give us? What could be more wonderful than to be a son of God and live with him for eternity? THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

What he meant by overcoming was overcoming the temptations, trials, and tribulations of this life. For it is only in this troubled and sin filled world where we can be qualified to become his sons for eternity. Therefore, dear reader, let nothing prevent you from overcoming, so that you too can inherit his incomparable gift and become one of his sons for eternity.

- **But for the cowards, and unbelieving, and sinful, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death** (Revelation 21:8).

That list of souls who will be cast into the lake of fire covers a range of sinners. It is, of course, simply representative and not inclusive. Perhaps the worse of the sinners in that list are the murderers, who are condemned in every society. Yet even many murderers are being excused by the sinners who now control my country, but they will not be excused in heaven. The other sins are rarely even called crimes in most of the countries of this sinful world.

Cowardice is only considered a crime in the military, although most people have a low opinion of cowards. However, I believe the use of the word coward in that passage refers to believers who are timid about their faith and refuse to combat sin. They live by the pagan proverb about prudent living, which says, “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” They indeed see evil in material things, but they keep quiet about the evil of spiritual things. They lament about the troubles and afflictions of the world, but they prefer to ignore the sin and wickedness that caused those things to happen, except perhaps in very general terms phrased so they will not offend. They flee from controversy about God’s righteousness because they fear conflict, rejection, and persecution.

Cowardice is the only one in the above list that could be applied to ordinary believers, and it is becoming increasingly common during these faithless times. Yet few of them realize how deadly it is to their souls. The hypocrites among them will no doubt deride my accusation because they love the praises of men more than the praises of God. Such men are like the Jews who derided Jesus when he said we cannot serve God and mammon: **“And the Pharisees, being lovers of money, heard all these things, and they sneered him”** (Luke 16:14).

Fornication and idolatry are now fully accepted in my country, and considered a right in most countries of the world. Sorcery has also become quite respectable in pagan America. Lying is widely practiced throughout the world, and is often even expected. The only thing criticized about it among sinners is getting caught doing it.

The sinful and abominable cover a very wide range of sins. They include all of the evil things that the world is enamored with. Remember, Jesus said, **“... what is lofty among men is an abomination in the sight of God”** (Luke 16:15). Many abominable practices are becoming very common in pagan America. People such as adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, transvestites, drunkards, gamblers, those who use vulgar language, those who dress obscenely, those who engage in lewd and licentious dancing, and many other such kinds of things are examples of the sinful and abominable.

Notice that simply being an unbeliever will condemn a soul to be cast into the lake of fire. A man may not be a murderer or a fornicator, or a coward, or do any of those other things. But if he refuses to believe in Christ and will not obey him, he will find himself in the lake of fire with all of those other sinners.

The new Jerusalem

- **And there came one of the seven agents who had the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues, and he spoke with me, saying, Come, I will show thee the woman, the bride of the Lamb.**
- **And he carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, the light of it similar to a most precious stone, like a jasper stone being crystal clear, which has a great and high wall having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve agents, and names inscribed, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel: from the east, three gates, and from the north, three gates, and from the south, three gates, and from the**

west, three gates. And the wall of the city having twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9-14).

That holy Jerusalem (which is the new Jerusalem) was personified as a woman, the bride of the Lamb. Remember, the book of Revelation is filled with figurative descriptions, and the one above about that great city is no doubt also very figurative. It had the glory of God, and was arrayed with precious jewels, which certainly means it was of great beauty. It had a wall and gates, which indicates it will not be open to everybody in that new world. It will only be open to the sons of God and perhaps some of God's select agents there. And the agents at each of the gates were probably guards to protect that limited access.

The gates had inscribed on them the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, and the twelve foundations had on them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The gates with the names of the tribes of Israel probably symbolize the fact that our ability to know God and his will for us came from the nation of Israel. And the foundations with the names of the apostles probably symbolize how their obedience to Jesus Christ was the foundation for building the kingdom of God upon the earth.

The great and high mountain where John was taken to see that holy city may have been one in that new heavenly world. It could also have been like the high mountain where Jesus was taken by the devil to see all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them (see Matthew 4:8). That experience was probably what we now call a virtual scene; it was not a literal mountain. That was the only way the devil could have shown him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. For, unlike God, he does not have the kind of power needed to do that in reality.

Its size

- **And he who spoke with me had a measure, a golden reed, so that he might measure the city, and the gates of it, and the walls of it. And the city lies foursquare, and the length of it is as great as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs, the length and the breadth and the height of it being equal. And he measured the wall of it, a hundred and forty-four forearms, a measure of a man, that is, of an agent** (Revelation 21:15-17).

That must have been some measuring reed! For twelve thousand furlongs is fifteen hundred miles. That great city was therefore described

as being in the shape of a cube having sides that were fifteen hundred miles long. That means it has a volume of 3,375,000,000 cubic miles. If a building of that volume had only one floor with a standard height of ten feet, it would cover an area of 1,782,000,000,000 square miles. Since the total area of the surface of the earth is 196,800,000 square miles such a building would cover an area that was over 9,000 times greater than the entire surface of the earth. That does not even consider the facts that about seventy percent of the earth is covered with water, and that millions of square miles of its land are almost uninhabitable to men, places such as Antarctica and the Sahara desert.

Of course, nobody knows what kind of architecture will be in that great city, but that comparison can give you a very general idea of the colossal size of the new Jerusalem, where all the sons of God will reside with him for eternity. And some foolish people believe that only 144,000 souls will be saved to go there. Their concept of the new heaven and earth is so tiny.

Now in spite of the great magnitude of the size of the new Jerusalem as reported in Revelation, I have no doubt the number is figurative. Remember, twelve is another number in the Bible that symbolizes fullness. Moreover, even considering the huge size of that number, I believe it is a great underestimate. For God knows it is impossible for us to comprehend the magnificent reality of the new Jerusalem in that new world.

The new Jerusalem is the city where God will dwell upon his throne. And it will be filled with his sons, who will be the most talented and exalted creatures in all of that new world. Therefore, it will be a very dynamic place. If you think modern cities are dynamic busy places, the activity of the new Jerusalem will far exceed the activity of the largest cities of the earth, even more than the size of the new Jerusalem exceeds their sizes.

And we will all work together with God and Jesus, in great joy and harmony. For we will all be loving brothers, as God's sons for eternity. If you can imagine the most beautiful and perfect relationship between a husband and his wife here on earth, all of our relationships there will be far more wonderful. And there will never be any kind of evil there. Fraternal unity is a wonderful thing even in this world of tribulation, as the psalmist said, "**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!**" (Psalm 133:1).

Dear reader, let not scoffers cause you to doubt the promises of God. He created you and gave you life. Can you doubt your own very existence? How then can you doubt Almighty God who created you? Do righteous fathers and mothers love their children? How then can you doubt your heavenly Father's love for us? Remember these beautiful

words of Jesus: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that every man who believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life”** (John 3:16).

There is a popular myth that says the sanctified of God who live with him in heaven will spend all their time sitting on the grass in a garden singing praises to him. That myth has provoked many unbelievers to scoff about heaven, and say they would be bored there. Their idea about the new Jerusalem is completely distorted and simplistic. It is just another example of how the devil leads them astray from faith in God.

Unless they repent, they are going to be deeply shocked and bitterly disappointed when they get a glimpse of the truth about its reality and its glories. For remember, when Jesus was speaking about the end of the world, he said, **“The Son of man will send forth his agents, and they will gather out of his kingdom all the stumbling-blocks, and those doing lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth”** (Matthew 13:41-42). There will be both sorrow and anger.

It is interesting that John was also commanded to measure the wall of the city, which was a hundred and forty-four (twelve times twelve) forearms. A forearm length is the same as a cubit, which is one and a half feet long. Therefore, the wall of that great city was two hundred and sixteen feet high. I have never heard of any wall on earth that was so high. That height is equivalent to a twenty-one story building. That is just another symbol of the exclusive privacy and security of that city, where God will reside with his sons for eternity.

Sinners will never enter the new Jerusalem, nor will they ever see God. For Jesus said, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God”** (Matthew 5:8). Only the pure in heart will see him. Sinners will only see Christ. For Revelation says about him, **“Behold, he comes with the clouds and every eye will see him, even the men who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth will wail against him. Yea, Truly”** (Revelation 1:7). And Paul said, **“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ”** (Romans 14:10).

Its beauty

- **And the structure of its wall was jasper. And the city was pure gold, similar to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city adorned with every precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second, sapphire, the third, chalcidony, the fourth, emerald, the fifth, sardonyx, the sixth, sardius, the seventh, chrysolite, the eighth, beryl, the ninth,**

topaz, the tenth, chrysoptase, the eleventh, jacinth, the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls apiece, each one of the gates was of one pearl. And the thoroughfare of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:18-21).

Those words are, of course, also figurative, but they describe a place of supreme beauty and glory. And Jesus said to his apostles during the last supper, **“Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many dwellings, and if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will take you along to myself, so that where I am, ye may be also”** (John 14:1-3). Since God only took six days to create this world for us, think of what he can create for us in the thousands of years he has before our world ends.

As glorious and beautiful as that description is in Revelation, it is only about the most superficial parts of it: the wall, the foundation, the gates and thoroughfare. I have no doubt that great city will not only contain magnificent places that Jesus is preparing for us, but it will be filled with marvelous furnishings, fabulous machines, and devices of super-high technology. We are only given an occasional glimpse of such wondrous things from heaven in passages like this one about a chariot of fire from heaven: **“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which divided them both apart. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”** (Second Kings 2:11).

Paul said it was impossible to even imagine the glorious things that God has prepared for those who will be his sons for eternity. It would have been very difficult for men of the ancient world to understand all of the amazing machines and other devices that men have created in the modern world. Remember the example of the airliner. And what God is creating for the new world is far more amazing, and even more difficult for us on the earth to ever understand, no matter how far advanced the civilization of mankind will develop.

I believe that since God is the great master Creator, and we will be his sons there, then perhaps our major activity will be to design and create marvelous new things. Remember what Isaiah said we would do in the new heavens and the new earth: **“And they shall build houses, and inhabit them. And they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them”** (Isaiah 65:21). Those words were no doubt chosen to simply inform those humble souls of over twenty-five hundred years ago that we would be productive and prosperous. The things we will actually create in the new Jerusalem will be far more wonderful.

If all the creatures that God made for this world are marvelously designed, then what God and his sons will design in that new world, will be incomparably more marvelous. And there will be nothing bizarre or foolish there like some of God's creatures he created for this world. Remember when Paul spoke of the foolishness of God: **"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men ..."** (First Corinthians 1:25).

Its temple

- **And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb. And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, so that they might shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the light of it is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by the light of it** (Revelation 21:22-24).

The temple of God in Jerusalem was also called the house of God, because it symbolized his presence on the earth. Since God and his Son are going to reside in the new Jerusalem, then that great city will itself be the temple. That is further indicated by this blessing Jesus gave to us: **"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will, no, not go out any more. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem (it comes down out of the heaven from my God), and my new name"** (Revelation 3:12). The new Jerusalem is going to be the temple of the new heaven and earth, and Jesus said that he was going to make us "pillars" in that temple.

Moreover, the entire new Jerusalem is apparently also going to be the throne of God and his Son, which means it will be the new command center for all of creation. For when Jesus gave another blessing, he said, **"He who overcomes, I will give him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne"** (Revelation 3:21). How could countless billions of the eternal sons of God sit with Jesus in his throne if it were not the entire city? We will all literally sit with Jesus in his throne, because that throne will be the entire city of the new Jerusalem.

The passage in Revelation says the glory of God illuminated that great city, and the light of it is the Lamb. Remember however, when Jesus was talking about our lives after the final judgment, he said, **"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"** (Matthew 13:43). We will, therefore, apparently reflect the light of God and the Lamb (Jesus Christ) the way our moon reflects the light of the sun. Yet the amount of light we reflect will be like the brightness of the sun itself.

Since the book of Revelation is filled with symbolism, our shining forth as the sun may symbolize how God will use us for the enlightenment and guidance of the nations of that heavenly world. The light of God, mentioned in the passage from Revelation, may also refer to some kind of new radiant energy that God will send to supply those nations with both power and information.

The nations of the new world

- **And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it. And the gates of it will, no, not be locked by day, for there will be no night there. And they will bring the splendor and the worth of the nations into it. And there will, no, not enter into it anything profane, and doing an abomination and a lie, since they are not written in the Lamb's book of life** (Revelation 21:24-27).

The citizens of those nations are probably his heavenly offspring that now inhabit God's greater world, and they have kings to head their governments. And the new Jerusalem will be the capital city of all of those nations, where God, his only begotten Son, and those whom Jesus redeemed to be God's other sons, will be the supreme rulers.

The passage says their kings will bring their splendor and worth into the new Jerusalem, which will be their capital city. That is further evidence to indicate that the sons of God for eternity will be rulers, designers, and creators, because God and his Son Jesus are the supreme rulers and creators, and we will be God's other sons there.

We will create and the nations will manufacture. We will be the designers and the engineers, and they will be the builders and makers. And their kings will bring what they manufacture—their splendor and worth—into the new Jerusalem. And those treasures will no doubt include marvelous devices of unimaginable complexity and function, the best of which will be brought into that capital city for the sons of God to use and to enjoy. Of course, since the citizens of those nations will be God's offspring, they will design things as well. However, what they design will probably be things needed for their own use.

Hell

Hell is a place of fire, because it is also called the lake of fire and the furnace of fire. And I believe that fire will be used to generate power. Those nations of the new world will be powered primarily by the energy that comes from God out of the new Jerusalem, just as our world is powered by the seven Spirits before his throne. However, there may also be another source, an inferior source of energy for

those nations. And that will come from power plants driven by the furnace of fire fueled by the energy there.

Remember, a spirit is energy, and the furnace of fire will be filled with spirits, the spirits of billions of sinners. And they will have no bodies; they will be naked spirits (see 16:15). And I believe that nothing in the heavenly world will be wasted, for their spirits will be fuel to help generate some kind of inferior power that will be transmitted out of hell for some menial purpose in those heavenly nations.

Regarding the energy those spirits will contribute to that fiery furnace, it will never be exhausted, because remember those spirits will always exist. They will always exist because the spirit of every man comes from God, whose Spirit is eternal, which makes the spirit of every man eternal. They will be cast into hell because they corrupted the pure spirit that God gave them when they were born, into an unclean spirit. And perhaps the most wicked of them will be forced to make the most agonizing labor in that furnace, with never a moment of rest, as inexhaustible fuel for that eternal power plant.

In the story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus, when the rich man was in Hades he pleaded in vain for just a little relief. Hades is a general term that means the place of the dead. However, it may also include a temporary place for the torment of sinners, the way paradise is in heaven for the joy of God's sons. That pre-hell was probably where the rich man was. Hades is a transliteration of the Greek word, and the King James Version translates it to hell.

Nevertheless, the Bible teaches there will be no respite from the agony of the eternal hell for every soul who refuses to repent and obey Christ before the final judgment. Remember, when the author of Hebrews was comparing the law of Moses with the good news of Christ, he said, **"For if the word spoken through agents became certain, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how will we escape, having neglected so great a salvation?"** (Hebrews 2:2-3).

Hell is probably a remote region in the farthest reaches of heaven. For when Jesus was giving a parable in which he mentioned a man who was not properly prepared, he said, **"Then the king said to the helpers, After binding him hands and feet, take him away and cast him out into the outer darkness. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth"** (Matthew 22:13). What Jesus called the outer darkness is hell, because he said elsewhere the furnace of fire was where there would be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Hell may be a separate region in heaven the way our world is separate from it now. Our world is a separate region with a different substance,

but it is still central in the heavenly world. For remember, God said, **“The heaven is to me a throne, and the earth a footstool of my feet”** (Acts 7:49). In contrast, hell will be a separate region that is exceedingly remote from everything else. It will be in **“the outer darkness.”** Also the abyss may somehow be associated with it. Remember, the abyss is a prison for evil spirits, and the abyss is defined as a very deep or bottomless pit. Perhaps the outer darkness is a kind of endless expanse beyond everything else.

Remember when the rich man in Hades was pleading to Abraham, he said to him, **“Father Abraham, be merciful to me, and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame.”** Abraham replied, **“Child, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now here he is comforted and thou are in agony. And besides all these things, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those here who want to cross over to you are not able, nor may those go across from there to us”** (Luke 16:24-26).

Abraham said a great chasm was fixed between them that nobody in either place could cross. That is evidence hell is a separate region isolated from the heavenly world, a separate region in the far-off outer darkness. It is a place of outer darkness, but those in it will apparently be able to see out. For the rich man was able to see Abraham and Lazarus. Being able to see out will probably add to their torments.

Perhaps the only link it has with the heavenly world is with some kind of long range radiant energy. That is probably the way the energy generated by the power plants there will be sent out. And perhaps also those condemned souls will be ruled with the rod of iron remotely by that radiant energy.

Sources of sustenance

- **And he showed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its thoroughfare. And on this side of the river and on that was a tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit according to each month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations** (Revelation 22:1-2).

Those are also figurative words. The water of life and the tree of life must symbolize the sources of sustenance provided for the sons of God there. And that source of sustenance will come from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The Bible teaches that God is the ultimate source of sustenance for every creature on earth. And the above pas-

sage in Revelation indicates God will still be the source of our sustenance. The water of life and the tree of life may symbolize special energy and information that is only given to God's sons.

The leaves of the tree of life used for the healing of the nations are no doubt for those heavenly nations. It was not for the nations of our earthly world, because the new Jerusalem will not be inhabited until this world is ended. Those words suggest the new Jerusalem and everything in it will never need healing, but the nations around it will. And if they need healing that means things can go wrong there, unlike in the new Jerusalem.

The citizens of those nations will not be sons of God, but they will still be offspring of God having free will. Therefore, they will still be able to commit sin. Remember the passage about agents who sinned: **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into hell being reserved for judgment ...”** (Second Peter 2:4). And they will no doubt make mistakes and commit errors in their endeavors. For unlike the new Jerusalem, those nations will not be places of perfection. Their lives will fallible, unlike ours in the new Jerusalem. Otherwise there would be no need for healing.

Remember, the spirits of God's offspring are eternal, meaning imperishable. And the substance of the heavenly world is imperishable. However, that substance can still be used wrongfully. And that will sometimes happen, because all spirits who are not God's sons in heaven are fallible. And whether they do wrong things accidentally or deliberately, the results will require fixing. And sometimes it may require healing from the leaves of the tree of life. Perhaps as sons of God some of us may go out into those nations to provide the substances (from the leaves of the tree of life) and the counsel those nations need for healing, whenever and wherever it is needed.

We will also serve as judges. For when wrong things are done deliberately, the guilty will need judging. Remember, what Paul said when he was rebuking the church at Corinth about going to law against each other: **“Or know ye not that the sanctified will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are ye unworthy of very small legal disputes? Know ye not that we will judge agents? Then why not mundane things?”** (First Corinthians 6:2-3). As sons of God in heaven we will also judge the agents there.

Serving and ruling

- **And there will be no curse there. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his bondmen will serve him. And they will see his face, and his name is on their foreheads.**

And there will be no night there, and they have no need of a lamp and the light of sun, because Lord God will illuminate them. And they will reign into the ages of the ages (Revelation 22:3-5).

This world is subject to many curses from God only because men are so sinful. Therefore, there will be no curse in the new world. Remember what Peter said about it: **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13). There will be no curse because righteousness will prevail in the new heavens and earth. Nevertheless remember, those heavenly nations will still need judging and healing, because they will not be places of perfection like the new Jerusalem.

However, the sons of God in the new Jerusalem will never sin. The quality of our spirits, developed in this world of tribulation, will keep us from ever offending God in that perfect place. Remember what James said about the value of our trials in the world: **“Consider it all joy, my brothers, when ye encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have a perfect work, so that ye may be perfect and complete, falling short in nothing”** (James 1:2-4).

And remember how Peter told how our faith, more precious than gold, is proven by fire: **“In which ye greatly rejoice, although made sorrowful in various trials. Since it is now necessary for a little while, so that the proof of your faith, much more precious than gold that perishes, and though proven by fire, may be found for praise and honor and for glory at the revealing of Jesus Christ”** (First Peter 1:6-7). Peter also said, **“... he who has suffered in flesh has ceased from sin”** (First Peter 4:1). No righteous soul who lived in this life will ever sin again. We will live infallible lives.

Notice in the above passage of Revelation that it says God’s sons will be his bondmen. We will not be bondmen like those of the earth. We will be bondmen to serve him as obedient sons, just as obedient sons on earth serve their fathers. As his sons for eternity, we are bondmen of him because we are bound to serve him, which is a supreme privilege and honor. That is very different from the role of bondmen on earth. Our labor and service for him will be full of joy and pleasure.

Remember what was said about the great multitude clothed in white robes that were praising God before his throne. When John asked one of the elders about them, he replied, **“These are those coming out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will dwell among them”**

(Revelation 7:14-15). They serve him day and night. A passage earlier said there will be no night there. Therefore the above passage about serving him day and night may be figurative. Or it could perhaps refer to the light cycles of the nations in the heavens around the new Jerusalem.

Sharing ideas

There is an interesting story in the Old Testament that suggests we will even share with Jehovah our ideas about how to achieve things. King Ahab of Israel and king Jehoshaphat of Judah were planning to war against Syria to recover one of the cities of Israel they had taken. All of Ahab's pagan prophets told him they would be victorious. However, Jehoshaphat wanted to inquire of Jehovah before going. And so Ahab called for the prophet Micaiah, although Ahab complained that Micaiah never prophesied anything good about him but only evil. Ahab was an evil man. His wife was Jezebel, and she also provoked him to commit many evils.

When Micaiah arrived he told Ahab to go and prosper. The king answered him, **“How many times shall I adjure thee that thou speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of Jehovah?”** Perhaps, because of the tone of his voice and other non-verbal ways that Micaiah responded, Ahab was able to recognize he had not told him what Jehovah really said. Micaiah replied to Ahab, **“I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And Jehovah said, These have no master, let them return every man to his house in peace.”**

Here is what the record says next: **“And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil? And Micaiah said, Therefore hear thou the word of Jehovah. I saw Jehovah sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And Jehovah said, Who shall entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.**

“And there came forth a spirit, and stood before Jehovah, and said, I will entice him. And Jehovah said to him, With what? And he said, I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shall entice him, and shall also prevail. Go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, Jehovah has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and Jehovah has spoken evil concerning thee” (First Kings 22:16-23).

Notice how Jehovah asked the spirits in heaven for suggestions about enticing Ahab. If God asked for ideas from the spirits in heaven, I

have no doubt he will want us, his eternal sons, to offer our ideas to him about how to achieve things in that new world. Of course, he will always know which ideas that we may offer will succeed, and which ones will not. He will always be supreme in every way.

Regarding the lying spirit, although Jehovah sent one in the mouth of all of Ahab's prophets, when Ahab demanded the truth in the name of Jehovah, the prophet told it to him. God has the right to do anything, even sending lying spirits in the mouths of sinful men.

Another example of God sending a lying spirit is a delusion that Paul said God would send to those who did not have the love of the truth: **“And because of this God will send them the force of a delusion, for them to believe a lie, so that they might be condemned—all those who did not believe the truth, but who delighted in unrighteousness”** (Second Thessalonians 2:11-12).

Also consider these words: **“And the disciples [of Jesus] having come, they said to him, Why do thou speak to them in parables? And having answered, he said to them, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those men it has not been given. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away from him.**

“Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing ye will hear, and will, no, not understand, and seeing ye will see, and will, no, not perceive. For this people's heart became fat, and their ears hear heavily, and their eyes are shut, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I will heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” (Matthew 13:10-16).

God did not want those sinful men in ancient Israel to turn so that he would heal them. He had already judged them unworthy. And Jesus did not want those men who were not his faithful disciples to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, because he had already judged them unworthy. God prevents unworthy sinners from understanding the truth, and he causes them to believe lies in order for them to be defeated. But he only sends the truth to men who are capable of repenting, because they will accept it and use it properly. And that is right and good and just.

That is a hard lesson for many to accept, because they have a distorted understanding of God and Christ. It is like another lesson Jesus gave,

after which his followers said, **“This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?”** And a short time later the record says, **“From this, many of his disciples went back at these things, and walked no more with him”** (John 6:60, 66). If you want to be one of his sons for eternity, then you must trust that whatever God does it is always right and good and just. You must have faith and listen to him, even when he gives hard sayings.

Special identity

When John was describing the sons of God in heaven, he also said we will have his name upon the foreheads of our new bodies. That will identify us as sons of God. And perhaps that will be an important indication to the citizens of the nations to inform them what our rank is, the same way insignias are used in the military.

Such identification may be necessary, because we will no doubt go out among those nations as their masters and judges, even over their kings. For the passage in Revelation says we will reign into the ages of the ages. And Jesus said, **“... he who overcomes, and he who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations”** (Revelation 2:26). That means over the nations of the new heaven and earth.

Nevertheless, God and the Lamb will always reign as the supreme Lord and Master. For although we will reign, we will always be his sons and bondmen to serve him, to serve him with great joy and pleasure. Perhaps our service will be like the pleasure of joyful play, but unlike play it will be serious and productive as well as pleasurable.

There are some men even in this world who so love their work that it is more pleasurable to them than any recreation. And everything we do in that new world will be far more pleasurable than any of the things men do in this life that give them pleasure.

THE LAST WORDS OF REVELATION

The last part of Revelation consists primarily of words to encourage obedience, and also words to warn against disobedience. For everything in the Bible was written for the ultimate purpose of developing faith in God and obedience to him.

- **And he says to me, These words are faithful and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his agent to show to his bondmen the things that must quickly come to pass. And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book** (Revelation 22:6-7).

The words “**quickly come to pass,**” do not mean everything described in Revelation was going to occur quickly. Because those words were followed with his statement, “**And behold, I come quickly.**” That was about two thousand years ago, and the Lord has not yet come, nor do I think he will come anytime soon.

Coming quickly may mean the complex series of events described figuratively in Revelation were going to quickly begin. For the Greek word translated “come to pass” in that passage is ΓΕΝΕΣΘΑΙ, which root word is ΓΙΝΟΜΑΙ. Remember that word has no exact English equivalent. Jesus is not coming quickly, but he will come quickly in one sense for each of us. I explain how farther in this chapter.

The Lord also spoke a blessing for every man who keeps the words of the prophecy of the book. By keeping the words of the prophecy he must mean obeying the warnings and the commands given in it.

- **And I am John, the man hearing and seeing these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the agent showing me these things. And he says to me, See thou not. I am thy fellow bondman, and of thy brothers the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!** (Revelation 22:8-9).

John was commanded not to fall down and worship the heavenly agent. And we should never bow down and worship anyone except God and his Son. However, bowing or kneeling before someone of high position simply to show submission would not be wrong.

- **And he says to me, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near** (Revelation 22:10).

The words of the prophecy of this book are to be kept open. That means they are to be read, studied, and applied. That also means they should be understood. And that is no doubt the most difficult part about reading them. It has been my goal to interpret the various parts of the Bible, accurately and faithfully to their true meaning, in order to help myself and others to understand them as God intended. And that will help strengthen faith in God and obedience to him for all who love truth and righteousness. And remember, the words “time is near” are not to be interpreted by what men consider to be a short time. Seven thousand years can be a mere seven days in the sight of God.

- **Let the man doing wrong still do wrong, and let the filthy man still be filthy. And let the righteous man still do righteousness, and let the holy man still be holy** (Revelation 22:11).

If men insist on doing wrong and insist on being filthy, then God is not going to stop them. God uses offices of authority to punish criminals. However, God is not going to stop everything wrong and everything filthy. He is not going to stop every sin because he is giving men freedom in this world to test their souls. God is not going to forcibly end all of the evils committed in this world, not until he ends the world itself.

Consider the example of king David. He lay with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was a faithful warrior in his army, and he was away fighting a battle. When Bathsheba told David she was with child, David called for Uriah and asked him how the battle was faring. Then he told him to go home. David was hoping Uriah would lie with his wife so he would think the child was his own.

However, Uriah did not go, and when David asked him why the following day, Uriah said to him, **“The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in booths, and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open field. Shall I then go into my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou live, and as thy soul lives, I will not do this thing”** (Second Samuel 11:11). Uriah was a Hittite, but he was a righteous and noble man.

David then sent a message by Uriah to Joab the commander of the army. The message told Joab to make Uriah vulnerable to be killed by the enemy, which is what happened. When Bathsheba heard of his death she mourned him. After that the Bible says, **“And when the mourning was past, David sent and took her home to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased Jehovah”** (Second Samuel 11:27).

David had committed adultery and murder, both of which were capital crimes in the law of Moses. However, nobody else knew of David's guilt. Only Bathsheba knew of his adultery. And only Joab knew of the instructions David gave him to make Uriah vulnerable to be killed, which was certainly not enough to accuse David of murder. Therefore, David could not be charged and tried by men for what he had done.

God certainly knew David was guilty, And he intervened in a special way by sending a prophet to expose David, and tell him that he was being placed under a terrible curse for the rest of his life. God does not act as a witness in the trials of men, nor does he apply the punishment of the law for them. Consequently, David escaped being caught and tried by men. Nevertheless, David still suffered severely.

Scoffers no doubt accuse God of being partial toward David. However, God has his own ways to punish sin. And those ways are always impartial, and they are always right and good and just. There are some punishments that are worse than death, and David's punishment may even have been one of them. You can read about the terrible consequences of that curse against David in the Old Testament.

God does not himself force men to stop sinning, nor does he himself punish each man the way he commanded for us. Nevertheless remember, there are many ways men suffer because of their sins. For God has so made the world that sin is always somehow punished. As I said in another book,

In his infinite wisdom the Lord has built into the laws of nature the consequences of wickedness, even as the rewards of righteousness are built into the universal design plans of God. Ironically, the very behavior of the wicked initiates their own punishment; it sets in motion a train of events (often imperceptible to us) that causes the evil they create to rebound upon their own heads. It may be years in coming, but the consequences are as inevitable as are the growth of crops when the farmer buries seeds beneath the surface of the ground.¹

God also sends his curses upon the whole world because of its sinfulness, and to encourage them to repent and become faithful to him. And as the next passage in Revelation says, he will judge them when this world is over.

Another reason for the above passage in Revelation may be to warn us not to waste our time attempting to convert men who insist upon doing wrong and insist upon being filthy. Jesus gave this command to

1. Walter Porter, *King Solomon's Advice for the World* (Still Voices Publishing, 2005) p. 142.

his apostles when he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick: **“And whoever will not receive you, nor hear your words, while departing that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet”** (Matthew 10:14). He does not want us to waste our time attempting to convert souls who are unreceptive. We are to depart, and “shake off the dust” from our feet.

- **Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me to render to each man as his work will be—I, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those doing his commandments, so that their right will be to the tree of life, and they may enter in the gates into the city** (Revelation 22:12-14).

Notice again that Jesus told John he was coming quickly to pass judgment on every man. And that was two thousand years ago. Notice also, he said he was going to render to each man according to his work. And he uttered a blessing for those doing his commandments. Again the emphasis upon obedience, not faith only.

The letters Alpha and Omega are the first and the last of the Greek alphabet. Since both the Father and the Son said they were the Alpha and the Omega, that may mean they are the origin of all things and they are the ultimate of all things. Both the Father and the Son also said they were the beginning and the end. Perhaps that means both the Father and the Son began the world, and they will end the world.

However, only the Son said he was the first and the last. What that probably means is that Jesus was the first son that was begotten from the Father, and he is the last son that will be begotten from the Father. He is the uniquely begotten Son, for there are no others like him, nor will there ever be. He is the first and the last.

- **Outside are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every man who loves and makes a lie** (Revelation 22:15).

In the Bible the word dog sometimes symbolizes male prostitutes, men who are filthy perverts. Such men live like dogs, mounting any trashy woman who wants them. However, the use of the word dog in that passage may symbolize every kind of filthy pervert.

The last part of that passage means every man who lies and loves to do it. By loving to lie no doubt means loving to use any kind of deceit, which thing is natural to the devil and all who belong to him.

- **I, Jesus, have sent my agent to testify these things to you for the congregations** (Revelation 22:16).

Jesus said the testimony in this book is for the congregations. This book was specifically addressed to the seven congregations of Asia. However, like other books of the Bible that were written for particular persons, their words contain lessons for all the disciples of Christ everywhere and at all times. And those who proclaim him are his ambassadors to testify to the rest of the world.

- **I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star** (Revelation 22:16).

Before David sinned God promised him a never ending dynasty (see Second Samuel 7), and Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. He is the bright and morning star, because in another book John said about him, **“He was the true light coming into the world that enlightens every man”** (John 1:9). He enlightens every man, but as John said in that same book, **“... the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. For every man who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God”** (John 3:19-21). The words of Jesus enlighten every man, but most men reject them and prefer the darkness of sin.

- **And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he who hears, let him say, Come. And he who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely** (Revelation 22:17).

The Spirit of God invites anyone to come and drink of the water of life freely. That is probably the water Jesus spoke about to the woman at the well (see John 4), the living water of his good news of salvation. Nevertheless, no man can drink of it unless he comes. And the only way to come is by believing and obeying Jesus Christ while still living upon the earth.

The bride (of the Lamb) also invites men to come. The bride is the new Jerusalem, and it beckons men to come there. It beckons them the way a beautiful woman beckons a man, by showing her attractiveness. And the attractiveness of the bride is described in the book of Revelation.

And he who hears also invites men to come. That means men who accept Christ urge other men to repent and receive his salvation. That desire to convert all men to Christ, all who are able, is expressed beautifully in another book by John. It begins by saying, **“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon, and our hands touched, concern-**

ing the Word of life (and the life was made known, and we have seen, and testify, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father, and was made known to us), what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that ye also may have fellowship with us. Even also our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we write these things to you, so that our joy may be made full” (First John 1:1-4).

Our joy is made full when men repent and come to Christ. For Jesus said, “**I say to you, that thus there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous men who have no need of repentance**” (Luke 15:7). And we on the earth who love God joy with them.

- **I testify to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man should add to them, God will add to him the seven plagues that are written in this book. And if any man takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life, and from the holy city, the things written in this book** (Revelation 22:18-19).

That warning is not just for the book of Revelation, it is for the entire Bible. The books of the Bible were not gathered together until many years after Revelation was written. But I have no doubt that God knew this book would be placed at the end of the Bible when it was finally assembled.

And that warning should be taken very seriously, especially by men who translate the Bible and add their opinions to it as part of the translation. The sloppy method of translation, euphemistically called “dynamic equivalence,” is an example of adding to and taking away the words of the Bible, to make them more pleasing to men.

I come quickly

- **He who testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly. Truly. Yea, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus is with all the sanctified. Truly** (Revelation 22:21).

Those are the last words in the book of Revelation. Three times in the last part of Revelation Jesus said, “**I come quickly.**” Although his words about coming quickly are not to be taken literally in our sense of time, nevertheless, he will come quickly in the consciousness of each one of us. And here is what I mean.

After every disciple of Christ dies, the next thing he experiences consciously is Christ coming for him (or bringing him by his heavenly agents). After we die we will sleep until he calls us. When I die my

spirit may sleep for a thousand years or more before he calls me and I awaken. However, I will have no awareness or memory of that thousand years or more while I sleep in death. I recently underwent cryotherapy surgery for prostate cancer. The last thing I remember, as I was being wheeled on a table to the operating room, was having a mask put on my face. The next thing I remember was struggling to become fully awake in the recovery room. I was completely unconscious during the operation.

And likewise will be the sleep of death. After I die I will immediately recognize him calling me. It will be immediate in my consciousness, no matter how long I may sleep. For the sleep of death involves a complete loss of awareness. There will be no dreams or any such experiences in the sleep of death.

And that total unconsciousness in the sleep of death is true not just of me, but of every man. For the disciples of Christ, when we awaken from the sleep of death, we will see an agent sent by Jesus to call us. However, for the unrepentant sinners when they awaken from the sleep of death, they will see an agent of God coming to take them for punishment. And since no man will have any consciousness of anything during his sleep of death, those experiences of the heavenly world will appear to be immediate in our consciousness after our body perishes. That may be another meaning of these words of Jesus: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). When our body perished, we will not see death. We will simply sleep and then awake when we are called to heaven.

Jesus will come quickly in that psychological sense for many of us. But Paul tells how he will come quickly in a literal sense for some others, because not all will experience the sleep of death. He said, **“Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will actually not all sleep, but we will all be transformed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For it will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be transformed.**

“For this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on imperishability, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come to pass the saying that is written, Death was swallowed up in victory” (First Corinthians 15:51-54).

Immediately after we die, our consciousness will experience him calling us, and we will be transformed **“in an instant, in the blink of an eye.”** That will happen whether we sleep in death, or are called immediately. But that marvelous transformation is only for his disciples, all who strive to become sons of God for eternity.

Paul also said these words about his coming: **“For this we say to you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain for the coming of the Lord, will no, not precede those who became asleep. Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the arch-agent, and with a trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up simultaneously with them in clouds to the Lord’s gathering in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage each other with these words”** (First Thessalonians 4:15-18).

We should encourage each other with those words, because God knows that it is not easy trying to live righteously, with a body that wars against our spirit, in a world in the bondage of corruption that is ruled by the devil and filled with evil spirits and evil creatures. Is not easy, but the reward he has for those who endure all the trials and temptations of this life, while loving and obeying him, is wonderful beyond what we could ever imagine. Remember what Paul said about it: **“For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us”** (Romans 8:18).

Therefore, dear brothers, hearken to Paul, and encourage each other with all those words. Rejoice and praise Almighty God our beloved heavenly Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because as long as we remain faithful to them we are destined to have life, and have it more abundantly in heaven as sons of God for eternity. For Jesus said about us, **“I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10). THEREFORE, HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE HIM? And if you love him, remember what Jesus said: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

ACCEPTING GOD'S TESTIMONY

The testimony of God our Creator is in the Holy Bible. And from its words I have tried to explain what he said about the meaning and purpose of existence. I have tried to describe what he is like, and to explain why he made the world. I have tried to help you understand who we are and what we can become. I have tried to describe the fundamental nature of the world and what to expect as you live in it. And I have tried to explain why the most important thing for everyone is believing God and his word, and living by that word. And I have used the testimony of God to do all of those things.

The apostle John wrote about the testimony of God, when he said, **“If we accept the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. Because this is the testimony of God that he has testified about his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified about his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have the life”** (First John 5:9-12).

Most of the knowledge that each man has comes from testimony: testimony given by the parents and teachers who taught us, testimony given by the books and other literature we read, testimony given by the reports we hear. We accept most of that testimony, but not all of it. For it is impossible to accept all of it because the world is filled with deceivers and deceived minds pouring out false and conflicting testimony.

Wise men confirm the truth of testimony by examining it carefully and testing what it says. Strict confirmation of testimony is why science has had such a great reputation for knowledge of things natural. And the violation of that strictness by such things as Darwinism is corrupting it.

We confirm the truth of the testimony in the Bible the same way. We examine it carefully and test what it says. And for me personally, after tens of thousands of hours of studying what it says, I have never found any false or conflicting testimony. Everything that first seemed to be false or conflicting proved instead to be my ignorance.

Jesus spent much of his time attempting to persuade the people to accept his testimony. For he was sent by God to testify to them. Here

is an example of a dialogue he had with the Jews about testimony: **“I can from myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I seek not my will, but the will of the Father who sent me. If I testify about myself, my witness is not valid. [the law of Moses required at least two witnesses for verification.] There is another who testifies about me, and I know that the testimony that he testifies about me is valid.**

“Ye have sent to John [the immerser], and he has testified to the truth. But I do not take the testimony from man. However, I say these things, so that ye may be saved. That man was the lamp that burns and shines, and ye were willing to rejoice for an hour in his light.

“But I have testimony greater than of John, for the works that the Father has given me so that I might complete them, the same works that I do, they testify about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father, he who sent me, has testified about me. Ye have neither heard his voice, nor have ever seen his appearance” (John 5:30-37). The mighty work of miracles that Jesus performed was God's testimony confirming the truth of what he said.

Evidence from natural things is sometimes used in an attempt to contradict the testimony of the Bible. However, such things as empirical evidence are useless to explain many things that God does. Whenever the “empirical evidence” of materialists conflicts with the clear testimony contained in the Holy Bible, trust God and accept what he says and not what men say. Remember, Paul wrote, **“The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are vain”** (First Corinthians 3:20). Empirical evidence is what convinced the world for centuries that the sun rotates around the earth. Can you not see for yourself how it rotates that way? That is the kind of foolish “empirical evidence” that unbelievers use when they try to discredit the testimony of God.

Enemies of God boast of their wisdom, and they belittle the word of God. But he knows how foolish they are. For Paul also said, **“Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world?”** (First Corinthians 1:20). God has made it impossible for men to boast of wisdom beyond his. And that is what they try to do when they rely blindly on things like “empirical evidence” for all their knowledge, and elevate myths like evolution over the testimony of the Bible.

I marvel how modern day scientists are continually dreaming up ideas trying to explain things without God. They are like the women Paul wrote about who were **“ever learning and never able to come to knowledge of truth”** (Second Timothy 3:7). And many of those things they are “ever learning” are vain and harmful theories. Be not proud and foolish like them, but seek and acquire the higher and

nobler spiritual wisdom that is contained in God's holy book, the Bible. Its knowledge will never fail you.

Ambiguous evidence

Another thing about empirical evidence, even for science, is that much of it is ambiguous and can be interpreted in various ways. That is why there are so many scientific theories. Indeed, God made the world so that many things about it can be interpreted differently. He no doubt did that because this is a proving ground for testing our souls. One simple example of differing interpretations is our understanding of why Jehovah is invisible. Men who deny him claim he is invisible because he does not exist. Men who love truth and righteousness accept God's testimony in the Bible which tells us why he is invisible.

God has made himself invisible to us because he wants us to search for him. Remember what Paul said to the Greeks in Athens: **"The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is he served by the hands of men, as needing anything, since he himself gives to all life, and breath, with all things. And he made from one blood every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined prescribed times, and the limits of their occupancy, to search for the Lord, if indeed perhaps they might grope for him and find him, although being not far from each one of us"** (Acts 17:24-27).

Every man who loves truth and righteousness will accept him as our Creator, and will believe the truth of words about him such as these: **"Giving thanks to the Father who made us qualified for the share of the portion of the sanctified in light. Who rescued us out of the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, who is an image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Because in him all things were created, things in the heavens and things upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or lordships or principal offices or positions of authority, all things have been created through him, and for him"** (Colossians 1:12-16).

We follow the steps of great men like Moses who believed in the invisible God. For the book of Hebrews says about him, **"By faith he forsook Egypt, not having feared the wrath of the king, for he persevered as seeing the invisible"** (Hebrews 11:27). And every man who loves truth and righteousness will accept the testimony of

Jesus, because he said, **“Every man who is of the truth hears my voice”** (John 18:37).

Men who are of the truth interpret ambiguous evidence to strengthen their faith in God and his holy word. Those who are not of the truth will interpret ambiguous evidence to deny him and discredit the testimony he has given us in the Bible. Thus, ambiguous evidence about God's testimony is one way he tests our souls, separating those who are worthy of eternal sonship from those who are not.

Who accepts God's testimony?

Dear reader, if you want to be worthy, then heed warnings like this one that Jesus gave: **“Truly I say to you, if ye are not turned, and become as children, ye will, no, not enter into the kingdom of the heavens”** (Matthew 18:3). One of the things he meant by becoming as children was to be humble and open minded about accepting God's testimony. For humble men who have open minds, and who love that which is good and right and just, are of the truth. And every man who is of the truth can see it in the words of Jesus and in all the words of God in the Bible.

When the Jews surrounded Jesus and asked him if he was the Christ, he said to them, **“I told you, and ye did not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me. But ye do not believe, for ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will, no, not perish into the age, and not any will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given to me, is greater than all, and not one is able to snatch out of my Father's hand”** (John 10:25-29). All who are of the truth, who love that which is right and good and just, who are gentle and humble like sheep, and who are open minded about God's testimony, will accept what Jesus says and will follow him.

The Holy Bible is the only source of true knowledge about our Creator God and the higher spiritual truths. And that is why God's enemies do all they can to discourage men from reading and believing what it says. Men who are not of the truth will reject God's testimony. Jesus taught that lesson in the story he told about the rich man and Lazarus, which I quote in its entirety below:

“Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously daily. But there was a certain poor man named Lazarus, who had been placed near his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But even the dogs that came licked his sores.

“And it came to pass for the poor man to die and be carried by the agents to Abraham’s bosom. And the rich man also died and was buried. And having lifted up his eyes in Hades, being in torments, he sees Abraham from afar and Lazarus by his bosom. And having cried out, he said, Father Abraham, be merciful to me, and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame.

“But Abraham said, Child, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now here he is comforted and thou are in agony. And besides all these things, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those here who want to cross over to you are not able, nor may those go across from there to us.

“And he said, I beg thee therefore, father, that thou would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham says to him, They have Moses and the prophets [referring to the Bible as it was then]. Let them hear them. And he said, No, father Abraham, but if some man would go to them from the dead they will repent. And he said to him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead” (Luke 16:19-31).

If a man will not listen to the words of the Bible to repent of his sins and live righteously, neither would he be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead. And what greater testimony could God give than that? He gave such evidence while the Bible was being written, but he will give it no more. He will give no more supernatural signs because we now have the complete Bible. And that is all a man needs to believe in him. Therefore, study that great book for yourself so you can learn about God and other things spiritual.

Be spiritually wise and trust the word of God more than the wisdom of men. Let not worldly wisdom make you proud and scoff at what the Bible says. Consider these words of Paul: “**We know that all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up**” (First Corinthians 8:1). Let not worldly knowledge puff you up. Be humble and open-minded about God and his testimony.

Be not like the men that Paul wrote about, when he said, “**Where is a wise man? Where is a scholar? Where is a researcher of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. And because Jews demand a sign and Greeks search for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, it is truly to**

Jews a stumbling-block and to Gentiles foolishness” (First Corinthians 1:20-23).

Dear reader, have faith in God's testimony about truth. For it is by faith, enlightened faith, faith supported by sound knowledge, that men of the truth accept the testimony of God. And remember what Peter said about the great value of faith in God: **“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begot us again according to his abundant mercy for a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for an inheritance imperishable, and undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heavens for you, men being kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

“In which ye greatly rejoice, although made sorrowful in various trials. Since it is now necessary for a little while, so that the proof of your faith, much more precious than gold that perishes, and though proven by fire, may be found for praise and honor and for glory at the revealing of Jesus Christ. Whom, not having seen, ye love, in whom, not now seeing but believing, ye exult in inexpressible and glorified joy, receiving back the outcome of your faith, the salvation of souls” (First Peter 1:3-9).

And Paul said about that faith, **“For I am not ashamed of the good news of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to every man who believes, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in it from faith for faith, just as it is written, And the righteous man will live from faith”** (Romans 1:16-17). Therefore, I urge you to accept God's testimony, and strive to become one of his sons for eternity.



“Now to him who is able to establish you according to my good news, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to a revelation of the mystery that has been kept secret for eternal times, but that was now revealed, and by prophetic scriptures, according to a commandment of the eternal God that was made known to all the nations for obedience of faith, to the only wise God through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory into the ages. Truly” (Romans 16:25-27).

APPENDIX:
TIME IN HELL

Before I speak about time spent in hell, I want to say that I do not believe in anything like the idea of purgatory. Moreover, I do not want to say or do anything that would diminish the warnings God has given about punishment in hell. Dear reader, if you know about Jesus, and you refuse his offer of salvation by believing and obeying him, then you are going to suffer the eternal fires of hell. That is as certain as your very existence, which neither you nor anyone else besides God had any part in creating. All your parents did was to join their seed together for you to grow, the seed that God created and everybody inherits from Adam and Eve.

I am offering these words about hell to help you believe in the justice of God, who is going to cast most of the people of the world in that place of torment. Jesus said that most people are going there (see Matthew 7:13), even though surveys have shown that few people believe they will. They do not believe it because they do not think they deserve to go there.

I hope what I have written here will help awaken you to the certainty of punishment in hell for the least of sinners as well as the greatest of them. Every one of them will deserve to go there, and their punishment will be perfectly just for the least of sinners as well as the greatest of them. For they will not all be punished with equal severity.

Most people who are destined for punishment in hell are not wicked sinners. They are like the foolish virgins in the following parable that Jesus told when he was warning his disciples to be prepared for the judgment: **“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins, who, having taken their lamps, went forth to the bridegroom’s gathering. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, foolish women, who, having taken their lamps, took no olive oil with them. But the wise took olive oil in their vessels with their lamps.**

“Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight a shout occurred, Behold, the bridegroom comes! Go ye forth for his gathering. Then all those virgins were roused, and put their lamps in order. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us from your olive oil, because our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Perhaps there may not be enough for us and you. But go ye rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came. And the prepared entered in with him for the wedding festivities, and the door was shut. But afterward the other virgins also came, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But having answered, he said, Truly I say to you, I know you not. Watch therefore, because ye know not the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes” (Matthew 25:1-13).

Those five foolish women were virgins, but they were still rejected because they had no properly prepared themselves. Foolish people like them live law-abiding lives according to the standards of the world, but they neglect their duty to God and his commands for us. Indeed, I suspect many of the millions of souls who claim to believe in Christ will still be lost, because they refuse to obey all of his commandments. Their faith in Christ is shallow, or misled by trusting men instead of the word of God. Their most common defense on the day of judgment will probably be to say, “But I thought ...”

Here is only one of many passages in the Bible that warn against ignoring the commandments of Christ: **“And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this man”** (First John 2:3-4).

Regarding every soul condemned to hell, no matter how different will be the degrees of their punishment, there is one punishment that is equal for all of them: they will never become sons of God, nor will they ever enter into the new Jerusalem.

Paying the debts

Nevertheless, I will present evidence from the Bible that some of the condemned souls in hell may not spend eternity there. For example, Jesus said to the people, **“Be agreeing with thine opponent quickly, while thou are with him on the way, lest the opponent deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the subordinate, and thou will be cast into prison. Truly I say to thee, thou will, no, not come out from there, until thou have paid the last quadran”** (Matthew 5:25-26). A quadran is two mites.

I do not believe Jesus was simply giving good advice about living in the world. His greater lesson is that we need to be reconciled to God if we want to escape having to pay all our debts to him. And the only way to be reconciled to him is through his Son Jesus Christ, who alone is able to pay all our debts to God. For those not reconciled, they will be required to pay every “last quadran” before being released from prison, the prison of hell.

Also, what Jesus said about blaspheming the Holy Spirit indicates that not all sinners will spend eternity in the lake of fire. Remember when Jewish scholars came to Jesus and condemned his power to cast out demons as being diabolical. After explaining how the kingdom of Satan could not stand if Satan cast out Satan, Jesus concluded with these words: **“Truly I say to you, that all the sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and the blasphemies, as many as they may blaspheme. But whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness, into the age, but is deserving of eternal damnation, because they said, He has an unclean spirit”** (Mark 3:28-30).

He said all the sins will be forgiven except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. By saying that all other sins will be forgiven suggests to me that not all men will be condemned to hell forever. I believe he taught that those not guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be forgiven when they work their way out of the lake of fire by paying all their debts to God.

Jesus said in that passage, **“... all the sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and the blasphemies”** The Greek word for forgiven in that passage is in the future indicative tense, which means it will actually happen. It is not in the future subjunctive tense, which means it could possibly happen. Therefore all the sins of men will be forgiven in the future, except blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I will explain more about what that blasphemy means under the heading *Never getting out*.

Forgiveness and punishment

Now regarding forgiveness, it must be understood that in the sight of God forgiveness does not mean the complete absence of any punishment. There are many passages in the Bible that show how forgiveness in the sight of God does not mean the absence of punishment.

While we live upon this earth we can be forgiven from eternal condemnation by being redeemed by Jesus Christ. And that will only be done for those who believe and obey him. Nevertheless, even the redeemed of Christ will still suffer punishment from God when we offend him. For the author of Hebrews said, **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives. Because of chastening ye endure; God is treating you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”** (Hebrews 12:6-7). And Jesus himself said, **“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent”** (Revelation 3:19).

More evidence that forgiveness does not mean the absence of punishment can be seen in the example of God's people whom he rescued from Egyptian bondage. On the way to their promised land they frequently complained and rebelled against him. And then when they reached the borders of the land, they even refused to enter into it after ten of the twelve spies they sent to examine it told them how fierce the inhabitants were there. Instead, they turned against God and were about to stone Moses for leading them out of Egypt.

Jehovah was angry enough to destroy them, but Moses pleaded for God to pardon them. When Jehovah replied to Moses, he said to him, **"I have pardoned according to thy word, but in very deed, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah, because all those men who have seen my glory, and my signs, which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers, neither shall any of them who despised me see it"** (Numbers 14:20-23).

How could God pardon them, and still condemn them to die in the wilderness? The reason is because in the sight of God forgiveness does not mean the absence of any punishment. They were pardoned from immediate death, but they were still punished.

And consider what God said in this passage: **"And Jehovah descended in the cloud, and stood with him [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of Jehovah. And Jehovah passed by before him, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth, keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and who will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, and upon the sons's sons, upon the third and upon the fourth generation"** (Exodus 34:5-7). Notice the passage says that Jehovah forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, but he will by no means clear the guilty. Which means his forgiveness is not without punishment.

Jehovah would not even allow Moses to escape his punishment for disobeying him. Moses, who was provoked to anger by the continual rebelliousness of the people, had struck a rock to get water after Jehovah commanded him to speak to it. Therefore, God said he could not enter into the promised land.

Here is what Moses told the people of Israel happened when he pleaded with God to allow him to enter that land: **"And I besought Jehovah at that time, saying, O lord Jehovah, thou have begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy strong hand, for what god is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy**

works, and according to thy mighty acts? Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.

“But Jehovah was angry with me because of you, and did not hearken to me. And Jehovah said to me, It shall be enough for thee. Speak no more to me of this matter. Get thee up to the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold with thine eyes, for thou shall not go over this Jordan” (Deuteronomy 3:23-27).

God forgave the soul of Moses because he is now in heaven (see Matthew 17:3), but he would not take away his punishment on the earth. If God would not take away the punishment of Moses, does any man think he will escape God’s punishment by simply being sorry and asking him?

Paying the last quadran

Thus I believe that some souls in hell can be forgiven, but they will still be required to suffer their punishment and pay all their debts to him, to “the last quadran.” Such forgiveness would mean that sinners in hell who repent could be pardoned from remaining there forever, but not before receiving all their allotted punishment.

Evidence that God will allow sinners in the afterlife to repent, is given in this passage by Peter: **“Because Christ also once suffered for sins, a righteous man for unrighteous men, so that he might bring you to God. Having indeed been killed in flesh, but made alive in spirit, in which also, having gone, he preached to the spirits in prison who were disobedient formerly, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah who prepared an ark in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water”** (First Peter 3:18-20).

Peter said that after Jesus was crucified, his Spirit went and preached to the spirits in prison, to those who were the sinners of the antediluvian world awaiting the final judgment. And although those men had been so sinful that God destroyed them all with the great flood, I believe Jesus went there in spirit and preached in order to offer them the opportunity to repent (those who are capable of it). Not meaning they would escape their condemnation in the lake of fire, but that they could pay all their debts to God with their labor there and then get out.

Perhaps after the final judgment those sinners that are not guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would be offered the opportunity to repent of their disobedience, and would be given a way to proved it. For true repentance involves producing **“fruit worthy of repen-**

tance” (Matthew 3:8). Perhaps then God would allow them to be released from hell after they had labored to pay their every debt to him, to “the last quadran.”

Nevertheless, even if a man can be released from hell that way, it will probably take even the least of the sinners a very long time, equivalent to many centuries on the earth. And it will no doubt take the equivalent of many thousands of years of agonizing labor in the furnace of fire just to pay the debt for terrible sins such as the murder of a man.

And remember, although such repentant sinners may be able to pay “the last quadran” they owe to God and be forgiven, they will never have the opportunity to become sons of God, nor will they ever enter into the new Jerusalem. Those men would live and labor as citizens of the nations in that heavenly world outside of the new Jerusalem.

Never getting out

Jesus said that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That kind of blasphemy is an enduring attitude of the heart. It is not a sin of a particular kind of behavior, although a man’s behavior reveals it. And God knows our thoughts and the attitudes of our heart. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an attitude that is contemptuous of the good news of Christ and those who live by it. That attitude is what the Jewish scholars had when they said that Jesus’ power to do that compassionate and righteous work of casting out demons was diabolical. And any soul with that attitude will never get out of the furnace of fire. That evil attitude of the heart will never be forgiven.

Consider these words of Jesus: **“But when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the holy agents with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from each other, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will truly place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me in, naked, and ye clothed me. I was feeble, and ye came to help me. I was in prison, and ye came to me.**

“Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see thee hungering, and fed thee, or thirsting, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked, and clothed thee? And when did we see thee weak, or in

prison, and came to thee? And having answered, the King will say to them, Truly I say to you, inasmuch as ye did it to one of these my brothers, the least, ye did it to me.

“Then he will also say to those at the left hand, Depart from me, ye accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his agents. For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink, I was a stranger, and ye did not take me in, naked, and ye did not clothe me, weak, and in prison, and ye did not come to help me.

“Then they will also answer, saying, Lord, when did we see thee hungering, or thirsting, or a stranger, or naked, or weak, or in prison, and did not serve thee? Then he will answer them, saying, Truly I say to you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of these least, ye did it not to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:41-46).

Jesus said those men who showed no mercy to even one of those who belong to him will **“go away into eternal punishment.”** That kind of callous heart toward Christ and his disciples is another indication of that evil attitude of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Such men are full of contempt and hatred for Christ and his church.

And there are many men upon the earth with that kind of evil attitude. They are like the evil spirits who said to Jesus when they saw him, **“Oh no! What is with us and with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Did thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou are, the Holy man of God”** (Mark 1:24).

I believe when Jesus **“preached to the spirits in prison who were disobedient formerly, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah,”** it was to those who were not guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He preached to those men who were simply foolish sinners, offering them the opportunity to repent, prove their repentance, and fulfill their time in hell to “pay the last quadran.”

Now could men with the attitude of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit ever change their hearts, repent, and forsake that attitude after being cast into hell? The passages about them being punished eternally suggest to me it is not possible. I believe their spirits will be like that of the devil—corrupted beyond healing.

For example, the above passage about not showing mercy says they **“will go away into eternal punishment.”** And Revelation says that those men who comprise the satanic beast, those who support it, and those who worship its image and receive its mark on them **“will be tormented day and night into the ages of the ages”** (Revelation 20:10). I do not believe they will ever be able to get out because they

corrupted themselves into evil spirits permanently with their lifelong blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Never going in

Dear reader, the only way to avoid being cast into the lake of fire is to humble yourself, repent of your sins, and believe and obey Jesus Christ while you have the opportunity. That is the only way you can be redeemed from condemnation and escape being cast into the lake of fire. Remember what Jesus said: **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6). Not only can you escape the fires of hell by believing and obey Jesus, but he will give you the power to become a son of God in heaven. For you will never have those opportunities when your life here is over.

Hearken to these words of Paul: **“So then if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new. And all things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation.**

“How that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore, ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were calling through us. We plead on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God” (Second Corinthians 5:17-20).

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